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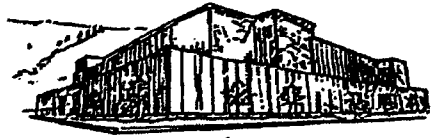
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**TREASURE STATE**

**By  
Chad Dundas**

B.A. University of Montana, Missoula, 2002

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

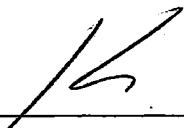
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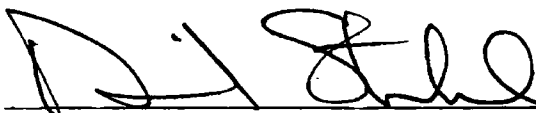
Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

May 2006

Approved by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_ Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_ Dean, Graduate School

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## One

Three days after Matthew Lehane turned fourteen, a miner named Swede Fredrickson died on a night shift, when one of the new motorized singejackers blew up in his hands. This was May, 1917 in Butte, Montana. The country had just got into the war and the mines were running 24-hours to keep up; the boys working doubles and triples and getting no overtime for it. People were talking about a union, slackers were parading against the draft and the National Guard was already in the streets. Swede Fredrickson worked down in the hole on the same crew as Matthew's Dad – going thousands of feet inside Granite Mountain to turn copper out of the hard rock – and had been on fifteen straight hours the night he died. The Company paid-off the state inspector to stamp Swede's death as operator's error, so the boys put together some money for services and a lump sum for Swede's wife and baby boy. Matthew got itchy just thinking about the funeral: Him cooped up in his church clothes on a Saturday afternoon and boiling in his own skin, listening to the service in some funny language. The funeral was going to be big. Most people in town knew Swede Fredrickson on account of him being nearly seven feet tall.

The wake was Friday evening and John Bulger came over early to pick up Matthew's Dad in a car. The two men went out on the back porch to talk and Matthew scooted out a side window to try to sneak on what they were saying. Something had spooked him and he was barely back in his room, polishing his dress shoes on the edge of his bed when his Dad stuck his head in the door and asked if Matthew wanted to go along to Swede's wake.

Matthew was still breathing hard. The dread of thinking he was caught and was going to catch a whipping for eavesdropping was washed over with a thrill at the idea of tagging along with Dad and Bulger. Matthew had been to plenty of wakes, but never with the grown-up men. He usually had to wait until his Ma got the cake baked and he would walk over with her and his sisters. The wake was usually at the dead man's house. Matthew's Ma would push him up to whisper something to the widow if she wasn't carrying-on too bad, and then he'd get sent out in the back yard with the other kids. They'd play baseball or get a wrestling circle going until their mothers decided it was time to go and somebody got yelled-at for getting grass stains on his church pants. The men might come out in back and watch the kid games, drinking beer and passing around a flask. If the dead miner had been with the Company long enough, a shift boss or a guy from downtown might show up with a good bottle. If the men stood around drinking too long there would be a fight. The wives would get upset and everybody would have to leave early. Most of the women didn't drink, but they'd gamble on pretty much anything. Going with the men would mean something different.

While he was thinking it over, his two kid sister ran in and jumped on his back. The girls lived for the sneak attack. Diedre pulled his ears while Eileen latched-on around his waist. They screamed from the fun of it.

"I guess so," Matthew said to his Dad. He tried to swallow his excitement, still a little out of breath from his sneak mission. He stood up and shrugged Deidre off his shoulder. She fell onto the bed still wriggling and laughing. Eileen

grabbed on to Matthew's foot and he almost fell down. "These rugrats won't leave me be."

Dad made a face. "What'd I tell you about them pictures?" he said.

Matthew had some wrestling pictures tacked-up above his bed with half-penny nails. He was training to be champion someday like Frank Gotch. Matthew wrestled junior city league at 105-pounds and would've been city champ if he hadn't twisted his knee and got pinned by some Bohunk kid in the finals. His ears were already starting to puff and cauliflower around the edges, which was why his sisters like to pull them. It made them burn.

"Those pictures ain't hurting nothing," he said. Dad took a step into the room and Matthew yanked the pictures down, tossed them on the bed.

"Five minutes," Dad said. "Be ready if you want to go."

The two of them almost made it out of the house before Ma called them back into the kitchen. She wasn't dressed yet, but she had the cake in the oven. She was leaning against the counter, smoking a cigarette, going through the sports in the newspaper, marking her picks for the baseball pool. A mess of bowls, the counter dotted with flower.

"What's all this?" She said.

Matthew was into his church clothes and had his hair slicked with a scoop of Dad's pomade.

"Dad's taking me to the wake," Matthew said.

His mother half-smiled, managing not to put any joy into it. "I don't think so," she said, looking at his Dad, but saying it the way she would when Eileen and



Diedre got up to something. His parents both talked like Old Country people, talked Irish. His Ma's words lifted up at the end.

"C'mon Ma," he said. "Don't be a hag."

Dad cuffed him hard on the back of the head. "That's fine talk," Dad said. Dad fished out his pocket watch and cracked it. "Started forty-five minutes ago," he said to Ma. "We're already getting a late start."

"Not with him you're not," Ma said.

"Boy's almost grown, Rebecca," Dad said. "He needs to see how men behave."

"Behave," she said like that was some kind of joke.

"It'd be good for him to start getting on with the boys," Dad said.

It felt good to hear his father lump him in with the grown men, Matthew stood up straight and tried to look Ma in the eye.

"I'm up to it," he said.

Ma didn't really look at him, but her face went softer. She used the back of her hand to wave them out of the kitchen, and went back to the sports.

"Don't let him get into anything," she said, "and no drinking Jimmy. I mean it."

She called after them: "And tell Ingrid Fredrickson the Hibernians are bringing lunch tomorrow."

Dad leaned close to his ear and Matthew could smell his hair grease.

"Sometimes I don't believe it," Dad said, "the way you talk to your mother."

Before that, this is what Matthew heard when he'd had dropped out the window and crawled along the side of the house to try to listen-in on the men's conversation.

"We can't pay for too many more funerals," Bulger's voice.

"Not from our own thing anyway."

"What you think they'd do?"

"Lynch us both for even talking."

"Is it too much to ask? Abide by state laws? The fucking constitution?"

"We'd need an outside hand. AF of L, maybe."

"Wobblies?"

"Bloodsuckers," Dad's voice. "Keep 'em out of it. Give Kelly an excuse to bust heads."

A car rattled by on Montana.

"With the draft maybe we could manage it," Dad said. "Maybe."

"You think we could get the street car people?" Bulger's voice.

"Electricians for sure. Bill Dunne still owes from when Willard kayoed Johnson."

Bulger laughing. "Coogan getting lax on collections?"

"Bill's a good man. We've been floating him. Good to have him in our pocket now."

"George Rooney settle up with you yet?" Bulger said.

"We'll see him tonight."

"He's pushing it. Someone might cut a pimp's throat for free."

In the yard next door, the Sullivans' old dog jumped up on a shed and started barking. The men stopped talking and Matthew heard their footsteps. He ran back and slithered in the window.

They drove down the hill toward downtown and Matthew was itching to ask them about the conversation. Behind them the seven skeleton fingers of the Neversweat stacks poked up over the crest of the hill, the main smelter jutting into the sky beyond them like the thumb. The stacks spit black smoke, the sulfur and burning stung the inside of Matthew's nose. Steel head frames, like hangmen's racks, stood out fifty, sixty, a hundred feet into the air. Most of the houses in their neighborhood were single story, soot-stained brick and peeling wood, built up off the street with raised porches. Piles of cast off dirt four men deep made little mountains on either side on the road and bled down into the street.

Matthew leaned his head into the front seat and asked the two men if they heard the rumor about the Krauts. President Wilson had been in the papers saying that the Butte operation was one of the country's most important outposts. Now rumors were everywhere: The Krauts had a secret base built into the mountains somewhere south of Missoula. There were maybe hundreds of soldiers and pilots down there, a whole army, rooting around in caves, waiting for the order from the Kaiser to swoop out and flush the whole state back to the Stone Age.

Dad laughed. "That's ridiculous," he said. "The idea of it."

"The Germans don't want to hurt the Irish, Matt," Bulger said. "We're friends."

They drove past where the boys from the Guard had a big gun set up on wagon wheels. The Guardsmen loafed around in their doughboy costumes. Matthew's Dad waved to them out the window, saying something under his breath once they were past. The wake was at the Atlantic Bar and Dad said it was because Swede Fredrickson had so many friends. The Atlantic had a big sign outside that said "Longest Bar in the World." Inside it was big but narrow, stretching the whole block. There were always four or five bartenders on at once, wearing dress shirts with garters around their elbows. Bulger dropped them off at the sidewalk and went off to find a place to park. Matthew had been inside the bar plenty of times, sent down to fetch Dad for supper, but he'd never seen it crowded like this. The place was busted to the gills with men.

There was a string band hunkered in the corner by the door and old Mizz Slivak was up on a chair with his accordion. A crowd of men pushed in on him, singing a song in Bohunk. The scare Matthew felt over coming to the wake drained out of him a little when he saw the Bohunks having such a good time. Matthew liked Bohunks, they stuck together almost like the Irish but would always treat you like one of their own kids if they knew you. Even though Swede wasn't one of them, they'd drink and party and cry at his wake just like he was. Bohunks had a temper, though. When they fought, they fought with knives and guns. It was best to be on their good side.

Dad ducked straight to the bar and bought a beer and a shot with a ginger ale for Matthew. The beer and the ginger ale came in pint glasses and Dad had to sniff them both to make sure which was which. Walking careful not to spill their

drinks, they pushed into the crowd. A bunch of men started slapping them both on the back. Matthew slopped some ginger ale on the floor. The air was warm and smoky and on one side of the bar there were barrels of liquor shelved up to the ceiling. Most of the people were Old Country people and so Matthew's ears filled up with a mishmash of different words he couldn't understand. Everybody was drinking. With everything so loud and the band playing, it was hard to make out anything clear.

They had the Widow Fredrickson set up in a big booth in the middle part of the bar. She had a new black dress and her make-up was already running. Some of the other women were with her. The table in front of her was covered with food and stuff the women had brought. Matthew's father took him by the shoulder and steered him up there, pushed him up into the booth so he almost tripped. The Widow Fredrickson wasn't an old lady, she had kind of a pretty face and blonde hair and blue eyes. It was like she didn't even really see him, though, and it felt weird hugging a stranger like that.

"Very sorry for your loss," Matthew said into her ear, which is what he was supposed to say and what he said to every widow at every funeral and every wake he ever went to. When he said it, the Widow Fredrickson tipped her head back and started screaming. The other women looked at Matthew like he'd pissed in their flower bed and his father pulled him away from the booth. His father leaned in close to the Widow Fredrickson and said something short and put a sealed envelope into her little gloved hand. The Widow Fredrickson stopped screaming

for a second and held onto Dad's hand and smiled in his face, and then buried herself in the shoulder of the woman next to her.

"What'd I do?" Matthew said when Dad came back.

"You did good, son," Dad said. "You showed the proper condolences."

"She sure liked hearing it better from you," Matthew said.

They went back into the crowd. With so many grown-ups crowded in, Matthew couldn't see more than a few feet, so he stopped-up short and caught his breath when they came to an opening in the crowd where Swede Fredrickson's dead body was stretched out on a pool table. He saw the top of Swede's head first, his blond hair combed in brittle straight lines as neatly as if Swede had done it himself. The sight of it made Matthew feel still all over and he stopped walking. His father went around the side of the pool table shaking hands with some of the boys. Swede was dressed in a suit, his tallness stretching almost the length of the whole table. His face, round like a baby, looked sticky and Matthew leaned close and saw it was because the body was wearing make-up. Pink cheeks painted on, powder up around the eyes. The body didn't smell at all. There were shots of liquor lined-up almost all the way around the pool table and some Bohunk had tucked a bottle of slivovitz in around Swede's neck, the fancy kind with black walnuts floating in it.

It looked like Swede might get up and do one of his funny tall-man dances to the music, except somebody had put green five-dollar poker chips over his eyes. Matthew watched the body for a long time and when he looked up, his father was gone. Men crowded around the table smoking cigars and huffing blue

smoke into the air. Matthew felt a tightening around his chest. He looked around for his Dad or at least for some other kids, but all he saw were men in dark pants and hardboilers.

He slipped through the crowd until he found an empty place under a row of mounted elk heads, the bar's few lights casting shadows of their antlers down on him. The light made the faces of the men and the booze glasses in their hands glow gold. They carried-on and drank, slapping each other on the back, shouting in each others' faces. Nobody paid any attention to Matthew. The air in the bar was warm and wet. Matthew dotted at his brow with the sleeve of his jacket and sipped his ginger ale.

When Matthew finally spotted him, his Dad was at the back of the bar, near the signs for the bathrooms, standing in a dark hallway with another man. Dad had put his jacket somewhere, was wearing his good white shirt with silver pinstripes. He stood very close to the other guy, who came only to Dad's chin. The other guy Matthew didn't know. He was balding and had a big bird nose that pointed down past his lip. They were talking and the short guy looked mad and started poking his finger into Dad's chest. Dad swatted the guy's hand away once but the guy kept poking it and then Dad shoved him up against the wall and held him there, his arms stretched out straight across the narrow hallway. Matthew tried to get through the crowd, but it was hard going with all the men standing around. Matthew had never seen Dad in a fight before and thought of it made him sick and excited at the same time. He ducked around elbows and swinging glasses, trying to get a good look.

Near the back hallway, Matthew saw John Bulger standing with a group of Irish guys around a high-top table. He must've come in through a back door. Bulger saw Matthew at the same time and stepped out and put an arm around his shoulders. Matthew tried to side-step, stretching his neck to see into the back hallway, but Bulger hefted him off the floor and onto a bar stool as easy as tossing a bag flour into the back of a truck. Bulger was as big as Dad, maybe wider through the shoulders. His hair was between blond and brown and he had a wide, clean shaven face that got very red when he drank. It was red now. Bulger had on an expensive three piece suit, the gold nugget chain of his watch across his belly. Bulger moved in front of him, blocking his view.

Matthew liked Bulger. A lot of times he came to the house for dinner and drinks. Afterward, he and Dad would go out onto the porch to smoke and talk in the dark and Matthew would go out the window to listen. Now, he tried to slide off the bar stool, but Bulger put a hand on his shoulder.

“Dad’s in a fight,” Matthew said.

Bulger didn’t hear him. The boys were standing around talking about the war. Most of them were against it. They were talking about the rumor of the secret base. The men didn’t believe it. They were goofing on the idea of the Krauts invading town.

“I wish they would,” somebody said.

“I’d clout one on the head,” somebody else said, playing at boxing, taking a couple of drunk punches.



Matthew twisted to try to see around Bulger, but couldn't. The men seemed to close-in around him. He knew a few of them. He saw mean Tim Coogan, who'd lost three fingers working mines in Michigan and who had an army of square-headed kids who went to St. Mary's; boys and girls alike that would just as soon knock you down on the playground and stomp on your fingers as anything else. He saw Denis Freeney, skinny with thinning dark hair, who had a wife and a little boy waiting to come over from Ireland. When Freeney talked about the Old Country, or talked about his wife and kid he got a glassed over look in his eyes and he would carry-on like the Old Country was better than Columbia Gardens.

"Dad's in a fight," Matthew said again, but he felt his voice was drowned in the noise of the men. Bulger hugged him close, in a friendly kind of way, but also not letting him move.

Everything the men did seemed too big: their voices, the way they moved their hands and swung their drinks, like they were play-acting for him. He saw chipped teeth and dirt under fingernails. A black eye. Scuffed work boots under dress cuffs. Somebody called out that they should find a Kraut and pound him. A cheer went up until somebody yelled to hell with double shifts and to hell with a rich man's war. That got a bigger cheer, pints in the air. Somebody said it was the round-the-clock grind that got Swede Fredrickson killed, and the men's talk turned into a violent rumble until Bulger quieted them with a wave of his hand.

“Aren’t you a sorry lot,” he said to the men. “We got Jimmy Lehane’s boy here and you all want to put him to sleep with your politics. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves.”

A few of the men chuckled. Some of them looked at Matthew like they hadn’t seen him sitting there. A couple guys sipped their drinks and looked away.

“What do you think, Matt,” Bulger said. “You going to be a miner like your Da and this pack of no accounts?”

Hearing his name brought Matthew back for a second. A cold shudder stirred in him when he thought about the mines. He thought of his Dad, who brought the soggy, burning smells of the mines home with him every morning – wet denims caked in mud, so tired he had to call Matthew from the breakfast table to help him pull off his rubber boots. In the evenings the guys on Dad’s shift walked to work together, and Matthew would go out onto the porch to wave goodbye, straining his eyes in the gloom until the men, with their hardboiler hats and lunch buckets swinging at their knees, disappeared up the road in the dark. As a kid, before he ever saw the mines in person, Matthew saw the glow of the lights up over the hill and the spooky shadows of giant head frames standing out against the plum-colored sky. He learned quick the squinted, dead-eyed stare, the face beat slack, of a man who worked under ground. It was his father’s face. When he was littler, he even believed the devil lived somewhere deep inside Granite Mountain. He’d asked Sister Mary Hannah about it in Sunday Bible class and the other kids laughed at him. He was too old to believe in that stuff now, but thinking of going

down into the cold or hot dark and coming out tired and beatdown like these men or even dead like Big Swede, he couldn't manage it.

"No," Matthew said. "I won't."

All the men turned to look.

"No?" Bulger said, a grunt of surprise. "What else will you do then?"

"Wrestle," Matthew said.

Some of the men laughed, nodding to each other. Matthew felt very small sitting on the bar stool under Bulger's big arm, his own voice sounding like a little kid in his ears.

"Yeah kid," somebody said, slapping backs, "and I'm Jim Thorpe."

Matthew's face got hot. "Laugh it up," he said. "I'm going to be a champ someday."

"You think you're too good for us?" This was Tim Coogan talking, sounding drunk, stroking his pint with the stumps of his three chopped-off fingers. "You're too good to be a working man like your Dad, or Bulger or me?"

Bulger put his hand up to quiet the group.

"Who do you like for the title this month, Matt," he said. "Caddock or Stecher?"

"Don't matter," Matthew said, building some speed now, feeling like talking about wrestling put him up on his feet with the men. "Frank Gotch would whip 'em both all hollow."

"Frank Gotch is retired," somebody called out.

“Frank Gotch is a kraut,” a short man said, like it was a smart thing he’d just figured out.

“You think a Kraut could whip Irish Earl Caddock?”

“Earl Caddock ain’t Irish,” somebody said.

Where was Dad?

“I don’t know nothing about any Krauts,” Matthew said, trying to keep his voice above the noise. “But Frank Gotch can pin any man walking, retired or not.”

“Talking about getting pinned, Champ,” Tim Coogan said. “I saw your match at city finals last year. You got pinned by a boy half your size.”

“Maybe,” Matthew said, a little more snap in his voice than he meant. “But I’m pretty sure I could pin you.”

That made the guys go nuts. Some of them took off their hats and held them in both hands they were laughing so hard. Guys paced back and forth, slapping each other on the backs like Matthew was Fatty Arbuckle. Matthew got a rush from it, making the men like him. Tim Coogan’s face twisted up. His knuckles went white around his drink. He stepped forward and took Matthew’s ear with his good hand, twisted. Matthew came up off the stool to his toes. A burning scream laced down through his shoulder. The guys were still chuckling, elbowing each other to see what would happen next.

