

HOW PINK WENT HOME.

Pink was not called so because he was pretty. I have heard of people who were "pretty as a pink," but Pink Dyer was not one of these. It was his hair, most likely. That and his eyebrows were of that peculiarly brilliant yet undecided shade of red which cannot be described by any other word (of sufficient brevity) than "pink;" so "Pink" he was called, and so remained to the end of the chapter.

I first met him in the Union Pacific train going West. He was full of faith, and hope, and charity then.

The way I came to notice him first, was through him asking me, at the Omaha station, a question concerning the time the train was due to leave. He was so unhandy, so dreadfully unhandy, and yet so "good" looking, that he attracted my attention as soon as he spoke; and after I heard his voice (it was a "good" voice Pink had), I took a fancy to study him.

When the train started, I walked through to see if there was anyone on board I knew, and in the "smoker," with only two or three fellow-passengers, I again found Pink.

He smiled at me, and said "Good-evening" in a pleasant way; so I sat down by him, and lit a cigar.

"Going West?" I asked, by way of opening the conversation.

"Yes," he answered promptly; "going to Colorado."

"Yes? Ever been there before?"

"No; I'm a tenderfoot, I reckon," he smiled.

"Then he added—

"I suppose it's a pretty tough country—have you been there?"

"Oh, yes; I live there."

"Well, how is it—any chance for a feller to get plenty work?"

"Yes, if he wants it."

"That's good; that's what I want."

Then, in his innocent, confiding way, he went on to tell me how it was he came to be going out West—the whole story.

It was a sad story, and yet not really a new one—a tale of an improvident father and a family of small children to get along, and their troubles in doing so.

Pink was the oldest—he was eighteen.

Then there Min, fifteen; Grace, eleven; Frank and Freddie, the twins, ten; Ted, eight; and Fan, the baby, five.

Pink (his name was George) and Min could handle a little; but there was not much they could get to do in the little country town they lived in, and, besides, Min did not like to work.

"Ye see," said Pink deprecatingly, "she's a girl, an' ain't been brought up to work, 'sactly, an'—well, ye can't expect girls to hanker after work much, nobow."

An'th' rest of 'em, ye see, they're pretty little—pretty little yet."

And Pink smiled in a paternal sort of fashion.

We talked on other subjects for a while. Then Pink, after a silence of some minutes, said earnestly, with a slap of his fist on his bonny knee—

"All I want—all I want is to see all o' them young uns fixed an' settled in good shape, an' well started, an' then I can go home an' settle down after mother."

He left the train at Julesburg—he had some prospect of getting work near there, he told me—and I saw nothing of him for over two years.

Then, one day, coming down Sixteenth street, in Denver, I met him. He had not changed a bit, and he remembered me at once when he saw me. I asked after his mother and the "young uns" in a little while. Pink's eyes lighted up, and his face broadened into a smile.

"Fine!" he said, "fine! I got a letter every week, an' they're all gettin' on good. I'm goin' home pretty soon; been hopin' I'd go to Min's wedding—she's goin' to get married next November—but I don't reckon I can make it. Ye see, these here women, they've got 'tag out a lot, an' got heaps o' things to get married in, so I can't rustle to keep Min staked in good shape; I want my sister to have as good as they is—wouldn't you?"

Almost a year later I met him again. Neither he nor his smile had changed.

"Well, I am glad to see you," he ejaculated. "D'ye know, it seems most as if you was an old neighbor of ourn, I feel I know ye so well."

We took lunch together, and I asked him how he was getting along, and how the "folks" were.

"Oh, I'm still punching cows," he said, "an' joggin' along same of gait. Oh, yes, I got a letter every week yet. Mother's don't first-rate, an' th' young uns gitrin' on fine. Min's got a darn good man, I guess. Grace's a well started, now-grown, now—an' Frank an' Freddie are growin' tremendous, mother says. An' Ted an' Fan, they're getting big, too; so most all of 'em's gittin' to help lots, what they can, out o' school-tin. Grace, she's goin' to learn stenography—they say, ye can get big wages out o' that."

"Have you been home to see them yet?"

"Home?" he asked, with a tender emphasis on the word; wish I could; an' I guess I will soon; but ye see, these here young uns all got to have clothes an' go to school, an' they cost a sight, they do."

After this, Pink was often in my mind, but I never saw nor heard anything of him for three years, until, one day, I drove out from Larimer to a ranch some miles distant on business. Pink was there. He was saddling a horse by the door as we drove up, and turned as he heard us approach. He was the same old Pink, except that he wore a mustache (of the same color as his hair and eyebrows), and there were incipient crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes, and lines about his mouth.

