

# The Vision of the Mountain Valley.

A Story of Christmas Eve., by Chas. H. Bowie.

It seemed as though the feud that had existed for years between the Browns and Smiths must now be broken, as the almost heartbroken father and son watched the shadow of death swiftly steal over the features of the beloved wife and mother, conscious as they were that the only woman within reach, a member of the hated Brown family, who might minister to the wants of the dying loved one, was within a mile or so. But it was not to be, and after the lingering and tender good-byes were said, the loved one laid her burden down and passed to the unknown shore.

As the mountaineer tenderly held one of those delicate, lifeless hands in his, and with the other gently brushed back the silver-streaked locks from the brow, already growing cold in death, the most casual observer could have seen that the load of sorrow was almost more than he could bear.

In abject misery the father and son sat for some time in that desolate home. Finally with one accord, they arose, and taking a spotless and neatly folded sheet from a nearby chest, they reverently covered the beloved form and left the presence of the dead, the son to prepare for a journey across the mountains on horseback in quest of a minister to conduct the burial service, the father to begin the construction of a coffin, which, though not lined with satin or bedecked with silver or gold, was as costly as any ever made, for every nail was as though it pierced the heart of the builder.

For two nights and a day the mountaineer and his son kept lonely vigil by the remains of the departed. On the second morning the mountaineer wended his way to a grassy plot of ground, high up the mountain side. His pathetic errand was evident from his haggard and wild look, coupled with the fact that he carried a spade and pick. On his arrival at the grassy casis he stood gazing for some moments at a little white stone, or rather a collection of them, built to form a miniature monument, which was half buried in flowers, placed there by the loving mother of the babe beneath. After looking long and earnestly at the tiny monument, like one chained to the spot by a grewsome enchantment, the mountaineer gazed sadly over the valley between the precipitous mountains, the valley that contained the homes of the Browns and Smiths.

It was a beautiful morning in June, and as the fleeting cloud shadows raced down the opposite mountain side, across the valley and up the slope, the scene was worthy the brush of a painter. But the mountaineer heeded it not. Had he not seen it day after day for years, as he toiled to wrest a living from those rugged mountain sides, and slowly to lay by a few dollars for the education of his only son, Alfred, who had dutifully aided his father to the best of his ability, though chafing with impatience at the unavoidable delay attending his education. But always he had a cheering word for the toiling father and a smile and caress for the ever-patient and hopeful mother.

How bitterly the parents had regretted that their son must wait and labor with them at home, while neighbor Brown's daughter had been enabled to go to a settlement to school, though she was two years younger than their son. And now, just as the arrangements were nearly completed for the son's education, the death of the wife and mother had left the father without the loving co-operation that has ever been a characteristic of the pioneer women of the great and rugged West.

Fate seemed very cruel to the mountaineer at this time, and as his thoughts wandered back over the past years he could not help but bitterly regret that he and Brown had been hereditary enemies. Though the feud had been started by a comparatively trifling circumstance, the years had only seemed to make it the more bitter, and both Smith and Brown being naturally of a stubborn disposition, had never let pass an opportunity to annoy each other. Thus the families, though near neighbors, and the only ones for

darkness in hope of seeing his son, only to return disappointed to his employment of lacing a pair of snowshoes with deerskin thongs.

Suddenly he noticed what appeared to be smoke or vapor start from the centre of the floor and wend its way toward the ceiling in beautiful and ever-widening circles. As it unfolded, behold! in the midst of it the image of his departed wife!

A hush fell over the house; the windows stopped their rattle, the very fire in the grate at his feet seemed to hold in abeyance the destruction of the oak-back-log; the air seemed permeated with that calm, sweet peace that counts no time—where it seems as though centuries might elapse, yet one remain as at the instant of contact with that blessed, tranquil peace that is not of earth.

The loving recognition which the white-robed figure of his wife gave him was proof to the mountaineer that she could only have come on some Heaven-sent message, and the slight

fire him, was the valley that had been his home for years. It seemed as though he comprehended every detail of the landscape in an instant. The two cabins nestled on the mountain side, now half buried in snow. The mountain stream that wended its sinuous way through the valley to join a tributary of the great Mississippi, and the gigantic mountain peaks that bordered it, all filled him with an awe that he had never before experienced.

Many times he had seen that identical landscape, but never did it seem as now; and as he looked upon those towering mountains, a sense of the littleness of man burst upon him, and he felt humiliated and awed.

The highest peak of all in the vicinity was that which towered over the Browns' home. It seemed to reach to the very heavens, when viewed from the cabin door, and as the morning sun glistened on the newly fallen snow, the mountain side seemed covered with countless millions of diamonds, garnets and sapphires, as though the very gods themselves had emptied their jewel caskets on that rugged mountain side for the pleasure of man.

Suddenly the scene was changed. An ominous roar arose which seemed to shake the earth to its very foundation. One quick, instinctive glance up the mountain side over the Brown cabin, and the truth was known. Millions of tons of snow were shooting down the mountain, uprooting trees and tearing giant boulders from their beds of centuries, each one of which lent impetus to the avalanche until it assumed proportions which no work of man could check.

As it was half way down the mountain there rushed from the doomed Brown cabin a beautiful young woman, whom the mountaineer at once recognized as the daughter of his hated neighbor. In her lustrous brown eyes there was no hate, no envy, no deceit, no cowardice, though they gazed up at certain destruction. Though the finely molded face took on the hue of death, yet it was as the warrior riding to battle. Those things were of the flesh; the spirit looked at death unmoved. The heaving bosom and clinched hands denoted the storm and rebellion of the flesh, but as the mightiest tempest that ever swept the ocean only ruffles the surface, so the spirit that is ready to meet God fears not the hand of Death.

Behind the girl came the mother, knowing only too well the purport of the ominous roar up the mountain side. One glance showed the mother and daughter their utter helplessness, and with one accord they sprang within the cabin, and there, clasped in each other's arms, with a prayer on their lips, they resigned themselves to God.

The mountaineer, with the sweat starting from every pore, tried to close his eyes on the scene. He tried to help—to cry out—anything that he might save two beings from a terrible death. But he could do nothing; he seemed chained to the spot, and strive as he might, he was powerless.

As the onrushing tons of debris overwhelmed the helpless women, he seemed to rise above it all and look from other points at the scene of desolation. Where but a moment before



CHRISTMAS MORNING.

miles around, had never associated or communicated in any way whatever.

The summer had come and gone when the Angel of Death once more came into that mountain valley, this time to take away an inmate of the other cabin, Mr. Brown, who had been drowned by the sudden rise of the mountain stream, thus throwing his wife and daughter on their own resources. The latter had to give up her studies in the settlement and return to her mother, but she pluckily set to work to carry on the farm with the help of a hired man during the busy season.

Thus the summer and harvest time had passed, and the Christmas holidays were once more at hand. The closing hours of the day had been unusually dreary to the anxious mountaineer, the more so that there was a raging blizzard without, and his expected son was long overdue from the settlement whither he had gone to procure supplies for the home. It was with no little anxiety that the father, as the night settled over the rugged hills, would ever and anon go to the rattling windows and try to pierce the

look of anxiety she wore, he was satisfied, could be erased by his prompt obedience to her request.

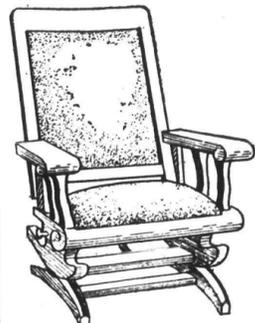
Pointing to the floor at his feet, she said: "Look!" There, spread out be-

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