

## RETRIBUTION

William Ewen, Manager of the Clinton Manufacturing Company, of New York City, sat leisurely at his desk, a look of serene happiness on his countenance.

Only two short months ago, he had received a letter accompanied by a substantial check, notifying him of his promotion to the position of manager; and to-day was the eve of Christmas.

"How unlike this to the festive seasons of other years," he mused, "How happy I can be."

He sank into a deep reverie: His good wife, how proud he was of her; how good and kind she was; and how bravely she had aided him through the long years of his struggle for success. And then there was little Nora and Mary and, lastly, his little boy, James, the pride of his heart.

And gazing into the fire-place before him he expressed his thoughts aloud, as if addressing the glowing embers.

"Is there anyone more fortunate than we this Christmas! Fortune seems to have smiled upon us. I see nothing but joy and happiness everywhere. No illness, no troubles, no worry."

This was to be the Christmas of Christmases. No longer would he have to struggle to provide for the future; the many luxuries he had to forego other years were now within his reach.

What man would not have poured forth his soul in gratitude for such blessings as these! yet in the mind of William Ewen no thought of gratitude arose.

Yes, William Ewen was happy, supremely happy, this glorious Christmas Eve. But yet, while he seemed to be living the future in joyful anticipation, a vague fear of some impending misfortune filled his heart. Some undefined dread seemed to overpower him. Could it be—surely no, he was a man, not a weakling; such a thing must not, could not bother him. He would dismiss it once and for all from his mind.

And yet, before he knew it, he was reviewing before his mind an incident which he had hoped to forget:—

He had been forced to dismiss his senior bookkeeper. An examination of the books had shown a shortage, and he had asked his Accountant for an explanation.

"I cannot account for this, sir," said the Accountant.

"Why should I hesitate to dismiss you then?" shouted the new boss.

"I understand, sir," replied the anxious clerk, "but have mercy. Do not turn me away at this festive season. Why, think of my wife, my invalid daughter, my—"

"No," interrupted Ewen, "you cannot remain."

His heart was set. He was a boss now; he would assert his authority. And, with a curse on his lips, the clerk had gone off to his home.

So vividly had he recollected this scene that it seemed to him as if it had just then taken place.

"Was this then the cause of the vague fear that had come upon him," he asked himself. Perhaps. Had he not been hard-hearted? Could he not have made up the loss himself for the time? The clerk would have repaid. "Give him another chance" something had said to him; but his pride had not let him humble himself. And then again, "was this man not jealous of him? He had shown signs of jealousy anyway. Oh, he would get along all right, and, moreover, the dismissed one had brought this upon himself. Why then should he worry?"

Dismissing the disquieting thought from his mind, he hastily locked the door and hurried off to the warmth and happiness of his home.

What a joyful picture presented itself at the home of the Ewens that Christmas Eve! What delightful surroundings! The Christmas tree standing in the corner, laden with gifts, told its story. The merry laughter of the children and the happiness of the mother told another. Soon it was the children's bed-time and they knelt down, as was their wont, to ask God's blessing upon themselves, and protection during the night.

And thus prayed little James—his father's joy:

"Dear God, bless me this night. Bless my mamma and papa, Nora and Mary, and tell Santa to bring me something good. And please God save Santa's reindeers. Amen."

At the conclusion of this simple prayer, tears filled the eyes of William Ewen and his wife, and they, too, prayed that God would protect their little ones. And then the children, eager for the coming morn, kissed their parents good-night and were off to bed.

Long past the hour for retiring father and mother



sat planning for the future of their loved ones, and it was well past midnight when they decided to retire. The mother, as was her custom, first visited the nursery to see if all was well. First she approached the cot of the baby, James. What? were her eyes deceiving her? No baby there?

"My God" she cried and frantically she searched the room. "William, William" she screamed, "Come quick, my baby, our boy is gone," and, overcome with grief, she sank to the floor.

Hastily but gently the frantic husband placed the limp form of his wife on the bed, and then madly ran through the house searching for his boy. Gone? His Jimmie, his darling, his idol for whom he had planned such a future. Where could he be?

In an instant he was at the telephone.

"Police headquarters. William Ewen speaking. Yes, Ewen, 75 Douglas Avenue. Our child was stolen an hour ago. Come quick," he shouted.

He hung up the receiver. He must think. He must act.