"Well, how are all the Dyers?" I asked, after we had greeted each other.

Oh, fine! Grace she's married now—got married almost two months ago. Min's got two kids now. Ha! ha! ha! Think o' me bein' a uncle! Th' boys? Why, they're big fellows now. Frank's learnin' a trade with Grace's husband; an' Fred, he's workin' in a newspaper shop, learnin' to be a editor. Ted's still goin' to school, but he's goin' to quit next year an' learn machine-makin'—he allus was a great case 'r foolin' round machinery. Fan? Oh, she's little yet; she's stayin' home an' helps mother—mother says she's a big girl now, an' helps a lot."

"Are you working here?" I asked him.

"Yes; I'm top man now, an' gittin' my fifty dollars a month; but, say—don't ye think it'd pay me to get out o' this an' go down in th' mines? This here's lazy work, I b'lieve. Maybe ye'd git me a job?"

I reflected a minute.

"I can get you a job," I said; "but it may not be a pleasant one. You'll have to work two months for a dollar a day, or until you can show yourself able to do miner's work; then you'll get three and a half. It isn't a good country to go into, though—it's new and pretty wild, but it's all right."

Pink was silent a few minutes and seemed to be figuring.

"I reckon," he finally said, slowly, "I can afford it, ef they's three an' a half a day on top o' the two months; but d'ye think I'll ketch on O. K.?"

I assured him I thought he would, and he added:

"All right—I'm y'r boy; I can go next week, when my month's up."

So Pink left the ranch, and went to work in the hills, in a new mining district. Every once in a while, after that, I used to hear from or of him. In one of the superintendent's first letters after Pink's arrival, he sent by my request a few lines about the new man.

"The new man you sent is a dandy—green, of course, but nobody's fool. He's eager to work, and flies at it like it was fun. Evenings now he takes a hammer and a set of drills, and goes over on the side hill and drills rocks, to get his hand in. I wish there were a few more people like him."

It was no more than I expected; but of course, I was gratified, nevertheless.

It was not long until Pink was a miner, of course—and a good one, too; and as such he continued for the next couple of years always in the same place.

One day the man who had been superintending the property dropped in on us at Denver: he was going to quit, as he had some property of his own to look after, he said. "And," he added, "of course I have nothing to say; but if you want a man to look after the property, you'll hunt a red-headed shitt-boss, Pink Dyer; he knows every foot of the mine."

We went down to take a look at the property; we arrived in the evening, as Pink was just coming off shift. He looked just as I expected he would, barring the crow's-feet and the lines about the mouth; they were too prominent for so young a man.

"Th' folks?" said Pink. "Oh, they're all fine. Got a new house, mother an' the kids have. Min's got three young uns now; and Grace's got a couple—don't it seem funny through? Th' twins, they're gettin' on tip-top, an' Ted, too. An' Fan—why, I suppose she's a young lady by this time. No, I ain't never been back; I'm goin' Christmas—sure, this time, and no tootin'."

I did not tell him of his coming promotion; I wish I had, for he never knew. Late that night—it must have been one o'clock in the morning or thereabouts—the whistle blew at the hoisting works, and we all hurried up to see what the trouble was. Pink, as temporary "boss," among the foremost.

One of the miners had been killed; he was a new man, and had been trying to make too good a showing—that is, he had tried to clean the roof and walls (he was drilling) after each blast, and a loose chunk of rock had fallen and killed him.

Pink and another man went down to bring up the body, and presently, when we expected the signal "Hoist!" there was an alarm from below, which continued for some seconds—then came the "hoist" signal.

A single man stepped from the cage; it was the man who had gone down with Pink to bring up the dead miner. In a few words he told us the cause of his first signal.

As they were bringing the dead man out of the drift, there had been another fall of loose rock, and Pink had gone down beneath it—he and the dead man.

It was not long before we had them out, but it was too late to save Pink. His back was broken, and we knew he could only live a few hours. We put him to bed, tenderly, and watched by him.

Once in a while he would come out of his unconscious state, and talk queerly. At last, about daybreak, as I sat looking at him, his eyes opened suddenly.

"What day is this?" he asked.

"December eighth."

"H'm—little over two weeks; I don't believe I'll git well enough by then. Darn it all, seem's if I'd never git to go home—an' seem's I think I never will. Somethin' allus turns up last few years."

