



The Victorians

1: The Trapper - Jimmy's first day

By Gordon Lamont

JIMMY: My name is Jimmy Turton. I'm eleven years old and I'm a trapper. I work in the dark for twelve hours a day, opening and closing the doors to keep the mine safe. You may think I'm all alone in my dark corner of the underground world. But I'm not alone. There are ghosts down here...

PRIEST: [FLASHBACK] George Burkinshaw...Amos Wright...Francis Turton...

JIMMY: It's my first day down the pit – as a worker anyway. I've been down before with my Da, but not since the accident. The sun's only just up and it's cold standing at the pit head. But when I look down into darkness I don't want to leave the outside world, no matter how cold it is...

WILLIAM: Now young Jimmy, are you all set?

JIMMY: Yes, sir, I think so.

WILLIAM: You don't have to call me 'sir', lad. I'm Will. Your brother here knows me and I knew your father as well as any man. You'll not find anyone to say a word against him.

JIMMY: Yes, Will.

BENJAMIN: Come on, Jimmy. You've been down pit often enough with our Da, God rest his soul.





- JIMMY: That's my older brother Benjamin. As strong a miner as you could wish to meet. One day I'll be brave and strong like him, but not today...
- WILLIAM: Hurry on now lad, you don't get your ten shillings a week for standing around chatting. Get in the cage with us.
- JIMMY: The cage is like a prison cell made of wood and iron and lowered down the mineshaft on a rope – operated by a great smoke-belching engine. Once the gate is closed I'll be going down into the darkness...
- WILLIAM: Come on now, lad, look sharp.
- JIMMY: Yes, Will.
- WILLIAM: Hold fast. Jed, let her go!
- JED: Right away!
- JIMMY: I'm in the cage, shut in the mine for the next twelve hours...and I can't think of owt but the day they buried my Da and lowered him into the ground for the last time.
- PRIEST: [FLASHBACK] Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope...
- JIMMY: I start to wonder how many times he went down into the darkness in this rickety old cage...
- WILLIAM: I know you're thinking of him, Jimmy. You should feel proud.
- JIMMY: I do, William.





- BENJAMIN: There may not be a word to be said against him but you'll find plenty who'll say nothing good about them that caused his death.
- WILLIAM: That's enough, Ben. We don't want to go into all that on young Jimmy's first day trapping do we?
- BENJAMIN: I'm just saying, them that knew about the build up of firedamp and did nothing about it...it's them that's to blame - but it's us miners that have pay the price.
- JIMMY: And then...we're down: the bottom of the shaft. We trudge out of the cage and along the tunnel, some carrying lamps. Tiny flickers of light in the deep darkness...
- WILLIAM: Now, lad, you know what you have to do?
- JIMMY: Yes, sir.
- WILLIAM: You 'sir' me again and I'll chase you round these tunnels 'til your legs drop off. Come on, let's get to the seam.
- JIMMY: He's only joking but I know he's telling me that I'm not a child now. I'm a miner. I'm here to work. But I don't want to be here. My Dad was buried in the explosion, and I can't help thinking what if it happens to me? Why shouldn't it happen again?
- WILLIAM: Right, lad. Here's your trap door. Keep your wits about you - the whole mine depends on you.
- JIMMY: But -





- WILLIAM: We have to earn our money so we're off to the live seam. You'll be fine, lad.
- BENJAMIN: Make sure you close the door behind us, Jimmy.
- JIMMY: I watch them bending low, almost crawling along the tunnel...Then, silence. That's it. I let the door close, heavy and dark behind them... ..and I'm alone. It's so dark that if I hold my hand up to my eye I can't see it. I wait. I'm listening, straining my ears in the darkness for someone to haul a coal cart up this tunnel. Listen – they're coming. When they do, I have to pull the door open for them...
- MINER: Thanks, Jimmy lad!
- JIMMY: Then close it quick behind them. Sometimes children pull the carts, but on my route the paths are steep and strong men are needed. The doors make sure that the air can move all around the mine to stop the explosive firedamp from building up. I lose track of time, but not of my fear. What if I don't do it right, what if the firedamp builds up and there's another explosion? What if...I start to worry that I'll fall asleep. It's so easy to drift off down here in the darkness. So easy to imagine things, feel things, hear things...
- MINER: [FLASHBACK] Look out! Fire!
- JIMMY: My name is Jimmy Turton. I'm eleven years old and I'm a trapper. You may think I'm all alone in my dark corner of the underground world. But I'm not alone, there are ghosts down here... ghosts of sixteen miners who died just a year ago...and my father was one of them.