Perhaps the child had got up and wandered off to the court. He would see—would do anything if there were the faintest ray of hope. His efforts were fruitless. No sign of him. An open window, however, told the story. His boy was stolen.

Soon the police were on the scene. Every possible escape from the house was watched. The entire City Police Force was notified, but no trace of the missing child could be found.

William Ewen was in misery. His wife was ill; he dared not rouse his little ones; he had to suffer alone and in silence. And in the silence a thought stole through his mind. Was God punishing him? And for what?

Suddenly he remembered. What did position, money, power, mean to him now? Would he not give all for the return of his darling? How slowly the time passed!

One o'clock, chimed the big clock in the corner, and yet no ray of hope. How his mind worked! Here he was on Christmas Eve and in so much misery. Surely he might have been spared all this. Soon all, both young and old, rich and poor, would celebrate the coming of the Messiah. All would have happiness. But not so William Ewen. Clue after clue was brought forth to

raise the spirits of the Ewens, only to be proven false, and to shatter their hopes again. The Christmas season passed, and, with it, the happiness of the Ewens. William Ewen's interest in life diminished. One lesson he had learned to his sorrow: Power and money are not the requisites for contentment. Thus the days passed into weeks, weeks into years, but never was there a sign of the lost child.

Day after day Ewen trod to his work, and returned at evening only to find his beloved wife sink lower and lower.

"God, must she die, must I suffer more?" he would cry.

"William," came a feeble cry from the sick bed, at his return one evening from work. "I am very weak, and I feel my time is short. I know I am dying."

With tears in his eyes, Ewen approached and smoothed the troubled brow of his wife.

"Where is my boy, my little one? Will no one bring him to me," she sobbed.

In vain did poor Ewen try to comfort her. "He will come soon. Bear up dear," he said.

"William come, kiss me. Be good to the children, and tell my boy to meet me in heaven. Good—bye—Dear God—have—mercy," she gasped, and all was over.

The little family circle once so happy was now broken and sad.

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Twenty-six years have passed—short years indeed, but long years of misery for William Ewen, now old and gray.

Left with one daughter, his eldest being employed abroad, he carries on with scarcely a word.

Another Festive Season has come round and the newly promoted clerk of Newton Bros., in the City of Ashur is happy. For has he not been made senior clerk of this thriving firm, and, has not the best girl in all the world just promised to become his wife? He was happy and he wished the same for all. She had been nothing but sunshine in his life in contrast to the poor miserable dwelling which he called his home.

And his father? Well—his father seemed always so worried and fretful. Why did his father frown and stare



when he had told him of his newly found happiness—of his bride-to-be? Why did he sigh and say nothing?

He had heard his father, he recalled, say something of a Ewen, and that was his fiancée's name. Could Maud Ewen be the person to whom his father had referred? He would find out.

He remembered that not so long ago his brother had been killed. His brother had come home one day with the word that he had enlisted. But his dad had not seemed enthusiastic but was rather surprised and anxious.

"No," he had said. "I cannot let you go. If you only knew, you would not wish to go. And yet I cannot tell you why."

"Do not go," the father had pleaded. But the boy had made up his mind, and nothing could prevail upon him to remain at home.

A short time later they had received a telegram which read:

Regret to inform you that.....killed in action.  
Recommended for Victoria Cross. Particulars later.  
.....O.C.

That night the senior clerk was in conversation with his sweetheart.

"I have often written Dad about you," she told him but in his reply he has never once alluded to you. I shall write him now and give him all the news, and tell him that we are to be married."

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Three days later William Ewen paced the floor of the office. He was deep in thought. Should he let it go on? Would this serve as a clue to the whereabouts of his son? These were the questions that ran through his mind throughout the entire day nor would they let him rest.

That evening he forwarded the following telegram to his daughter Maud:

Letter received. Leaving for Ashur. Tell no one of it.  
Dad.

Would this be a solution to the mysterious disappearance of his son, so long ago? He would see.

Arrived at Ashur, and accompanied by his daughter, he immediately left by auto for the home of her friend; and to her enquiries regarding his business he answered not a word.

'Twas now approaching midnight and the people of Ashur were making their way towards the little chapel to worship at the Midnight mass; cars were scurrying to and fro, and the snow falling in thick flakes made traffic dangerous. Two persons were trudging along—an old man accompanied, one would presume, by his son. In deep conversation regarding a coming marriage, they heard not the warning sound from an approaching automobile. The driver threw on the brakes, but 'twas too late. The old man was struck, and flung to the pavement fatally injured.

