

WALLED UP; OR, Two Wedding Rings.

'Carson, I said, involuntarily, stopping to knock the ash from my cigar, 'perhaps I ought not to ask, although I have known you for nearly three years; but is it usual for a wife to wear two wedding rings?'

There had been an evening party, and, as I was to stay at the house till morning, Carson's wife had said 'good night,' and left us to finish our inevitable smoke and talk.

His mouth twitched a little, but it was some time before he asked, in a low tone:

'Is it usual for a man well under forty to have hair as white as mine?'

'Well, perhaps not; but I thought you attributed that to some shock or other. What has that to do with—with the two rings?'

'Everything.'

He listened at the door for a moment, turned down the lights, and then came and sat down, spreading his hands over the fire.

'Two rings? Exactly; one is the ring I put on her finger when I married her; the second was put there by another man—and will stay there as long as the first.'

'Never mind now,' I said. His voice had trailed off huskily. 'I had no idea there was any tragic element behind the fact.'

'Tragic? Heavens! it was more than that, Arthur,' he whispered, turning up a drawn face. 'I never meant to touch upon it; but when you spoke it came back with a rush as vivid as if I had been standing at the mouth of the old north shaft again. And that was six years ago.'

'You've heard me speak, at least, of the mine itself—the Langley Mine. I had only been assistant surveyor at the pits there for about nine months, when it happened. At nine o'clock that morning, Arthur, three of us stepped into the cage—old Jim Halliday, the foreman, his son Jim, and myself; the men had gone down an hour before. I shall never forget that young Jim's sweetheart had walked over to the pit with him, as she occasionally did. They were to be married in a week or two, and she—and she had on her finger the ring that he had bought the day before—just for safety's sake, or perhaps out of womanly pride. I recollect that just as the chain clanked, and the winter sunshine was disappearing overhead, he shouted out a third 'Good-bye!' to her—little dreaming that it was to be 'Good-bye.' Little enough old Halliday and I thought that days would elapse before we emerged into a God's sunlight again!

'A new vein had been bored the year before and then abandoned because it ran in the direction of the river. We three had had instructions to widen it for a space of three hundred yards—a piece of work that had occupied us nearly a month. Old Jim picked, and young Jim wheeled the coal away to the nearest gallery, from where it was carried over rails to the bottom of the main shaft.

'Well, by four o'clock that afternoon we calculated, roughly, that we had reached the limit laid down. I think it's as near as possible, Mr. Carson,' old Halliday said. 'Jim give another count; we don't want the water coming in.'

'Jim went back. We could hear him singing out the paces in his light-heaved falsetto as he returned, his voice echoing through the long galleries. 'Two-sixty-eight—peak! you are miles off it, old!' It was only a score of yards off, though. 'Two-sixty-nine—two-seventy-four. I'll allow a full twenty feet yet, I reckon.'

'He had just finished his count when—but there, no man could properly describe it. It was something one had to realize for himself before he could understand a bare half of the sudden terror that whitened our lips and seemed to bring our hearts to a standstill. There was a rumbling in one of the distant galleries, and a sickening tremble of the ground underneath us; then—the most paralysing sound, I do believe, that is to be heard in this world. How or why it happened is something to be placed among the host of unsolved mysteries; but there was one grind, fine, splintering roar, as though the earth had split into pieces.

'I dare not stir hand or foot to save ourselves, before we could even take in that an explosion had occurred while we were guarding against another sort of danger, down thundered a mass of coal—tons upon tons of it—that blocked up the only passage leading to the shaft. It just reached young Jim; standing where he did, he was struck down—we heard his screech stifled beneath the debris. For about five more seconds the earth seemed to be heaving and threatening universal chaos; then all became as still as a tomb.

'A tomb? We had our lamps; old Jim and I looked, and saw that we were cut off from the rest of the world.

'What happened next, I hardly know; I was stupefied with the shock, sick with a mortal fear of death. He and I stood staring mutely at each other.

'He was the first to come back to sense. He gave one choking cry of 'Jim!' and staggered forward to that black pile. The boy's hand was sticking out from it, clutching convulsively at nothing. I sank down and watched, in a sort of dreary fascination, as old Jim, uttering strange cries tore at the mess in a mad frenzy. Heaven help him! Jim was the only being he had in the world to love. In less than five minutes he had dragged him out, and sat down to hug him in his arms. Dead? No; he could just open his poor dust-filled eyes in answer to his father's whispers; but we knew at once that he would never again make the galleries echo with his merry whistle.

'For whole hours, I suppose, neither of us attempted to realize our situation. We sat on in the dead silence, waiting for something to happen. Once or twice we saw young Jim's blackened lips move feebly, and each time his father would mutter brokenly, 'Ay, my precious boy, we'll look after her!' Once the old man broke out, quaveringly, into the hymn, 'Abide with me!' but he got no further than the third line. That, perhaps was about eight o'clock, but we could keep no account of time, as my watch had stopped. Hour after hour must have gone by, and still old Jim sat, with rigid face and staring eyes, clasping his burden. In all probability it was morning above ground before at last he spoke.

'How long can we hold out, Mr. Carson? I'm feared to go. I've been a Godless man all my life.'

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'How long can we hold out, Mr. Carson? I'm feared to go. I've been a Godless man all my life.'

