

An Unrecorded Story.

BY GEORGE E. HAAK.

Submitted in The Tribune's Short Story Contest.

THE Lackawanna Herald, of August 11th, 1887, contained this brief but tragic notice:

"Gwendolin Davis, a comely Welsh lass, aged 18 years, 6 months and 11 days, and only child of Mrs. John Davis, widow, was found dead yesterday morning in a dislodged shaft at the White Oak mine, Archibald. The body was terribly crushed, and no explanation as to how she met death can be given. The supposition is general that she committed suicide. Mother heartbroken and her condition is serious."

Thus in this brief notice, was passed by a story unparalleled in the volumes of legendary lore and history which the good anthracite coal held about it, for simple love and tenderness, and as I gleaned the facts in the remarkable case, an admiration touched with sadness possessed me for the simple and crude, yet rockribbed devotion displayed through a portion of the events herewith recorded.

Archibald, in the late '90s, was not the bustling business town it is now. There were fewer houses, and those scattered here and there in groups. Only one or two stores the town then boasted, and the staple industry then, as now, was mining; the White Oak mine being probably the largest, but while yet comparatively in its infancy, this mine has thrust its long black tentacles in every direction—down and out in search of its prey—spasmodically breaking through Nature's cloak, revealing dark, gaping wounds, and to be kissed by the rising sun, bathed by the gentle rains and cooled by the north wind, but also furnishing an excellent stamping ground for tramps, vagabonds and highway robbers. In the primal stages of its development, the town was composed of a more or less rough element, which added to the fact that the Rebellion had taken away many of its stalwart citizens, and that law and order could not very well be enforced, led that element to pretty much as they pleased.

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One spring evening in April, 1887, the whistle of the White Oak announced in clarion tones that reverberated among the hills that it was 6 o'clock and quaffing time. Through the doorways of the roughly hewn houses hustling housewives were seen busily engaged in preparing the sweetmeat meal for the stalwarts who were already descending the hill, preceded, as usual, by the rollicking, mischievous and omnipresent breaker boy, not quite so small as he is now, indulging in his wild and uncontrollable antics. Directly at the foot of the path by which ascent was gained to the breaker above from the main thoroughfare or commonly known then as the Providence Plank, meaning plank road, and short distance away from any other habitation stood the small grocery store of the "Widder Davis," as she was affectionately known, whose husband had been killed at Gettysburg in '63, and who, although in poor health, opened a small grocery store and managed to live nicely with her only child.

Outside the town she would never have been known, had it not been for the fact that this child had grown to be a young lady of 18, whom it was good to look upon, and it was even whispered, with many a nod and shake of the head by Mrs. Murphy to "Brigie" Nolan across the fence, that she had "callers" of nights from Scranton, for whom, however, he said, that "Gwen," popularly called, did not care a flip. She was a brunnette of the variety that set men wild. Not a decided brunnette, however. While her hair was at the night, her eyes were of the softest brown; her forehead high and arched; a rosy-tinted skin;athletic, medium height, and moulded perfectly.

This was Gwen, joyous, quaint, dashing, hot-tempered, but with a kind, tender-hearted and loving, Adonis-like she had by the score, but so far she had no preference, not even for Robert Campbell, the leading merchant's son who held an opinion that he was the first violin. Thus it was that the Widow Davis' store became widely known, aided by the rejuvenating effects of a godly store of tobacco, known as the Red Clover.

As the miners reached the foot of the path, some entered the store, no doubt for the Red Clover, as there were borrowers in those days as now, only they were not so numerous. Shuffling noiselessly in, big "Jim" Connelly, who held an enviable reputation as the best scrapper in town, rough-and-tumble.

"Evenin', Gwen. Howdy, Widder Davis?"

"Ho, Jim!" exclaimed Gwen, "ten or fifteen cent pack?"

"Eight pounds sugar," solemnly said Jim.

"That's Sam Morgan's voice," as a volley of curses fell on her ear. Now

Gwen eyed him incredulously for a moment, "Jim, since when?" and seeing the merry twinkle in his eye, said, "for that, two packs at fifteen cents."

"Now, sure, Jim," interposed Mrs. Grogan, who "dropped in just to see what's now." "Don't be goin' yet. What's that you hear about Mr. Farley, who cum home early this morning from Philadelphia and who was hild up and relieved of two hundred and eighty dollars in gold?"

"'Twasn't tha mouch," asserted Mrs. Durkin, sagely; "me Moike sex two hundred and stivty-five." Five dollars making a mountain of difference.

"'Twas so," reaffirmed Mrs. Grogan, "my husband was on the—" "Sphot, mostly likely," sarcastically interposed Mrs. Durkin.

