

## FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

IT was the autumn of '75, and there had already been a light fall of snow. We—Reub. and I—had met three years before, on our way to the mines of Virginia City; and now he was foreman of the "Gould & Curry," and I held a sub-office under him. We had taken a strange liking to each other from the first. This was owing chiefly, I think, to our utter dissimilarity in almost every respect.

He was the personification of strength—massive and solidly built throughout. His hair and beard were black, and thickly streaked with gray; his eyes were of the same hue, and could shoot lurid lightnings or melt into liquid softness. I was stoop shouldered and narrow chested, with pulmonary tendencies, and inclined toward the blonde type. He was the bravest man I ever knew; I was naturally, from a child, very timid. He was gentle as a woman; I, soured with ill health, was often, I fear, rude and gruff. He saved nothing, but spent his surplus earnings on those who had small wages and large families. That he was a man universally beloved, was a natural sequence.

I was standing in the door of the little office, waiting for him to lock up for the night. He was very punctilious in the methods of his work, and never let to-day's tasks infringe upon those of tomorrow. I watched him in silence for a few moments, then suddenly put into words the thought that had been in my mind all day—

"Reub, how has it happened, that with all your knockings about the world,

you are free from the vices which are common to most men?"

He turned toward me, a flush mantling his dark cheek: "I have always tried, Dick, to keep myself pure and worthy of her."

"Her?" I repeated. There was a woman in it then. I was all interest at once, and as persistent as an over-indulged child. In all my knowledge of Reuben Day, he had never been known to show more than a passing civility to any lady of our acquaintance. He referred to his mother, of course—he's just the kind of a man to idolize a good mother. I thought this within myself, but looking straight into his eyes, I said—

"Your mother? Tell me of her."

He came out and locked the door. The gravity of his face deepened almost into a scowl. "We'll go home by way of the old mines, lad," he said. "It will be a longer road, but the exercise will do you good."

His manner toward me was always that of a watchful mother over a delicate child. He drew my arm in his and strode along the circuitous route we had chosen, seemingly, for the time, oblivious of my presence. I was panting and breathless, and had the uncomfortable feeling of having trespassed on forbidden ground. As we reached one of the many abandoned works, he sat down on one of the timbers.

"We'll rest here a bit, lad." Then, with grave solemnity: "I've a mind to tell you now, what I've often thought of doing, in case anything should happen, you know."