'That roused me. I examined our position carefully. The passage was about eight yards wide at this point, and measured about twenty paces from the end to where that

solid wall of coal blocked our path to the outer world. As the bore ran level with the foot of the north shaft, we were about forty feet below the clear surface. We had no food, and our lamps would burn, say, another five or six hours; while the breathing air, hot and gaseous already, would probably become unendurable before the evening came. That was our situation, and let any man conceive a worse, if he can. One slender chance at the best was left: perhaps the entire passage was not blocked, and we might force our way to the main gallery. We sprang to the task, wild at the thought that those few hours of stupor might have made all the difference between life and death. We were half choked and blinded with dust, our hands were raw, and we had made scarce any headway. Barely, too, had we given up the work as hopeless when my lamp flickered out; half an hour later, old Jim's followed suit.

'Total oblivion! As I sat and contemplated our fate, a faintness of angled hunger and despair crept over me. Young Jim, quite still, was snoring up against the wall close by. Within a few feet of me sat his sister, at times he would start up and shriek out in nameless terror—at others he would catch up his pick and hack at the walls with the fury of a maniac, and worse was to come. 'I think I must have fainted. I do not seem to recollect any more until the moment when I became conscious of my mate's hard breathing over me, and of the fact that his hand was feeling—or, so it seemed—for my throat. I dashed him away, panting under the shock of this new horror. 'Jim! I gasped, 'for Heaven's sake, keep sane! If we're to go, let us die like men!'

'No answer; I heard him crawling away, and that was all. The dead silence was only broken by a faint, trickling sound. Trickling! Yes; I put my hand to the level, and found half an inch of water. . . . And hotter and more stifling grew the atmosphere. Praying hard to myself, I realized now that, should not help come, only a few hours could lie between us and the end. And then—old Jim might go first, and I should be left. Nay, I was already practically alone; the fear that was slowly whitening my hair had turned old Jim's brain.

'He suddenly sent up a peal of derisive laughter. 'Water! Who says water? Why, mates, I'm swimming in it! Here's a go!'

'Presently he began creeping round to find me. I could hear him coming, by his labored respiration, and the swishing of the ooze as he moved. Round and round the space we went, stealthily, until at last he made a cunning rush and caught me by the ankles. 'Got him! He yelled it with a glee that was unmistakable.

'Here words could never convey the sensation of that moment. Half-suffocated, past all ordinary fear, I closed with my poor old mate, and we went staggering to and fro across our prison until at last I managed to throw him so that his head struck heavily against the wall. After that, he lay quite still. I believed at the time that I had killed him; but we knew afterwards that it was that blow which preserved his reason.

'The rest can be told in a few words. After that I lay there like one in a dream, while the pestilential air slowly did its work. Sometimes I fancied I could feel cool breezes blowing down on me, and at others heard someone telling me to wake up, for that the whistle had sounded at the pits. How long I lay so, I can only conjecture. I really knew nothing more until I was roused by the sound of that coal barrier crashing down before the picks and spades of a dozen miners, and the hubbub from a dozen throats as they broke into our tomb.

'Only just in time. Old Jim's face was only just out of the water, and they said that no human being could have lived in that atmosphere for an-

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other two hours. And young Jim? Well, there was just enough life in him to last three days.

'Till the end of that third day I kept to my bed; and then they sent to say that he was going, but that he wished to see me first. I reached the house just in time to catch his last whisper. 'You—you'll take her, mate! Marry her—no one else! Only—only—you'll let my ring stay there. Promise—me—that.'

'What could I do but promise? I had no thought then of marrying his sweetheart—but it was his dying wish, and for years Jim and I had been like brothers. 'Just a year later I asked her if there was room in her heart for me, and—and—well, that's enough. Now you know why my wife wears two wedding rings.'

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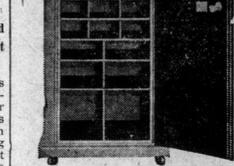
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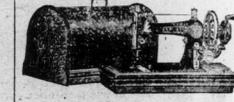
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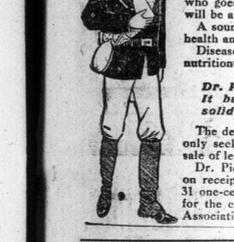
The Evening

By RUTH CA



She means so well that I suppose it is a shame to find fault with her, but really—"She" is the ultra-enthusiast. Enthusiasm is undoubtedly one of the qualities that most easily wins popularity. Everyone likes a man or woman who is alive and interested in life. It is the one of the reasons why we all love the young folks so—because they haven't yet lost their enthusiasm. But just as high as the balance rises in favor of a reasonable degree of enthusiasm, just so low I think it sinks under an unreasonable degree of unnatural and forced enthusiasm. Perhaps I'm unjust in calling it "forced" and "unnatural," but truly, I can't believe that any such abnormal amount of fervor and emotion as the ultra-enthusiast displays on every occasion is entirely natural and spontaneous. Of course, you know her type. Everyone does. She is always in a fever of enthusiasm over something or other. Sometimes it's her own affairs, and sometimes it's yours. She has always just had the loveliest time, or she has the most interesting thing to tell you, or she's just found the most wonderful bargain. Superlatives are the breath of life to her. She really couldn't live

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Fads and Fashions.

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Another feature to be noticed this spring is the fact that many of the hats are small, and that they fit snugly and closely to the head.

Separate blouses to match the suit skirt of the spring wardrobe. These appear in many new designs.

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A new hat model is of vivid green tuscany straw. The crown is high and the brim slightly rolled at one side.

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