“You’re clever,” Tim Coogan said, his voice different now. Bulger put his hand on Coogan’s shoulder and shook his head no.

Dad showed up then, folding a cleft of dollar bills into his wide, leather wallet. His eyes searching the table tops for his beer. When he saw the guys and Coogan and Matthew he put the wallet in his pocket and straightened his shirt. Coogan saw Dad and let go of Matthew's ear. Matthew rubbed the sting out of it and went to Dad's side. He felt relieved, both to be free of the pinch from Coogan and also that Dad looked okay, happy even, coming out of the back hallway. Dad put his hands in his pockets and smiled like a dummy, like guys do when they come into a conversation halfway.

"What's this?" He said.

Coogan took a pull of his drink. "Nothin' Jimmy," he said. "We was just havin' fun."

The men nodded and Dad smiled wider, something stiff about it, he looked at Bulger and his eyebrows went up. Bulger shrugged and checked the time on his watch.

"No harm, Jimmy," Bulger said. "We was just talking grappling, that's it."

Dad clapped his hand down on Matthew's shoulder, too hard. "This one could show us all a move or two there," he said with a laugh. Coogan looked away. The guys edged back and laughed along with Dad.

"You were in a fight," Matthew said. "I saw."

Dad was still smiling at Bulger and not listening to Matthew. Dad pulled some coins from his pocket and jingled them into Matthew's hand.

“Get us a top off, will you son?” he said. Matthew collected a couple of glasses and went the bar. He looked back he saw Dad and Bulger joking together, Dad lacing a few dollars into Bulger’s hand.

In a trickle, more of the wives started to show up with kids. Matthew was glad to see people his own age. He and Frankie Shovlin got a running game of pool going at the back of the bar, on the tables that didn’t have Big Swede’s body or a bunch of food and presents for the Widow Fredrickson. Frankie’s father owned one of the big boarding houses near downtown where a lot of greenhorns and migrants stayed. That meant the Shovlins had money and Frankie went to St. Pat’s on Sundays instead of St. Mary’s. Frankie was littler than Matthew and a red-head like his Dad. They played pool against some of the younger kids for pennies and whipped them. Frankie said it gave him the creeps that they had Big Swede laid out on the table like that. Matthew said he thought so too at first but now he was getting used to it. It’s just like he’s sleeping there, Matthew said.

“You’d have to be dead drunk to sleep on a pool table in all this racket,” Frankie said.

“Dead anyhow,” Matthew said and they both laughed.

Matthew’s Ma waved to him when she showed up with Eileen and Dierdre and the cake, but she went straight to the where the Widow Fredrickson was sitting and brought her a handkerchief. Matthew’s Ma was president of the Ladies’ Auxilliary of the Ancient or of Hibernians downtown, which was an Irish group where Old Country people got together every week and made a big dinner and talked about the Old Country and other stuff. Matthew had been to the

dinners before and it was pretty good, but kind of boring if you were a kid. It was a good group, Matthew figured, because the AOH had different events to raise money for stuff all over town and some of them were funny, like Halloween dance or the Spring bake sale.

Matthew and Frankie scored money at pool until they both got bored with it and then just stood around watching the men. A bunch of miners from the Mountain Con got into it with the boys from the Speculator. Mountain Con and the Spec were both Company jobs and almost all Irish, so the boys who worked there liked to rib each other and compete hard at different games. Now they were getting into it over the big tug of war they had every year at the Fourth of July picnic out at Nine Mile. Last year the Spec boys had whipped them good, dragged the Mountain Con team all the way through the ditch, soaked them through. The Mountain Con guys were still sore about it, in a joking kind of way. This year they wanted high stakes and laid it out that the losing team had to take the everybody from the winning team's whole families to Columbia Gardens some Saturday. The Spec boys looked around at each other and decided that was okay, because they were likely going to win again and so Matthew's Dad and John Bulger stepped out of the crowd and shook hands with a couple of the shift bosses from the Con.

"That's gonna be good," Frankie said to Matthew and Matthew nodded. He couldn't wait. Fourth of July picnic was the best thing of the summer.

Dad was out in the middle of the floor with his arm around the shoulders of a Mountain Con guy and it was like he was giving a speech.

“On behalf of the whole crew, we accept the challenge,” Dad said, “and we look forward to drenching your asses again this year.”

Everybody laughed and the Mountain Con guy shook his head no.

“Course, it’s beyond us how a greenhorn operation like the Con thinks she can compete with the Spec,” Dad said, lifting his arms. “But that’s your affair, not ours.”

The Mountain Con guy flexed his muscles for the crowd and there was some applause. Matthew smiled.

“So we say good luck to you,” Dad said, “You’re going—,” something caught his mouth and he cleared his throat against his hand.

Dad lifted his head to go on, but he started coughing. He made a fist and covered his mouth and turned away from the Mountain Con guy. He bent over a bit and shook his head from side-to-side, trying to get his wind. Dad took a drink of his beer to try to clear it, but it was like that made things worse. It came up from deep in Dad’s gut, a wet barking sound with a high wheezing underneath. His whole body lurched and he put his hands on his hips.

It seemed to Matthew that the bar got very quiet.

That cough. People knew it cold.

The miners and their wives and some of the kids recognized it as plainly as the bells that rang the shifts in and out. It was a cough that, if you heard it in any bar or restaurant, made you suck in your lips and shake your head slow if the guy retching it was a guy you didn’t know. Now, people looked into their drinks,



glanced each other over, watched Dad out the corners of their eyes. Somebody murmured something about getting the doc.

The Mountain Con guy backed off a little more and Dad kept coughing. He spit some beer onto the floor and some women groaned. Bulger slapped him between the shoulders, the sound echoing up into the lights. Matthew looked around for his Ma. She was still sitting with the Widow Fredrickson, but watching Dad out on the floor with a tight look on her face. The Widow Fredrickson was holding a handkerchief to her face and still crying. Make-up smearing over her eye bags and onto her nose.

A group of little kids rumbled in from the back hallway, playing a game of chase and shouting, Eileen and Diedre with them and it seemed to break the moment. The whole thing took less than thirty seconds and then Dad was standing up straight again, shoving John Bulger away and saying, "I'm okay, I'm all right," in the voice of a guy who didn't want the attention. He finished his speech about how bad the Spec boys would trounce Mountain Con in the tug this summer. There was clapping at the end and Dad cheered the Mountain Con shift boss, who didn't smile at Dad, but touched him on the shoulder. Matthew felt rooted to the spot on the floor next to Frankie Sovlin who, when it was over, nudged Matthew with his pool stick and said, "Let's play another round," with a sad voice. Nobody mentioned the cough and Dad went to the bathroom and after a long time came out looking okay. He went back to the group of guys from the Spec and told some jokes that got the boys laughing and slowly the party picked up speed again.

## Two

Oates drove up from St. Louis. His new car was a black Cadillac and he steered with his left hand on the wheel, his right arm folded across his lap. His right was no good for driving. The big, expensive machine felt good underneath him and he had money in a satchel behind the seat, so he was flush. Only a small black and white sign marked the border when he got to Montana. Oates brought his right arm up and steered with his elbow while his left hand retrieved the forty-five Colt from between his legs. He poked the pistol out the window and fired two rounds at the sign, hitting it twice, blowing a chunk out of either side. The shots echoed out across the prairie and it struck Oates how wide-open and empty this place was. He put the pistol back in his lap and took the wheel with his left hand again, pushing on the accelerator, feeling the car jolt forward on the dirt road.

The Cadillac and the gun were both gifts from the head of the machinists union in St. Louis. Oates had gone to see the man at the office he kept downtown. Oates saw the Cadillac by the curb and once he was inside he asked the man if it belonged to him and the man said it did. Oates asked him, didn't he think it was an awfully nice car for a man like him, a so-called working man to be driving around. The man told Oates to go fuck himself. Oates said he wondered how a man in his position could afford a car like that, with the strike and all. Oates said the only way he could figure a guy like that could catch a nice machine like the one outside is if he had something going on the side. Another source, Oates said, maybe like he was skimming from the union pension fund. The man opened his

desk drawer and took out the forty-five Colt and pointed it at Oates' head. Oates put his arms up next to his face. He had a black silk bag tied over the end of his right arm, where his hand should have been.

Oates told the man not to shoot. Oates told the man there was something in the pocket of his suit jacket that the man would want to see before he shot him. The man danced his eyebrows and Oates could tell he was enjoying this now. Oates reached into his pocket and took out a child's toy, a small rubber ball, black and red, and let it roll across the desk and off the edge, into the machinist's lap. The man put the gun down on the desk. The ball belonged to the man's six year-old son, who Oates had gone to see earlier that morning. Oates had to wait until the man had finished crying and then Oates told him the machinist union strike was over. He told the man that he was going sign over the title on the Cadillac to Oates and also give him that pistol as a going away present, because if he did that Oates would tell the man where he could find his son, safe and sound, and the man would never see Oates again.

The man got the necessary papers from his desk and filled them out in the necessary ways. He got to the part for Oates' name and looked up, his face dirty from tears.

"Billy Oates," Oates said and the man wrote.

When he was done, Oates took the pen and a piece of paper and wrote down the address of a boarding house on the south side. Oates wrote down a room number. He went slow to make sure he got all the letters and numbers right, because Oates wasn't the best with writing. He gave the man the paper and told

him to take a cab. He said everything would be fine and that if he hurried he could get home before his wife returned from shopping and then he'd never even have to tell his wife what had happened. The man said he had no money for cab fare. Oates laughed. Oates said a nice car like that and not two cents for a cab. He gave the man money for cab fare both ways and then he left the office. Three hours later he got paid for his work and he left St. Louis for good.

Oates drove through the night and there were hours at a time when he didn't pass another car. The sun came up behind him, pink and gold on the edges of the prairie. He saw men on horseback working the great fields and every one of them waved as the Cadillac rumbled past. Oates waved back with his left hand and tooted the horn a couple of times. Sometime in the afternoon he'd stopped on a deserted stretch of gravel and set up a line of empty beer bottles on flat rocks twenty or twenty-five feet off the road. He'd been drinking the beers slowly as he drove, flicking the caps out the window and throwing the empty bottles onto the back seat. It was hot when he stopped, but it was a dry heat, so Oates didn't sweat much under the sun. He went back to the car with the forty-five in the waist of his trousers, pulled it out and took aim across the hood. He steadied the elbow of his left arm on the hood, which was warm from the engine and the sun and he used his right wrist to brace his aim. One. Two. Three. He exploded the bottles with pistol shots. The gun was very loud and it kicked some, but it suited him fine. He was a good shot with it, and when he missed the fourth bottle with his first two shots he realized that he was a little drunk.

The reports echoed out over the flat lands and when he was done shooting, his ears rang and his left hand tingled from absorbing the shock of firing the gun. When his magazine was empty, he stopped to listen, but it was silent. He'd scared up a flock of crows with the shooting and they circled overhead now. He felt like he could see forever in every direction, but what he could see was nothing. Oates realized he could do all the shooting he wanted to out in these hills and no one would ever hear.

With the sun dropping down the sky toward evening, Oates passed a person walking in the road. At first he thought the person was a man, from the clothes, but as he rolled up alongside, he realized it was a girl walking along by herself. She was dressed in black work boots and denim pants and a matching long-sleeved denim jacket like the kind the hard rock miners wore. She had on a droopy hat that didn't quite cover her dark curls. Oates slowed the car to a crawl and when he spoke to her he did so without thinking much about what he'd say, which was always how he was best.

"Where you headed?" He said.

The girl ducked her head and smiled at the car, which was just as good as her smiling at Oates. She leaned up close to the window and Oates smelled booze on her breath and saw that she was a bit too thick across the face, but she was pretty enough if you only looked at her eyes.

"I like your car," she said.

"Where you headed?" He said again.

"Looking for work," the girl said.

“Are you a whore?” Oates said. “They got whores up here.”

The girl’s eyes went hard and Oates knew he shouldn’t have said it. The girl snorted. “I would be, the price was right,” she said. “Why? What do you do that’s so great?”

“I’m a gunman,” Oates said, not able to look at her when he said it, eyes darting up the road.

“A gunman.”

“That’s right.”

The girl covered her mouth with a fist, maybe stopping a giggle. “You don’t look like any kind of gunman I ever saw,” she said.

“Well,” he said. “I am one.”

“I’ll be,” she said, putting a hand flat against her chest above the place in the jacket where her breasts must have been.

“Yes ma’m,” he nodded.

“Well that must just be the most exciting thing,” she said. “I’ve never met a real, live gunman before.”

Her voice sounded funny and Oates couldn’t tell if she was having him on or not. He wanted to get her in the car. He could feel his pulse beating in his throat.

“Where you headed?” He said a third time, the words feeling stiff in his mouth.

The girl took hold of the car, both hands side by side on the door, stepped up on the running board. Oates looked at her fingers curling over the window sill. The fingers were thin and weathered and the knuckles were scarred.

“I could show you what I can do,” the girl said, sour breath. She moved her hand off the sill and stroked his cheek. Oates didn’t expect it and he flinched, leaning away on the bench seat.

The girl laughed.

“Oh,” she said, like she was saying lines from a theater play. “Are you nervous?”

“Are you trying to be smart with me?” he said. “I hope you’re not trying to be smart with me.”

She reached in the car and felt his shoulder through his jacket. The girl made a clownish sad face and then made a show of looking up and down the road. She lowered her voice to a whisper, cupped one hand around her lips. “Are you a queer?”

She laughed again. Louder and longer this time. Oates waited for her to stop. He leaned closer to the window. The girl swayed a bit on her feet.

“Now why’d you go and say a thing like that?” Oates said. He saw from the way her eyes suddenly found him that she heard the change in his voice. A clicking in her face, scared, but not even knowing why. It excited him, he felt his blood spinning through his body.

Oates showed her the hook. He brought his right arm up from his lap and put it in the window so she could see it. The hook was about eight inches from point to the special cup that fitted over Oates’ wrist. It was like the kind dockworkers used to haul bags of wheat or rice on and off a ship. There was a rubber strap, actually just a piece of cut-up tire, that went down each side of

Oates' right arm and looped around his elbow to keep the hook in place. When the girl saw it she let go of the window and sucked at her teeth. Oates smiled at the girl. He looked in his rearview mirror to make sure the road was deserted.

He turned sideways on the seat and brought his other hand up, the pistol in his fist. The girl screamed a little bit, not too loud. She hid her face with her hands. Oates pointed the pistol at her. He waited for the girl to look again, meet his eyes, but she didn't move. He saw a dark stain spreading out on the crotch of her denims and he sat and listened to her breath in little spurts.

"Look at me," he said.

The girls shook her head from behind her hands.

"Look," he said.

She moved her fingers, saw the gun pointed at her and winced like someone does when a wasp buzzes their face. Now that he had her attention, Oates couldn't think of anything to say. He put the Cadillac in gear with his good hand and popped the clutch so it started with a lurch. He stomped on the gas the car squirted forward in the dirt, the back end sliding out a little bit before it righted itself. He drove and laughed and when he looked back, he couldn't see the girl, just the cloud of dust stirred up by the Cadillac.



### Three

In a month, Matthew's Dad was too sick to go to work. His hacking got deeper and worse until he couldn't make it down and up from the basement to get a beer from the ice box. Matthew found him sitting at the top of the steps, wheezing and holding the collar of his shirt against his mouth. The Company sent a doctor and the doctor put Dad to bed and ordered the door closed. A couple times a week the doctor came with jugs of cough syrup that smelled like grape soda and iodine mixed. Matthew didn't see how drinking syrup was going to make Dad better, but Matthew wasn't allowed in the room. Once he spied through the crack when the doctor left the door partly open. He saw Dad in his night shirt, propped up on a stack of pillows. The doctor stood over him, pressed a stethoscope to Dad's chest and listened. When Dad saw Matthew he gave a wink and a wave, his head big and yellow on a skinny neck. The doctor looked up and came over and banged the door shut. Matthew didn't like the doctor after that. The doctor had private talks with Matthew's Ma, out in the street next to the doctor's company car, where the kids could only watch through the window and couldn't hear. Matthew's Ma started shredding their old clothes into rags. The rags went into Dad's room and came out dotted with bits of blood and phlegm.

On a Saturday in May, Frankie Shovlin came over to show Matthew the spyglass he bought out of the back of *Mutt and Jeff*. It was the first day in a long time without rain. They took the spyglass out back and used it to try to see in the windows of the whorehouses down the hill and out across Mercury. They were

hunkered against a hole in the back fence when Matthew's Ma came out onto the porch with a basket of bloody rags. She dumped the rags into a trash bin, poured some kerosene on top and lit them on fire. In the whoosh of the flames, Frankie turned around and stared.

"What are you fellows up to?" Ma said.

Matthew pushed the spyglass tighter against his eye and focused it with a twist of the wrist. The spyglass was lousy. He could see almost as well with his bare eyeball and, anyway, the whorehouse windows were pinched-up tight.

"Nothing," he said.

"Nothing," Frankie said.

Ma watched the flames until they went down and she poured a bucket of water on top and clamped down the lid. She hauled the basket back into the house and closed the screen door quiet, the way everybody was supposed to do. Frankie looked at Matthew like his face got slapped.

"All them rags," Frankie said. "That's disgusting."

Matthew handed him back the spyglass. "This thing don't work for shit," he said. "It was a lousy buy, you ask me."

Frankie frowned and looked for himself. Next door, the Sullivans' old dog was up on the shed again, barking. Matthew threw a rock and the dog stopped and stared at them.

"Your Dad come out of that room yet?" Frankie said.

"Nope,"

Frankie pulled his face back and held up the spyglass. "I don't know," he said. "Everything looks a lot bigger."

"It's junk," Matthew said.

"You're just grouching," Frankie said. He collapsed the spyglass and put it in his pocket. "I'm hungry. Let's go to the Pony."

"The first day it ain't cold and you want to eat chili," Matthew said.

"They got big portions," Frankie said. "I like a big portion."

The Greek guy at the Pony would give them extra cheese for free. Matthew looked at the screen door. Things were tight these days. He wasn't getting any allowance.

"I ain't hungry," he said. "Let's go see if anybody's around."

They went out through a loose board in the fence and walked out to Montana. At the end of the alley they met another kid they knew from school. He was littler than Frankie and Matthew. His dad was a manager at one of the gambling houses downtown. Matthew thought the kid was a grouser, the kind of guy who doesn't have any friends, so he thinks everybody's his friend. The kid had a bat and ball and his glove, but there was nobody else in the street. He'd throw the ball as high in the air as he could and then he'd run under it and catch it. The bat was lying against the sidewalk and Matthew picked it up. It was a pretty nice bat.

The kid started talking about the German bases hidden in the mountains. He wanted to go out into the hills to scout for Kraut war planes. Frankie showed him the spyglass and the kid said his friend from the Flats had a nicer one, but he said that it could be good for spotting planes.

“I don’t get it,” Frankie said. “What’d the Germans want to bomb us for?”

“It’s the mines, stupid,” the kid said.

Frankie looked out into the low sky like some kind of war general. “Still,” he said.

Matthew laughed at them. “There ain’t no Krauts,” he said.

