

The Miner

Natsume S seki

Jay Rubin, Translator

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In this unusual offering by one of Japan's greatest novelists, a nineteen-year-old has run away from his Tokyo home and is walking through an endless pine forest in a "fog of unsettling anxiety," accompanied only by familiar thoughts of suicide and goaded on by a voice that tells him to "go into the dark." One thing, he feels, is certain: he can never go home again.

Though he has the soul of a poet-philosopher, he is still too young to know it, and too confused about life to care. On his trek through the woods, he meets an old man who entices him to embrace the life of a miner. Though warned about what such a life would entail, the proud young man, son of a prominent family, is stubborn in his commitment to the miner's life "precisely because of the work's similarity to death." But despite his supposed longing for silence, blackness, and self-obliteration, a short time in Earth's dark depths soon brings him to the realization that he was in a "terrible place."

Alternating between fear, despair, and a "pale happiness," he encounters an older miner, an educated man, who shares some hard-won truth with him. One day, abandoned underground by his team, he comes face-to-face with death in the bowels of the mine, and must choose whether to live or die.

KRISTINE MORRIS (Summer 2016)

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