

the night shift; and though it was close upon their leaving time, they could not have come up yet.

"It's fired! pit's fired!" I heard people shrieking; not that there was any need, for there wasn't a soul that didn't know it, for the pit had spoken for itself. And as I hurried out I thought all in a flash like of what a Christmas it would be for some families there, and I seemed to see a long procession of rough coffins going to the church yard, and to hear the wailings of the widow and the fatherless.

There was no seeming, though, in the wailings, for the poor frightened women, with their shawls pinned over their heads, were crying and shrieking to one another as they ran on.

I didn't lose no time, as you may suppose, in running to the pit's mouth, but those who lived nearer were there long before me; and by the time I got there I found that the cage had brought up part of the men, and three who were insensible, and that it was just going down again.

It went down directly; and just as it disappeared who should come running up, pale and scared, but Mary Andrews. She ran right up to the knot of men who had come up, and who were talking loudly, in a wild, frightened way, about how the pit had fired—they could not tell how—and she looked from one to the other, and then at the men who were scorched, and then she ran towards the pit's mouth, where I was.

"There's no one belonging to you down, is there?" I asked her.

"Oh yes—yes! my father was down, and John Kelsey."

A. she said the first words, I felt ready for anything; but as she finished her sentence, a cold chill came over me, and she saw the change, and looked at me in a strange, half-angry way.

"Here comes the cage up," I said, trying hard to recover myself, and going up to the bank by her side; but when half-a-dozen scorched and blackened men stepped out, and we looked at their disfigured faces, poor Mary gave a low wail of misery, and I heard her say, softly, "Oh, father! father! father!"

It went right to my heart to hear her bitter cry, and I caught hold of her hand.

"Don't be downhearted, Mary," I said huskily: "there's hope yet."

Her eyes flashed through her tears, as she turned sharply on me; and pressing her hand for a moment, I said, softly, "Try and think more kindly of me, Mary." And then I turned to the men.

"New, then, who's going down?" I shouted.

"You can't go down," shouted half-a-dozen voices; "the choke got 'most the better of us."

"But there are two men down!" I cried savagely.

"You're not all cowards, are you?"

Two men stepped forward, and we got in the cage.

"Who knows where Andrews was?" I cried; and a faint voice from one of the injured men told me. Then I gave the warning, and we were lowered down: it having been understood that at the first signal we made we were to be drawn up sharply.

The excitement kept me from being frightened; but there was a horrid feeling of oppression in the air as we got lower and lower, and twice over the men with me were for being drawn up.

"It steals over you before you know it," said one.

"It laid me like in a sleep, when Rotherby pit fired," said the other.

"Would you leave old Andrews to die?" I said: and they gave in.

We reached the bottom, and I found no difficulty in breathing, and, shouting to the men to come on, I ran in the direction where I had been told we should find Andrews; but it was terrible work, for I expected each moment to encounter the deadly gas that had robbed so many men of their lives. But I kept on, shouting to those behind me, till all at once I tripped and fell over some one; and as soon as I could get myself together I lowered the lamp I carried, and, to my great delight, I found it was Andrews.

Whether dead or alive I could not tell then; but we lifted him amongst us, and none too soon, for as I took my first step back I reeled, from a curious, giddy feeling which came over me.

"Run, if you can," I said, faintly; for my legs seemed to be sinking under me. I managed to keep on, though, and at our next turn we were in purer air; but we knew it was a race for life, for the heavy gas was rolling after us, ready to quench out our lives if we slackened speed for an instant. We pressed on, though, till we reached the cage, rolled into it, more than climbed, and were drawn up, to be received with a burst of cheers, Mary throwing her arms round her father's neck, and sobbing bitterly.

"I'm not much hurt," he said, feebly, the fresh air reviving him, as he was laid gently down. "God bless those brave lads who brought me up! But there's another man down—John Kelsey."

No one spoke, no one moved; for all knew of the peril we had just escaped from.

"I can't go myself, or I would," said Andrews: "but you musn't let him lie there and burn. I left him close up to the lead. He tried to follow me, but the falling coal struck him down. I believe the pit's on fire."

There was a low murmur amongst the men, and some of the women wailed aloud; but still no one moved except old Andrews, who struggled up on one arm, and looked at us, his face black, and his whiskers and hair all burnt off.

"My lads," he said, feebly, "can't you do nothing to save your mate?" and as he looked wildly from one to the other, I felt my heart like in my mouth.

"Do you all hear?" said a loud voice; and I started, as I saw Mary Andrews rise from where she had knelt holding her father's hand; "do you all hear?—John Kelsey is left in the pit. Are you not men enough to go?"

"Men can't go," said one of the day shift, gruffly: "no one could live there."

"You have not tried," again she cried passionately. "Richard Oldshaw," she said, turning to me with a red glow upon her face, "John Kelsey is down there dying, and asking for help. Will not you go?"

"And you wish me to go, then?" I said bitterly.

"Yes," she said. "Would you have your fellow-creature lie there and die, when God has given you the power, and strength, and knowledge to save him?"

We stood there then, gazing in one another's eyes.

"You love him so that you can't even help risking my life to save him, Mary. You know how dervy I love you, and that I'm ready to die for your sake: but it seems hard—very hard to be sent like this."

That was what I thought, and she stood all the time watching me eagerly, till I took hold of her hand and kissed it; and though she looked away then, it seemed