“Why not?” The kid said.

“It’s ridiculous,” Matthew said. “The idea of it. There ain’t no Krauts, not unless you count Mr. Planck, owns the butcher shop on Crystal Street.”

“Mr. Planck is a Kraut?” Frankie said.

“He’s probably a spy!” the kid said, like he was being smart. “We should go down there and keep a lookout on him.”

“Yeah,” Matthew said. “He’s probably a spy. He reports back to the Kaiser about what kind of meat people like.”

Frankie laughed.

The kid said, “He could be.” He said: “You don’t know he ain’t.”

Matthew took a couple cuts with the bat. He said, “It’s ridiculous.”

Matthew said he wasn’t going to waste his time looking for Krauts. He said they ought to play ball. Frankie said okay and the kid looked happy just to have other guys there with him. Matthew took first batter. He sent the kid out to be field because the kid was the only who had his mitt. Frankie was pitcher. Frankie’s arm was garbage and Matthew cranked the first pitch over the kid’s head. The ball hit the pavement and rolled down the hill. The kid ran to get it and it took a while. When he got back he was out of breath. He looked goofy trying so

hard, running red-faced in a poofy white dress shirt that was so big it must have been a hand-me-down. Matthew and Frankie laughed about it and when Frankie went to throw the next pitch he winked and sent a lazy meatball right down the middle. Matthew belted it. Even farther this time. The kid looked tired when he got back. The kid wanted to know when it was his turn to hit.

“You gotta put me out first,” Matthew said.

The kid went back to the outfield spot. Frankie sent another easy one in and Matthew hit it hard. The kid went for it again, but when he got back he said if it wasn't going to be his turn he was going to go home. Matthew told him he sounded like a girl.

“Shut up,” The kid said. “Give me my bat.”

“I like this bat,” Matthew said. “I'm thinking about taking it home.”

The kid looked like he might cry. He licked his lips. Matthew never would have expected the kid would hit him, but he did. Right on the button and Matthew saw lights. He took a step back and found his legs. He shot on the kid, hooked him in a single leg and dropped him onto the dirt. Matthew came down on top, his knees crashing into the kid's ribs. The wind screeched out of the kid's body and Matthew punched him as hard as he could in the middle of the face.

The kid said: “Oof,” and Matthew hit him again. The kid's hat came off and Matthew picked it up and muffled it over the kid's face. He looked around for something else to hit him with. Matthew looked up at Frankie, but Frankie wasn't watching. He was looking off down the road. Matthew heard the rattle of an engine and turned around to see a car coming up Montana. The car was big and

black, headlamps turned on, a cop car, and Matthew got up and dropped the kid's hat.

"Run," Frankie said, but nobody did.

The car came up slow and stopped in the middle of the street. The man inside the car smiled at them, managing not to put any joy into it. His head was thick and knobby, a big forehead, brown hair balding on top, going grey over his ears. His mustache chopped off in straight lines at either point of his lips. The man got out and came around the car. Not in a hurry, walking like a guy who knew the world would wait for him. He wasn't dressed like a cop, but had on an old brown suit and double-color wingtips.

The kid pulled himself up, blood dribbling from his nose onto his dress shirt. They all stood in a line without being told. The cop put one wingtip on the running board of the car, took out a handkerchief and buffed some dirt off the tip of his shoe.

"What's this?" He said, like he was talking to it, the shoe. An Irish clip in his words.

"Nothing," Matthew said.

"Nothing," Frankie said.

The kid just sniffed.

The cop folded the handkerchief and put it back in his jacket. He faced the boys, both hands in his pockets. He had a round face, big shoulders. He had maybe once been in good shape, but was going fat now with old-man body, gut hanging out of his open jacket.

“It looked like a real fisticuff you had going,” the cop said.

“We was just playing ball,” Matthew said.

The cop’s cheeks puffed. A little laugh. He put his face close to Matthew’s face.

“That isn’t what I asked you,” he said.

Matthew smelled coffee and cigarettes and booze stink on the cop’s breath. He sounded chipper, like somebody’s granddad, but there was something blunt, something animal in his face. Matthew looked down at his own feet, chewed his own lip. That *was* what the cop asked them, but Matthew knew if a cop wanted to play it like that – ask you things and then say he never did – there was no winning it. He ran his tongue across the back of his teeth and counted them. Filled his mind with the numbers so he wouldn’t talk anymore.

It was Frankie that fucked it up. “They was just on a goof,” Frankie said, his voice shaky scared.

The cop looked out over their heads, down the road and into town. He came out of his pocket with a leather sap and knocked Frankie above the kneecap. The sound as loud as a firecracker. Frankie yelled and jumped back, both hands on the spot. Matthew did not look at him. Matthew wanted to look only at the cop, but his stomach clutched and he coughed into his hand and spat into the dirt.

The kid started crying. His shirt was ripped, face tracked with tears. A baby’s face. His bottom lip shook and made a square shape and showed blood on his teeth.

“Shut up,” Matthew said. “Shut up.” It didn’t do any good.

The cop came back to Matthew. "Are you a smart little Cabbage Patch bastard who comes up the hill to make trouble?" He said. "Is that it?"

"No," Matthew said. "I live here." He tried to keep the whine out of his voice. He said: "We was just playing ball."

The little kid busted in. "He hit me!" Almost screamed it, sounding queer.

The cop looked at the kid like he hadn't noticed him before. He put a hand on the kid's shoulder. "I know that, son," he said. "Now run along home before I show you what they do to snitchers in the penitentiary."

The kid did not look back. His stupid white shirt disappearing down the hill. His baseball gear in his hands. Gasping sobs over the noise of his shoes slapping the pavement. Matthew kicked Frankie's boot, hard, but Frankie wouldn't stand up straight. They were out on a main street, anybody could see if they looked, but they were alone with the cop, who leaned against the car, tapping his sap against his thigh.

"You boys want to take a ride?" He said, not asking. "Find out what it feels like not to be the biggest man in the fight?"

The cop turned to open the door. Down the block, a screen door slammed. Matthew saw Mrs. McVeigh, who walked with a cane, coming out onto her porch. Checking the mail. The cop looked too and when he turned his head, Matthew grabbed Frankie's wrist and took off running back down the alley. His lungs felt full of fire when he did it and as they ran he felt the sag of Frankie's body lagging behind. Heard Frankie coughing in the dust they kicked up. He told himself not to look back. Willed himself not to look, but did. He saw the cop,



pink-cheeked, cursing in the street, getting back the car, pulling off with a lurch. They beat it back to the fence and Matthew shoved Frankie through first. He crawled in after and then they both put their backs against the wood and listened for the engine of the cop's car above the sound of their own breathing. The Sullivans' dog was back up, barking, but outside of that it was quiet. They slumped down into the dirt.

"You ran," Frankie said. "You ran from a cop."

"He don't even know who we are," Matthew said, knowing even as he said it that they would see the cop again. Knowing there would be a time when they would reckon with this, but feeling good because that time was not right now.

Matthew's mother came out onto the porch and asked where they thought they'd been. She had a tone and suddenly Matthew was sure they'd been caught. They hadn't gotten away after all. Somehow, the cop knew where he lived. The cop'd beat them there and told his Ma what he'd done. She yelled at him to send Frankie home. Matthew asked why and she came down off the porch like she might slap him and Frankie took off running toward home.

They went inside and Matthew braced himself for it, but the cop was not there. Not standing in the house with his leather sap and ticket book. Instead it was just the company doctor, waiting with his sisters in the front room. A ripple of relief fluttered in his gut when he saw the doctor. Out the front window the street was quiet. Matthew's Ma put him on the couch with his sisters and she stood by the little table in the dining room. The doctor was sitting in Dad's chair. The doctor had his hat resting on his knee and he was staring at it. When he

talked, the blond whiskers around his mouth twitched and that's what Matthew watched while the doctor said that Dad was not getting better; that Dad had just a few weeks to live.

Matthew squinted at the doctor. The cuffs of his pants were caked with dirt and he had flakes of dandruff on the shoulders of his suit jacket. He didn't look like a doctor who would know too much. Matthew looked at his own hand and there was blood there, streaked across the back of his knuckles and he wiped it on his pants but it wouldn't all the way come off. The bedroom door was closed and Matthew half thought Dad would come out and smile at them, looking fit and full like his old self and tell them that the doctor was full of it. Dad was in there right now, propped with pillows, still alive and listening to them talk about him dying. The room was dark and Matthew panicked for a second, thinking maybe Dad was already gone, that he'd died while Matthew was out running from the cop and they'd already come and taken him away. He stood up and moved toward the door but his mother caught his hand.

His sisters were crying and his mother held them with one arm. The doctor went on talking, saying he couldn't be certain when exactly it would happen. Things like this couldn't be charted or predicted absolutely. Ma said things back to the doctor, asked questions and the doctor answered her the long way around, so that when he got done talking, Matthew couldn't remember where he'd started.

They went on talking for a long time, but Matthew stopped listening to them. Suddenly it was like he could see the things in the room from up close. It was like he was looking through Frankie's shitty spyglass, even though he wasn't. He saw

the ashtray on the little table, heavy blue glass and full of cigarette butts. Eleven cigarette butts. Most of them were his Ma's Luckies but the little burned-up corners of rolling papers were Dad's. The glass on the side of the ashtray was chipped in spots and the top of the table burned from places where people hadn't been careful with their ash. The doctor said something about money then and his Ma sat up straight in her chair.

"I'll have my lump sum," Ma said to the doctor. "For the damages."

The Doc cleared his throat. "Mrs. Lehane," he said and then stopped. There was a long silence while the doctor decided what to say next. Finally the doctor told them he was not certain the company would be inclined to offer a lump sum settlement in this case. Ma looked like somebody kicked her. The doctor's eyes traced the room and then he said that Dad had got the Miner's Con, a leading cause of which is known to be the Irish race's, shall we say, particular inclination toward drink. The doctor said he wasn't sure a judge would decide the company was liable to pay anything.

The glass ashtray was low and flat and it was heavy when Matthew picked it up and threw it at the doctor's head. He missed, or the doctor ducked and the ashtray exploded against the wall and left a hole where it hit. The doctor jumped out of his seat, ashes in his hair. The doctor looked scared and like he didn't know what to do.

Matthew twisted free from Ma's hold. He started crying and hated himself for doing it where everybody could see and he went back through the hallway and into his room, slamming the door. His bed was there but he wouldn't lie down.

Above his bed were the wrestling pictures he had tacked up, pictures of Gotch and Stetcher and the rest. The pictures Dad had told him to take down because Ma didn't want half-penny nails in her walls. He took them down now, ripped each one off the nail that held it and then folded them carefully and put them in the drawer of his bedside table. When that was done, he stretched out in bed and looked at the ceiling.

He heard the noise of the doctor's car driving away. When his mother came into the room a minute later, she told him to get his feet off the bed, and then sat next to him and petted his hair and talked to him in a low voice. She told him everything was going to be okay. She told him not to worry about the money, that she was going to get a job, cleaning houses maybe or working at the laundry out near the flats. For a second he didn't know what money she meant. He asked her if Dad was really going to die and she said she didn't know, but she hoped not. He asked her, if she went to work, who would watch the girls while he was at school? She was quiet a long time after that and then said that they would figure something out. Matthew told her that she sounded stupid. He said that Dad was going to be okay and she couldn't go to work while the girls needed her and even if she did, she wouldn't earn enough for all four of them. Matthew said he would go. Just a temporary thing, a fix until Dad got well enough to get out of bed. She asked him where he thought he would work that he would make so much more than him and Matthew said he would work in the mines.

His mother nearly laughed. "You most certainly will not."

"I will," he said. "I'll go."

She said she wouldn't allow it, but as soon as he'd said the words, Matthew knew they were true. He knew the mines had always been waiting for him the way they waited for all the men and that any other life he'd thought about or dreamed of when he was littler was just a lie to himself. He had never been inside the mines before, had only seen the surface works and the squinting, dead-eyed stare of the men who worked underground, but he felt like he knew them. He knew them familiar; like he knew the names of his sisters, like he knew the feeling of a baseball slapping into his glove. He knew. Ma closed her eyes and shook her head and he realized that she was crying too. Both of his sisters came into the room and crawled in bed with him. They all sat for a long time, them hugging him around the head in the dark until Matthew felt that he could barely breathe.

## Four

Oates got a room at one of the big boarding houses downtown. He came in late and paid extra for the kitchen to cook him a stack of waffles. It tickled him to be able to eat breakfast at suppertime. He ate slow and drank a scoop of beer, soaking up the stares of the nickel-and-dimers who were all eating the regular slop. He wanted everybody to know he was an important man who came to town in a nice car and a load of cash. Outside, the city glittered and bucked just the way he imagined it would. The sidewalks swam with people, faces under electric lights.

In the morning he walked to his meeting. On the way over, he went through the way it would go in his mind. You will meet the man who will be your boss, Oates told himself, the man with the money. You will smile at this man, don't try to shake his hand. You will look him in his eyes. You will not tremble. Your voice will not catch. You will be smart and easy.

On the fifth floor, all the secretaries were eating birthday cake. A pretty girl in click-clack heels took him down the hallway. She looked only at her plate of cake, half-smiling at it in a way that said how good it tasted. She showed Oates through a frosted glass door and into an office, where a man lay flat on his face in the middle of the floor. The secretary made sure Oates sat down in a soft leather chair and she left.

Oates tilted his head to the side. The man on the floor wore no shoes, just thin black socks and a white dress shirt pinstriped in grey and wool slacks. His shoes

sat on the carpet by his side. Oates could not see his face, but he could hear him fat-man breathing into the deep red carpet. The back of the man's head was pink and bald. A Chinese girl in a blue silk gown with a pair of fancy red birds stitched on the back stood on the fat man's back. The girl walked slowly up the man's back and stood near his shoulders. She shifted her weight from foot to foot. A little dance. The man groaned. The girl turned and inched back down to the man's waistline and stopped. She shifted her weight from foot to foot. The man groaned.

Oates was wearing his best suit. He'd had waffles again for breakfast in the boarding house common room and followed his directions to this office. The office was big and dark, everything heavy wood and soft fabric. The only light came from a green hooded desk lamp. The desk was as big as a battleship. Oates looked it over so he wouldn't have to look at the fat man on the floor.

After a time, the girl got down off the man's back. The man stood up and dusted off his front. He said: "Thank you, Ling," in a soft voice, queer sounding. The girl left the room, looking at the floor. As she passed, Oates caught her smell, a nice perfume that tickled his nose.

The man scrunched his eyebrows and adjusted the tuck of his shirt. A scolding look, like it was Oates' fault he'd walked in while the girl was here. Oates checked his watch, he was right on time. He put his eyes back on the man, shot for cool and collected. The man's fatness made his face look tiny in his big head. He took a pair of little round glasses off the desk and put them on. His cheeks were smooth and babyish.

The fat man sat down at the desk and looked at some papers. Finally he said, "Mr. Oates."

Oates said. "Mr. Alley." He assumed this was the Mr. Roy Alley he'd come to see.

"Come closer, please," Alley said. "My eyes in this dark."

Oates stood. He hesitated a moment, then picked up his chair and moved it closer to the desk. Alley looked up from his papers, looked at Oates over his glasses.

"Closer," Alley said.

Oates got up again, scooted the chair, sat down with his knees almost touching the desk.

"You come recommended," Alley said, voice like a woman's, light and shrill.

"Yessir," Oates said, a little nod, smart and easy.

Alley stuck out his right hand for a shake and Oates had to stand up one more time. Oates took Alley's hand awkwardly with his left. Alley's eyes passed over the silk bag that Oates wore over the hook on his right arm. Oates sat down.

"I have reliable intelligence that you are a child murderer," Alley said, "and that you have a history of violence against women."

Oates gripped the arm of the chair with his good hand, squinted at the fat man, he said: "Sir?"



Alley put his palms up in front of him. "I'm not here to judge you, Mr. Oates," Alley said. "Your peccadilloes are your own. In fact, a more common kind of person would be less desirable to us in terms of your employment."

Oates nodded, his cheeks starting to burn, he told himself not to touch his face. Behind Alley's head were a row of pictures and framed certificates.

"I just need to make certain that you don't have a problem with that sort of thing," Alley said. "In the rare instance that it would be called for."

"With what sort of thing?" Oates said. "With killing?"

"With killing," Alley said.

"Yessir," Oates said.

"Yes what?" Alley said. "Yes you can handle it? Or yes you have a problem it?"

"Yes, I can handle it."

"You're absolutely certain?"

"I said I was."

"Indeed," Alley said. He stacked his papers. "With one caveat. You are not in St. Louis anymore, Mr. Oates. I don't know how you're used to working, but we run a big boy operation here. The Company is the thing. The men who work above me, the men who are at least at a distance your employers, require strict professionalism from all of their employees. Are you following me?"

"Yessir," Oates said.

"That goes for me the same way it does for you," Alley said, he smiled.

"There are standards for our conduct."

“You mean like that girl was in here when a came in?” Oates said.

Alley coughed into his head.

“What I mean to say,” Alley said. “You do what you’re told, when you’re told and nothing more.”

Oates scratched at his neck. “Yessir,” Oates said.

“I understand that all men have certain urges,” Alley said, “and we would like you to take pride in your work for us. But forgive me if I must speak bluntly for a moment. If, during your stay here, you harm anyone without the express orders to do so from the company, then the company will have no choice but to terminate your employment with extreme prejudice. Understood?”

Oates ran his tongue across the front of his teeth. “Yessir,” he said.

“We’ll set you up with some legitimate work. As a security officer in the department store on the ground floor and we’ll give you extra assignments as needed,” Alley said. “The company has a variety of men like you in our employ. We use freelancers like you. Pinkertons. City police officers. Undercover agents.”

Alley stopped and looked at him, like he was making sure Oates was following along. Oates nodded, but the silence stretched. Finally Oates said, “I don’t do undercover.”

Alley chuckled. He let his eyes rest on the black bag again. “I don’t expect that you do.” he said. “You are missing your right hand, correct?”

“Correct,” Oates said.

“You lost it,” Alley said, he shuffled some paper, looked at one of them. “At age eleven. You worked in your father’s brewery. Doctors couldn’t save it after it was crushed under a full keg of beer.”

Alley looked at him again. “Is that correct?” he said.

“You know all that from that piece of paper?” Oates said.

“I have the hospital record right here,” Alley said, fluttering a yellow sheet. “It says it was an accident, while you were helping your father load a truck. Is that correct, Mr. Oates?”

Oates didn’t like the fat man’s tone. His blood spun a little bit. “It says on that piece of paper that my daddy dropped a full barrel of beer on my hand?”

“Yes it does,” Alley said.

“Does it say how many times?”

Alley blinked. He looked at the paper. “It does not.”

“Well,” Oates said. “If it said how many times, you wouldn’t have to ask me if it was an accident.”

Alley nodded curtly. “I’d like to see it,” He said.

“What?”

“I’d like to see it,”

“You want to see where they sawed my hand off?”

“Very much,” Alley said, a little baby smile.

Oates’ blood ticked faster. He had the pistol tucked in a shoulder holster. He untied the bag and pulled it off. He held the hook up for Alley to see. The hook poked out from the cuff of his suit jacket. It was dull metal and rusted in a

few spots. For a time, Oates had cared for it religiously, wiping it down each night and cleaning the rubber parts from time to time. He'd got away from that now.

