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"Gosh"

(Continued from page 6.)

loosely, that if you fall into it even in the sloping freedom of the yard piles, you find it hard enough to get to the bottom with your head and shoulders clear. And in a big coal pocket, whether the spout be closed or open, it seems to be in the same constant motion. Alternately and unceasingly it is lodged and released by corrugated iron walls, and sustaining beams, and funnel gullet. A chunk of large coal thrown into it will keep it running from nowhere to nowhere for ten minutes. In this alone it possesses a quality of the diabolical.

Gosh had worked little in slack, but he knew it, and he spread himself as he dropped. He closed his mouth tightly, and began to "swim" with the sliding coal. For much of it was still running in a direction away from him; and by that he knew that the captain was still moving; the coal would itself almost take him to his boss. Yet, with every movement of his own, too, in that thick blackness, he seemed to bring down more tons of it. Again and again his hands and arms and almost his clogged-up nostrils were buried.

But just as long as he kept himself flat and moving, he knew that he would "float." Not knowing this, Ryan or Carrol, or even Lieutenant Hannan himself, wholly fearless as they were under conditions to which they were accustomed, would in a matter of seconds have been taken with quicksand panic. . . . He heard something come slating down behind him. He knew it was one of the roof lines. But, "The way it is now," he told himself, "I reckon I better not wait to go back for it."

He could hardly see. "Gosh, I wish my winders wasn't so dirty," he breathed. But he blinked them a little cleaner. And the next moment he had made out the captain's hand and arm. The fingers were opening and shutting horribly. Another half-dozen feet, and he had hold of the wrist. Then, abandoning all heed for himself, he began to "heft him out." He had almost no lifting, no lever power, and at moments he was half-strangled. But the captain had gone in bowed over, he had his face in the hollow of his left arm, and his shoulders were barely below the surface. Gosh worked a leg under him, lay back, and heaved. Yet to "heft" him even eight inches, he had to let himself go down at least twenty. Once he had allowed himself to leave the horizontal, all support and foothold dropped from under him as if he were in the "sand" itself. Like quicksand, too, it sucked.

He was in to his hips as he felt the captain's head and the arm still vised over mouth and nose. "I guess he—he didn't have no rag with him," Gosh explained it. He pulled his own handkerchief loose, groped for the captain's face again, bent the arm down, and knotted the handkerchief.

The dust acted upon him at once like that mandarin method of suicide, the gold-beater's skin. One inhalation through the mouth, and the throat seemed to coat and close completely. "I'm needin' that line now," was his thought—as he choked—"and now I ain't got it. . . . Why don't they keep—keep makin' tries with it?" He wondered if it was possible to shout without taking in air. He tried, and produced only that dry, soundless sound we utter in nightmares. But, though every moment going deeper, he fought on to keep the captain up.

As in all such cases, the nerve-breaking thing was the terrible slowness, or seeming slowness of those who should come to help. But all the while, through the murk and above the slide of the coal, he could hear them shouting—and, high over all, the commanding snarl of the lieutenant. Some of them were wanting to come down. "An' on'y bury the two of them!" rasped Hannan. With the word, however, other lines began to come—three, four, five of them. Yet Gosh's eyes were so dirty now that he could not see them. With the arm he didn't need for the captain, he kept waving crazily about his head in the hope that one of those ropes might strike it. At last it did.

The line was noosed, too. Putting forth an effort which sank him below the armpits, he got it over the captain's head and shoulders. It was loose upon him, though. And, while he drew and drew on it, it seemed to grow only