"My father is killed—you killed my father" cried the young man, as the girl, horror stricken, ran from the car to soothe him.

Quickly the police and crowd gathered; the injured man was borne to the church, followed by his son, William Ewen, and Maud.

"My God," gasped William Ewen as he bent over the face of the dying man "you—you—Slagerty—Jim Slagerty, speak—speak—before 'tis too late. Do you know any thing of my lost child?"

The latter opened his eyes and his stare was fixed and cold.

"Water," he murmured.

Turning to the officer he said: "Let this driver be. I alone am to blame."

"What of my son," harshly interrupted William Ewen again, and the reply came, "He is dead."

And, while Ewen bowed his head in sorrow the old man spoke on: "You remember how you dismissed me at Christmas-tide long years ago. How I pleaded for mercy and you heeded me not. Well—I had a family as you well know, and, with myself out of work, we were in need. My wife through worry took sick and died and I was left with a son and daughter. I swore vengeance on you; I thought to take from you your favorite child and to break your spirit as you had done mine. And one evening while you and your wife sat before the fire-place I stole your boy. But, William Ewen, I was good to that boy, for I didn't wish him to suffer on your account.



He lived happily with me until one day he told me that he had enlisted. I entreated him not to go for he was young and I had learned to love him. I thought to inform you but I was afraid. He went away and a short time later was killed. The Medal he won is safe at home. No one knows how I suffered. I could not sleep. My conscience was driving me mad. I wished that I were dead myself, I wanted to tell you of my sorrow and repentance. But I would not—I dared not do so."

"Forgive me, Ewen, forgive me," he said.

Ewen's eyes blazed with anger.

"Forgive you," he cried. "Forgive the murderer of my son—of my wife—and the destroyer of my happiness these 26 years; forgive—no—no—I cannot—I will not." And Ewen shook with rage. Then, as if stayed by his anger from saying more, he stopped. Slagerty, calm though sorrowful throughout, said:

"You will not forgive? Think Ewen; for God's sake think. Some day you will be lying as near death as I am now—and then you will be as glad to forgive as I am now."

William Ewen heard these words of the dying man unmoved at first, but after a long silence he began:

"You are right Jim Slagerty—if I would repair the past I must learn to forgive. And besides, it was my pride that was the cause of all. Forgive you. Rather do I ask you to forgive me. I forgive and beg your forgiveness."

"Had I not been revengeful," returned Jim Slagerty, all this would not have been—may God forgive us both." The hands of Wm. Ewen and James Slagerty met as the latter continued:

"James my son, come here," he cried. "Now you know why I did not urge you on in your friendship with Maud Ewen for she was then the daughter of my worst enemy. But now we have both suffered, and, thank God, we are friends."

"Wm. Ewen, our children are to be married. Here I give you the best and dearest boy on earth in return for the one I took from you." Then he sank back exhausted.

Just then a priest who had been hurriedly summoned came to administer the last Sacraments to the dying man

and all retiring into the church they left Jim Slagerty to make his final peace with his God.

As William Ewen accompanied by his daughter and newly adopted son, retired from the Holy Table after receiving the Babe of Peace into his soul, he knelt before the crib of Bethlehem and thanked God as he had never thanked him before.

Again he found himself musing, but how unlike his musing on that Xmas Eve twenty-six years ago.

“How happy I feel he thought and yet, how different from that other happiness! How grateful I am to God! How merciful he has been to both of us—for how many are called away without repentance!”

And then as he dwelt on his newly-found happiness he poured forth a prayer for the repose of the soul of James Slagerty.

And as he knelt there, that joyful refrain sung by the Angels two thousand years ago sang in his heart:—

“Peace on earth good-will to men.” and William Ewen felt a happiness he had not known for years—a happiness born of the love of God and Man.

—A. A. F. '27



I love to wander through the woodlands hoary  
In the soft light of an autumnal day,  
When Summer gathers up her robes of glory  
And like a dream of pleasure glides away.

—*Sarah Whitnem.*

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The time draws near the birth of Christ;  
The moon is hid; the night is still;  
The Christmas bells from hill to hill  
Answer each other in the mist.

—*Tennyson.*

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I heard the bells on Christmas day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet the words repeat  
Of peace on earth goodwill to men!

—*Longfellow.*