heavier and rougher in tone and somehow old-fashioned. There were so many questions in her mind.

"But I thought the mine was closed a hundred years ago," she said nervously. "That's what I was told, anyway."

"Well, you was told wrong," said the old man, whom Cherry could see more clearly now under his candle. His eyes were white and set far back in his head, unnaturally so, she thought, and his lips and mouth seemed a vivid red in the candlelight.

"Closed, closed indeed; does it look closed to you? D'you think we're digging for worms? Over four thousand tons of tin last year and nine thousand of copper

ore, and you ask is the mine closed? Over twenty fathoms below the sea this mine goes. We'll dig right out under the ocean, most of the way to 'Merica, afore we close down this mine."

He spoke passionately now, almost angrily, so that Cherry felt she had offended him.

"Hush, Father," said the young man, taking off his jacket and wrapping it around Cherry's shoulders.

"She doesn't want to hear all about that. She's cold and wet. Can't you see? Now, let's make a little fire to warm her through. She's shivered right through to her bones. You can see she is."

"They all are," said the old tinner, pulling himself to his feet. "They all are." And he shuffled past her into the dark. "I'll fetch the wood," he muttered, and then added, "for all the good it'll do."

"What does he mean?" Cherry asked the young man, for whom she felt an instant liking. "What did he mean by that?"

"Oh, pay him no heed, little girl," he said. "He's an old man now and tired of the mine. We're both tired of it, but we're proud of it, see, and we've nowhere else to go, nothing else to do."

He had a kind voice that was reassuring to Cherry.

He seemed somehow to know the questions she wanted to ask, for he answered them now without her ever asking.

"Sit down by me while you listen, girl," he said. "Father will make a fire to warm you and I shall tell you how we come to be here. You won't be afeared now, will you?"

Cherry looked up into his face, which was younger than she had expected from his voice; but like his father's, the eyes seemed sad and deep-set, yet they smiled at her gently and she smiled back.

"That's my girl. It was a new mine, this; promising, everyone said. The best tin in Cornwall and that means the best tin in the world. Eighteen sixty-five it started up and they were looking for tinners, and so Father found a cottage down by Treveal and came to work here. I was already fourteen, so I joined him down the mine. We prospered and the mine prospered, to start with. Mother

and the little children had full bellies and there was talk of sinking a fresh shaft. Times were good and promised to be better."

Cherry sat transfixed as the story of the disaster unfolded. She heard how they had been trapped by a fall of rock, about how they had worked to pull them away, but behind every rock was another rock and another rock. She heard how they had never even heard any sound of rescue. They had died, he said, in two days or so because the air was bad and because there was too little of it.

"Father has never accepted it; he still thinks he's alive, that he goes home to Mother and the little children each evening. But he's dead, just like me. I can't tell him though, for he'd not understand and it would break his heart if he ever knew."

"So you aren't real," said Cherry, trying to grasp the implications of his story. "So I'm just imagining all this. You're just a dream."

"No dream, my girl," said the young man, laughing out loud. "No more'n we're imagining you. We're real right enough, but we're dead and have been for a hundred years and more. Ghosts, spirits, that's what living folk call us. Come to think of it, that's what *I* called us when I was alive."

Cherry was on her feet suddenly and backing away.

"No need to be afeared, little girl," said the young

man, holding out his hand towards her. "We won't harm you. No one can harm you, not now. Look, he's started the fire already. Come over and warm yourself. Come, it'll be all right, girl. We'll look after you. We'll help you."

"But I want to go home," Cherry said, feeling the panic rising to her voice and trying to control it. "I know you're kind, but I want to go home. My mother will be worried about me. They'll be out looking for me. Your light saved my life and I want to thank you. But I must go, else they'll worry themselves sick, I know they will."

"You going back home?" the young man asked, and then he nodded. "I s'pose you'll want to see your family again."

"Course I am," said Cherry, perplexed by the question. "Course I do."

"'Tis a pity," he said sadly. "Everyone passes through and no one stays. They all want to go home, but then so do I. You'll want me to guide you to the surface, I s'pose."

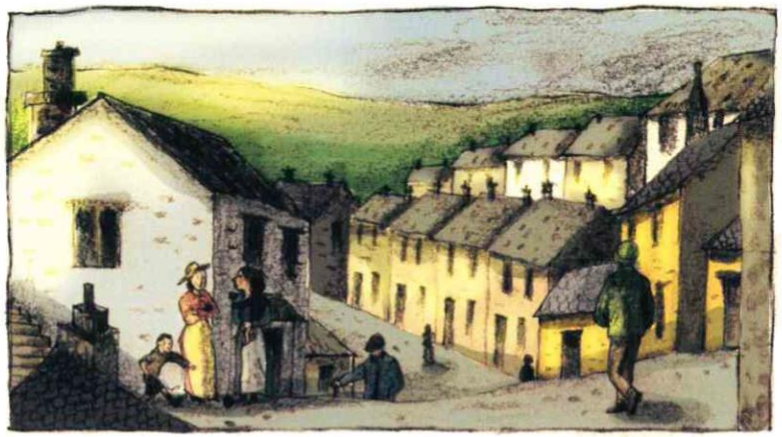
"I'm not the first then?" Cherry said. "There's been others climb up into the mine to escape from the sea? You've saved lots of people."

"A few," said the tinner, nodding. "A few."

"You're a kind person," Cherry said, warming to the sadness in the young man's voice. "I never thought ghosts would be kind."

"We're just people, people who've passed on," replied the young man, taking her elbow and leading her towards the fire. "There's nice people and there's nasty people. It's the same if you're alive or if you're dead. You're a nice person, I can tell that, even though I haven't known you for long. I'm sad because I should like to be alive again

with my friends and go rabbiting or blackberrying up by the chapel near Treveal like I used to. The sun always seemed to be shining then. After it happened I used to go up to the surface often and move amongst the people in the village. I went to see my family, but if I spoke to them they never seemed to hear me, and of course they can't see you. You can see them, but they can't see you. That's the worst of it. So I don't go up much now, just to



collect wood for the fire and a bit of food now and then. I stay down here with Father in the mine and we work away day after day, and from time to time someone like you comes up the tunnel from the sea and lightens our darkness. I shall be sad when you go."

The old man was hunched over the fire rubbing his hands and holding them out over the heat.

"Not often we have a fire," he said, his voice more sprightly now. "Only on special occasions. Birthdays, of course, we always have a fire on birthdays back at the cottage. Martha's next. You don't know her; she's my only daughter – she'll be eight on September 10th. She's been poorly, you know – her lungs, that's what the doctor said." He sighed deeply. "'Tis dreadful damp in the cottage. 'Tis well nigh impossible to keep it out." There was a tremor in the old man's voice that betrayed his emotion. He looked

up at Cherry and she could see the tears in his eyes. "She looks a bit like you, my dear, raven-haired and as pretty as a picture; but not so tall, not so tall. Come in closer, my dear, you'll be warmer that way."

Cherry sat with them by the fire till it died away to nothing. She longed to go, to get home amongst the living, but the old man talked on of his family and their little one-room cottage with a ladder to the bedroom where they all huddled together for warmth, of his friends that used to meet in the Tinners' Arms every evening. There were tales of wrecking and smuggling, and all the while the young man sat silent until there was a lull in the story.

"Father," he said. "I think our little friend would like to go home now. Shall I take her up as I usually do?"

The old man nodded and waved his hand in dismissal.