"Oh my," Alley said.

He came around the desk. He adjusted his spectacles. Putting his face very close to the hook he sniffed at it and passed the tip of his fat finger over the top and down to the point slowly, barely touching. He whistled low. Oates could smell Alley's cologne. Up close the fat man's skin was pink and scrubbed clean. Oates thought of spinning his hand and tearing through the man's face with the hook. He smiled at the man and nodded, his own face feeling like wax.

"Take it off," Alley said, his voice soft.

Oates squinted at him, but Alley just circled the backs of his hands in front of Oates' face as if to say get on with it. Oates slipped his arm out of one side of his suit jacket and unbuttoned the cuff of his shirt. The shirt was old and yellowed a bit in the pits and Alley watched him as Oates did the unbuttoning. He slipped the rubber loop from around his elbow and used his good hand to pull the hook free. Underneath, the stump was grayish and looked thinner than it should have looked. It was scarred across the front from where the doctors had sewed him up. Alley made an Oh with his mouth and reached to touch the stump but Oates jerked it away. Alley pulled his own hand back like Oates had tried to bite him.

The door opened behind Oates and he turned to look. The pretty secretary stood with her hand on the frosted glass door, a man in a brown suit standing behind her. The secretary looked away when she saw Oates' arm. Oates looked at the floor. The man in brown stepped into the room and the secretary closed the

door behind him. When he heard the door click shut, Oates looked up at Alley. Alley nodded to him as if giving him permission to pull his shirt back up.

The man in brown came into the light. He was older than Oates, but shorter. He had square shoulders and his middle was going to fat with age. Balding on top, his hair grey over his ears, matching a thick mustache. The man's eyes were small and hard.

Alley introduced him as Chief Police Detective Ed Morrissey. Morrissey came forward and put out his hand. Oates shook it in a jumble again with his left. He was flustered now. Morrissey smiled at him, showing tiny sharp teeth, little gaps between each. Oates strapped the hook back into place and wriggled into his jacket.

"I've arranged for you to work closely on one of our biggest projects," Alley said

Oates looked at him and Alley smiled. "I'll have Mr. Morrissey explain it to you," he said. He clapped Oates on the back. "Thank you for that demonstration, Mr. Oates. It was quite illuminating."

Alley and Morrissey smiled again and Oates nodded to each of them. Oates signed some papers at the front desk and he and Morrissey went down in the elevator. Morrissey stood with his hands stuffed in his pockets, his jacket ruffled up over his arms. Oates rubbed at the base of the hook with his good hand. Morrissey turned his head and eyed it.

"You have a nice visit with Mr. Alley?" Morrissey said. "I know he has a peculiar way of saying hello."

“I think he was crushing on me,” Oates said.

Morrissey laughed, gruff and low. “Alley’s no queer.”

“He had me fooled then,” Oates said.

When the doors opened on the lobby, Morrissey made a show of straightening his suit.

“No. Our man Alley is a pedophile, to be sure.” Morrissey said. “But at least he likes girls.” Morrissey laughed his barking laugh again, slapped Oates hard on the arm and walked out of the elevator.

## Five

The plan was to run away. He mapped it out at a lunch counter downtown with a train schedule spread out in front of him and his book about Frank Gotch on his lap. The book was tattered and worn-out from so much reading it. The cover was barely on and there were some pages that he'd ripped out for the pictures. The train schedule was hard to figure. The trains ran all day and all night and line was marked out with different twisting colors and lines. Matthew was an alright reader, but some stuff was complicated. Northern Pacific offered direct passage and if he could figure out a way to jump it, he'd be in Chicago in a little over 24 hours. The book said Frank Gotch lived in Iowa, which looked like it was pretty close to there, and Matthew planned to ask around until he found somebody who knew the way. Matthew imagined if Gotch was retired, he might be able to talk Gotch into training him.

The night that was supposed to be first shift on Granite Mountain, Matthew kissed his Ma on the corner of the mouth and walked to the end of the block before doubling back into the alley. It was raining again, the kind of weird spring rain that all came down at once, like someone in heaven kicked over a bucket. He was wearing Dad's boots, which were too big for him, and the sickening yellow mud sucked at the soles, trying to pull them clean off. Behind the trash cans of the Lowneys' house, he'd stashed an old knapsack. Things he'd need for the road. Two shirts and an extra pair of pants, candy bought from the

mercantile and some comic books. Down the hill he could see the city lights twinkling in the purple gloom. Matthew had never been on a train before.

He tried to see himself riding out of town on a summer day, wearing an expensive hat and a gold nugget wallet chain like the one John Bulger had, but he couldn't picture it. All he could smell was the stink of his father's work clothes. Sulfur and sweat and tobacco. Everything hung on him like he was a scarecrow. The jeans rolled at the cuffs, grey wool shirt and his father's hard-boiler rattling around on his head. He walked to the end of the alley and stood out on Montana Street, where a couple of cars drove by with their lights on.

He'd fought with Ma for hours about his going to work. They'd talked to Dad about it and he'd settled it with just a nod. They'd cleared it with Bulger, who said he could get Matthew on his crew and get him a rustling card. Big adult wheels had turned to make it happen which made Matthew feel important. When it had come time for him to leave the house for the actual going and doing it, Matthew had started to cry. It had been his idea, like a big brave cowboy and now he wanted to get out of it. Hop that train to Chicago so he could be a wrestler like he wanted to be. He hated that feeling. Hated that he could even have it.

The thought that stopped him was his sisters who'd both just sat down to dinner as he was leaving for work. He'd eaten early and his Ma had fixed him a dinner for later in Dad's old lunch pail. Eileen and Diedre came away from the table to hug him and it'd made him blush and he'd pushed them away after a second of it. Ma kissed him on the corner of the mouth and gave him a little prayer card, tucked into his breast pocket. The looks on their faces were like he



was off to war and it had puffed him with pride. Frank Gotch and Iowa and wrestling were just ideas he'd had – not the real thing, not something he'd really do – and standing on the street corner now with his knapsack over his shoulder he realized he'd known that all along.

He went back into the alley and stashed the knapsack and then went up the hill toward the mines. In the rain it took him awhile to find the right place and when he did find it, he was late. The other men had already gone down into the hole. The hoistman was a steady guy with a long thin nose and a bag of chocolates in his jacket pocket. He had a straight, unfeeling way of talking, but when Matthew had to stop and puke in the dirt, the man came up and slapped him on the back with a big hand. It was a nice kind of slap. Matthew said he must of ate something wrong. The hoistman said he'd been feeling rotten too, it'd been going around he said, and he gave him a piece of candy. Matthew knew the hoistman man from church, but didn't know his name. Dad said the man always carried chocolates because he didn't drink liquor anymore.

The hoistman locked him in the cage, where the only other rider was a blindfolded mule. There weren't many mules in the mines anymore, most of them replaced by electric carts that took ore to the cage so it could come to the surface. Down at the 2000, they were putting in a new sprinkler system, the hoistman said, and the mules were helping out with that.

The mule's legs were hobbled and someone had tied a piece of black cloth over its eyes. It was wet and trembling, its coat shining with water. The hoistman stepped away from the cage and called through the mesh: "Watch your fingers."

He pulled a level and the cage lurched down, the sound of screeching metal from somewhere up in the night sky. The mule twisted in its hobbles and tossed its head. Matthew moved to the other side of the cage. The mule scared him and he told it to hush and it brayed back at him. The cage rattled from side to side in the wind.

When he went underground, it was slow and steady, the hoistman probably giving it to him as easy as he could. The darkness of it was immediate and heavy on his face. Matthew thought his heart was going to pop and he put his hands in his pockets. Above him, the sky got smaller until it was just a milky pinhole. There was hush, with just the grinding of the cage cable and the dirt of the tunnel rubbing against the sides of the mesh. Matthew squeezed the chocolate in his fist until it molded the shape of his hand. He thought it would be cold underground, but instead it got warmer, the air taking on weight. It got inside his body when he breathed and made his guts feel full. When he couldn't stand still anymore he paced to the other side of the cage and tried talking to the mule. The mule had settled down and was riding along with its nose dipped down against its chest. Matthew reached a hand out and touched it side and the mule turned its head but didn't move. Matthew pressed his back against the mesh of the cage and slid down until he was sitting on the floor of it with the mule's nose at his hip.

The sides of the tunnel turned into solid rock and clay. Matthew took his hard-boiler off, wiped sweat from his forehead onto the sleeve of his jacket, and put the hat back on before something fell and crushed his skull. The chocolate in his fist softened into a sticky blob and he unwrapped it and put it in his mouth. Felt it

gooey on his tongue. He imagined the world's middle, like a giant hot marble spinning somewhere underneath him. He touched the mule's nose, cool and damp on his fingers, and he wished as hard as he could to be anywhere else in the world but right there.

When the cage stopped the gate unlatched, clicking like a rollercoaster. Matthew expected to find a dungeon, something dark and lurking, but instead it took him a second for his eyes to adjust to the light. The place was lit up bright with carbide lamps and candles. The big room had been blasted open with dynamite and the walls and ceiling had been framed with wooden planks to beat back the earth. The floor was rock, patched in places with boards and there were spots where tangles of chains hung from the ceiling. It was hot as a summer day and he could feel the air in his throat like thick maple syrup.

Only the miners looked exactly like he knew they would. They stood in a mob near the cage door, dressed just like him. The men looked dark and wet already, shirts spotted grey with clay and brown with dirt, dinner pails hanging in their hands. He knew most of their names. He remembered them bright and pink-cheeked in their church clothes at Swede Fredrickson's wake. Now they were pale and in the shadows he could see the bones in their faces. Some of them still dirty from the night before. A few of the faces smiled at him. When the cage door clicked open, some of the men took up tools and started off like they'd been waiting a long time.

There were Bohunks with wide, hairless faces and a few Wops, who he knew from their bushy mustaches, shiny tips of hair hanging under their hardboilers. The first man who stepped up to shake his hand wore a scarf on his head, a little man with brown skin and crooked white teeth. Matthew knew it was Afghan Bob, a Mohammaden who'd come to Butte alone on a train a year ago and had caught on with the Spec boys. Matthew shook his little hand, feeling his crusty skin. Afghan Bob nodded to him and pulled him out of the caged and into the room.

John Bulger, Denis Freeney and Tim Coogan came toward him. Bulger put his hand on Matthew's shoulder. He felt a stinging pride then, feeling good to be down here with the men about to go to work. Someone came and unhobbled the mule and, when it was finished braying and stamping, they took it away to the underground stables.

"Jesus," Coogan said taking off his hat, looking at Matthew but not talking to him. "Don't it look like they chopped Jimmy Lehane off at the knees?" A cigarette hung from the corner of Coogan's lips and he dragged on it, pulling it out of his left hand when he exhaled. The hand was just a thumb and a pinky finger and three stumps. "Don't the kid look like a midget Jimmy Lehane?" Coogan said again. There were some chuckles.

Bulger said to shut up. His voice came out quiet but it made Coogan look the other way. "You ready, son?" Bulger said to Matthew.

Matthew didn't know what to say. Coogan tossed his cigarette into a puddle.

"Can't you hear us when we're talking to you?" Coogan said.

Bulger told Coogan to leave off and walked Matthew up to see the shift boss. The shift boss was squatting next to a broken singlejacker, spitting hunks of chewing tobacco into the dirt. He had had blue lips and wore a handkerchief tied over the top of his head like a woman doing the wash.

“New man here,” Bulger said. He reached into the pocket of his jacket and took out a yellow paper rustling card.

The shift boss squinted at the card and squinted at Matthew. “How old?” The shift boss said.

“Nineteen,” Matthew said. The shift boss looked at him in a way that said the shift boss was not talking to him and maybe never meant to, ever. Then and laughed a wheezing laugh that sounded like crumbling leaves and tucked the card into Matthew’s breast pocket.

“Just keep him alive please John,” the shift boss said. “I don’t need the state inspector down here taking measurements.”

The shift boss said it flat and the pride Matthew had been feeling melted. Just from the way the shift boss looked at him, he knew he was going to die in the mines. He saw his own future then, saw himself stretched out on a pool table at the Atlantic like Swede Fredrickson. His mother crying in a booth and men drinking and laughing about it. He followed Bulger back down the path to the rest of the crew.

Matthew worked with Bulger and Denis Freeney, doublejacking a rock face for dynamite. Bulger hefted a twenty pound maul while Freeney and Matthew held either side of a four-foot steel that was like an enormous screw. Bulger

swung the hammer and as he pulled back, a little puff of dust drifted out of the hole. Freeney and Matthew turned the steel. They did this for what must have been hours. Over and over until they'd drilled a Y-shaped pattern and then circled it with other holes. Later the holes would be plugged with dynamite and the rock face blown away. They worked in the same room as Coogan and Afghan Bob, who both ran motorized singlejackers, like the kind that blew up on Swede.

Matthew kept his face hard and his eyes steady but the older men had so much strength and energy that he could barely watch them go. After about ten minutes he felt a burning in his shoulders. He breathed carefully through his nose and made himself go on, not thinking about it. He imagined himself with Frank Gotch in Iowa, Gotch would have a barn or something for them to train in. Gotch might be mean to him at the start but Matthew would warm him with his talent. He worked until he could barely breathe and had to take a break for water. Sweat stung in his eyes and his hardboiler kept slipping and covering his face. He gulped big from a jar by the entry way of the drift. Coogan shut down his machine, walked over, and tossed a wrench down in the dirt at Matthew's feet.

"I can't use this goddamn thing," Coogan said.

The wrench was as long as Matthew's thigh. He tried to look the man in the eyes to show him he wasn't scared, but he was scared. Coogan held up his crippled hand, used his good one to point out the stumps of flesh where his three strongest fingers should be. "My fingers," he said, slow like he thought Matthew was stupid. "I need the left hander."

Matthew didn't know what to do, so he stood still. Coogan came close and practically shouted in his face: "The left-handed wrench," he said. "They got one up at 1600." Then quieter: "Be a dear and run get it for me."

Matthew felt a bit of relief to get a break from drilling. He started back toward the cage. Coogan called after him, "Take Little Bob with you."

Bob caught up with him while Matthew waited for the cage door to open. They got in together and started up to the 1600. Bob smiled at him again and Matthew saw that one of his front teeth was gold.

The shift boss at the 1600 told them he didn't have the wrench they needed. The wrench was down at the 2600, the shift boss said. He slapped Matthew hard on the side of the shoulder, "Lot of lefties down there," he said and smiled in a way Matthew didn't like.

The wrench wasn't at the 2600 either. The shift boss there was a big Bohunk who just looked at them like they'd asked him an impossible question. They went back to the 2400 and told Coogan they couldn't find the wrench he wanted. Matthew thought he would be mad, but Coogan just laughed at them. There was, it turned out, no such thing as a left handed wrench.

"I would've asked you to grab the rock stretcher too," Coogan said. "But I didn't think the two of you could lift it."

The whole shift laughed at that one, stood around in a circle laughing at them in a way that got Matthew mad. Afghan Bob just nodded and, smiling, and scratched the back of his neck.

Matthew spent the next few hours staring at the back of Coogan's work boots, while Coogan worked up on a little ledge. When the shift broke for dinner there was a rush to the room where the men kept their pails. When Coogan shut down his machine and tried to join them, he tripped, fell face first into the dirt, scaring up a cloud of dust that covered his shirt and pants. When Coogan sat up, he found that the laces of his work boots had been tied together. The rest of the men laughed, but Matthew didn't look at him at all.

Sunday dinner they ate in Dad's bedroom. Ma said they were still the finest family in Butte and until she said otherwise, they were going to act like it. Matthew helped her drag the dining table into the room. They pushed it up at the foot of the bed. Dad sat propped up with a pillow and a handkerchief in his hand. He couldn't eat much. Deidre and Eileen wore their church dresses but Matthew came to dinner just in shirt sleeves. He was too tired to dress up for it. Ma said something about it, but Dad just waved it off, said it was okay. They ate, and when Matthew told them all about the thing with Coogan's boot laces, Dad laughed so hard he coughed into a fit and the kids had to leave the room.

They sat on the sofa in the front room until Ma came out to get them. Diedre fiddled with her napkin and Eileen kicked at the leg of the sofa. When they went back in, Dad looked the same as before, a little more color in his face maybe. He told a joke about watching out for chicken bones and they all laughed a little. Matthew tried to keep up with the talk, Diedre lecturing them all about



what she'd learned in school. Eileen poked around her plate with her fork, spreading the mashed potatoes out into a picture.

Ma told them stories about Ireland. Their Grandpa Daniel had been a hat-maker, she said. He worked in a town called Crosshaven and one time a very important English lord had come on a tour to see the city and give a speech. The lord had a lot of body guards with him all the time, because the people in Ireland didn't like the English, even then. Ma said the lord gave a big speech in the middle of town surrounded by his bodyguards, but at the end of it, nobody could find the lord's hat. They looked everywhere, even threatened to throw people in jail if the lord's hat didn't turn up. Finally, Grandpa Daniel came forward, head bowed, with the lord's hat in his hands. He said: "Pardon me lord, but I think you misplaced this," he gave the hat back and the bodyguards snatched it away. The lord got his hat back, but he left Crosshaven and he never came back.

When she was done with the story Ma sat back and had a bite of her food like it was something very special what she'd just said.

"I don't get it," Eileen said.

Dierdre smiled her school smile, "What was he the lord of, Ma?" she said.

"I get it," Matthew said and the whole family turned to look at him and he felt another rush of tiredness that made him wish he hadn't said anything.

"Well?" Ma said, a little nod.

"It's like, if they can take his hat whenever they want, they can take what's under it too," Matthew said. "All them bodyguards didn't do no good."

Ma nodded. The girls looked at him, still not getting it. Dad waved his fork, his plated perched on a pillow in his lap.

“Don’t fill their heads with nonsense about Ireland, Rebecca,” he said.

Ma looked at him like he’d tried to kick her. “Why not?” she said, more of an order than acting a question.

“We learned about lords,” Dierdre said. “Someday I’m going to be a lady.”

“Kids,” Dad said, “in Ireland things’re complicated. Your Ma and me, we was poor back there, more poor than we are now, which is why we came here in the first place.”

“That’s a traitorous thing to say, Jimmy,” Ma said.

Dad went on talking to Matthew and the girls. “Ireland is a fine place,” he said, “but we’re in Montana now and Montana’s done us a lot better than Ireland ever did.”

“Jimmy,” Ma said.

“I don’t want em wasting their lives fighting for Ireland when the world I worked me skin off to give em is right there out that window,” Dad said and pointed.

There was silence after that until Ma said: “How dare you,” and she left them room. Dad started coughing again, hacking into his handkerchief, and Matthew and the girls got the plates together and took them to the kitchen.

Matthew learned quick, quick as he could, how it was in the mines. He learned the frying pan heat and the wet pockets that near froze your bones. He learned the right places to step and how to tell the places where the ground would give way if you put your weight on it. Down in the hole there were jackers and nippers, muckers, dynamite men and wood-choppers, hoistmen, trackmen, ropers, swampers, greenhorns and bosses. There were men who had houses in town with kids and wives and men who came and went with the weather. And all the men were called boys. There were boys who came to work drunk and got drunker and there were boys who never touched the stuff. Boys who scratched naked ladies on the walls in chalk and God-fearers who wouldn't look. Matthew figured which of the boys he could kid with and talk a little bit about sports, and which of the boys might give him the dessert from their dinner pales if he fetched them the good tools. He figured which of the boys to not even look at.

