

were dreaming of Santa Claus, and how mysteriously those little stockings would be filled with Christmas joys, for it was Christmas Eve.

Midnight had passed when Ralph awoke, raised himself to a listening attitude, and

with an unknown dread and foreboding of evil, which he felt powerless to prevent. Yes, there were voices, muffled and uncertain, and he *must* hear what they said, if he could.

His senses were quickened to an extent he had never before realised; the murmur of



THEN THE TWO LOWERED THEIR BURDEN DOWN THE DEEP SHAFT.

waited as though afraid to move lest he should break a spell. Had he dreamt it, or were those really human voices he had heard? Were not those the sounds of stealthy footsteps, and a presence boding no good?

A cold, clammy dew lay on his forehead, his hands trembled, his limbs were paralysed

the creek below seemed like the rumble of a coming storm, the faint flutter of the karaka leaves like threats of deadly danger. Yet above all these, Ralph heard the cautious tread of footsteps, the murmur of voices. Almost like a whisper in his ear, came the words :