

## AU CHAT NOIR.

"Dear Tom is dead, please come tonight!"  
She telegraphed. With keen delight  
I read the message,  
Roses for consolation meant,  
I sent, but Oh! with what content,  
I paid expressage.

Don't think me heartless, till you know  
Death has relieved me of a foe.  
Tom was my rival.  
When he began to pine away,  
I scarcely was the one to pray  
For his survival.

He's hated me since first we met,  
He was a most pronounced brunette,  
While I am fair.  
He was more favored of the two;  
Of soft caresses very few  
Fell to my share.

But now he's dead, I feel no spite,  
I hope his harp is tuned all right,  
His robe a fit, his halo bright  
With gems galore.  
And just this once do I confess  
The reason of my happiness—  
Because on earth there's one cat less,  
In Heaven one more.  
—M. T. Hart, in Life.

## AT THE PIT'S MOUTH.

No, no; I wud a fool to hope or think sic a thing. There be anither man tha lovest; a younger man, a better man nor me. It be Will Benson. Dunnot answer, lass; I know it. Well, forgi' me what a' said. Good-by, Jemie, and God bless thee, lass, God bless thee!"

Thus spoke Steven Armstrong, as he turned away from the cottage where Jessie MacDavitt lived, that cottage with the gay flowers round its porch that made the one patch of brightness in this dismal, dust-begrimed country side, blackened everywhere by coal, saddened by the lives of men whose destiny had cast them to delve and burrow beneath the fair earth that other men might grow rich.

But, somehow today, Steve Armstrong could see no brightness in anything. He had been a fool and no mistake, this great stalwart, broad-shouldered miner! He was well past forty; his hair becoming gray, and sparse on top—quite old to her.

He had been a bachelor all these years. He might have known it was sheer madness now to lavish all the wealth of his great manly heart on pretty, winsome Jessie. She did not want an old foggy like him.

At first she seemed to hear his tale with gentle tenderness and pity. Bad, indeed, must be the woman whose heart remains untouched by the love of a true and honest man. Then a word or two she dropped almost unconsciously had revealed the truth. Of course, Will Benson was the man. He had been a blind fool not to have seen it long ago. Will was twenty years younger than himself. On Sundays Will was quite a masher (the Americanism had grown into common use even here). Will was just the lad to please the girl's fancy.

And so, having settled that matter in his own mind, Armstrong walked slowly and sadly away about his business.

It was Saturday night. Bar and parlor of the Miners' Arms were crowded with men. Here the hard-earned money flew merrily; money which should have gone to wife and weans at home—money which might have been as a tower of strength in fighting the battles that labor and poverty always have to fight.

Will Benson was there, in the midst of a noisy throng, reeking of beer, spirits and rank tobacco. He had had a great deal too much to drink already. Suddenly some one laid a hand upon his arm. He turned tipsily, and encountered the serious, steadfast gaze of Steve Armstrong, who was not drunk, entered the public house.

"Dunnot tak' ony moor," the latter whispered, gently but firmly.

"Who told thee to interfere, Maister Preacher?"

"No one. I ask thee not to for t' sake o' t' girl who loves thee."

"Did she tell thee to coom pryin' after me?"

"Tha knowest better nor that. I ask thee for her sake, and fur tha' own good."

"Bad! I've heard yond' stuff fro' t' blue-ribbon fowk afore now."

"A' be none o' them. I hold that a chap as canna' tak' a glass or two an' stop when he's gotten enough is no worthy o' bein' called a mon. I believe in total abstinence na moor nor I do in drunkards."

"Then what t' devil be'est jawin' to me about?" the young man said fiercely.

"I ask thee not to spend all t' neet here. Think o' her who's to be the wife. These chaps do thee no good. They'll mak' thee spend the brass, and when 'tis all gone, they'll only laugh at thee."

"Shew me t' mon as'll laugh at me! Ye daren't! It's tha thyself as are doin' it. Come outside, then, and we'll see who's t' best mon!"

"I winna fight wi' thee—and certainly not now," Armstrong answered, slowly and with dignity; it was not the retraction of a coward. His well meant remonstrances had proved worse than useless; and from that time those two men felt each other to be rivals.

Horror and consternation are spreading far and wide through the grimy Lancashire town. A terrible explosion has just been heard. They know only two well what that means; and the poor women, both young and old, are rushing wild and terror-stricken to the pit's mouth.

Down in the "workings" the excitement is at its height. Men are running to the bottom of the shaft, running for their lives; for the noxious after-damp is choking them and they know only too well that many of them are destined never to see the light of day again. The cage is going up and down again as quickly as may be, but it will only hold a limited number. They must patiently wait their turn, and that turn may mean life or death.

"There be room for one moor," the miners shout. "Come along, Steve Armstrong; it be tha' turn."

But he does not move. "No," he answers; "I be old an' alone. Here's a young fellow as a gotten a mither; let him go instead this time."

