

Chapter 2.5

Milly's Watch



Listen to the Story :



(If you found this chapter, well done. You're one of the lucky few. Just don't tell everyone... wombats like their secrets kept quiet.)

Milly's Watch, as told by Milly himself:
Ugh. Humans again.

I was this close to a nap. Perfect temperature. Good spot under the lantern shelf. Bit of quartz dust for the pillow—prime real estate. And then they show up.

The girl and the boy. Ruby and... Linseed? No. Liam. That's it. Always adjusting his face windows. Can't even see properly underground, poor thing. And what are they doing? Sneaking around my tunnels after dark. Figures. I've got centuries of stories buried down here, and now I've got to babysit two walking backpacks with zero survival instincts.

Offfff.



Still... I suppose they're better than most. Ruby's got spark. Heart. And the map. That thing's older than half the ghosts down here. It only shows up for the right people. Usually. Unless the wind's being cheeky again.

Anyway. I'd better keep an eye on them before they fall into Shaft Twelve or poke something cursed.



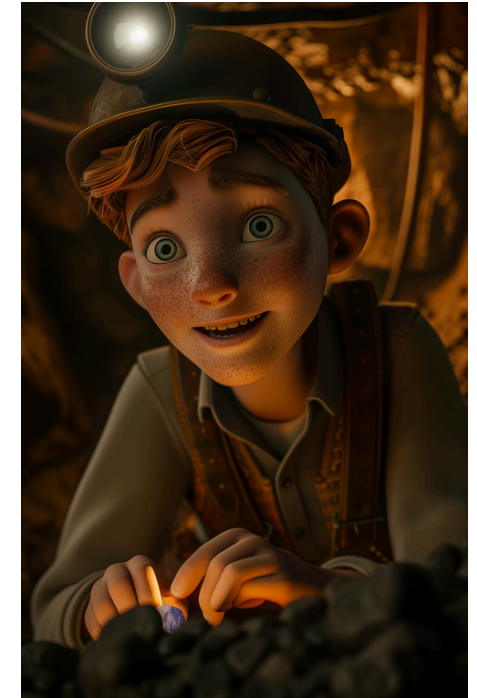
Now listen, while they're off wandering,
let me tell you a little story. Not one you'll
find on the big posters or museum panels.
This one's from when the mine was still
young, and I was still quick on my paws.



The Miners' Test – Now with Secret Club Vibes and Christmas Cheer

Back then, there was a young miner named Ray. Yep, that Ray. Before he went all ghostly and wise, he was just a bloke with strong arms, kind eyes, and a quiet way of going about his work. He was new to the crew, see? And the other miners—well, they were a tight bunch. They joked around a lot. Played little games to test newcomers. Nothing mean, just... miner mischief. One morning, Ray uncovered something unusual—a bright blue stone, smooth and beautiful, tucked into a pocket of quartz. He slipped it into his pocket, thinking maybe he'd keep it as a gift for his family.

But the others saw the sparkle too.



"You've got to pass the test to keep a find like that," one of them said, grinning with a glint of mischief.

They handed Ray a small wooden box.

“Inside are two stones,” they said. “One white, one black. Pick white, and the stone’s yours. Pick black, and, well... tough luck.”

It was an old trick. One whispered about in the tunnels. Part test, part tradition. A miner’s way of saying: prove you’re one of us.

Ray wasn’t just strong—he was sharp. As the lid closed, he spotted something odd. Both stones were black. A harmless trick. A riddle. A secret rite of passage.





"Oh no," he said, calm and polite. "Well, you can check the one left in the box. Then you'll know which one I picked."

The miners opened the box... and found a black stone. Which meant—of course—that Ray must've picked white.

They stared at him for a second, stunned—and then they all burst out laughing.

Ray closed his eyes and reached into the box, pulled out a stone—and before anyone could see it—"Oops!" he said, letting it drop into the dirt with a perfectly timed wince.





Smart one, that Ray," someone said. Another clapped him on the back.

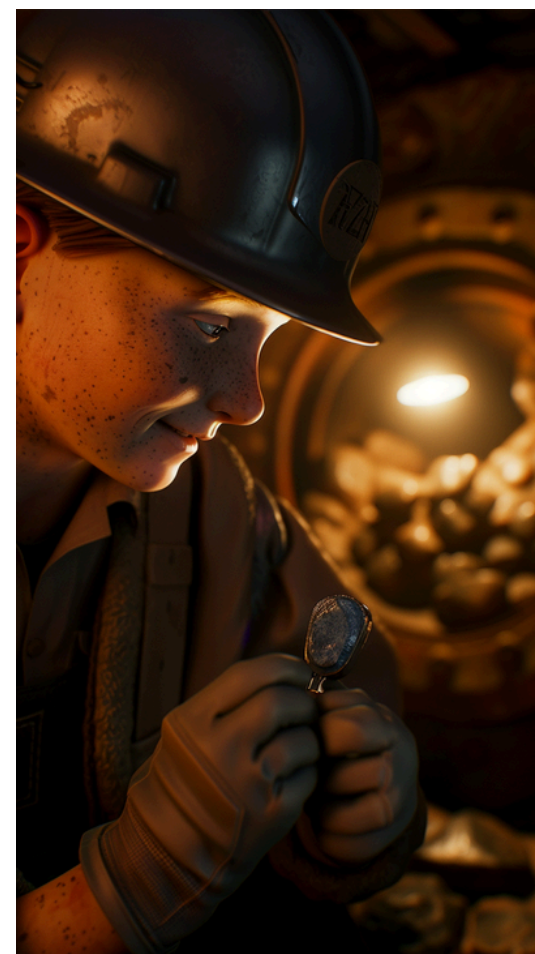
"You're one of us now."
"Welcome to the crew," another added with a grin. "And since it's Christmas... Merry Christmas, mate."

"You've just joined the oldest secret club in Bendigo."





Ray kept the stone.
Turned it into a necklace
for his family. Passed it
down, I reckon. Might even
look familiar, if you've been
paying attention.



Wombat Milly turned his face to his children—or perhaps just to the empty air, where memories lingered longest—and said: “Long years after that Christmas trick, Ray told me something I’ve never forgotten. He said it softly, like he was sharing a secret meant for the stars themselves.”

Milly paused, scratching behind his ear with a thoughtful grunt.

“My time here has long passed,” Ray had said, “but my soul rests in peace knowing that the story of this mine—of our hard work, our dreams, and our friendships—will not be forgotten and lives in the hearts of those who remember — my family, my friends, and all who carry these stories forward.”

Milly glanced around, as if checking to see if anyone else was listening. Then he continued, his gravelly voice softer than usual.



“He paused then, all glow and translucent, shimmering like moonlight on water. ‘I hope that the Spirit of Bendigo and his mine will live on... not only in books and stories, but in the hearts of my family and loved ones. That they will keep my voice alive, so that one day, you too may pass this place on to those who come after you.’”

Milly huffed, pretending to be unimpressed—but there was a glimmer of something deeper in his eyes.

“Then he got all quiet-like, but his words hit harder than a pickaxe to quartz. ‘Because history truly lives only when we continue to tell it together.’”

The old wombat fell silent for a moment, letting the weight of Ray’s message settle over the clearing. Finally, he gave a gruff snort.

“Sentimental nonsense,” he muttered, though his whiskers twitched with a hint of pride. “Still... good advice. Now, shoo. Nap time.” And with that, Milly curled up in his favorite patch of sunlight, leaving the rest of us to carry the stories forward.





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