

Was a child unruly? The mother would call Mary in to help her, and soon the unhappy little one was listening with open eyes and dirty mouth expanding into a smile to her account of some St. Patrick's Day parade, or a Fourth of July exhibition of fireworks on Boston Common. To Mary, versed in city lore, the country was one thing to be desired; but the Kataladin children, tired of monotony and loneliness of a life in the woods, could never hear enough of the crowds and the noise.

So 'Cronin's Daughter' became the story-teller of the settlement. Often the workmen stopped and joined the circle of children, and crowded around her in the summer twilight and listened to her story.

'Seems a different place, somehow, since 'Cronin's Daughter' came,' said many of the people. 'The children don't fight half so much as they did, nor torment the critters. They're nice folks them Cronins.'

Before her mother was taken ill Mary's hands and feet and head had been at the service of the whole settlement. Every one loved, petted, and tyrannised over her.

In spite of her mother's sharp but short illness, from which she was now recovering, the summer and autumn had passed happily with Mary. Her father had kept sober, and no one suspected his past shame. John Cronin was a good workman, and soon rose from being a driver of the four-horse waggons, which carried the ore down from the mountain to the works, to being a top-man.

The duties of the top-man were of a very responsible nature. Eight times an hour the elevator, built beside the chimney, came creaking and groaning up to the top-house with its load of ore and limestone. The top-man fastened the elevator with a bolt, and the car to the rear mouth of the chimney. Over this the car rested while the top-man pulled a chain which opened the bottom and precipitated the mass of ore and rock down the chimney and into the furnace below. The car was returned to the elevator, the bolt pushed back, a bell rung, the man below started the machinery, and the elevator began its downward journey.

All this required methodical care and wakefulness. The children of the settlement had told Mary of an awful night, two winters before, when, owing to the neglect of the night top-man, an explosion had occurred which wrecked and burned the works and brought all the men in the top-house to a fearful death.

*

No wonder Mary's heart stood still with fright when her father reeled through the door, nor that she resolved to follow him to the top-house to make sure that he had not fallen asleep. She had watched the furnace and knew by the shower of sparks that were sent up that the ore was being dumped regularly, but at any moment sleep might overtake him—sleep that means dismissal and disgrace, and possibly death to himself and others.

The road was white and lonely. The frozen river had no word of encouragement as she crossed the old red bridge, and the stars were far away and cold. She avoided the front works for fear of being seen by some of the night force in the casting-room. Around the charcoal-house and through the thick smoke, up the hill, over the bridge, and up the ladder the child went, with chilled hands and feet, but with a heart warm with love and desperation.

Surely that is the elevator rattling up beside her. Now she steps for breath on the landing, waiting for welcome noise from above that will drive her fears away. How her father will laugh and kiss her, and, with a cheery word, send her home for the night. The intensely cold air may have brought him to himself, she thinks.

There was an ominous silence above, and the child hurried up the ladder. John Cronin lay asleep on the floor.

Mary had no time for thought. She drew the bolt and secured the elevator. Then she seized the handles of the car and wheeled it towards the fiery pit. The heat grew more and more intense. Could she guide the car and dump it? Before she knew it, it was done. The car was replaced, the bolt pushed back, and the bell rung. The elevator had gone down and the floor had been replaced.

Then Mary crouched beside the sleeping man and moaned and cried:

'O father, father, wake up! I can't stay here all night. If I call for help you will be dismissed. I'm afraid to stay here alone.'

The man slept on. It was impossible to rouse him. Mary had feared one weakness, but suddenly she became conscious of her inner strength. She knew that she would stay here until morning, but hoped that by that time her father could be roused and that they might go home without suspicion.

The elevator was coming again, and again she must nerve herself to roll the heavy car at that awful brink. Well, she had done it once and she could do it again.

Again and again she had bent herself to the heavy task. The hours went by, Mary counted them by the loads—eight to an hour. At first they went quickly, for she dreaded the return of the car; but as the night wore on the child became conscious of an overpowering desire to sleep.

The dreadful sense of responsibility, the loneliness and unnaturalness left her. She even began to forget her desire to save her father. All emotion was swallowed up by the sea of sleep, which surged around her, making her sick and giddy.