It was Will Benson who stood by his side. "You, Armstrong! You mak' room for me!" he exclaimed.

"What dost suppose a'd do? A' fight fair—when a' want to fight."

"You do this for my sake?"

"Not for thine, mon; for hers!" Go!

The words were few—there was no time for more—but they had a rough heroic dignity about them. Benson stepped into the cage without another word; the signal was given, and they went up towards the light and air above.

From those about the pit's mouth a ringing cheer arose as the cage reached the surface. They knew that so many, at least, of their mates were safe, and some of the women went away with hearts full of joy and thankfulness. The word went round that Steve Armstrong had sent up Will Benson instead of himself. Pretty Jessie MacDavitt was there. When she heard the whisper, she understood. A woman's instinct is much the same after all, whether she be a princess or only a rough miner's lass. Benson came towards her, but she seemed hardly to notice him. She was waiting for some one else.

The cage was let down again. Some anxious minutes followed that seemed like hours. Once more it appeared with its load of men. Jessie pressed eagerly forward. Great heavens! he whom she sought was not there! Several voices asked after him—Jessie dared not trust herself to do so—and then came the appalling answer:

"Choke-damp ha' taken him, and bit wall fallen in ower him!"

Suddenly a woman's voice rang out—Jessie MacDavitt's:

"Then he be i' danger—dying—dead mayhap! He gave his life for one o' ye. Aren't ye men? Are none o' ye goin' to save un?—Then I wull!"

She pressed forward towards the pit, but a dozen strong arms restrained her, and one old fellow said:

"Keep back, lass! It'll be death to go down there for nigh an hour yet. This is no place for women fowk."

She heeded not, and, breaking away from them, entered the cage. Two or three men followed her, ashamed to think that a girl should be braver than they; and down they went, from the light into darkness; down among the noxious, deadly gases—down to the unknown!

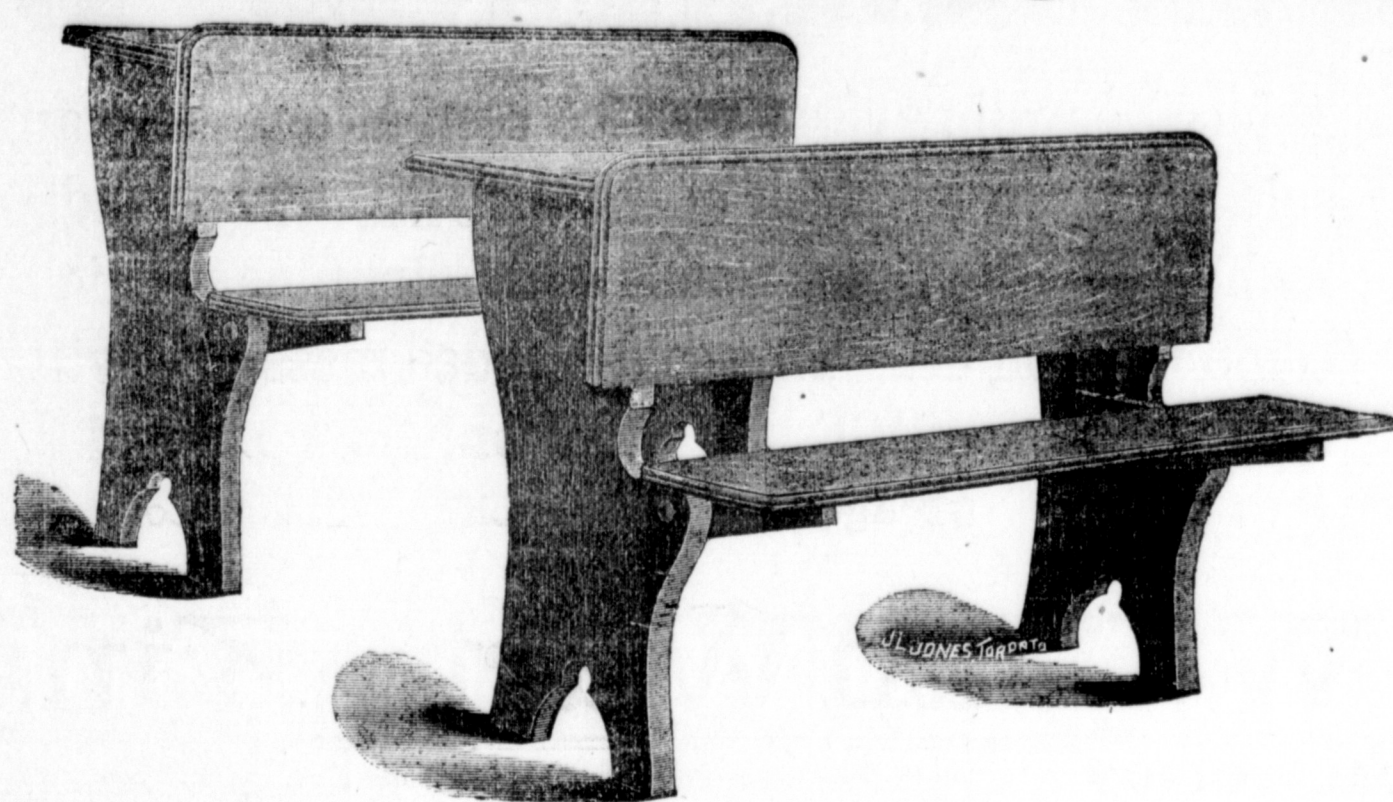
A long, long time now elapsed, or so it seemed to the anxious watchers. Two or three cages full of miners came up, but they were not among them. Great Heavens! was it possible that all had perished in their heroic attempt?

