

A Nest of His Own*

(By Milo Milton.)

The woman with the baby carriage essayed to cross the street at the very moment Officer Baxter was engaged in a wordy dispute with an insolent truck driver. He did not see the accident—he sensed it. An intuitive instinct told him that something had happened, and he wheeled abruptly just in time to behold the gruesome finale. Gentle hands lifted the woman and carried her to a waiting ambulance. There was first a crowd, then a dense throng, and suddenly all traffic had ceased. He heard the sharp, shrill oath of a man and the subdued murmur of many awed voices. A sort of tense under-current of emotion swept the whole of a city block.

Twenty minutes later the incident was forgotten. Street cars moved forward, automobiles whisked away to the accompanying tune of purring cylinders, pedestrians elbowed and jostled each other in the haste and hurry of a busy afternoon. But in the mind of Officer Baxter, whose fourteen years on the city police force should have inured him to such occurrences, persisted the tragic picture. He wondered who the woman was. A strange interest pricked him. Time and time again, standing there with hand raised and eyes strained to every exigence, there reverted the unhappy vision of the limp, helpless form and the white troubled faces of many onlookers.

Baxter was relieved at six o'clock. He reported at the police station, lingering a few moments to gather a few resulting details of the tragedy.

"A strange case," the Chief informed him. "Woman dead; the child practically uninjured."

"What's her name?" inquired Baxter, his face grave and troubled, "or haven't you found out yet?"

The Chief reached for a paperweight and sat for a moment thoughtfully fingering it.

"I don't know," he admitted. "There were no identifying papers; no inquiries. I have three men working on the case right now."

Baxter squared his broad shoulders and half-turned in readiness to depart.

"Where is the baby?" he asked.

"At the general hospital," the Chief answered. Then immediately his eyes became soft and luminous.

"You ought to see that kid," he confided. "Just a small scratch right here across the left cheek and a slight bruise over one eye. Don't seem to mind it at all. And not a whimper—not a whimper! Reminded me of my own little boy."

Thinking deeply, Baxter walked slowly into the open air. Dusk lay over the city, a darkness pierced by a million man-made stars. The streets fairly palpitated with life. Life swayed and billowed and pushed its course heedlessly and thoughtlessly on. Life smiled in the faces of the passers-by, and scowled in the dark corners of the alleyways. Everywhere was life, activity, color, action.

*Note.—By a curious coincidence the name used for the police officer by the writer of this story, was found, on inquiry, to be not only that of a member of Vancouver Force, but of an officer at present on point duty in the city. We have, therefore, changed the name.—Editor.