

## Coal Miner

Mary E. Payne

A COAL MINER begins his day as most workmen in America, but as he comes home from a weary day of pulling our most dependable fuel from the earth, he presents a unique sight. As he slowly plods his way home, his shoulders are humped forward, compelled by the constant turning and bending that a miner must do. With a shuffling gait, caused more from his heavy, black, high shoes with their steel protective toes, than from habit, he presents a study in greys and blacks. It goes without saying that our miner is muscular, since only the muscular survive the tasks that the work prescribes. His face is covered with the dust of the coal he has been mining and only his red lips, made more red by contrast, and the dead whites of his eyes are not stained with the symbol of his work. His heavy, hard safety cap, ridged and with a short peak, is pushed back on his head for comfort. The cap is peculiarly marked with the clasp that holds his light, and the long, flexible black cord, blending with the rest of the blackened picture, twines itself around behind him to join the silvery case, attached to his belt, which holds the batteries that power the lamp. His clothes are like other work clothes: blue denim shirt, heavy, brass-studded denim trousers, and if the weather is bad, a short, heavy jacket. All are blessed with the symbol of the trade he follows. Black dust seemingly seeping from every fold, it appears that our miner has just come from another world and somehow is set apart from the everyday folk of the city.

Added to the shuffling of his heavy shoes is the flat jangle of a new empty lunch pail, not rectangular with a cylindrical top like other craftsmen carry, but a cylinder itself. Its shape is like a small cook pot similar to the one from which his lunch came. Inside the scarred pail is a tinkling sound which seems to indicate an empty jar which perhaps held soup. He does not carry this pail; he possesses it. The bail is pushed high on his forearm while the pail itself fits tightly underneath, giving him a free hand. This hand holds his heavy gloves, which are made to withstand the rough handling of rocks and timbers. We know his gloves serve him well, for his hands are a light grey in contrast to his blackened face. After getting home he must still beat the coal dust from his clothes and scrub it from his body before he can finally feel that the day's work is done.

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