

have returned and commenced sluicing without noticing the child, was inconceivable; nevertheless, a foreboding that it might be so took possession of her mind and numbed her senses.

"He must have lifted baby out," she whispered to herself in agonised defiance of the fear that gripped her heart, as she sped across the field. She shut her eyes desperately against the vision of that tiny tender object, dearer to her than life, being swept ruthlessly down the tail-race. At the corner leading into the claim she paused unsteadily, ere, with her courage in both her hands, and a wild prayer in her heart, she ran forward into the mine.

Lucy is an old woman now, but her voice is tremulous still when she describes the scene. It was Stevens, in the adjoining claim, who was sluicing. Rorrison was kneeling beside his box with a queer, puzzled expression in his eyes. He rose and stretched out his arms to the girl as she approached, and all the eloquence of a love as eternal as the purple hills, which he could never outlive, yet would never know how to express, shone in his dark eyes.

"Why, Lucy, girl!" he said.

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The afternoon shadows lengthened. The men had returned to work, and a sound as of the rushing of many waters came from all quarters of the field. In Rorrison's claim there was a silence broken only by the peaceful breathing of a child in slumber, and the hushed voices of a man and a woman, tasting a larger draught of human happiness than the wealth of all the world could convey to any of those gold seekers.

"I knew the child was yours," Rorrison told her presently, pointing to a familiar locket and chain that encircled the baby's neck. "I spotted it first glance, though I never heard the father was dead, and you and the little one left like this."

"I thought I loved him when I married," the girl explained in a whisper. "I soon found I'd made a mistake." She shivered in Rorrison's arms, as though struck by a chilly blast.

"It's a good job I didn't know it," the man declared in the earnestness of his simple morality. "I wanted you so bad, Lucy. It's a good job I reckoned you'd forgotten me."

"I did you a wrong, and I paid for it," she said sadly. "If it hadn't been for the little one there, I think I'd have died."

Rorrison's eyes turned to the child, and for one single moment in his life, he hated it. Its existence seemed an offence—he was jealous of the hold it would ever have on the mother's heart. The pride and delight of a parent in its first-born, was Lucy's, and he had no share in her joy.

And then, all at once, a wonderful thing happened. Rorrison spied a gleam of brightness that was not sunlight shining beneath the little clenched fist and rounded arm that rested amongst the blocks of the sluice-box. His quickened breath made Lucy look. Her eyes followed his, and with one accord they threw themselves down on the ground, and Rorrison's hand shook and his face grew pale at the contents the little uplifted arm revealed; while Lucy snatched the tiny luck-bringer to her heart, and kissed it again and again.

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The nugget must have got dislodged from a crevice in the box, and rolled beneath the baby's hand. It presaged a patch which proved to be worth five thousand pounds, and when the settlement had been duly feted, and he and Lucy married, Rorrison sold his claim and bought a nice little dairy farm in the North. At the present day, a substantial, prosperous homestead, wherein large and festive family gatherings are wont, each Christmas, to assemble, is the happy result of Rorrison's last clean-up.