

**Slightly
Twisted
TALES**

By

B. L. Higgins

Author of "A Most Dangerous Prey"

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Preface

I love to write. I have *always* loved to write. I am in a lifelong love affair with the English language.

Prior to now, though, there has been precious little to encourage it. If an author wanted their work to be published, they had to go the route of the big publishing houses and, if they happen to be an insecure introvert, that was just deemed impossible. So, by and large, I stopped writing and went the practical route of becoming a nurse...

Until, decades later, after discovering the internet, I began to write again. A friend had created a website and needed fictional short stories as filler. Having dabbled in writing years ago, I took the plunge. I wrote, and got published, four stories that can be found in this collection; "Cave-In", "Just Along For The Ride", "Yep", and "Lost And Found".

These stories, which had been published previously, are now back in my possession. I have also included some new material that I have written more recently, like, uh, *yesterday*. With the new "self-publishing" websites calling to me, I have collected my works into this volume and now present them to you for your enjoyment. I have included small snippets of my thought processes before each story for clarification or edification or whatever 'fiction' you prefer. It is my hope that these snippets, combined with their attendant stories, will provide you with a unique kind of entertainment, springing, as they have, from my ADD-equipped brain. It tends to give me perspective that many don't have, hence the quirky nature of my stories.

Now, go forth and read! (cat and tea optional, but recommended)

B. L. Higgins

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Cave-In

This story originated in a dream, as some do. I remember thinking, what can I do to make this scenario more interesting, more unique, but keep the emotional power it had held over me when I awoke? My brain just can't leave things alone sometimes, as the story would have been enough on its own. So I wrote, and this is the result.

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The last clacks of falling rock shards could be heard dimly through the stifling darkness. Mike attempted to move his arms and legs but found himself pinned from all sides. He could turn his head, but that was about it. He sensed, rather than saw, the dust in the air.

"Charlie?" he called into the blindness surrounding him.

A thin sound of tumbling dirt and pebbles trickled into his hearing range.

"Yeah, I'm here." A coughing sound. "What happened? I thought this part of the diggings was safe to work in. They just fixed the supports last week."

"Well, not well enough, I guess", Mike returned. He tried to move again but was foiled in the attempt. "Can you move?"

"A little," Charlie grunted. "I think some things are broken, though. Not really surprising, if you think about it. More surprising we're still alive, considering..."

"Considering half the cave face just came down on us. Can you see anything? I'm stone blind in here."

"Nope. I'm pretty well buried myself." A long pause, then in a low voice, "Wonder how long it'll take 'em to find us?"

Mike shrugged, about all he could do in response. "Well, they know we're down here, so it'll depend on how long it takes 'em to get organized and send the big guys down to dig us out."

There was silence for a long time. Mike was left to his own musings, dark as they were. There was no way to tell what time of day it was outside, no way of knowing if he'd ever see the outside again. The seconds ticked by, slowed to a crawl by the darkness, the isolation, the fear.

Maybe they can't get through to us, he thought. Maybe the landslide goes back so far that they can't even get a rescue tunnel through. He shook his head to dispel the thought. Nah, the foreman'll find us. The company values us. They won't just leave us to...

"Charlie?"

Silence.

"Charlie?"

A weak voice came back. "I'm still here, kid. Just...getting weaker, that's all. Losing strength..."

"Charlie!" A rush of concern for the old miner, coupled with the dawning awareness of his own weakened condition, caused Mike to stammer. "You...you c-c-c-can't leave me here alone, Charlie! Stay with me! You c-c-c-can do it! You've still g-g-got lots of good years left..."

A gusting sound like a sigh. "Kid, I'm old. I've had my days, and they've been great ones. I don't think I'm going to come out of this one. It's just...just the way of things, that's all. The old clear the way for the young and then pass on. Don't worry about me, Mikey. I'm finally gonna get some rest, that's all. My stint is over..." The voice faded away with a rattle.

The ensuing silence was deafening.

"Charlie! *Charlie, no! Stay with me! Charlie!*"

No response.

Mike closed his eyes, his solitude suddenly crashing in around him just as the avalanche had. Charlie. He'd worked with him for years, side by side. He thought Charlie'd be around forever.

Mike felt himself growing weaker by the hour. Without Charlie's presence to buoy him, he began to lose his will to go on. *Maybe it's my time, too. Young or old, it doesn't matter down here. When it's your time to go, you go.*

Mike laid his head back against the cold, unyielding rock of his prison and stared into the void, unseeing, as he awaited his fate.

Hours passed. No sound broke in upon his mindless state. No sound of footsteps, no voices calling for survivors, no heavy equipment coming to dig him out. Just the occasional >plink< of a loose stone falling from above. Not enough to warrant his attention. Not enough to make him want to survive anymore.

Hopelessness swept over him like a slow tide, blending with his helpless state and dark mood. He was definitely weaker now. His thoughts were hazy, erratic. Memories came and went without order, memories of his time in the mines, of the other miners he'd known who were still here and those who had passed on before. Dimly he felt his energies dip, ebb, flow away from him. He closed his eyes and just let it happen. It was almost...comforting when it did.

>>>***<<<

"Hey, boss, we found the last two over there," the beefy rescuer said, taking off his breather. The rest of his face, not covered by the breather, was layered in dust.

The foreman nodded, lighting a cigar in spite of regulations regarding smoking in the mines. This area had been determined to be clear of explosive gases and the ventilation fans were clearing out the dust from the rockfall. "How are they?" he asked nonchalantly, waving the match to snuff it out.

The rescuer half-sat back against part of the rockfall and rubbed his nose. "Well, the C-class model is in pretty bad shape, but the M-class is OK. We can repair it. The C-class," he shrugged, "it was pretty

old anyway, one of the earlier diggers we bought. I don't think it'd be worth repairing. We can just use it for parts."

The foreman nodded again. He removed the cigar from his lips and blew a smoke ring into the still-dusty air and watched as the particles mingled. Then he smiled down at the other man and said, "It's a damn good thing we don't send humans down into the mines anymore..."