The Spec wasn't exactly what they called an Irish mine. There were Serbs and Greeks and Wops. Cousin Jacks. Turks. Polacks. Blacks and Chinamen. Frenchies. Afghan Bob worked with his headwrap on under his hardboiler and prayed all through the night to Allah and Mohammad. The boys just shrugged and giggled at him. They lived in the Big Ship or other boardinghouses in the steel block downtown. They lived on Nanny Goat Hill, out in Seldom Seen, Dublin Gulch and Chicken Flats. They talked about pro ball and wrestling and fighting and which of the city-leaguers would win the crown this year. They worked until they could barely move and after work they wanted a big cold scoop of beer and to meet girls they could take dancing at the Coliseum.

One of the first nights Matthew was at work, the boys took dinner on a long flat piece of rock that looked out onto a lower level. Muckers down there loaded ore into carts and wedged into crevices with long-handled shovels. It was probably near two or three in the morning. Denis Freeney came over and sat down by Matthew and their elbows touched. Matthew could feel Freeney's skin cold under his cotton shirt. They were all dirty and wet from the copper water that leaked out of the earth.

Matthew's jeans were stiff and damp. The mines were always either too hot or too cold, and that you could never tell which it was going to be before you got there. His shirt was wet and buttoned to his throat, but he shivered so much he thought his bones might crack and come sticking out the ends of his fingers. He pulled his hardboiler tighter on his head. The bottom chamber of his dinner pail had tea, which he'd warmed by hanging it over a candle flame for the past couple of hours. Steam from the tea heated the top chamber of the dinner pail where he found the rest of his food – a beef pasty and a harboiled egg, both soggy as cooked wheat. Some of the boys had lowered growlers of beer down with them and passed the giant glass jugs around in the long shadows cast by carbide lamps.

Freeney handed the jug to Matthew and he took a swig. The beer was frothy and put an awful taste in his mouth. He spit it into a corner and the men laughed at him, some of them grumbling that it was a waste. Matthew passed the bottle to Afghan Bob, who took it with a wink. Freeney rolled a cigarette and offered the little paper envelope to Matthew, but Matthew shook his head. Freeney shrugged and licked the cigarette shut. He lit it in the flame of one of the

lamps and dragged off some smoke. Freeney asked him if he'd seen any fairies yet.

The other boys broke off again in a fit of sniggering and some of them shook their heads. Coogan, who was off by himself in the dirt with his legs folded and a lip full of Peerless said "Fuck all."

"I'd say the only fairy down here might be Little Bob," Coogan said and the men laughed again.

Afghan Bob smiled at hearing his name and Freeney darted his eyes around the room at the other men. Freeney used soap that made his skin smell like licorice and Matthew liked him because he had a friendly kind of face. Now, though, Matthew gave him a look that said he didn't believe in fairies.

"It's the truth," Freeney said. "These others know it too, they just won't admit it."

"Up your ass with that talk," Coogan said. He got to his feet and went to the edge of the rock face. He unbuttoned the fly of his jeans and peed over the ledge. The other boys turned away. They passed the beer around, drinking and belching and talking about the war. German U-boats were having their way off the coast of Europe. Some of the boys seemed happy about it. One of them said he'd put his money on the Giants in the baseball pool, that this was Schupp's year to turn it on.

Freeney told Matthew an old story about a group of miners who got trapped underground after a bad explosion blocked them in and put out most of their candles. This was years ago, Freeney said. The men wandered blind through

the caverns for two days before they found their way out. Later they said they'd followed a strange floating light to an old forgotten shaft that was still open. The men said it was a fairy or an angel. They even put a story about it in the paper, Freeney said.

"I heard that one before," Matthew said. "That's bull."

It was something parents told little kids to get them to go to sleep at night. He wished Freeney would talk about baseball or the war like the other boys. He took a drink of his tea put the lid back on tight. He put it back into his lunch pail and took out the hardboiled egg. Freeney was still smoking and looking at him, Matthew could feel the man's eyes on the side of his face.

"What?" Matthew said.

Freeney smiled. He said: "The world you know, the one that most people know. Up there. It's not the only one," he said like he was choosing each word as he went. "Things happen down here that people above ground wouldn't believe if you told them."

"You're just trying to trick me," Matthew said. "You want to have me off looking for the left-handed wrench again or something."

Matthew tossed the egg in the air and Freeney reached out and snagged it out of the air.

"You don't believe me," Freeney said. "But I'll show you something."

Freeney stood up and waved his hands for Matthew to follow him. Matthew wanted his egg back. The other boys weren't paying them any mind. Freeney raised his eyebrows and dipped his head as if to say, come on. Matthew still

wasn't sure if Freaney was putting him on, but the look on the Freaney's face made him wonder what it was he wanted him to see. Matthew got up off the cold slab of rock and followed Freaney's lamp into the dark.

They went to the main cage. Freaney shut the cage and put out his lamp and the cage started to move upward. The two of them rattling up through the shaft in total blackness. Matthew looked up, but couldn't see the night sky out the top of the mine shaft.

"Where we going?" Matthew said.

"You want to see Ireland someday, Matt?" Freaney said.

"I don't think so," Matthew said. "Montana is the only place I been."

Matthew was born in Butte and baptized at St. Pat's just like all the other Irish-Catholic kids in town. The stuff he knew about Ireland was what his mother told him, that it was their home, their real home and that maybe someday they'd go back there and live on a farm or something. She hadn't been talking about it much since Dad and her got into it at dinner.

"You ever hear the story of Lousy Luck Pete Harrington and the time he played the numbers at the Collar and Elbow?" Freaney said.

Matthew's eyes were getting used to the black and he could now see the outline of Freaney's body against the cage. Freaney's head was looking right at him and Matthew wondered if Freaney could see him the whole time.

Matthew shook his head. "You know you don't make no sense when you talk?"

“Lousy Luck Pete was a guy we all knew from Marquette,” Freeney said. “That’s in Michigan, where there used to be copper mines before they were here. He came over from Ireland about the same time as me, years ago, and he came out to Butte when we all came. Me, John Bulger, your dad.”

Freeney stopped like he was waiting for a response. Matthew didn’t give him one. The cage kept rattling toward the surface.

“Lousy Luck Pete, the whole time I knew him, never won a thing,” Freeney said. “Not even when we all used to bet on the rooster fights down at the Timbers Bar. That’s why they called him Lousy Luck, see?”

“I ain’t totally dumb,” Matthew said.

“Yeah, until one day he hits the number at the Collar and Elbow,” Freeney said. “He hits it for something like four thousand.”

Matthew nodded, but couldn’t picture what that much money would look like.

“He picked up the loot on Friday,” Freeney said, “and by Monday he was gone. Back to Ireland. Never came back neither. That’s the kind of place Ireland is.”

Freeney sounded like Matthew’s Ma. Matthew thought about what Dad said and decided the homesick look on Freeney’s face was kind of girly.

“I got a wife over there, you know,” Freeney said. “Married her just before I left. Someday I’ll send for her, then you can meet her. Or I’ll just fuck off like Lousy Luck Pete Harrington and you won’t see me anymore, never again.”



Freeney made a gesture with his hands like a magician finishing his trick — poof, gone. Then he laughed and punched Matthew on the arm, little bit too hard. He said: “But guys like me, guys like your dad, Bulger, Coogan we don’t play the numbers at the Collar and Elbow.”

Matthew rode along and didn’t say anything, listening to the rattle of the cage.

“You know why we don’t play the numbers at the Collar and Elbow?”

Matthew shook his head.

“Because it’s fixed.”

The cage stopped. Freeney hit lit his lamp and smiled at Matthew, a goofy crooked smile that made him look like a kid. He reached out and pressed the hardboiled egg back into Matthew’s hand. The egg was gushy and smashed, but Matthew was hungry. He put it in his mouth and chewed. They went out into a narrow walkway of rock and dust. They were only a couple hundred feet down now, in one of the original shafts that had been cut when the Granite Mountain mines first opened. Freeney told Matthew this while he led him down the path. They came to a small opening in a rock face, just big enough for a man to crawl through.

“You ready to see it?” Freeney asked. The light from the lamp made him look like a ghoul, a long nose and chin. Matthew didn’t believe in ghouls. Freeney cut his head to one side. They got down on their hands and knees and crawled through the tunnel about fifteen or twenty feet. They were too far down for worms

or even spider webs, but the tunnel smelled like wet rock and Matthew could hear the sounds of dripping water far off.

The tunnel opened into a little room of cracking rock walls and a damp dirt floor. They stood up as soon as they were able and Matthew squinted in the lamp light. Above them a shaft extended as far as Matthew could see into the dark. At one side of the room a trickle of water slithered out of a fracture in the rock. It made a tiny stream that moved out into the room and disappeared into the black dirt.

In the center of the room, hooking out of the dirt in a crooked lean, was a little tree. The trunk was no wider than a baseball bat and about a foot up from the roots it twisted at almost a flat angle before righting itself into a plume of green leaves. Matthew walked slowly to it and ran his fingers over the bark, which was rough and deep-lined. A few of the roots were exposed, bent like skeleton fingers the tree used to grip the earth. Matthew took one of the leaves between his fingers and smelled it. It was real. Up close he could see the tree was blooming little yellow fruits, the size large marbles. Freeney came up behind him and plucked one of the fruits off a branch. He held to his nose, smelled it, smiled at Matthew and took a bite. He offered the fruit to Matthew. Matthew took it in his hand and looked at it. It was a lemon, slick on the skin, but meaty inside. The juice ran down his fingers. He took a small bite and the bitterness stung the inside of his mouth. He spit it off into the dirt.

Freeney swallowed his piece.

“They say a seed dropped out of some old miner’s lunch pail, but how it really got here, nobody knows for sure.” Freeney said. He pointed upward. “This is an old shaft, goes all the way to the surface. It’s grated off at the top, but in the day you still get two, three hours of daylight down here. Light, water, dirt, that’s all you need.”

Matthew kicked a little bit of dirt with the toe of a boot.

“A few of us boys take care of it,” Freeney said. “Not many other people know it’s here, I guess.”

Matthew wondered what the nuns at St. Mary’s would say if he told them there was another world underneath the one they knew. Underneath the streets and buildings and maybe even underneath the mines, further down than even they went. A world where a lemon tree grew a quarter mile down and grown men who believed in fairies might not be crazy. He figured talking about it would get his knuckles whacked with a ruler. But here he was, the taste of the lemon still burning on his tongue.

“I suppose you don’t have much choice but believe me now, do you?”

Freeney walked back to the opening of the room, got down on his hands and knees and crawled back into the passage way, lamp first. Matthew stood still and let the room get very dark before he followed.

## Six

Dad went on getting smaller. Matthew imagined that someday he would peek inside the room and he would just be gone. Like something from the crazy science stories that Frankie Shovlin liked to read. Matthew went to the room sometimes to talk and Dad would hold out his arms give him a rough hug. Matthew could feel him getting weaker. It smelled like sickness in the room, the sweet smell of

the syrup the doctors brought for his cough. Dad would pull the one chair up close to the bed. One day when Matthew went in to see him, he found Dad sitting up, waiting, holding envelope in one claw hand.

Dad ruffled his hair. "Bulger tells me you work like a mule," he said.

Matthew shrugged. "I don't know," he said.

Dad said he was proud of him, picking up the slack like that, said that he heard he'd been getting on good with the boys too.

"Sometimes I get a terrible feeling," Matthew said, "like I know that you're dead. Dead already and I have to run home to check."

"It hasn't been true yet, has it?" Dad said.

"Nosir," Matthew said, not sure if that was a joke. "I talked with God about saving you. Now I don't really think you're going to die at all, I hope. But I still get that feeling."

Dad smiled. "I've had everything a lad like me could ask for in this life," he said. "I've had a fine family, some fair and honest work and I know you all will make sure I have a grand funeral when I go. I don't want you worrying about me. Hear?"

He put the envelope in Matthew's hand. It was a ruffle of money as thick as a deck of cards. Matthew thumbed through it, mostly small bills. Dad asked him if he liked that, holding that money. Matthew shrugged and said he guessed so. Dad said there was more than just the working in the mines and some of it could belong to Matthew if he thought he was ready.

“Like you talking to that guy at the wake,” Matthew said. “I saw you in a fight.”

“You think you’re ready for something like that?” Dad said.

Matthew nodded. “Yessir,” and he hoped that was true.

“You were young when the union fell apart,” Dad said. “They dynamited the hall, you remember that?”

He did. Matthew was littler when it happened, but he remembered it. He and Frankie Shovlin used to play in the wrecked wood and bricks of the old building.

“Most of them boys up on the hill now, they’re working their guts out with no support, nobody to stand up for them,” Dad said.

Dad said a lot of them boys can’t look after themselves. He said that’s why they needed something to keep them together. Dad said that’s what he did now, look after the boys and make sure everything in town ran smooth. Him and John Bulger and some other guys.

“Sort of like the old union?” Matthew said.

“Sort of,” Dad said. “But there’s more to it.”

Dad said people knew him and Bulger from the union, knew they were honest types. He said these days if somebody got into a jam, owed money or something, they could come and ask for help and that he and Bulger would help them out. As long as the guy paid them back once he had the money. A lot of stuff happened in town that people couldn’t go to the cops with, especially since half the cops worked for the company anyway.

“Let’s say a lady gets beat up by her boyfriend,” Dad said. “Or a guy can’t get a rustling card because the Company won’t give it because of the guy’s God-given rights to look after his own interests politically.”

Matthew wasn’t sure he got it, but Dad went on talking. “We can help out, because we’re men people trust to do the right thing,” Dad said. “Understand?”

“I don’t know,” Matthew said.

“You know we been doing good, me and your Ma,” his father said. “We got this house while a lot of the boys are living in the flats. We own. And we look after you and your sisters okay. You know that, right?”

“I guess so.”

“We couldn’t do it on just the mines,” Dad said. “That’s what I’m trying to tell you. We need a little bit extra coming in on the side. Get it?”

Matthew nodded.

“But me cooped up in this bed,” Dad said. “I’m no good to anybody.”

His father turned his head and coughed into the cloth. The sound was wet and Matthew looked away. His father wiped something from the corner of his lips.

“So,” Dad said when his throat was clear. “I want you to hold on to that envelope. If it’s alright with you, I’m gonna tell Bulger to send you out on a couple of errands with Coogan and Freeney.”

Matthew didn’t want to go anywhere with Coogan.

“Learn the ropes,” Dad said, “and there’s plenty more envelopes like that coming.”

“Okay,” Matthew said. He felt a stir in his stomach that reminded him about how he felt just before a big match. When he was about to wrestle a kid he didn’t know if he could beat. His father took hold of his arm.

“One thing though,” Dad said. “You can’t tell your mother.”

“Why not?”

“You’re mother’s a fine woman, probably the strongest in all of Butte,” Dad said, “but you give her that money and half of it will wind up on a ship bound for Dublin. That or she’ll throw it in on a baseball pool.”

His father laughed, showing his teeth and places where it looked like his gums were rotting. The laughs turned to coughing. Dad covered his face with the cloth and held his free hand up to say he was okay. Then he was shaking and breathing in little gasps. Ma came into the room then without knocking and sat on the bed to try to calm his father down. Ma sat on the bed with her hand on Dad’s chest, which heaved up and down with every sucking breath his father tried to take. Matthew went into his own bedroom and tucked the envelope between his two mattresses. Then he went to the bathroom and ran the sink so the rest of the family wouldn’t hear him crying.



## Seven

A wrestling match broke out between Coogan and Afghan Bob during a dinner break. It was good natured and the little man put up a good fight before Coogan finally stuck him on his back and one of the boys slapped his hand on the rock to count him out. Coogan sat up laughing, holding on to Afghan Bob's hat. He took the hat to the edge of a cliff and sailed it off, down into a gully of granite about thirty feet below the job site. All the boys laughed, even Afghan Bob. He went down, inching his way along a narrow ledge to get it back.

Afghan Bob was down there when they all heard a low rumble, a dynamite blast from another level. It shook the room and a boulder the size of a Model T Ford broke loose from the place where Afghan Bob was standing. The little man didn't have a chance. He was almost to his hat when the boulder crashed down on top of him, covering his lower half from below the rib cage to his ankles. The boys broke into a panic. Somebody sent for some rope and shovels. A few of them tried to scramble down the ledge to him, but it was too narrow for them to make it all the way and they had to turn back.

Matthew stood at the edge of the ledge with Freeney. Some blood leaked out from underneath the boulder. Afghan Bob was blinking up at the rock ceiling and moving his mouth, though no sound was coming out. A few feet from his body, his harboiler sat on the ground, open side up like a rabbit might jump out.

Coogan was with the rest of the boys, his face blank and hopeless, his eyes red and his adam's apple working up and down in his throat. Freeney said someone should get a doctor in a kind of flat and dry voice. Someone else said to get a priest, though nobody knew what kind of priest to get a Mohammeden. A few of the men were testing the rope to see about scaling down the rock face, but John Bulger stepped in and said it was too dangerous. The boulder coming loose could mean a slide and Bulger said they couldn't afford to lose anymore men. The blue-lipped shift boss was there, leaning against a boarded-up wall. He was wheezing, like he'd run down.

Matthew felt something thick rising in his throat and he turned and spit into the dirt. When he got his wind back, he slipped through the crowd of men and down onto the narrow ledge that led to where Afghan Bob was trapped. The path wasn't wide enough for a grown man, but Matthew flattened his body against the rock face. He heard a murmur from the men when they saw what he was doing. They shouted for him to stop but he went on.

The ledge was solid granite and rough underneath his boots. Afghan Bob blinked up at him. There was blood smeared on the side of his face, dribbling out the corner of his mouth, and in the gloom his eyes looked very white. From the look on his face, Matthew couldn't tell if Afghan Bob could hear him. Afghan Bob was talking, saying something and Matthew pressed his ear close, but the words were in Bob's language.

"Hush," Matthew said. "Quiet."

Matthew had never seen a dying person before. He wondered if Afghan Bob was going to hell when he died. That's where men went when they didn't believe in a proper God, the nuns said. It didn't seem right to Matthew that a guy like Bob, who was always nice and smiling at everybody, would go to hell. Above him, the men were still shouting at him. It occurred to Matthew that he didn't know exactly what kind of God the Mohammadens worshiped, if it was the same one Matthew prayed to in service at St. Mary's or not.

There was a scratching sound, some bits of rock falling and Matthew turned. John Bulger came down with a rope tied around his waist. Bulger looked mad, but when he got to where Matthew was standing he put his hand on the back of Matthew's neck and bent over Afghan Bob. The boulder had crushed him nearly completely. His heels stuck up from the ground at an odd angle and underneath the rock his clothes were ripped and bloody.

Afghan Bob moved his arm and Bulger and Matthew stepped back. The hard work of it strained in Bob's face, but he stretched his arm out as far as he could, fingers reaching. He was going for his hat, still. Matthew went over and picked it up. He dusted it off and stuck it under Afghan Bob's arm and Afghan Bob pressed it against his chest.

"Come on, son," Bulger said in a low voice. "Nothing else we can do."

