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Old Towt's Thanksgiving.

As related by the Hero's Appreciative Friend and Faithful Coadjutor, Waxy Bill, who cheerfully vouches for the Truthfulness of the Story, in whole and in all its parts.

HE were an old heathen, old Towt Deatherage were. Me and him was pards them times. Where he came from nobody knowed, and nobody cared to ask for pertickelers; he wa'n't that kind.

Old Towt wasn't purty—not to look at. It's my belief he were a way-down-easter, by rights—a long-legged, slab-sided, lantern-jawed Yankee; he had all the marks. His hair was fire-red, where 'twa'n't grizzly-gray. Ever seen eyes that was sharp as lightnin'? Well, them's Towt's. We was all scart of him up here in Soledad Diggins, and

the worst blarphemor in Soledad Diggings would be scart listening at such rip-roaring wickedness.

There wasn't only jest one thing in heavin or yearth that old Towt Deatherage was afeard on, and that was that so'thin' 'nother might happen to his little Nugget. For, ye see, when he clumb up into Soledad Diggings, with that lame old sorrel mule of hisn, he didn't bring nothin' with him—not to speak on,—'cept a big pair of shooting irons and a four-year-old baby, the purtiest mite of a yeller-

the boys useter to drop into our cabin nights and Sundays consid'able regular, and they alwus 'lowed to have so'thin' in their pockets for the little 'un.

She'd pretend to be so mighty independent and indifferent at first, and then, some way, she'd come up to one and 'nother, a-listening at their b'ar stories with big eyes; and mebbe she'd pat a feller on the cheek, like he was a baby, and then she'd give a little tug at 'nother feller's long whiskers; and so, bimeby, she'd be setting up on the aidge of the table, with her lap full of nuts and sugar-candies, like ary little queen.

And purty? She jest growed sweeter and purtier every minute.

No human ever sot by anything the way old Towt sot by that little cooin' girl-baby of his'n. He wasn't never jest right in his mind without he had her nigh him, and he'd set and eye her by the hour, and forgit to swear—yes, he would.

He never let her outen his sight till she was six or seven year old; then she knew every crook and turn as well as he did, and began to run about by herself when he was digging or blasting in the mine. Sometimes she'd get tired, and take the back trail to the cabin. But didn't her little voice sound like a angil's a-pipin' down the shaft, "Pappy! Say, you pappy! I'm going home!"

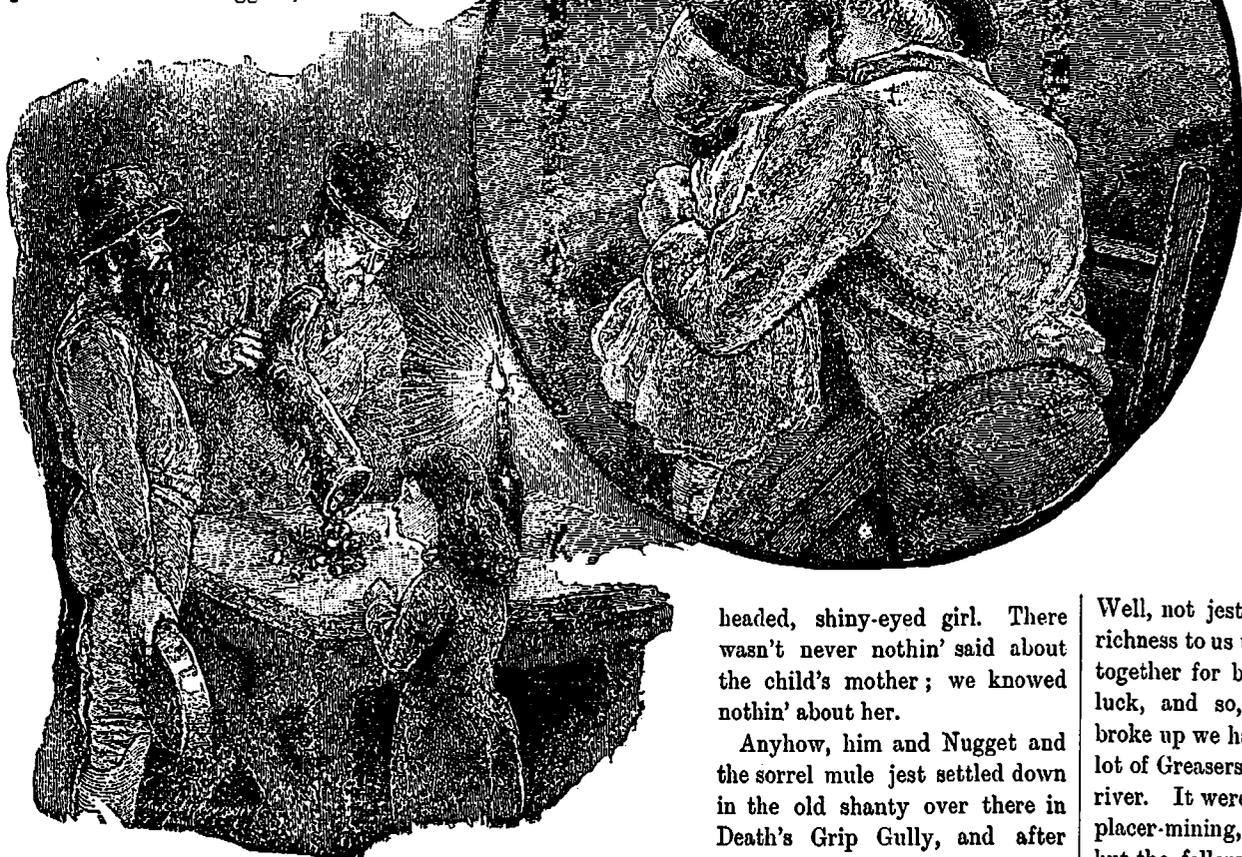
Then Towt he'd hef to climb out and kiss her goodby.

