

THE MINER AND THE BOY.

BY B. H. HANSBROUGH.

One lonely miner's cabin rose to break the monotonous view of the sunlight falling on miles of snow. Fields, billows and mountains of snow. A glistening, scintillating waste of white. Ghastly, unvarying, wearing to the eyes and brain.

The cabin was occupied by two men. On the cot lay the stalwart old miner, stricken with snow blindness. A Hercules laid low.

By the fire, clad in a rough hunting suit, sat a delicate youth of 18, cleaning his gun and ever and anon casting a look of inexpressible sympathy toward the old man on the cot.

Neither spoke. Is it not the custom of these Western miners to while away time in conversation. The hopes for the future are buried in their own breasts. Their present admits of few observations, and there is an unwritten law in the West against a man discussing his past.

The boy had come West, a delicate youth with a severe cough, seeking health. The miner had found him in a wretched hotel, sick and discouraged. The older man nursed him back to health and took him with him on a prospecting trip. The boy never left his friend, his love and gratitude knew no bounds, and the miner's lonely heart responded to his love.

The boy started. The box by the miner's side, which served in lieu of a table, went down with a crash, tin cups and empty bottles fell clattering to the floor.

"Hello, old man! Happened to an accident?"

"No, kicked it over to make a noise."

There was silence again for a while, then the miner turned his back to the boy and said:

"Chappie, it is a devilish thing lying still and thinking all to one's self, and when a fellow can't see his surroundings he gets so he doesn't distinguish the past from the present, or both from the future. He don't think of a thing but the cursed mistakes he has made, and how different things might have been if he had not made an ass of himself at some important time.

"I made such a mistake twenty-five years ago, and have spent all the intervening time trying to convince myself I was right. Now, boy, I've a mind to tell the story, because I am tired of this thinking, and because I am getting old and garrulous, I suppose. She must be 42 now, and I am 50, but I know her love is just as true now as mine has always been, and her life has been sacrificed to me, as mine has been to pride. Nothing can kill a woman's love.

"My father was a wealthy banker, my mother died when I was a baby.

"I was given every advantage socially and educationally, but was completely impotent to make my own way in the world. My father died suddenly bankrupt.

"I resolved to come West, and, after everything was settled, I went to tell Jennie good-bye.

"It was a quiet, starlit night, when I left the train at the little station and walked through the woods to their country home. Jennie was waiting for me at the gate, and as we walked up and down the path leading to the house I told her my plans, and painted in blackest words my helpless condition and inability to cope with the world. But women

are queer things, boy. Jennie only clung to me the closer, and begged, 'Don't go, don't go,' until my resolve was crushed, and I told her, in foolish, boyish words, how much I loved her, and she would always be the only woman in the world for me.

"'But I will not bind you to me; you are perfectly free.'

"'But I am not free,' she sobbed, 'because you know I love you.'

"And those words have kept the old man straight through all the temptations of a miner's life, and they left an ache in my heart against which I have battled for twenty-five years. At first I hoped to make untold wealth and claim her, but, as each year has brought only disappointment, I at last have despaired. Now I see the pity of it, her lonely waiting, my dreary failure, and my life and strength ebbing away with the years.

"I did not ask her to write, but four letters followed me, full of love and devotion. I did not answer them. The last one came twenty years ago, my chap, and now—"

There was a long silence, the miner turned his face to his young companion, and raised himself on his arm, as if to watch the expression of the boy's face.

"I have been thinking, when this cursed snow clears away, and I can see again, I will answer that letter. Do you think there is any use?"

The boy dashed a suspicious moisture from his eye and cleared his throat.

"Yes, there is always use in mending two lives."

Then he went to work to prepare the evening meal. Twenty-five years the miner had been humbling his pride to accept happiness in God's way, but now that only physical weakness stood between him and the consummation of his resolve, his impatience knew no bounds. He tossed and moaned, his handsome, tanned face, framed by iron-gray hair, grew thin, his big black eyes had a strained, restless look, and all the boy's tenderness could not soothe his impatience. He cursed his blindness, his weakness, the snow, and daily grew more miserable and irritable. The boy noted this, and his heart ached for his friend.

One morning he trudged away to the station for some supplies. Light hearted and happy, his spirits rose, exhilarated by the clear, bracing air, and the beauties of nature's grandest work, the great west. But, after the first mile, he thought of the old miner; his frayed, raveled life, of the love which had kept him pure and strong and true to himself. Of the lonely girl, now an old woman, waiting, waiting. The light goes out of the sunshine, the breath from the air, the boy turned hurriedly back to the cabin. At the door he hesitated, and looked at the miner lying so still on the cot. He stood a long time making up his mind, then he came hurriedly up to him.

