

The moment I put my foot into the chamber, my senses, trained by long experience to note the varying phenomena of the under-world, detected a hint of coming danger.

There was a faint rumbling in the earth. The air was close, and had a taint of electricity in it, similar to that which precedes a thunderstorm. There was surely peril in the mine, but how and whence it would come I could not guess.

As I turned to urge my visitor to a hasty retreat I caught sight of some small fragments of wet earth dropping from the wall near at hand, followed by a jet of water. Then I knew what was coming.

"Out! out for your lives!" I cried, springing toward the wall. "The water is bursting into the mine. Ring for the cage and give the alarm!"

The old man needed no second warning. With a cry of terror he sprang out of the chamber, and the next moment I heard him give the alarm. Then followed the shouts and trampling of the escaping men. I knew if I could hold the water in check for ten minutes I could save the lives of every one of them. As for my own—well, one life, and that a useless one, seemed a good exchange for a hundred fathers of families.

When I first saw it, the jet was no larger than a man's finger; but in a moment it had enlarged to the size of my arm, and a heavy stream of water began to pour into the chamber. There was no apparatus at hand, neither clay nor sand-bags to check it, as I well knew.

A happy inspiration came to me. With a Titanic effort I managed to thrust my arm into the fissure, and for the time being I succeeded in checking the leak.

Then, with my arm in the wall, I turned half around toward the opening in the chamber, and there, to my horror, still stood Eve Guion. I saw that her face was very pale, but firm and self-possessed.

"What are you doing here?" I cried. "This place will be full of water in five minutes."

"And what are you doing here?" she asked, quietly.

"My duty," I replied. "I am trying to hold this stream in check until the men escape."

"Then you will be drowned!" she exclaimed.

"What of that? Better one than a hundred. But go," I entreated. "I tell you you have only a bare chance to get out as it is. The water is pressing harder every moment. It will soon be too much for my strength."

"Then I will stay and help you, Wallace," she said, in a strangely gentle voice.

"Ah, you know me!" I cried.

"I have known you from the moment I entered the mine. I came here to see you."

"To taunt me with my poverty!" I cried. "When your father turned me away from your doors, when I became out-cast and wretched, I thought I had the right to hide my misfortunes from your eyes."

"It is because my father used you so cruelly that I am here," she said. "I was not to blame, Wallace. I knew nothing of it until you were gone. Since then I have tried to learn of your whereabouts in order to let you understand my feelings. It was only yesterday that I heard of John Wallace in the Maberly Mine, and on the bare chance of identifying him with Wallace Grover I influenced my father to bring me here."

"Well," said I sorrowfully, "it is too late to think of the past now. Go, Eve. Go and keep poor John Wallace's secret. It will soon be over with him."

"You persist in remaining here?" she asked.

"I must!" I said. "I should be a coward and a wretch to desert my post now."

"Then," she replied, very quietly, "I will stay with you."

"Why?" I asked, amazedly; "are you jesting with me?"

"Can I jest with death, Wallace, or—love?"

Then, before I could comprehend her words, she came to my side as I stood with my wrist in the wall, and, putting her arm around my neck, drew my cheek down upon hers.

"It is hard to die so young, Wallace," she said, sweetly, "but it would be harder to live without you. In the hour of death, my dear, we can dispense with false delicacy. I know that you have loved me many years and I have returned your love. If we have met again only to die, death at least cannot separate us."

With death staring me in the face—not five minutes off—I had never known a happier moment in my life.

As I stood there, with my arm in the fissure, with the blood surging in my head, and all my muscles straining with the effort to keep my position, I knew nothing more than that I felt the heart of the woman I loved beating against my own, her warm young cheek touching my cold one in the embrace of love and death.

Then consciousness of her position rushed upon me again.

"No, no!" I cried. "You must not die. Go live, my darling—live until it comes your time to meet me in the other world, where I shall be before you. Go, and believe no man ever met death so gloriously as I shall."

"We go out together, or we die together," she said firmly.

"Speak of it no more."

Then a solemn silence fell upon us. The men must have nearly all escaped as I could tell by their distant shouts.

The earth was breaking away around my arm, and the water was already nearly two feet deep upon the floor of the chamber. I could hear the subterranean stream roaring more threateningly in the bowels of the mine. Another pound of pressure and I should be flung down and the chamber would fill.

Then came great desire for life. How could I bear to have my new found joy so suddenly smothered in the ground? Was there not yet one hope?

The sounds of the escaping men had ceased. If we could get the cage down once more in time we might perhaps escape after all. I explained my hope to Eve.

"Run," said I, "ring for the cage. I will hold on here a moment more. If we can reach it we are safe."

Eve looked at me sharply an instant—she feared I meant to deceive her into escaping while I remained behind, but she divined my intention.

With a quick movement she seized the light, lifted her skirts and ran through the water out of the chamber. The next thirty seconds seemed like hours.

I desperately held my own against the water, while every vein seemed bursting with the strain. I heard the bell ring for the cage, heard it slowly descend, then the water overcame me.

I was flung down as by a giant's hand. There was a roar and rush as of a Niagara, and, with a whirl of lights and faces, a chaos of confusion and terror, I knew no more.

When I slowly struggled back to life, after many days, I was far from Maberly Mine. I was no longer John Wallace, gang-master, but Wallace Grover, gentleman. I was in my father's house.

My old servants were around me, and, like a fairy who had worked a wonderful transformation, sweet Eve Guion was the dominant angel of the scene.

My affairs had been settled with my creditors very much more to my benefit than I had imagined could be possible. My ancestral home and a modest competence were still left to me.

This, too, was the work of Eve Guion, whose love and faith in me had never faltered in all my wretchedness and exile, and whose strong will had drawn comfort and happiness for me out of the depths of sorrow.

If Mr. Guion objected to the turn affairs were taking he had the sense to offer no fruitless opposition to his daughter's inclination; and I will do him the justice to say that he performed his part at our wedding with a very good grace.

—Charles L. Hildreth.

[Written for the Family Circle.]

Lines, Paraphrased from "Sunrays."

BY ROBERT ELLIOTT.

A shadow is ever cast by the earth
Into the realms of space
And yet by mortals 'tis never seen
Till it veils the Moon's fair face;

And so though Death each moment throws
A shadow on some hearthstone
It is never felt in its truth by us
Till it drives the light from our own.