

The Mines

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THE towers over the shafts rise grimly upward, etched against the bleak sky. Beyond lies the iron range, barren, valueless land except for the wealth of iron ore beneath it. Here and there a stunted tree, or squalid shack of some Indian squatter breaks the monotony of the desolate scene. Behind the mines, the rows of identical houses inhabited by the miners rise over the hill. Ugly houses in themselves. Made doubly so by countless repetition. It is Sunday and nothing moves. The huge pulleys on the towers are still. Only the smoke from one of the innumerable bungalows gives sign of human life. The inevitable dirt of a mining town hangs like a pall over the scene. Gigantic piles of red ore lie waiting for shipment to the mills. A switch engine stands hitched to a string of battered ore cars. No life in her pistons. Her boilers cold and dead. It is a dead scene, and there is nothing.

Tomorrow the countless little men will come out of their countless little houses, and the mines will hum with activity. More dirt will fill the air. More red ore will be added to the pile for the little switch engine to move. And still there will be nothing, and the little men will not understand. The little men in their little houses lead their little lives, and still they will not understand.

A crow flaps and flies away between two towers. A door opens in one of the little houses, and a frowzy woman empties a pan of water onto the ground. A man staggers up the street. One of the little men has rebelled and had his alcoholic escape, but tomorrow he will be back in the mines with the other little men. More crows come and perch on the towers. They look like vultures waiting for death. It is death, for there is nothing. Two children come out of a house and begin playing. They are playing they are miners. They are the little men of tomorrow.

It is growing dark. Only the outlines of the towers can be seen. But even their shadows rear skyward strong and grim. And over the range, and the mines, and the little houses, hangs the dark and the dirt. It is loneliness, and there is nothing.