"Old man, couldn't—couldn't I write that letter for you?"

The old man stretched his hand out eagerly and clasped that of the boy; no word was spoken.

The boy cheerfully cleared the top of the box, found writing paper and pen, and seating himself, opened the letter the miner had produced from an inner pocket. As he did so a photograph fell out, the boy picked it up with a look of dismay. A sweet, girlish face, soft brown hair, tender, dreamy eyes and a mouth which seemed trying not to smile. As he gazed he was carried back to the library of

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his elegant home in the far East. He saw for a moment the polished floor on which the fire light danced in fantastic shadows, the elegant rugs, the tiled hearth and marble mantel, the leather chairs and ebony cabinets, the statuettes and bronze and alabaster vases, the rows of invaluable books and above his father's desk this picture, done in oils, looking down with half-smiling lips and tender eyes—the picture of his mother. With a start he came back to his present surroundings. The lonely miner's cabin, encircled on every side by miles of snow, the smoky walls, the guns in the racks, the box and tin cups and pans, the bottles of rum on the shelf, the rickety cot, and the strong, handsome, old man on it, with such an eager, half-wistful look in his eyes. The boy groaned and buried his face in his hands. The miner hastily raised himself.

"What is it, boy?" His voice was husky with presentiment of evil.

"My God, it is my mother!"

The miner lay still a long time, then he laughed a harsh, mirthless laugh.

"Nothing can kill a woman's love," he said, and ground his teeth.

"Nothing but neglect," answered the boy. Then he did the only thing one man can do for another at such a time; he slung his gun across his shoulder, and, with a backward glance at the still form and white, drawn face, started out across the snow.

When the boy returned that night he found the miner lying on the floor drunk, beastly drunk.

A stranger sat on the hotel porch of a Western town. His position commanded a view of one long, shambling street, the range of mountains beyond and the glowing western sky. A man came out of a saloon opposite; he was an old man, his hair was gray, his face was wrinkled, his once straight figure was bent. The wreck whisky had made of a strong man. His eyes were bleared, the corners of his mouth drooped, his hands trembled, and his whole frame swayed and reeled. A pathetic sight, but not the drunkard one could laugh at. The old man looked a tragedy too sad for tears. He stood tottering in the door, looking helplessly around. A young man came hurriedly up the street, he put the old man's feeble hand in his own strong arm and carefully guided the drunken imbecile's steps.

"Who are those men?" asked the stranger.

"That," replied a bystander, "is Dick Houston, the richest mine owner in Colorado. The other is old Carrington, a drunken miner, to whom Dick devotes his life. Keeps the old fool like a monarch, never leaves him a day. Won't go east to live and spend his money because he would have to leave old Carrington alone."

"You have some queer people out West," said the stranger.

Mrs. Joe Doty, Port Gilbert, N. S., says: "My little girl would grind her teeth so I concluded she had worms. I gave her three doses of Dr. Low's Worm Syrup which acted with good effect." Price 25c.

Why She Wouldn't Wait.

"When does the next train that stops at Manchester leave here?" asked the resolute widow at the window.

"You'll have to wait four hours, ma'am."

"I think not."

"Well, maybe you know better than I do, ma'am."

"Yes, sir, and maybe you know better than I do whether I am expecting to travel on that train myself, or whether I am inquiring for a relative that's visiting at my house and wanted me to call here and ask about it and save her the trouble, because she's picking up her things and expects to take that train herself and not me; and maybe you think it's your business to stand behind there and try to instruct people about things they know as well as you do, if not better, and, perhaps, you'll learn some day to give people civil answers when they ask you civil questions; young man, my opinion is you won't!"

With a gasp, "Yes, ma'am!"—English Paper.

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Another Little Whistle, Please.

"George, George, mind; your hat will be blown off if you lean so far out of the window!" exclaimed a fond father of his little son, who was travelling with him in a railway-carriage.

Quickly snatching the hat from the head of the refractory youngster, papa hid it behind his back.

"There, now, the hat has gone!" he cried, pretending to be angry.

And George immediately set up a howl.

After a time the father remarked:—

"Come, be quiet; if I whistle your hat will come back again." Then he whistled and replaced the hat on the boy's head. "There, it's back again, you see."

Afterwards, while papa was talking to mamma, a small shrill voice was heard saying:—

"Papa, papa, I've thrown my hat out of the window! Whistle again, will you?"

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