

The Turn of the Tide

"Trinity" was ringing out the sweet old hymn "Adeste Fideles" in recognition of the Xmas. morning as Jack Nelson left the office for home ; and raising his head at the sound of the old familiar bells he breathed a prayer of thanks-giving that at last those busy rushing days which preceeded the Xmas. holiday were at an end.

The air was clear and sharp after the storm which raged the early part of the night and the snow lay in a soft feathery mantle upon the streets and buildings, but he paid little heed to the invigorating atmosphere or his surroundings,—his thoughts were of other Xmas'es., spent back home, each one standing out like the white lights of the city boulevard, and he grew heavy and sick at heart. He loathed the thought of spending the day at the hotel which of late he had the habit of calling "home." Although ease and luxury were there in plenty, still to his mind all the furniture and bric-a-brac in the world would not constitute one home.

On reaching the hotel he went directly to his room, but not to rest. He pulled a chair up to the window and lighting a cigarette, gazed sadly out over the now dimly lighted city, endeavoring to banish the unholy thoughts of his boss, and his constant struggle for a mere living.

His thoughts now ran back to the day he left home to make his way in that great industrial metropolis, and how he had fancied that the spirit of fortune was hovering over his head to turn his speculations and theories to profitable transactions ; of how from day to day his meagre capital slowly dwindled away until he was now but as one of the many thousands who thronged the city thoro-fares, who depended solely on the good graces of their bosses for a living. Yes ! he thought, he had been an utter failure, his physical ability would never stand the nervous tension to go on in the same capacity of bread-winning.

Slowly the worn out body relaxed, the burnt out cigarette fell from his fingers, and he was wafted away

on the wings of a dream. He was back home again to the center of his affections, where he loved and his love was returned.

The mellow rays of the Xmas sunshine were flooding the countryside, and a sense of almost sacredness seemed to pervade the place as he walked gently up the roadway from the station, renewing again the scenes of his childhood. Yes! he would steal quietly in and take them by surprise. His hand was almost upon the knob when suddenly the door opened and with the words "Jack, my boy" he was folded in the tender embrace of his mother.

The features of the dreamer twitched nervously, and he awoke with a sudden start, the kindly words still ringing in his ears. He almost imagined the speaker was in the room. He rose languidly from the chair and consulted his watch. It was now five o'clock. A few early worshippers were hurrying along the streets to morning devotions, and only the grating of the street cars and the clang of their bells disturbed the peacefulness of the morning. He would go back home this very day he thought to himself. He made a hasty toilet and collecting a few articles in a travelling bag descended quietly to the office and left a few brief instructions with the clerk in regard to calls while he should be gone.

An hour later he was comfortably seated in the pullman of a Great Western Express, half enjoying the blur of flying scenery from the window. The car was filled with belated Xmas travellers, and his eyes wandered from one to the other, studying the expressions of each face until he was wholly absorbed in his surroundings, forgetful that he was an ill-humored, ill-paid, overworked newspaper reporter in a wild flight for freedom.

The train was now coming into the open country places and was fast gaining speed. It swung around curves and bellowed through echoing stations at a mad rate. It seemed as if it were some huge monster in a wild dash for freedom, trying to get clear of the long line of pullmans which were encumbering its progress. He partly guessed they were trying to make up for the

delay in getting away from the city. He was about to consult his Folder when a terrible crash came. He was pitched violently forward, the cars buckled up on end, balanced for an instant and then crashed over on their side, then all was blank to Jack Nelson's mind.

II

The news of the terrible accident on the Great Western Railroad was trickling over the wires from town to town,—slowly back to the Mecca of the prairie province,—the Mecca of Jack Nelson's early fancies and ambitions, as he slowly opened his eyes amid the turmoil and confusion of the wreck. Was he dreaming again, he thought, or was it the horrid realization of which he felt conscious. If it were, he had miraculously escaped, for he felt in no way the least sense of pain. He lay perfectly still for several minutes, to collect his thoughts and strength, and then looked for some means of escape from the twisted mass of iron girders, splintered timbers and overturned trucks which hemmed him in on all sides, as if stayed in their destructive work by some Divine-power.

Outside he could hear the hum of voices intermingled with the moaning of the injured and the blows of axes upon the roof of the car in an attempt to excavate the injured and ill fated passengers from the crumpled mass of wreckage. Vainly he tried to force an exit through the entangled mass. He shouted and moaned in his futile efforts to free himself, but all to no avail and then sank exhausted amid the debris. An icy chill stole about his heart as he thought of his impending death, as the wreckage might now at any moment settle and slowly crush his life out before assistance could arrive, or perhaps he thought at this very moment the terrible fire fiend was completing the work of destruction. Frightful visions of his funeral cortege flitted through his mind until he thought he was going mad. He tried to think of holy things and make peace with his Maker, but the awfulness of the situation was ever before his eyes, and again he elapsed into a state of coma.

The untiring efforts of the willing workers were slowly but surely cutting an entrance into the wreck and at last the limp form of Jack Nelson was borne to the opening where all the means of restoration was applied and slowly the color once more ebbed back to the pallid cheek. He was soon conscious of kindly hands arranging bandages about his aching brow and cheery words spoken in his ear. An auxiliary train had now arrived and with others he was placed aboard and was soon on his way back to the city.

But this day saw the turn of the tide in Jack Nelson's life. The two long weeks during which he lay in the hospital afforded him ample time for reflection, and the sufferings of those around him made a deep impression upon him. By the time he was able to return to the office, he had come to a realization of the fact that he had very many things to be thankful for, and that the misery and dissatisfaction of his past life were due, not so much to the adverse circumstances in which he was placed, as to his own selfish disposition. He, accordingly, formed the resolution to take a different view of life for the future, to think less of himself and of his own comfort and, above all, to put the very best that was in him into his work. The change thus wrought in his manner, and especially in his application to duty, was very soon noticed by his employer, with the result that, ere another Christmas morning dawned, he was promoted from the humble rank of a reporter to a higher and more remunerative position.

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