

THE BURNING MINE.

A Story of the Famous Comstock Lode.

In the bonanza days of the Comstock Lode, Virginia City, Nev., harbored two populations, in many ways distinct from one another.

Miners, whatever their nationality, are superstitious. They live close to nature in her mysterious moods, and they acquire a peculiar tendency to belief in the supernatural.

John Treloar and James Pennart were employed in the Yellow Jacket mine, and being close friends, they had arranged so as to be in the same shift—a term nearly equivalent to the sailor's "watch" at sea.

Now these two friends did what has severed many friendships; they fell in love with the same woman. Alice Minton was not a Cornish girl, but of American parentage and born in California.

Jack! She's just all there is to me! Then silence fell again, and the two brooded, shielding their faces with their hands, no longer looking at each other.

Treloar's voice, low and yet strained, at last almost whispered:

"Lad—Jim—count me out of the running!" Then a pause, and evidently with difficulty: "Stand thou up to the rack, boy! I'll do all I can for thee!"

There was no more talk on the subject. Pennart accepted the sacrifice, after his manner, perhaps cheapening it, for the quieting of his conscience, with the assumption that his friend really did not care much for the girl. Treloar did not appear to feel the renunciation deeply, though he knew in his heart of hearts that he had missed the best life could hold for him, and through even his modesty could hardly have failed to realize that Alice looked upon him with special kindness.

Jim Pennart's suit did not prosper. Alice Minton was no coquette, but a very candid and ingenuous girl. She did not dislike Jim, and she did not realize that her feeling toward Treloar was more than one of strong friendship.

All the workings on the Comstock lode are lined and roofed with heavy framed timbers, from a foot to eighteen inches square. Even these large beams have often proved unequal to the tremendous strain upon them; and when they do not give way it is found necessary to replace them at intervals, their fiber being destroyed by the pressure.

How the great fire in the Yellow Jacket mine started will never be known, for those who were alone likely to know the truth perished in that disaster.

Then he awoke, and at breakfast he told his dream; and his comrades did not like it at all, but shook their heads, and one or two of them determined then and there that they would "lay off" that day and not venture to go down the Yellow Jacket.

Now, the strangest part of this strange story is that on this same night Alice Minton dreamed about the counterpart of John Treloar's dream—but with a difference which can hardly be regarded as fortuitous.

Then she seemed to float away from the crowd, and into a comparatively silent working, where two men were frantically digging at a heap of rock and earth that filled the passage in front of them.

For within twelve hours the great fire in the Yellow Jacket mine broke out, and all Virginia City was thronging to the hoisting works, where the massive engine was being worked at dangerous speed, and the cage was being almost hurled up and down the deep shaft, and the clanging of the signal-bells, the shouting of orders, the excitement of the miners, and the piteous moans and cries of the women who had husbands, fathers, brothers below combined to make a memorable and tragic scene.

Jim, lad, do'st 'ee care for her greatness? Jim, with pained eyes and trembling lips, made answer:

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that old miners held their breath as they saw the cable spin over the pulley.

Meanwhile the dream had been fulfilling itself in the depths of the mine. Treloar and Pennart were as usual working together when the alarm was given, and it had broken out in the level they were then in. They quickly ascertained that the way to the shaft was still open, and they started for it, side by side, retaining their tools more from forgetfulness than foresight.

"No, no, dear lad! It's no use! I'm done! Climb thou through the hole. See! The smoke is thickening, and another minute 'll block that way, too, for 'twill hang under t' roof an' choke thee. Good-by, dear Jim, an' don't worry over me!" And he sank against the timbers of the wall, panting heavily.

The crisis of James Pennart's life had come. In such circumstances men's minds work with lightning rapidity, and he took in the situation instantly, and grasped the duty that lay before him clearly.

John Treloar would have had no hesitation in such a case. He knew that there was just a chance of being able to thrust John through the hole, or to go through first himself and then drag him after. He felt still physically capable of doing this, and yet something held him back.

But as he said this, James Pennart clearly knew that the moment for action had passed. John Treloar's eyes opened slowly, he moved his head so that he could look down the gallery, and, seeing a dense curtain of smoke pressing toward them, he once more shook his head, and with half-strangled utterance murmured: "Get, Jim, for the sake of—Alice!" and his head sank upon his breast.

Pennart hesitated no longer. Pressing his friend's hand, but unable to speak for emotion, he sprang up the pile of debris, forced his body through the narrow opening, rolled into the clear gallery, and reached the shaft in time to be taken up on the last trip of the cage.

As he was struggling over the rock heap after abandoning his comrade, he thought, but could not be sure, that he heard a faint, a dying voice whisper: "Alice!"

It might have been an echo or a fancy, and no one could prove or disprove it; for when, after many weeks, the Yellow Jacket mine was once more habitable, nothing but a few charred bones remained beside the fallen rock in the gallery, to show where John Treloar had died.

Had died—I have said—but, after all, which of these two men was it whose life ended on that fateful day? John Treloar's name is never mentioned by the miners, save with deepest respect and admiration. He, indeed, seems to our circumscribed vision to have missed happiness and success and love; but what do we know of ultimate consequences? As for James Pennart, surely his was a living death from the hour he proved recreant to his duty; for he was sensitive and clear-sighted, and he could not forgive himself.

—Important Information.—A Texas lawyer undertook to cross-examine a colored witness, Jim Webster. "What's your name?" "Jim Webster." "What's your occupation?" "I drives a dray." "Have you got a brother who looks like you, and drives a dray?" "He am dead." "What was he before he died?" "Alive.—Texas Siftings.

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