All this he said slowly and painfully; but his next words were spoken more naturally. Just as the morning sun sent a stray beam into the little window of the dingy room, Pink's eyes opened suddenly again.

"Let's see," he said; "let's see—eight, twenty-fifth—more two weeks—h'm! Let's see—let's see—ten, seven, seventeen. I can git home. I'm goin' home—they're not talkin'." He shut his eyes a little while, then added, forcefully—

"I am goin' home!"

"Yes, my boy, I know it," I said.

A YOUNG WIFE'S ERROR.

"What!" cried Kitty Kelford. "Coming here? Without an invitation?"

"I invited her, Katherine."

Kitty's blue eyes lightened. When Julius called her "Katherine" it always denoted very serious annoyance on his part. Straws show which way the wind blows, and that particular appellation was one of Julius Kelford's verbal straws.

"Well," flashed she, "I think you might have consulted me first. Just at this time, of all others, when I am so flooded with engagements and society affairs. No, you need not think it; I am not going to receive your backwoods relations here. If they once get to coming, they never will leave off. Can't you write and postpone this woman?"

"I couldn't if I would," coolly retorted Julius. "And I wouldn't if I could. There's something else in life besides dances and teas—and Aunt Lois was very good to me when I was a child. They are breaking up the old home in Fairfield now, and—"

"Julius, you never mean that she is coming here for good and all?"

"That was the impression which I intended to convey, Mrs. Kelford."

"But I won't have her!"

Kitty was beautiful and breathless, her forget-me-not eyes blazing, her cheeks dyed an exquisite rose, the very realization of a dimpled fury. Julius stood tacing her with folded arms. They had had many a little difference since the honeymoon days, for both Mr. and Mrs. Kelford were gifted with "tempers of their own," but never anything like this.

"You will do as I tell you," said Julius, turning on his heel with a glance at the clock, and Kitty was left alone.

She stood a minute biting her cherry lip and breathing short and quick. For there was no disguising the fact that Kitty was very angry. Then she went into the back room, singing "After the Ball," with affected nonchalance.

"Jenny," said she, to a white-capped maid, "put up my things in the little stateroom trunk. I am going to spend a few days with a friend. Immediately, Jenny!"

Two hours later, Mrs. Egmont Lasalle, packing in her boudoir, was amazed at the sudden appearance of Mrs. Kelford.

"Why, Kitty, you darling!" cried she. "Who would ever have thought of seeing you?"

"I've changed my mind, Celestine," said Kitty. "I will go with you to Etno Park. I've concluded that there's no use in my sitting in the chimney-corner forever."

"So glad!" cooed Mrs. Lasalle. "And you can act Juliet to Vernon Blake's Romeo. But what has wrought this transformation?"

"To tell the truth," laughed Kitty, "my husband has invited an old aunt from the wilderness to visit us, and I'm determined to put a stop to all this sort of thing at once."

"I admire your spirit," said Mrs. Lasalle. "It's the only thing to do. But you'll find he'll send for you."

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Mrs. Lasalle's cottage was the headquarters for all the creme de la creme, and Kitty Kelford thought she was having a delightful time. She had been a society belle before her marriage, and had been fully resolved to "marry right" until Julius Kelford's dark, melancholy eyes and straight, classic features had induced her to abandon her colors.

"A love match," said all her friends. "But who can blame her? He's so handsome, and he's sure to be chief justice some day."

But all the time Kitty's conscience—her she had a conscience, after all—was secretly pricking her with unacknowledged pangs. Was she treating Julius fairly? Was she doing right by herself? Would it not have been wiser for her to consider a little more before she had thus openly defied the man whom at the altar she had promised to "love, honour, and obey?"

She was still turning these things over in her mind on the night of the masquerade, as she stood by the stairs in her pink domino, borrowed for the occasion of Mrs. Lasalle.

"Ah! Celestine, come here," said a stout person, dressed as Catherine of Arragon, giving her a witch. "Sit down by me, and let me tell you a story."

She knew she was in the train. I don't know how you make the things grow. Mine drop and die directly they leave the florist's. Tell me what all this is about. Kitty Kelford's husband? Is it true that he has tormented, or embzzled or something? How does the child dare show her face here, with all those damaging newspaper reports about? Because—Goodness me, what's the matter?"

For the supposed Mrs. Lasalle had jerked her skirt out of the tudy hands of Catherine of Arragon, and was gone.

Like a pallid ghost she fled up to her room, flung off her pink satin mask, and stood staring at the ashen resemblance of her own face.

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