Matthew knelt and pressed his fingers to Afghan Bob's forehead. Matthew bowed his chin and moved his lips silently, stumbling through the words to the baptismal rights the best he could remember. The words didn't come out perfect

and he knew he forgot a bunch of what real priests normally said, but he baptized Afghan Bob to a Christian God the best he knew how.

Matthew didn't know if the baptism would count, since he wasn't a priest, but he hoped it was better than nothing. When he was done, he opened his eyes and saw that Afghan Bob was dead. Bulger squatted down on the rock a bit so Matthew could jump up on his back. They tied themselves to the rope and the men hauled them back up to the 2400. Some of the men came up and patted Matthew on the back. The shift boss sent someone to the surface to get the state inspector.

## Eight

Oates got there fifteen minutes early and stood around at the corner of the block until it was time. He clocked it out exactly on his new wristwatch and then walked down North Idaho to Morrissey's apartment building; the only pink building on the block. It was two stories with purple trim, a porch painted grayish that would be big enough to have a nice party if you wanted. Morrissey was out there sitting with one foot down on the stairs, pressing an ice pack against his eye. Oates had a good bottle of wine tucked under his arm.

"I run into a door," Morrissey said.

Underneath the ice pack the eye looked like a big purple toe. It was squeezed up almost tight, just a slit for Morrissey to see out of. Oates told him he looked like a Chinaman.

"A door," Oates said. "That's a pretty stupid thing to do."

It took Morrissey a long time to answer. Then he said: "Yeah."

They went inside the building and up the stairs to the apartment. It smelled like cigarettes and a roast cooking. There was a rug in the front room going to threads and dusty furniture set around. Down the long wooden hallway, Oates could see a pair of women's shoes on the floor and could hear somebody rattling around in the kitchen.

"You have a hired girl?" Oates said.

"Oh, that's no lady," Morrissey said. "That's my wife."

He laughed in a way Oates didn't like. Morrissey was drunk already. He poured Oates two fingers of whiskey from a bottle in the front room and they went into the kitchen. The woman back there leaned against the counter and smoked, tipping her head back to exhale into the overhead light. She had a pile of kinky dark hair pulled back into a bun. Maybe she was pretty once, but her face had thickened out. Pale and too dark around the eyes, no makeup at all. Her dress was black and lace like for a funeral. She stood with one hand in a brass spittoon which had been washed out and filled with ice.

Morrissey introduced him just as "Oates." When she didn't take the bottle, Oates set it on the counter.

"You here for the puppet show?" the woman said. Oates was wearing his silk bag on his gone hand. With his glass of whiskey in his good hand he felt stuck. He felt his face blush and he turned on a toe so that he was in between her and Morrissey but not looking at either of them. The woman took the bottle off the counter, her hand brushing his side, and looked at the label, cigarette hanging from her mouth. She looked like a whore standing there like that. Oates felt himself start to get hard.

"This is my Kate," Morrissey said, voice sad like they were looking at a picture of her.

She didn't look up from the bottle. "His Kate," she said. There were bruises on her arms. "I'm like a horse to ride. Put me away in the cupboard when you're done with me."

Oates smelled something sticky sweet on her breath.

“What happened to your hand?” Oates said.

“The oven door,” she said.

“Clumsy,” Morrissey said.

“Is it broke?” Oates said.

He reached for her hand and she pulled it away. He smiled at her and reached again. This time she let him. He ran his thumb along her bones, felt them like little bird claws. Her hands were small and soft. Oates breathed a little quicker now. She smiled at him. She felt no pain. The hand seemed okay and Oates let her go. He had the feeling of Morrissey standing very close to them.

“You like pot roast, Mr. Oates?” Kate said.

“I like waffles,” he said. There was a pause and then Kate and Morrissey laughed in a way that embarrassed him.

“You’re an odd one, Oates,” Morrissey said.

“Open the bottle, Ed,” Kate said. She went into the cupboard and came back with a little blue medical flask. The label said it was laudanum and Oates placed the sweet smell.

He took a gulp of whiskey. He turned from them, pretended to look at a picture on the wall. The picture showed Morrissey in an army uniform, the staged kind of shot they did for new soldiers. The man in the picture was thinner; of course, more hair but his eyes were the same.

“I was in the war,” Morrissey said, stepping over.

“The war just started,” Oates said.

“The Spanish war,” Morrissey said.

Kate opened the oven and pulled the roast out. The smell of it filled the room, making Oates feel the depth of his own hunger for the first time.

“You’re two drinks from seeing the medals,” she said to Oates. “You keep him talking at your own risk.”

Oates smiled at her but she didn’t look at him.

The roast was overcooked, dry. It flaked off onto their plates and stuck to Oates’ teeth when he chewed. Kate mixed laudanum with her wine. Oates and Morrissey both had whiskey. Oates had the awkward feeling of being the only sober person in the room, even after Morrissey had fixed him four or five drinks. Morrissey told a long and complicated story about killing a man in the war. It was hand-to-hand in the fields of Cuba. Morrissey had come across a lone Spaniard while on patrol and Morrissey’s gun had jammed. The two men fell into a deadly row, twisting and flailing in the mud until Morrissey had finally got on top. Without his firearm and finding his dagger lost in the struggle Morrissey had had no choice but to plunge his thumb through the Spaniard’s eye. Morrissey’s face turned a deep purple and a pair of veins stuck out on his forehead like earthworms as he demonstrated this part of the story on a soft roll. His thumb had popped through the eye like through the skin of an orange and he’d gone deep, digging for the Spaniard’s brains. He’d torn the eye completely out of the Spaniard’s skull and the Spaniard had fallen dead in weeds without any more sound.

The story was going to put Oates off his food, but before Morrissey finished the telling Kate started laughing. Slowly at first, covering her mouth in embarrassment, but then breaking into it long and loud. Oates stared at her. She



must have been very high. She still had the strong jaw line that might have made her pretty as a younger lady. The lines of her neck were slim and nice. Morrissey stopped telling his story and sat with his thumb still jammed in the dinner roll. His face was knotted up. He cleared his throat, louder than he needed to. Kate seemed not to notice. She took a big pull off her wine and turned to Oates, eyes as empty as a man who'd been knocked-out.

“What insane lies,” She said, and Oates caught a hint of an old country accent for the first time.

Morrissey had been holding a butter knife in one hand and he set it down now, a noisy clink, almost tossing it. Oates shifted in his seat. The look on Morrissey's face was like he was sinking into himself, a pot heating on the stove. Morrissey put his hands flat on the table.

He said: “Darling.”

Kate looked at Oates, he smiled at her again. “Quite the war hero I married, Mr. Oates,” she said, words running together. “He spent the lion's share in the stockade for drunkenness or the infirmary, for depression.”

Morrissey tried to shut her up with a wave, he also looked at Oates. “I still have the medals.” he said.

Kate set into another laugh, this time she patted Oats on the arm. He flinched and stiffened. “I told you,” she said. “Didn't I tell you about the medals?”

Morrissey kept his eyes on Oates. “I could show them to you,” he said.

“Do run get them, Eddie,” Kate said. “Maybe you can tell us the crime scene you swiped them from.”

Morrissey stood up, bumping his knee against the table hard enough to rattle the settings and knock over Kate's wine glass. Oates reached out and set it right while the glass was still half full. Kate had already jumped back from the table, a thin rivulet of wine darkening the stomach of her dress. Oates felt small as the only one sitting but he didn't get up. Morrissey cocked his head so he could see her with his good eye, looking like a strange animal with the other blacked shut. He walked slowly away from the table and into the front room, where he cranked the gramophone until the record began to play. A chunky, off-beat ragtime piano. He was rolling up his sleeves when he came back in. Kate finished her wine, picking up a steak knife from her setting as she set the glass down.

"You want to embarrass me in front of my friend?" Morrissey said. The word caught Oates funny, friend.

"Everybody in town knows what you are," Kate said.

Morrissey started around the table one way and Kate went the other. They chased each other once around, like children. Oates got up and went into the hallway, where his suit jacket hung near the front door. He could hear them chasing each other, chairs screeching across the floor, the pictures flapping on the walls. Oates got his gun and went into the front room. It was dark in there, the only light in the house above the table, making Kate and Morrissey look like actors in a stage play. Kate was against one wall now, holding Morrissey off with the steak knife while he ducked and dodged closer to her. Oates raised the pistol and shot the gramophone dead center. The wood box at the bottom exploded into splinters and the sound phone dropped off one side onto the floor. The record

album flew off and rolled across the hardwood. Inside the apartment the noise of the gun seemed preposterously loud.

Kate and Morrissey both jumped and she dropped her knife. Morrissey came into front room. He didn't look mad anymore, just surprised and his one working eye wide as a fried egg. Oates tucked the gun into the seat of his slacks, the butt resting against the small of his back. He walked past Morrissey and out a back door, where there was a small screened-in porch. He was feeling the rush of drunkenness in his head now, just catching up with him when he'd stood up. He lit a cigarette with his good hand and looked out over the skyline of the city.

He stood there by himself and listened to the street. Some uniform cops came to the front door, but left as soon as they saw Morrissey. Oates smoked three cigarettes. It was quiet in the house until Oates heard Kate leave out the front. After that, Morrissey came out onto the porch and lit a cigar.

"She has another man in Butchertown," Morrissey said. "Name of Milligan, and a nickel and dime thief and a forger at that. She's off to see him, I expect."

The breeze was cool through Oates' shirt sleeves. The scar where the doctor had taken his hand ached awfully. Morrissey told him about working for the Company. He said a lot of the mine workers had been talking about a union and he and Oates' job was to squash that talk as quickly as they could. Anyway they could. Figure out who the chief agitators were and take care of them. Morrissey had a group of men who worked under him on the police force, good boys who kept their ears open and would do the right thing when the time came. Butte had been an open shop for three years, since some of Morrissey's people had got the

socialists and union stiffs fighting with each other and somebody had dynamited the union hall. Morrissey laughed and winked at Oates when he said it. The Company wanted the shop to stay open, keep a lid on things and keep organizers and agitators out of the mines with rustling cards or whatever else it came to.

“Sounds like the same old dance,” Oates said.

“This is better than the gold rush for boys like you and me,” Morrissey said. “Especially with the war on, federal money coming in, the people in charge downright hospitable to our way of doing things.”

Oates nodded and flicked his cigarette off the porch, watching the cherry spin down into the dark. Morrissey got happy and drunk and started rambling. How he'd been fired as chief of detectives and re-hired when the socialists were voted out of office. How he was a federal agent for awhile too, but quit because the fed boys didn't know their dick from anything. The man talked a lot. Drinking alcohol seemed to have the opposite effect on Morrissey as it did Oates, drawing him out like a bull in a ring. In the middle of it Oates started to feel agitated, his blood ticking in his body and the feeling that he needed something to keep him occupied. He stayed late until Morrissey drank so much he nearly went to sleep in his chair. Oates helped him inside and left him at the front door, the buttons of his pants hanging open as he undressed for bed.

“You owe me a new record machine,” Morrissey said.

Oates put the gun back in his holster as he shrugged into his suit jacket. He said: “I'll see you tomorrow.” He left the front door open and walked down the hall, thinking Morrissey would close it. At the top of the stairs he looked back and

saw that Morrissey had left it open, had gone back into the dining room and fallen asleep in a straight-backed chair with a drink in his hand, his pants around the middle of his thighs.

## Nine

A few years later, the young priest Father Hatrick disappeared after the littlest McGlaughlin girl turned up pregnant. There was a big thing about it in the papers. Mr. McGlaughlin showed-up at the church with a pistol. When he and one of the older nuns broke down the door to Father Hatrick's room they found both the young priest and his large traveling trunk missing. A short letter on the writing desk said Father Hatrick was sorry to leave his parishioners and that he would always think of Butte in kindly way. Nothing about Elsie McGlaughlin or anything else. The baby was born a few days shy of Elsie's fifteenth and the family put the kid in with the church. It eventually went to live with a family in Billings and nobody ever heard of it or Father Hatrick again. But that wasn't until 1919 or 20 maybe. After the flu and the Black Sox and after girls started wearing flapper hats. So when father Hatrick showed up at the Lehane house on Matthew's first day off from the mines, people in town still knew him as the young priest who specialized in the problems of children. The one who made a lot of house calls. The one you could talk to about things that the other priests would wrap your knuckles for.

Matthew never liked Father Hatrick. The man was tall and skinny and frail-looking and he always needed a shave. Lonely hairs poked out over his cheeks and it didn't seem to Matthew that Father Hatrick could grow a beard or mustache like most men, even if he wanted. Matthew was trying to sleep when he showed up at the house in denim pants and his priest shirt. Matthew hadn't been sleeping

much. The night shift had his rhythms turned upside down and his bones ached so bad he couldn't get comfortable on his bed. That morning he'd finally settled down on an old chair in the dark basement and then his Ma woke him. She walked him outside and sat him down with Father Hatrick at the small table on the porch. Matthew rubbed his itchy eyes with his palms. Ma offered to get Father Hatrick a bowl of her lemon curd and he said yes please.

"It's a mother's place to worry about her son," Father Hatrick said while she was gone, leaning forward in a way that seemed funny, giving Matthew a quick wink like it was a secret between men.

Matthew said: "Huh?"

Father Hatrick looked to make sure they wouldn't be overheard. "She's says you've been downright rotten since your Dad got sick," Father Hatrick said. "You lurk around, she can't say a word to you, your sisters are scared to death of you."

"No they aren't," Matthew said. He remembered snapping at Deidre when she forgot to hang his workshirt on the clothesline.

"You don't look well," Father Hatrick said.

The only thing in the whole world that Matthew wanted to do just then was sleep. At first, Matthew had hoped the priest brought word from the Lord. Matthew had been praying for a sign; something from God to say that Dad would be okay. Just from the look on Father Hatrick's face told Matthew that the priest hadn't heard anything. He looked out down the street where some of the neighborhood guys had a game of baseball going. He got mad then. Who did the

priest think he was, this man that's probably never been into the mines in his life? Father Hatrick smiled at him awkwardly in the silence, then squinted up at Ma and grinned when she gave him a bowl and spoon from the kitchen. Ma apologized for the curd before Father Hatrick had a bite, saying she was trying some new recipes to get ready from the Order of Hibernians' picnic later in the summer. When Father Hatrick tasted it, he groaned in a way that said the curd was just right.

"Delectable, Rebecca," he said, through a mouthful of it, shook his head with his eyes closed and said it again: "Delectable."

Matthew's Ma smiled and sat down at the corner of the porch with a copy of the *Gaelic American*. Father Hatrick asked her if they might have some privacy.

"It's my porch," she said like they were already in an argument. "My boy." Father Hatrick sighed a bit and spread his hands. Most people in town knew better than to try to argue with Matthew's mother, so the young priest dropped his eyes and looked at Matthew again and cleared his throat.

"Your Ma is afraid you won't talk to me," Father Hatrick said to Matthew. "She says you've barely said a word since all this has happened."

"All what?" Matthew said.

Father Hatrick looked up again as if he wished Matthew's mother wasn't there. "Your Dad's illness," he said. "The mines."



Matthew wanted to go back to bed. He reached out and took Ma's hand and squeezed it. His mother smiled. Father Hatrick took another bite of lemon curd and then tapped his spoon lightly against the side of the bowl.

"Well," said Father Hatrick, food in his mouth. Then after swallowing and with a little chuckle: "I told her, you'll talk to your priest."

Somebody down the street hit a whopper, the crack of the bat echoing down the street. The boys cheered. Matthew watched them.

"You'll talk to me is what I told her." Father Hatrick said.

"I got nothing to say," Matthew said.

The priest laughed a bit more and smiled at Matthew, who just blinked at him. The laughter died out and left a silence. Father Hatrick made a face and scratched under his chin with one finger.

"Look, Matthew," he said. "The Lord has a plan for each of us. A plan that none of us can pretend to know." The priest's eyes danced around somewhere above Matthew's head as he trailed off. He seemed to be trying to pick something out of the air. Matthew stared at him, keeping his face flat, but beginning to feel annoyed that the priest wouldn't know that he'd already spoken to God about it.

"Each of us deals with grief in our own way, I know that," Father Hatrick said, "but I want you to remember that your mother and your sisters and the church, myself, we're all here to help you and support you through anything you might be having trouble with."

Across Copper Street a stray dog picked its way between the houses and across the dirt lots. It kept its nose low to the ground unless it heard a noise, when

it would pick its head up and stand very still, the same way the deer that sometimes came out of the mountains in the winter would do. Matthew watched the dog. He rubbed the blisters on his hands. Afghan Bob's funeral had been small and outside in the rain at the cemetery. Instead of one of the Catholic priests, a man in a western suit and a cowboy hat stood underneath a small tree and gave a sermon that sounded to Matthew as if it could have been about anybody. After the ceremony a lot of the men had slapped Matthew on the back and said Little Bob was a good man and Matthew had done right by him. Part of him wanted to tell Father Hatrick about Bob and the lousy funeral he got and to ask Father Hatrick if Bob went to hell when he died. Instead, he stretched his back and made a show of a big yawn.

"I'm just tired," Matthew said. Father Hatrick nodded like that was very meaningful and he touched his lips with the points of his fingers.

A car turned onto the street and they all watched it come up and park on at the corner. Bulger, Freeney and Coogan all got out. Bulger came up on the porch while the two others stayed in the street with the car. Coogan leaned against the hood and rolled a cigarette. Bulger was dressed in a black suit with a vest and Matthew could see the gold nugget chain from his watch swinging in front of him.

Bulger nodded and smiled to Matthew and put his hand on Matthew's mother's shoulder as he said hello to her. Father Hatrick stood up and shook hands across the porch with his bowl of lemon curd still in one hand.

"Father," Bulger said. "You got the donation. The new stained glass for the rectory?"

Father Hatrick looked away, his eyes darting over the stray dog, which was now in the street getting shooed away from the car by Coogan's boot. "Very generous," Father Hatrick said. "You have our thanks."

"I need to see Jimmy," Bulger said to Ma.

The two of them went to the front door, but Bulger turned before he went inside. "Mattie," he said. "Go with the boys. An errand."

Matthew's heart jumped. His tiredness seemed to scare away and he felt excited to be away from Father Hatrick. He left the priest standing on the porch, took the steps in a jump. Freeney slapped him good naturedly on the back of the neck and Coogan flicked his cigarette at the stray dog and climbed behind the wheel. Matthew slipped into the back seat.

"We'll stop for an eye-opener," Coogan said.

Freeney parked the car at the M&M. The front of the bar was shiny aluminum and the big electric sign buzzed over their heads. Matthew saw himself in the siding like a carnival mirror, squished into a fat midget. Coogan held the door. They went into the bar, which was crowded even though it wasn't even noon. This was normal. It seemed like boys were always getting off shift and looking to drink it away. The bartender, a short and thick man with a ring of hair around his bald head, looked at Matthew over his mustache, which was waxed into points. Coogan nodded to the man and the bartender turned away. The three of them sat and Freeney ordered Sean O'Farrells. The bartender put beers and shots in front of Coogan and Freeney.