The news that Jessie had gone below reached her mother; and Mrs. MacDavitt—with her sleeves tucked up, fresh from the wash tub, her cheeks pale as death, her eyes streaming—rushed wildly to the spot.

Even at that very moment the cage was coming up again. A deafening cheer rang out, loud and long, upon the murky air. It was they—they at last; thank God! But were they alive. Two inanimate forms were laid down upon the black, dusty bank—the forms of Jessie MacDavitt and of Steven Armstrong.

Jessie MacDavitt sat alone at work in the front parlor of her mother's cottage. She

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was quite well again now, but her recovery from the effects of her adventure in the mine had been slow and painful.

There was a knock at the door. She called out, "Coom in!" in sweet, cheery tones. It was Steven Armstrong who entered the apartment. She looked up, surprised, and colored up to her very brow as she arose to greet him. She had not seen him since that fearful day; perhaps this was the reason of her confusion. He didn't wear his working nor yet his "shifting" clothes, but was habited in a tweed suit and wide-awake. How brave and noble he looked, albeit a trifle pale just now.

"Mr. Armstrong!" she said, "I am so glad to see you fettle again. I haven't seen you since!"

"Not since then—No; it wur churlish o' me not to coom an' thank thee—only—only there be nae thanks possible for sic things as that. Oh, Jessie, why didst do it; why didst risk tha' life?"

"Because you gave your chance o' life to him," she answered simply, but with an unsteady tremor in her voice.

"Now I ha' coom to bid thee good-by," Armstrong said, like a man who has an unpleasant duty to perform and wants to get it over quickly. "A' be goin' away."

"Goin' away!" she echoed. "Where to?"

"Reet away—for iver. To America or Australy—a' hardly know where yet. A' be tired o' t' life here. But remember, if there be iver anything I can do for the, o' wull. Tha shalt know where I go to, an' if tha should iver want a friend or a helpin' hand, a' coom to thee if 't were half across t' world! If a' han't said mooch, remember a' know that a' can niver hope to pay ma debt to thee!"

"Oh, dunnot talk about that; please dunnot talk about it—I hadn't an idea you were thinkin' o' goin' away—it's—ye've took me so sudden like—I—I dunnot know what to say."

"Say Jess, ma lass! Just say 'good-by and God bless thee, Steve Armstrong,' or soom sic words as a'll be able to tak' wi' me, and cherish i' memory o' thee when a' be far away."

"I'll say 'God bless thee, Steve Armstrong,' wi' all ma heart, but not 'good-by!'" Jessie said, in a voice that was even more unsteady with emotion than before.

"Ah, dunnot—it mun be, I say—tha would not torture me?"

"Wouldn't tha stay, Steve, if a' were to ask ye?"

"There's naethin' I wouldna do that you bid me—except that—except that, why, a' be goin' away fro' thee!"

"Fro' me!"

"Surely a' needna tell thee all ower again. A' wish thee an' tha husband well wi' all ma heart—but a' canna stay!"

"Ye said just now ye'd do anything for me," Jessie answered, clasping her hands, and the bright color mantled in her cheek hotter and redder than ever—such a coy pretty blush! They were hard words for a girl to speak; but she had made up her mind all at once, and felt impelled to go on. "Ye said ye niver could hope to repay yer debt to me. Suppose I show ye t' way. Stay here for me sake, an'—dunnot ye understand?—Dunnot mak' me have to say any moor!"

"What madness is this? And t' mon tha't plighted to?"

"We are na plighted now. He be gone reet away. Haven't ye heard?"

"No; I have no been mooch among t' chaps o' late."

"It was a small thing that parted us; something I asked un to give up for my sake—only t' drink. But he said no; no wench should iver mak' a milk-sop o' him. Then a' cam' to compare ye both together; he, who wouldn't even do that mooch; you who would ha given yer very life for ma sake. A' think t' were at t' Pit Mouth t' thought first cam' to me. A' weighed ye both i' scales, and then I knew which way ma heart had gone!"

And that was where she nestled now her pretty head; to that brave heart which was to be her home forever more.—St. Paul's

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