"No! Not on the photon, the devil take ye, but on the midnight shift, and he cum home with Mr. Farley."

"Hold on! It was this way?" broke in Jim at once from Gwen, who saw him coming.

"Mr. Farley was comin' up from the station, and when close to the river something jumped up, big and terrible like, so he says, dressed in a white shroud like or cape, an' cried:

"The saints presarve us!" ejaculated Mrs. Grogan.

"And was no trace found of him?" inquired Gwen. "Are you sure he jumped in the river?"

"Although search was made, nothing could be found of him. No trace. The water leaves no trace. Begorra! I'd follow a crack at the spalpeen meself. So I woul—"

On that night east-south bolts and bars were applied that for months had not been touched, but in spite of all these precautions the uncanny murderer still paid his respects. Bold highway robbers were committed shortly after dark. Campbell's store was looted, and Boniface Morgan, of the Oak house, had a well-filled till rifled shortly before closing; in fact, the people were terrorized. Now here, now there; no descriptions corresponding, except that he was tall, very muscular and dressed invariably in white or black capes which reached to the knees. Of one thing they were certain. Some of the old abandoned slopes and air-holes of the White Oak were this creature's means of egress and ingress, and especially those near the river.

On noon, Friday, April 29, the miners were paid for their month's labor in gold, and as was customary, the evening witnessed free flights of an undiminished variety. However, eight hours later, when the miners had succeeded to get riotously drunk at the upper town at a tavern kept by one Michael Sponey, and by night were in a hilarious mood. Late that night a fearful thunder storm arose. It swept down the valley in sultry rage, wrestling with huge trees and accompanied by their mournful notes as they beat beneath its crushing weight. The driving wind seemed to increase the force of the watery globs as they struck the board roofs as if to drive them through. All violent electrical storms affected Mrs. Davis, and as the storm increased her strength gave way, and she collapsed completely and lay gasping on a couch in a little room in the rear of the store.

"Mother," whispered Gwen, standing over her, "Mother, drink this," and while with one hand she held her mother, with the other she held a goblet to her mother's lips containing brandy. "Don't worry, mother; we're safe. Now I'll have over and tell Doc Evans to come in."

"Good evening, Gwen."

"Good evening, Robert," for they were schoolmates, and still addressed each other as such. "Won't you take a chair?"

"None," this is better, Gwen?" And as he uttered her name she colored rosily, not on account of the name, but the manner and terseness in which it was uttered.

"Well," said Gwen, looking him squarely in the eye and waiting for the reply which she anticipated and was prepared to face.

"I came here to see you on important business; you know full well what I'm after, but you have given me no encouragement. Gwen, I love—"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Robert, that's not for me," interposed Gwen hurriedly, "and with a hurried kiss, and an 'I'll be back soon,' she wrapped herself in an oil shawl and started off.

Once outside, she found it had ceased raining, but the wind and vivid lightning and deep reverberations of the thunder sent a chill through her body. She struggled bravely on, and was reaching the more thickly populated portion of the town, when her attention was diverted to some one coming down the street.

"Wonder who it is?" was her mental exclamation. "Must be some of the men going to work," discerning more than one. "Well, they know me, so whose afraid?" But hark! They were quarreling, and on the gait was borne to her the sounds of oaths and harsh words.

"Eight pounds sugar," solemnly said Jim.

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it's Jack Brush's. Hello Jack, Tom, Ned!"

"Hello yourself!" vociferously shouted Tom. "Who are you, boy?" and in the presence of a newcomer the quarrel ceased, and they all turned to face the common foe, but as they found it was only a woman, they bravely blocked the road.

"Hello, there, leddy; can't git by 's?" "Tom," implored Gwen. "It's me, Gwen. Let me pass. Mother is very ill. I want the doctor."

"Don't know you, leddy; but yet you must pay toll to pass these yer diggins." Eh, boys?"

She turned to escape, but they closed around her and would have seized her, had not a tall muscular man in a long cape, sprang in their midst, and with vigorous blows sent the girl's assailants sprawling to the ground.

"Pardon, me madam, I'll see you home." And he half-pulled the frightened maid away from the scene without deigning to glance at the drunken miners.

"Thank you," began Gwen, timidly. "But I'm going to Doctor Evans. My mother is very ill."

"A young girl!" ejaculated the stranger, peering at his companion intensely through the darkness, "and what a voice!" and as a vivid flash of lightning disclosed the fair, well-poised head, from which the shawl had fallen during the scuffle, he exclaimed:

"Whew! what a beauty!" Then added aloud: "I'll accompany you, then, if I may. Do you know any of them?"

"I know them quite well, and they would not have harmed me had they not been drunk. They are kind-hearted when sober."