Coogan tapped the bar with his finger. "Three," he said. The bartender brought the same set-up for Matthew and Coogan slapped some money on the counter. The bartender shook his head and walked away without taking it, moving off down to the other end of the bar where a group of men were crowded around a cribbage board. Two guys who looked like miners were playing a tight game. One of the guys had an eye-patch and they were all speaking a language that Matthew didn't recognize. Some guys were betting on the game, making a big stack of money on the corner of the bar. The one with the eye patch tossed down his cards and did some counting on his fingers. He moved his marker forward and sat back, raising his fists above his head. The loser tossed his cards in and bought a squatty drink with ice and a square glass for the guy with the eye-patch. Eye Patch took the drink and ran it under the loser's nose so he could smell it. The whole bunch of them laughed and started singing a loud song, hoisting drinks and shaking hands

Coogan nudged Freeney with two fingers and gave him a wink. Freeney went over to the men and tried to talk with them. It went slow, they didn't seem to speak much English, but in the end Freeney nodded at Coogan and when the guy with eye patch looked, Coogan waved and smiled. Eye Patch shrugged and peeled a few bills off his winnings and gave them to Freeney. When Freeney came back over he tucked a dollar into Matthew's chest pocket and gave half the rest to Coogan.

"All the boys think it was a swell thing you did for Little Bob before he died," Freeney said. "You got moxie like your old man."

“Don’t get a big head over it,” Coogan said. “It was something anybody coulda done.”

They went to a high-top table away from the rest of the action in the bar. Matthew took a drink of his beer, frothy with metal-taste in his mouth and he must of made a face because both Freeney and Coogan laughed at him. The other drink smelled like burning and Matthew pushed both of them to the middle of the table. Coogan lit another cigarette and blew smoke into the light.

“We’re going after Big Fritz Tatreault today,” Coogan said.

“Fuck sake,” Freeney said. “The hell we are.”

Coogan nodded.

Even Matthew knew Fritz Tatreault’s name. He worked the back door at the Pay Day Lounge. Every year the Robert Emmett Society put on a big tournament of all the barroom bouncers in town, dog eat dog fights where anything goes, to see who was the toughest. They put up big posters all over town with the guys’ pictures on it and sold tickets as a fundraiser. Fritz Tatreault had first place a couple years running. He was big as a moose and tougher than a five-cent steak.

“Big Fritz caught on as a nipper with a crew on the Snowball,” Coogan said.

“He ain’t bouncing no more.”

“I’ll bet he can lug some tools,” Freeney said.

“Too good,” Coogan said. “He’s been pinching stuff, pawning it later for walking around money.”

“Tools?” Matthew said and Coogan looked at him like he’d forgotten

Matthew was there.

“That’s right,” Coogan said.

“What do we care if some guy swipes some tools?” Matthew said.

Coogan looked up into the lights like Matthew was a real sucker. “Cuz he ain’t cutting us in,” Coogan said.

They drove out to the Cabbage Patch, where the houses were built almost on top of each other. Coogan said Fritz Teatrault had been pulling nights in the hole and hoped the giant would be asleep when they got there. Freeney pulled out a pistol and loaded it. Bullets as big as Matthew’s thumb. Matthew couldn’t take his eyes off it.

“This guy we’re going to see is a Frenchie,” Freeney said to him, sighting down the barrel at the floor of the car. “You gotta watch a Frenchie.”

The place was a wood shack in the middle of a block and looked like it was falling in on itself. Sagging like you could push it over with your finger. There was a window in the alley and Coogan boosted Matthew up to have a look. It was dark inside the shack and crowded. Matthew made out a wood stove and a table, a metal-frame bed with a big lump in the middle of it.

Freeney worked the latch on the door with a file and an L-shaped bit of metal. Inside the shack it smelled like a stockyard, a foul body odor that made Matthew breathe through his mouth. Freeney had his pistol and Coogan had brought a length of rope. When the door eased shut, it was dark in the shack and they all stood still until their eyes got used to it. Fritz Teatrault was in the bed snoring like grizzly bear.

One end of the rope was tied like a lasso. Coogan fitted it loosely over the giant's feet. Freeney stood by the bed with the pistol crooked hip high. When Coogan gave a sign, Matthew jerked hard on the rope. He braced his feet against the metal legs at the end of the bed and arched his back like he was the anchor on a tug of war team.

Teatrault woke in a start and his big body bucked hard, moving the whole bed a few inches one way. He was wearing an undershirt with only one strap across his huge hairy chest. His forehead was deep and lined, probably wider than Matthew's whole face and his hair was deep black, kinky as a scouring pad. He had sideburns that came almost to his chin. He stopped struggling when he saw the gun.

"Hello Mr. Coogan, Mr. Freeney," the giant said. He sounded calm, like they were meeting for tea. His voice came from deep in his body and with his Frenchie accent it was hard to make out the words. He moved his head so he could see Matthew at the end of the bed. He smiled, showing a giant's mouth and a thousand teeth. "Who is this little guy?"

"You know why we're here, Fritz," This was Coogan talking, leaning close to the giant's face.

Teatrault laughed, an impossibly loud laugh, his big head falling back on the pillow and his teeth showing.

"So how about it?" Freeney said. "You cut us in and nobody finds out about your racket."

Teatrault sat up in the bed. With one giant arm he shoved Coogan, who twisted to the side and fell onto the floor. With a swipe of his other hand, Teaturalt knocked the pistol out of Freeney's fist and sent it skidding toward the end of the bed. He brought his knees up to his chest, pulling Matthew's whole body forward. Matthew lost his balance and banged his chin against the metal bed frame. Matthew hit the floor and saw a flash of light behind his eyes. He touched his chin and found sticky blood there, a little trickle running down onto his throat. He looked up and saw Freeney tumble backward, banging his back against the wood stove, knocking over a metal spittoon near the front door. Freeney lost his balance, landing on the floor with his hand and his arm in the chunky black goo that dribbled out of the spittoon.

Teatrault was on his feet, moving like a big cat, going for the gun, but Matthew beat him to it. He popped up to his feet and the giant stopped up short with the pistol wiggling a few inches from his chin. He put his hands up. Coogan yelled, "Shoot him," but Matthew didn't shoot. The gun was heavier than he'd thought it would be.

"Easy, little guy," Teatrault said.

Matthew said: "I ain't little."

Coogan and Freeney pulled themselves up off the floor. Freeney's face had gone green and he wiped his hand against his pant leg. Coogan said, "Shoot him, kid." Freeney doubled-over when he saw the muck on his hand, hacking and spitting on the shack's slat floor. Teatrault smiled at Matthew and came forward he reached out his hand and grabbed Matthew by the shirt front. He felt his feet



come off the floor as the giant picked him up with one arm. Blood ran down his neck and onto his shirt. Matthew pushed the barrel of the pistol into the fleshy part of Teatrault's face, but the giant barely seemed to notice.

Teatrault reached up and took the pistol out of Matthew's hand. He spun around so they both were facing Freeney and Coogan. He pressed Matthew tight against his chest and Matthew could feel the metal of the gun barrel against the side of his head. Freeney was still spitting up on the floor, the smell of puke and liquor taking over the shack. When Coogan and Freeney saw the gun against Matthew's head, the both of them went ghost pale. Coogan looked like he'd hurt his arm when he fell, cradling it against his belly.

"Whoa," he said. "Whoa."

Teatrault laughed his rumbling laugh and he pushed the barrel of the gun roughly against Matthew's temple. "Who is Mister Smart Guy now, eh?" he said.

"You put that gun down, Fritz," Freeney said. He still looked sick.

"I work same as you," Teatrault. "I am in the hole fifteen, twenty hour a day. What do I get?"

Coogan held up his crippled hand. "This is not the way you want to go with this," he said. "Listen."

Teatrault shook his whole body, whipping Matthew's legs from side to side. "My wife she run off to the San Francisco," the giant was yelling now. "I'm still here. I live here," he waved the gun around at the inside of the shack.

Freeney nodded. "I know," he said. "You got it rough just like all the boys."

“So what?” Teatrault said. “So what I steal some little bit? Just for once in while to buy a steak, a woman?”

Coogan took a step forward. “Now you listen to me,” he said, his voice like he was talking to a rabid dog. “That boy you got there? The one you’re fixing to shoot? Well, that’s Jimmy Lehane’s boy. That’s Jimmy Lehane’s only boy.”

The pressure of the gun barrel against his head slacked a little bit. Matthew felt the giant’s arms sag a bit. The giant said: “Really?” Sounding like a little kid.

“Now,” This was Coogan again, going slow, being careful with his words. “Do I have to tell you what’s going to happen to you, what’s going to happen to every man in this room if any harm comes to that boy?”

Matthew kicked his legs. Teatrault’s body dipped, putting Matthew’s feet back onto the floor. Matthew tried to run, but the giant still had hold of his shirt. The giant spun him around and looked at him. Matthew saw Teatrault’s big blue eyes and saw something quiet and sad in them.

“You have his face,” Teatrault said, like it was the answer to a great question.

He let go of the shirt and ruffled Matthew’s hair hard with his free hand. Matthew backed away until he was standing with Freeney and Coogan. Teatrault looked at the pistol, which was like a toy in his huge hand. He tossed the pistol across the room and Coogan fumbled with it before he caught it. Freeney put his arm around Matthew and Matthew shook it off. The giant went over to the table and sat in a chair. His knees bunched up around his chest. He seemed to be carrying a lot of weight now. Teatrault unwrapped a package of Peerless, fished

out a big dip and sunk it in his lip. He sat back, put his hands behind his neck, elbows pointing straight forward.

“I give you ten percent,” he said, not looking at anybody. “Once a month, I find you, give you ten percent.”

“That sounds like a real fair split,” Coogan said. He tucked Freeney’s pistol into his pants.

“It’s the right thing to do, Fritz,” Freeney said. “What with Jimmy on the shelf and all.”

Teatrault shrugged and clapped his palms on the table. “I make you fat,” he said. “Everone gets fat except Fritz.”

When they let themselves out the front door, Matthew realized his hands were shaking. Back in the car, driving back into the city, Coogan gave them both an earful. Unprofessional, he called it. No excuse. They got into a spot like that with somebody that couldn’t be reasoned with, they were all in a fix.

“What do you want?” Coogan said, turning in his seat, looking back at Matthew. “You want me to have to tell your Ma you got killed? Some Frenchie blew your brains out because you couldn’t handle a routine job?”

“Sorry,” Matthew said.

Coogan faced forward and dropped his back heavy against the seat. Freeney didn’t look anywhere but the road. “Routine job,” Coogan said. “I told John it was a bad idea to have you in. I ain’t no babysitter.”

Matthew kicked the back of the seat. "Actually," he said. "When you think about it, I saved your hide back there. If my last name was Coogan we'd all three be dead right now."

Coogan socked Freeney on the arm. "Pull over," he said.

Matthew walked the rest of the way home with blood dripping onto his shirt.

## Ten

Oates woke in the dark feeling very agitated. He'd dreamed of a pale woman, her black dress, her fucked-up hand. The boarding house was as quiet as it ever got, but he could still hear some men having a party somewhere down the hall. He put his body as straight as he could in the lumpy boarding house bed and tried to breathe. Oates stayed there until he decided he wasn't going to calm down and then he went down to the lobby and asked the man at the desk where there might be a girl.

Across Wyoming Street onto Mercury he found the whores. They were up in the windows like storefront dummies, lit from the back by little bedside lamps. Some of them had their names printed on cards. Oates walked with his hands in his pockets. He gripped a wad of cash. Some of the girls wiggled for his attention, others sat in chairs, eyes barely moving as he passed. They knitted or drank booze from dirty water glasses. One of them ate Chinese noodles from a paper container. Oates heard the tick, tick as he passed, knitting needled against the window. When he turned to look, the girl flashed sallow tits behind smeared glass. Oates' blood spun and he looked away. He walked fast and got out onto the next street where there were electric lights and normal people out on the sidewalk. He stood around near the corner watching traffic until he got his breathing under control and then he went back down the row.

The name in the window was Riley Kat, but when Oates asked her three times, the girl said it was Mae. She was on the chunky side, blonde with skin that

would bruise easy. She wore a purple evening gown and Oates asked her to put on something black. He peeled bills off his wad until she agreed. The girl smiled at him, smiled at the money. Oates was not wearing the hook at all, but had his bag knotted tight over the stump of his right arm. Left his pistol between the mattresses in his room at the boarding house.

The girl went into the bathroom and came back in black lace, which Oates said was nice. She came right over and started rubbing on him and Oates asked her to stop, that he wanted to do things slow. He would pay as much as it took for them to have a nice time.

“I don’t like it when a man keeps his hands in his pockets,” she said.  
“Makes me think he’s hiding something.”

Oates showed her his arms and she pulled the bag off. She straddled him and held his wrists. She kissed his neck and whispered in his ear. She said:  
“Around here, baby boy, I seen a lot worse than that.”

Oates felt good. He unclipped her dress for her and she sat on the bed in a kind of pose. She crossed her legs. Oates liked she had a roll of fat the bunched up under her rib cage. She didn’t look starved like some do. For the first time in a long time he felt a little bit of peace. He went and stood over her while she undid the front of his pants.

“When I get through you’ll tell all your friends about me,” she said.  
“Won’t you?”

“I don’t know nobody,” Oates said. The girl giggled and took him in her mouth.

“In that case,” she said in a minute. “I like a man who keeps a secret.”

Oates told her to watch it, because he wanted to get the whole thing for his money. She let him loose and they sat for a bit on the bed. She fit herself under his arm and let her head loll on his shoulder. He told her he was from Colorado, worked with copper and made good money. She was from San Francisco and came north when she heard that the mines here were the biggest anywhere.

She asked his name and he couldn't think of another one, so he said:

“Billy Oates.”

They had sex on the bed and then on the chair. Oates was never much for circus tricks, so he asked her to move back to the bed. Oates stayed on top and for a while he imagined the girl was Kate Morrissey. If he closed his eyes he could see her tired face and delicate wrists. Mae moved underneath him in a nice way and he stopped before he came. She asked him if something was wrong.

“You're the only person in this town been decent to me since I got here,” he said.

“That's a sad state of things,” she said.

“I want to choke you,” he said.

She flinched then, but said, “Okay.”

He used the tie from his silk bag, a trick he'd used before. It fit neatly around her slender throat. He started fucking her again while he did it. Oates thought of Roy Alley in his expensive office with his Chinese girls who came in to walk on his back when he wasn't feeling right. It didn't seem right that Alley – a big, soft pig – was the one who gave the orders. A lawyer, the one who signed

the checks for the afternoons Oates wasted walking the showroom at the Hennessey department store in his starched security uniform. Alley's world of pretty secretaries and certificates on the wall. Alley knew things, sure, but Oates knew things too. Alley could read a million books and not one of them would tell him the right way to choke a person.

It wasn't about breathing at all. That's the mistake most people made. People who didn't know the first thing about it. Oates pulled the cord tight over the place in Mae's throat where he could see her heart pumping. Stop the blood to the brain. She could still breathe fine, so at first she didn't even know it was happening. Then her eyes shot wide and she struggled for a few seconds. A choking person always struggles, even when they're letting you, because it's the brain's natural reaction. She went out quick after that, dead weight under him. Her eyes stayed open. Oates finished himself off, a trembling that quieted the spinning in his own blood. He pulled the cord off her throat. He pulled her to where she was sitting up and rubbed the back for her neck gently with his palm. Slowly, she came back to him.

Her eyes fluttered. "What happened?" she said.

"You went to sleep," Oates said. "But you're up now."

She said: "Oh."

They sat together on the bed. She told him a little about her folks, who didn't know a thing about what she was doing in Montana. Oates said he didn't know his Mamma and that his Daddy was dead. Mae told him that was sad and Oates said not really. He asked her if he could come back and see her again and



she said sure. He asked her if next time they could switch and she wouldn't mind choking him. It took her a minute but she said okay. She said she was tired and asked him to stay until she fell asleep. Oates said okay. When he left, he put a stack of money on the dresser like he said he would.

## Eleven

Ernest Sallau had already been into the bottle, was what people said later. Sallau had been one of the first to sign-up to help put in the new sprinklers at the 2,000 and it's easy to imagine he wound up behind the pump house drinking slivovitz with some of the boys. These were underground men on a surface detail. They were breathing fresh air and watching the sun go down. Any evening not spent down in the hole was worth celebrating. They had almost a quarter mile of power cable coiled up at the mouth of the main shaft. The cable was as big around as a watermelon and covered in a dull lead casing. By the time they got around to the job they were all feeling pretty happy. It was almost eight o'clock and they worked under the glow of the surface lights.

Some of them were giddy and lightheaded. Sallau talked about his daughter's christening, which was in two weeks at St. Lawrence and everybody was invited. The cable crew was already down two ropemen, because a couple of greenhorns had been snatched by the draft and were on trains to the coast getting fitted for doughboy costumes. The boys that were there toasted them and poured some out on the ground before they went to work. The cable had to go down easy and undamaged. It was going to feed the exhaust fans at the 2,000 so workers could start in on the sprinklers in the morning.

The Spec was a Safety First operation, which put it near the top of the list for things like sprinklers and extinguishers. The signs were everywhere, printed in big letters and posted up at every level underground. Once a month the Company

paid for all the Spec boys and their families to have dinner and drinks at a theatre downtown and they'd watch a moving picture about how to avoid accidents and what to do if they did happen. The parties were fun and the ladies smoked cigarettes in the balcony. Kids ran in the aisles and the Spec boys sat around acting important to have the whole theater to themselves.

The cable crew tied a guideline to one end of the power cable and fed it down the hole slow and easy. They tied off stoppers on the surface with manila rope every ten feet to ease the strain. Four of them at the lip of the shaft wrestled with the cable like a giant snake. They dug their heels in and braced their legs. The cable kept catching on the sides of the shaft and kinking up. As assistant foreman, Sallau said they'd have hell over it if the cable got twisted or got a short in it. He told the boys to cut off some of the stopper rope so they could try to straighten the cable. They hacked the manila rope with their pocket knives until it snapped off.

Without the stopper rope holding it, the cable yanked down into the hole and the boys at the edge of the shaft lost their balance. A couple of them let go, rolling away into the dirt as the cable hissed by them. The cable hit the lip of the shaft and twisted. The remaining stopper ropes busted loose and the whole cable slugged forward at once. It seemed to hang for a second on the edge, looping up on itself and then crashed down into the shaft. The boys couldn't do a thing but let go and watch the cable drop, making a swishing, humming sound as it disappeared into the hole. There was a moment of sickening silence before the sound of the cable crashing somewhere deep below.

Sallau sent a couple of them down in the cage to check it out and told them not to touch anything. The cable had dropped almost 2,400 hundred feet and crashed through shaft timbers and water pipes the whole way. A mess of it was hung up on the pipes down there. A big stretch of the lead covering had tore off, leaving just the tar insulation underneath. When Sallau heard the report, he ordered the boys to take lunch. He said they'd leave the cable until morning when they could send a fresh crew down to cut it out and take a look at the damage.

They were all sitting around on a stack of timbers eating sandwiches when Superintendent Braly came down. He took Sallau up to the office to ball him out. He told Sallau the cable would absolutely not hang down there until morning. Not with six crews of men coming in at eight to get started on the sprinklers. Sallau told him about the exposed insulation and the foreman said they would just have to be careful with it. If the jobsite wasn't ready in the morning they might as well toss their schedule in the trash. What if the morning shift bosses found out about the cable and wanted to shut down the lower levels until they got it cleared up, Braly wanted to know? Then what? There'd be a call up to the main office and maybe Mr. Lowney would come down to take a look. Somebody would have to call the state inspector and the state inspector might write it up. Did Sallau want that? Sallau said no he did not. Braly told Sallau to get the cable set right before morning, then. He told Sallau to eat something, he smelled like a still.