At last she became conscious that she must do something. She struggled to the next dumping, and then opened the door of the warm-house, which was enclosed on three sides, the fourth side opening on the chimney. She closed it behind her, in order that her father might not feel the cruel cold, and sat on the icy platform and looked down, down on the shapeless works beneath her.

The intense coldness revived her and seemed to freeze the sleep out. The December moon shone steadily, and the wind, now rising, blew the charcoal smoke away from her. From this great height the settlement seemed crowded at her feet. Each house stood out from its pure white surroundings, and Mary thought of the friend in each. What would it be to leave them all and go back to the old wandering, disreputable life?

Her eyes traversed over the road till they rested on her own home—her first home. Then something blurred them, and the old frayed shawl brushed away a tear. Her patient mother was there—her mother who would have died in the city, the Brownsville doctor said, had this illness overtaken her there; her mother who would need the fresh, bracing, balsam air of the mountains for many a long day, and all the comforts that her father's good wages could buy.

For her mother's sake and for her father's sake she must go on. 'O God, keep me awake!' was the fervent prayer that went up in the frosty air.

A shout from below, a rattle of chains, and again came the elevator, creeping up the chimney like some gigantic beetle. Mary went to work with new enthusiasm. Between trips, she sat outside and suffered with the cold. But such suffering was positive joy, after the deadly numbness she had fought within.

The worst hours—from one to three—were past. The moon set and the stars began to pale. A faint pink light spread through the east. Lights appeared here and there in the houses below. The men of the 'day force' were being roused and the women were preparing the morning meal.

One more load was dumped. It must be half-past five, Mary thought, but she was not sure. She might have lost count once or twice. Yes, she had, for there was the bell clanging below her.

It lacked five minutes of being six, and Jim Brennan, the other day top-man, would come in five minutes.

'Father, get up!' Mary called, in a clear whisper, as she shook his shoulder. 'Father, do you hear! Would he move, or had her awful night's work been in vain?

'Why, Mary, have I overslept?' said he, rising suddenly and leaning on his elbow.

Then like a lightning flash the truth fell upon him. The liquor drunk in the woods the afternoon before; his return to his home to supper; his difficulty going up the ladder, at which Jim Brennan had unsuspectingly laughed; the first few hours which he fought the stupor that was coming on—this John Cronin remembered, but what had followed?

'Hush, father, don't speak a word. Jim Brennan is coming up the ladder. The furnace is all right. Jim will think I have just come to tell you how mother is. No one need ever know, father dear.'

John Cronin was on his feet in an instant, sobered for life. He took Mary's hand, grimy from her work. 'Open the door,' he said huskily, 'or I'll choke.'

Jim Brennan's face appeared above the platform.

'Well, mate, how goes it? Hello, Mary; blessed if you didn't scare me. 'Gainst the rules, you know, to be in the top-house, but I guess the boss won't mind as long as there's a sick mother in the case. Had a hard night, of it, did you, young 'un? You look all beat out. There, go 'long, John, put the child to bed; I'll tend to this load, though it ain't mine.'

'Thank you, Jim,' said Cronin. 'Come, Mary, you must be tired.'

Not a word was spoken between the pair as they went down the ladder and hurried down the hill. The furnace men were lounging on the floor of the furnace-room.

'Blessed if here ain't Cronin and his gal. Hope the missis ain't no worse,' said one.

'She's probably been up all night with her. Never seen such a plucky little woman as that gal in all my life,' said another.

Back over the red bridge Mary went, with her hand tightly clasped in her father's. She gave his hand a little squeeze once, when she felt a hot tear drop on her own. There was a smile on her tired, pale face, and a great content in her heart. Father, mother, friends, and reputation—all saved.

When they had passed the group of houses that clustered near the bridge, and the woods were before them, her father said: 'Mary, does mother know?'

'No. Don't tell her. She will think I went to meet you if she is awake.'

'If you'd not followed me last night, Mary, do you know what might have happened?'

Mary nodded her head vigorously. She could not speak.

'Mary, you have saved my life—you have saved the works! As God hears me, I will never drink another drop!'

And he never broke the vow he made.

Mary cried with joy on her father's neck. All the terror, loneliness, and labor of the night were over like a bad dream. Best of all, the burden of ceaseless anxiety,