"But brutes when not," quickly replied the stranger.

A short walk, during which neither spoke, brought them to the residence of the doctor, and the stranger vigorously bumped the knocking, and while they were waiting for someone to come, Gwen shyly said:

"How can I ever thank you for your timely assistance? The doctor will soon be here, and I will not require your aid any longer, but I am very grateful. My name is Gwendolin Davis, and my mother and I keep a small store at the foot of the White Oak. Now, whom am I to thank? I think you are a stranger."

"John Dream," replied he of the six-feet-two, laconically, "late Tenant of the 52nd Pennsylvania Volunteers, now traveling for my health."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Doctor Evans, and John Dream eagerly accepted her outstretched hand, and with a muffled "good-night," was off. Gwen, still zealous and frightened, told the doctor the whole story on their way back, and when she reached her home, she lay down to rest, carefully watched by Gwen, who had but the day before been sunshine itself.

"Why, Gwen, how strange you look! What ails thee?"

"John Dream," she began brokenly, facing him, "I loved you for an honest man; my soul was yours. Oh!" she frantically cried; "it is yet. But last night I saw you, yes, my ideal, on my return from Mrs. Norton's, where I carried a bit of supper to her sick Jimmy, saw you strike down Mr. Carl and rob him of his money, the entire wealth of the hard-working men of this town. Oh! say it was not you? Say that I'm dreaming, but—What have you to say?" Her manner changed. She was now just.

He aghast, stepped forward, and then sank back into a chair, apparently stunned. "I did it," "To Mr. Carl," he laughed mockingly, recklessly; "I did all of it." And seeing the anguish portrayed on her face, exclaimed vehemently: "But by the heavens above, I've not robbed you of your love. For if ever one loved, I love you." He came pleadingly forward; she remained immovable. "Explain," she finally gasped.

Dream sprang to his feet, his cheeks alight, his eyes flashing defiance. "I will, then judge! I am of good family, and when the war broke out, entered the Fifty-second Pennsylvania volunteers from my native town as a private. I worked to Lieutenant, aye, and worked hard for it, and I was ambitious to become a captain, but 'twas at Petersburgh. Oh! the scene of that day I shall never remember. Our line was slowly giving way to the onslaughts of the Rebs, and our captain ordered a retreat. I, maddened at our repulse, shouted to the men to come on. 'Damn that captain!' I cried. 'We're no cowards,'

and as he uttered her name she colored rosily, not on account of the name, but the manner and terseness in which it was uttered.

"Well," said Gwen, looking him squarely in the eye and waiting for the reply which she anticipated and was prepared to face.

"I came here to see you on important business; you know full well what I'm after, but you have given me no encouragement. Gwen, I love—"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Robert, that's not for me," interposed Gwen hurriedly, "and with a hurried kiss, and an 'I'll be back soon,' she wrapped herself in an oil shawl and started off.

Once outside, she found it had ceased raining, but the wind and vivid lightning and deep reverberations of the thunder sent a chill through her body. She struggled bravely on, and was reaching the more thickly populated portion of the town, when her attention was diverted to some one coming down the street.

"Wonder who it is?" was her mental exclamation. "Must be some of the men going to work," discerning more than one. "Well, they know me, so whose afraid?" But hark! They were quarreling, and on the gait was borne to her the sounds of oaths and harsh words.

"Eight pounds sugar," solemnly said Jim.

"That's Sam Morgan's voice," as a

marble-topped table with a page bent in. Quickly opening it, she read in a bold hand, her breast rising and falling with the tide of her emotions:

"Here's to my love with eyes of brown, And dark as the night is her hair, Upon whose brow came ne'er a frown, And whose face is so charmingly fair, "D."

She read it twice, and then, with a furtive glance around the room, kissed the page, and thrust the book into her bosom.

Dream kept his promise and called often, and their friendship soon ripened into love, warm and affectionate. She was now supremely happy. She was loved by a good, honest man, a soldier as her father, and under the quickening impulses of love's radiation, how beautiful she grew! Like the rosebud, gradually unfolding its petals under the warm, loving caresses of the sun.

In the meantime young Campbell, still smarting under his repulse, had an idea, and he hugged it tenaciously. He was thinking. Who was this man? No one knew him in the town. Where did he eat? Where did he sleep?

What was he doing? These unanswered questions roused the dormant suspicions only too eager to rise in the young man's mind, and he dogged Dream whenever opportunity presented, only to lose him in a most mysterious manner. "I'll follow him, I'll see you home," he half-pulled the frightened maid away from the scene without deigning to glance at the drunken miners.

"Thank you," began Gwen, timidly. "But I'm going to Doctor Evans. My mother is very ill."

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