'Long about then we struck ore in the Blue Lightning. Rich?

Well, not jest off-hand, but a'most anything was richness to us then. You see, me 'n' Towt had stuck together for better'n three year. We'd had bad luck, and so, one way or 'nother, we got that broke up we had to grub-stake for awhile with a lot of Greasers that were placer-mining down the river. It were low-down business for a white man, placer-mining, and the grub was mean enough; but the fellers was all kinder good-natured, and they kept goats,—being Mexicans,—so Nugget had milk to drink, and was all right.

We spent the heft of the next summer opening up a new mine, and come fall we was pretty hard up. But we opened up the Blue Lightning, and things began to look promising, if we could hold out when the cold season came on. The weather was as good as gold, and we kept pegging away for dear life, day in and day out, until, first we knowed it was nigh onto Thanksgiving.

We went hungry, yes, sir. Many's the day we dug our stent with empty bread-baskets, and jest made up a hoe-cake after dark, afore we turned in. But the little 'un never knowed we was short o' coorn-meal and merlasses, you may be sure of that. Afore it settled down right cold, we was sure



headed, shiny-eyed girl. There wasn't never nothin' said about the child's mother; we knowed nothin' about her.

Anyhow, him and Nugget and the sorrel mule jest settled down in the old shanty over there in Death's Grip Gully, and after prospecting up mountain a spell,

him and me turned to and staked a claim as pards, and sunk a shaft in the Lone Jack-Rabbit.

Ye never seen a cuter young'un than that little Nugget of Towt's,

Smart? Well, she were! And she jest wa'n't afeard at nothing, same as her pappy. Old Towt useter tote her on his back everywhere, up hill and down dell, jest wropping her in a b'ar-skin when 'twas cold; and she never whimpered. You couldn't 'a' told her from a boy, she was that sure-footed and steady on her legs; and then she had such cute and cunning' little ways, that nobody couldn't stand out agin her. The way she took to us rough old diggers was so'thin' to see. Some o'

we weren't so easy to scare, nuther—not by no means.

Not that he ever started no graveyards in these parts, but a feller knowed somehow, soon as ever he sot eyes on old Towt, that things had to go his way, or so'thin' had got to drap.

Nobody never asked no favors of him; he wa'n't that kind, nuther. Everything he had was as free as air. He were white—old Towt Deatherage were.

Swear? Well, if I was put onto my affydauid I should say he wore the worst swearer that ever I heard swear. Most times about every other word he spoke were a swear-word; but when he got riled,