Sallau went back to the men and picked out three of them to go down in the cage with him to see about cutting the cable loose. Down in the shaft it was hot and wet and Sallau could feel the weight of the liquor he'd drank sloshing

around in his gut. They took the cage down to where the cable was hung up and saw that, on the way at least, the damage wasn't too bad. The cable itself was knotted-up in some water pipes just shy of the 2400. They stopped the cage and held the cable steady and cut through a couple of the pipes with hand saws. Even if they got the cable loose and back up to the 2000, they'd have to figure out a way to re-wrap the lead casing to have it ready for the sprinkler crews. It was almost eleven o'clock.

Sallau wanted to tie the end of the cable to the cage so they could haul it up. He crawled out onto a support beam with his carbide lamp and a heavy rope. He reached a hand out for the cable. Looking down into the blackness, he felt a rush of vertigo. The shaft lurched and spun around him. He tried to steady himself, choking back a bit of vomit. He swung his lamp around and grabbed the side of the cage with his free hand. The flame of the carbide lamp licked against the tar insulation and the inside of the cage surged with a new light. Flames curled up the sides of the cable and Sallau jumped back inside the cage. The other boys tried to beat the fire out with their saws and the flat side of a shovel, but they couldn't get it out. Smoke filled the cage and then they couldn't see.

Flames started to funnel up the shaft like a chimney. Sallau tried to take the cage up, but the heat was too much. The support timbers in the shaft caught fire and some of them dropped away, sheering past the cage on their way down. The metal in the cage getting was hot to the touch and Sallau ordered the cage to go down, away from the fire. They lurched and dropped as fast as they could, down into the blackness. Sallau had read the manifest before he clocked-in that

evening. There were over 400 miners at work in the Spec on almost 300 miles of track. The cage pushed down into the darkness. Above them, the men heard a popping sound and looked up to see a great fireball whooshing up the inside of the shaft. They crouched and covered their faces against the heat and felt a powerful sucking in their chests, like the air inside the mine was being ripped from their bodies.

The same shift, Matthew went down to the stables on his break. He liked to go down there to be by himself. The stables were almost deserted, just a few old mules still working. The Company had nowhere to put the mules, wouldn't kill them if they could still squeeze out a shift here and there, so they were just using them up until they could be replaced by the electric cars that carried the ore to the cage. There was a stillness in the stables that he liked. The cool, a long row of dark stalls. Sacks of feed and bales of straw still lying around. Migrants came in and mucked out the stalls, fed the animals, but mostly the mules just stood around waiting to die. Some had been there since before Matthew was born. Lived their whole lives in the dark, gone blind because of it. Their eyes looked white and frosted over and they spooked easy if you snuck up on them.

The mule named Woodrow Wilson, who had come into the mines for the first time the same night as Matthew, was down there, nuzzling around in his stall and grunting. Matthew gave him a piece of licorice from his pocket and mule chewed it. Matthew ate some of the licorice and did a couple of stretches he learned from wrestling. Listened to his back pop and whimper. He'd been

thinking of writing a letter to Frank Gotch, maybe to try to get some help. He figured if he explained things, Gotch might let Matthew come out to Iowa so Gotch could train him. Maybe bring Ma and Diedre and Eileen and Dad too, if he could make the trip. Matthew had started the letter a few times in his head, but kept scrapping it. He knew it would take a real feat of word to impress a guy like Frank Gotch and Matthew hadn't thought of the right ones yet. The mule nudged his hand and Matthew showed him he was out candy.

Matthew liked to talk to the mules. He'd say anything he could think of, just to keep talking and not go back to work. Matthew told them about Frank Gotch and about how Gotch had won the world title against the European champion in Chicago when Matthew was little. At first, everybody thought the European champion would be too strong for Gotch, but Gotch had gone two hours with him and finally made the bigger man quit with Gotch's special step-over toe hold. Matthew kept his voice down so nobody would hear. It had happened when Matthew was so young he could barely remember it, but he'd read about it in his book. The two of them had wrestled again a few years later, Matthew remembered it this time, and Gotch had whipped the European champ easy.

The mule stamped his foot and turned away and Matthew heard men's voices in the dark behind him. They sounded angry and loud and Matthew heard a clattering sound like pile of tools had been dropped or kicked over. When he got back to the main drift at 1800 he smelled smoke and saw the shaft was already starting to look hazy. Men were running, pushing past him to get to the main shaft and then turning back, running back down toward the job site. Matthew looked

for faces he knew, only saw scared looks. Twisted brows and nobody looking at anybody else. A man shoved him out of the way and Matthew heard the word. He couldn't see who screamed it but it sounded like a group of voices shouting together and apart. It rose above the rest of the noise. The word. Fire.

Matthew started running too, even though he didn't know where he was headed. There were too many men running in the passage and Matthew felt picked up with them. He ran along, trying to keep up. He stumbled and got back up. One of the men fell and more fell on top of him and got stepped on until they were scooped-up and tossed forward on their feet by the men behind them. The passage was filling up with smoke. Some of the boys were already coughing. The safety lights flickered off and then on. Matthew kept running. There wasn't time to think. The crowd pushed him toward the wall and he ducked around timbers. Matthew saw Denis Freeney, pale and sweating coming out of a drift with a shovel in his hand. Matthew grabbed his arm and Freeney pushed him on ahead. Matthew fell again and Freeney lifted him, shoved him. The shovel clattered in the dirt behind him.

They found Bulger and Coogan at the job site with a group of other men. Smoke was pouring out of the main shaft now, down the drift to where they were. Freeney and Matthew had barely got to the site when they heard a growling from behind them, down the drift, and then heat and flames shot out of the drift and licked up against the rock ceiling. All the boys hit the rock. They didn't have to look into the drift to know that all of the men behind them had been burned alive,



but some of the boys stood up and went back down the drift to look for survivors. The smoke kept coming.

The room started to fill with smoke and some of the men already couldn't breathe. They had to abandon the job site. Bulger and Coogan took the boys down old drift that snaked down away from the fire. The lights flicked again and then went out for good. Men were yelling and coughing and Matthew grabbed onto Denis Freeney's hand in the darkness. Matthew slipped twice, down in his hands in the dirt and Freeney scooped him onto his back. Matthew was surprised that the skinny little man could hold him, felt tears on his cheeks wet against the back of Freeney's shirt. They went deeper, each man holding onto the man in front of him. Timbers collapsed as fire swept the job site and they heard the screams of the boys who'd got caught in it. Rock fell in the tunnel behind them and the fire choked off the air that they'd been breathing just a heartbeat before. Matthew felt the heat of the fire, close now, and he pressed his face into Freeney back and knew they wouldn't make it out.

Oates went to the all-night diner near his boardinghouse. He sat near the window and ordered waffles and eggs. The guy who was working said they weren't making breakfast, not for another eight hours. He was a little wormy guy, a pencil-line mustache. Oates told the guy he'd pay extra, but the guy just shook his head.

Oates had been to the diner three times before. It was as narrow as a train car, wedged in between a barber shop and a Chinese chop-suey joint. A glass

front looked out on the dark street. The inside was dirty tile floor and grease stains. It was the kind of place where nobody even looked twice at the hook on Oates' arm. He figured the people here were used to all kinds. The last time he'd bought dinners for the other guys eating and left a big tip.

"You don't remember me," Oates said. "I come in here before got waffles."

"Not at eleven o'clock," the guy said. "To make eggs I gotta turn the whole flattop down."

"Turn it down then," Oates said. He wanted to mention the big tip he'd left last time, but he didn't.

"Don't raise your voice, sir," the man said.

Oates had some coins on the table, he rearranged them with his finger. He said: "How about hold the eggs?"

The man had a pencil behind his ear. He took it out and tapped a sign by the door for when breakfast was served. Oates grabbed the guy's wrist. The guy tried to twist away, but the grip on Oates' good hand was like a vice when he wanted it to be. The man made a little sound in the back of his throat. There was sweat standing out above his little mustache. The guy pulled Oates halfway out of his chair and it was like some awkward dance.

"I just want a plate of waffles," Oates said.

There was a hot light then as something huge screamed across the night horizon. Both men turned to look out the window. On the north end of town, near the mines, a great flame had erupted from of the ground. It shot maybe a hundred

feet up like a giant Roman candle and illuminated the whole side of the hill. The guy stopped fighting. The glass flickered a reflection. Neither of them moved. They stood joined together at the wrist and watched it, as if in the flashpot of a photograph, like a snapshot of two lovers holding hands.

Coogan and Bulger led them all down the dark drift until it dead-ended. They found the cold concrete of the bulkheads in the dark with outstretched hands. The boys bottled up there and crouched together while the fire started creeping down the drift toward them. Freeney set Matthew down and he sat down in the dirt. It was very dark. Somebody nudged him and handed him a canteen and he drank, the water warm and coppery. One of the boys lit a carbide lamp and they squinted against it.

In the lamplight their faces were long and pitted. Streaked with dirt and tears. The men's looks said they were all going to die down there. Matthew sat back against a support beam and started to cry again. Freeney saw him and came over and slapped his face. Freeney said for Matthew to cut that out. Freeney said he wasn't going to die down in the hole, not tonight, not before he got the chance to see his wife once more. Some of them boys nodded when Freeney said it. Some of the others were trying to scratch out letters to their girls with tiny pencils, using whatever they had for paper. Matthew thought he'd like to write a letter to Dad and Ma and the girls, but he didn't have a pencil or any paper. His cheek stung from where Freeney had hit him, but he did his best to swallow back the tears.

Freeney stood over him for a long time and then slouched back down into the dirt and put his arm around Matthew's shoulders.

Bulger called for the lamp up front. He and Coogan had brought long-handled mauls from the job site and they started chopping away at the bulkhead. Chunks of concrete dropped and flew. Men came forward a ripped at the bulkhead with their hands. The concrete was solid and thick, but on the other side of the bulkhead was the Badger State Mine, where maybe there was no fire and if the boys hadn't been evacuated they might be able to get out.

The drift was getting hotter. It wouldn't take the fire long to get to them. The boys explored up as far as they could into the drift and brought back loose timber and even ripped down a couple of support beams. They builr-up a temporary bulkhead in the drift, trying to block the fire and keep out poison gas. Some of the boys said they'd seen guys choked off by the gas while they were running, saw them falling dead in their steps one by one. The bulkhead went up quick, but looked flimsy and the boys took off their shirts and stuffed them into the holes to try to make it tight.

They still had some timbers left over and they carried them to the front to use as battering rams. They tried to help Bulger and Coogan, taking turns with the mauls and also ramming the timber against the concrete. It was slow going, one of the trackmen said the concrete bulkhead was almost two feet thick. The boys were walled-in now between the two bulkheads and Matthew felt the crazy shake in his gut he got from very tight spaces. Somebody started yelling about the sprinklers. Where the hell were the sprinklers? The guy carried on and shouted until

somebody else told him to stuff it, to act like a man and sit down and not waste up all the air by yelling like that. A couple of the boys sat very close to the new bulkhead and they said they could feel it warming up. Matthew sat with his back against the hard wood, leaning into Freeney. Somebody said shut the lamp off, it was burning up the air. Then it was dark again in the drift and all they could hear were the grunts of the men who were trying to break through the bulkhead. The fire made a low his from behind their wall of wood and cloth. It was getting hard to breathe.

Sallau and his team went down to where it was safe and made their way out of the mine through the main shaft at the Granite Mountain. They told the men they found about the fire and they all trooped out together through the manway to the cage, where they lifted as many as they could at a time. Sallau looked pale and spotted with dirt and blood from where he'd cut his hand trying to get out. At the surface, things were hectic. Boys from the Granite, Black Rock, Orlu and Diamond had mostly got out okay. They were getting set up into rescue teams to go back in and try to find men who were still inside. There was still a lot of the Spec boys unaccounted for; Badger and Bell too, by the calculations they had. Superintendent Braly was keeping track on his clipboard. When he saw Sallau he turned and walked away like didn't know him. Some of the boys at the surface got outfitted with the special helmets to help them breathe and they went back in as soon as the fires in the shaft burned down to the point where it was safe. It took a

lot longer than anybody liked. Still, if guys down below could get to the shafts or into a cross-cut or a manway, they could maybe get some of them out.

Some doughboys who'd been stationed up at the High Ore came down and roped off a big area. The Company rescue teams came out and stood around. Ambulances from St. James and Murray both came and brought the fire trucks with them. Police in the paddywagon. The undertakers from Duggan's. They stood out by the ropes with their hands in their pockets and nobody talked to them. They smoked cigarettes and tossed them into the dirt and poked around with the doughboys who weren't letting anybody in.

Sallau didn't totally lose it until he found out about Sheridan and Conway, the two station tenders. When smoke started to pour out of the shaft and Sallau and his team never came back, Sheridan and Conway talked the hoistman into putting them down in the hole to have a look. The two men had been down forty-five minutes without a signal when the flame shot up out of the shaft and into the sky. The hoistman, Evans, had brought the cage up then, as soon as he could, and found Sheridan and Conway still in there, burned-up inside it so bad he couldn't tell them apart. Looked like they'd both probably got in from the gas quick after they went down and then got cooked inside the cage when the fire came up. A couple of the boys burned their hands trying to get the bodies out of the cage, which was hot as tinder. The ambulance took them, with their hands wrapped in gauze like prizefighters.

When Evans told Sallau about Sheridan and Conway, a couple of the boys had to drag Sallau out behind one of the buildings to calm him down. When he

came back he had dirt tracks on his cheeks and he demanded to get on with one of the rescue teams and go back down. Braly and Evans tried to talk him out of it but eventually let him go to not have a big scene in front of all the people watching from the other side of the rope.

Of course people in Dublin Gulch and Walkerville and everyplace else had seen the flame shoot up and had come up the hill to the mines to see about it. Wives and mothers and children stretching the ropes and calling out to people they saw who they knew. When the ambulances and undertakers came, there was a lot of screaming. A woman fainted. People went to their houses and came back with the crucifixes they tore down from above their beds. A couple of priests showed up with Bibles and handed out prayer beads. Braly went out and made a speech to say that everything was going to be okay, that everybody should just go home and let the rescue workers do their jobs, but nobody left. A woman started screaming at him and tried to slap him and a couple of the doughboys took her away. In an hour or so the crowd of people standing around outside the rope stretched all the way down the road to the hill. Some brought food and blankets as the night started to get cooler and people stood around and waited for word.

Sallau's rescue team got in the cage for the Diamond mine. They were going to go down and try to find away into the Spec from one of the cross-cuts. They had carbide lamps and shovels and even a couple of buzzies in case they needed to drill through a bulkhead. Sallau didn't have a lamp, didn't want to have one in his hands, but he carried a small rock hammer and a sack of blankets they could use if they found anybody who needed to be carried out. They got to a drift

maybe 1800 feet down and got out of the cage. In the lamp light they could make out the bodies of men on the dirt floor. Sallau order they load the bodies into the cage but when they tried to move them, the bodies fell to pieces. The drift itself seemed open, undamaged. It wasn't the fire killed the men. Sallau and the others ventured a few feet into the dark before a hot gust braced their faces. It burned in the lungs and smelled distantly of something Sallau couldn't place. The lamp blew out. The heat pressed on their face and caught in their throats. Sallau tried to yell gas but choked and dropped the sack of blankets. He fell dead in the drift before he could even turn to try to get back to the cage.

The makeshift bulkhead started to burn. They heard a faint whoomph from the otherside and then the shirts that were stuck in their started to melt away. Men scrambled down the drift, couldn't see, and fell on each other. Somebody lit a candle and they all scrambled to where Bulger and Coogan and the other men were breaking through into the Badger.

Matthew had been trying to picture his father's face, the way it used to be before he got sick, but he couldn't remember. Instead, he kept seeing Swede Fredrickson stretched out on the game table at the Atlantic bar. He thought of his mother and sisters, but their faces were blurry too. He panicked thinking he would die not being able to remember them. If the fire came through the wall, Matthew imagined that he was going to run into it, to burn up before he could choke to death or hear the screams of the others. Freeney was still with him, pulling him up to his feet and then down the drift and yelling for him to keep up.



Some of the boys had their medallions out, their chains and they were praying. Matthew wasn't going to pray, he decided, not if God was going to make Dad sick and then send him down into the earth and kill him in a fire. Freeney pulled him all the way up to where they were chopping through the bulkhead. Bulger looked white and wore out and his hands were bleeding from the handle of the maul. The battering-ram timber was splintering against the concrete.

When the bulkhead finally broke, it was from the other side. The head of a pickaxe came through and pulled out a chunk of the concrete. Men from the Badger were there and yelling to them. All the boys lit their lamps and some guys cheered. Bulger and Coogan chopped out a hole in the bulkhead at hip high and the boys started to crawl through. Matthew went feet first and hands from the other side grabbed his legs and pulled him into the Badger. Then men on the other side looked tired, but happy and they shoved him forward. They all moved in a pack to the main shaft of the Badger and piled into the cage until they couldn't fit another man.

Matthew was on with Freeney, but he saw Bulger and Coogan still down below as the cage went up. He wanted to yell to them, but he didn't. Nobody in the cage said anything until they got to the surface. When the cage door came open, Matthew was one of the first out and the night air was cool on his face and the back of his throat. Some of the boys sat down in the dirt a few feet from the cage and cried. Some men in firesuits came up with blankets and jugs of water. Matthew sat down too, feeling dizzy. He saw people everywhere and a big crowd maybe a hundred yards away who all cheered and screamed when the boys hit the

surface. Matthew saw a group of guys in doughboy costumes bringing men on stretchers out from one of the buildings. There were so many people and cars and trucks around that Matthew just looked up at the sky, where the stars were out and the edges were starting to go purple with morning.

The cage went back down and came up again with another load of guys, Bulger and Coogan with them. Matthew even hugged Coogan when he saw them. The four of them walked through the mess to where the crowd was roped-off and people they didn't know were hugging them and shaking their hands and washing their faces with water. It seemed like the whole town was there. Coogan's family pushed through to meet him and Bulger found his wife. Freeney went off somewhere into the crowd, saying he needed a cigarette and they all laughed at him. A nervous sounding laugh. Matthew looked around for his Ma and didn't find her until she grabbed him from behind and practically lifted him into the air.

His sisters were there too and they were all on him. His Ma said a thousand thank-yous to God and to Jesus. The crowd parted a team of guys came through with bodies in blankets and loaded them into one of the police paddywagons. The crowd went crazy with women and kids crying. There weren't many men standing around and Matthew realized there must've been a lot of them still stuck in the mines or working on the scene at the surface. He asked Ma where Dad was and she said he was okay, but had wanted to come to the mine so bad that she had to give him a pill to put him to sleep before she left. Some nuns from St. Lawrence brought coffee around. Matthew ate a sandwich out of a box that got

brought up on the back of truck. The sun poked up above the mountains behind the mines. It got brighter, looking like a hot day. He felt the sudden panic of being free and not in danger, but not knowing what to do. It was going to be a long, long time before anybody went home.