

he was hungry even though he ate it in the kitchen.

His wife was not stirring and he guessed that she was sleeping in the spare room at the west side of the cottage. It was said of the Burnside cottage that it was a proper bungalow, built on broad lines and low-set. It was a pretty and a comfortable home even if it was close to the railroad track. Although a street separated them from the track they lived, as Tom loved to say, "on the main line." They were isolated from the rest of the town, too, by many vacant lots.

Tom roamed restlessly about for a time. He busied himself with inconsequential pottering in the kitchen and cellar. He picked up a paper and half read it, dipped into his favorite magazine without interest, and at last settled into blank cogitation. He thought he heard his wife's breathing and though it seemed odd that she was not up and around the house as usual he dashed from his mind any tendency to dwell upon it.

It was getting near his time to go out on his night run. His train left at 8.45. It was his custom to be at the round house at eight.

He went back to the kitchen and made some more lamb sandwiches. He lighted the gas stove and made some tea. His supper was a solemn event and he ate little. He packed his lunch pail with the sandwiches that were left, put in some cake and a cut of pie, and got into his overalls. Manlike, he left the gas stove lighted. He started off. Before he had closed the front door he fancied he heard his name called faintly, "Tom!" He was sure it was Jessie's voice. He hesitated on the threshold.

"No," he muttered to himself. "She can't throw me down like she did this morning and fix it up with a word." Half way down the path he stopped again. "Wonder if I shouldn't go back," he mused. "Lord, it's miserable, living this way—trouble on the road and trouble at home. Hang it, no—I'll get over the other trouble first, then—" He hurried on.

The superintendent walked up to where he stood at his engine, oiling up. "I've pulled you through that scrape, Tom," he stated. "There won't be any demerits after all. I made it clear that the track was O.K. for full speed over that soft stretch and that I told you to make it. What followed was up to the next train, not you. The argument went all right and you're freed from all blame. Only, you may expect some surprise testing on speed, so be careful!"

Tom was grateful and he showed it. Yet he was not care free. His action toward Jessie called for adjustment. He was unfair with her. It was the man's place to comfort, not to be comforted. The enormity of the mistake had not sunk in, however, for he passed it off with a cheerful resolution:

"I'll give the usual toot passing the house and then we'll patch things up when I get back."

It would have been better had he adopted Bell's principle, but the train was ready to start now.

The two long toots, followed by a long, clear interval, then two short, sharp toots was the regular whistle-post signal with a touch of individuality. His wife had learned to read in it:

"All's well—good-bye!"

"Well, she's not up yet," he remarked, as he sounded the two long blasts. "Not a light in the house—but—but what's that on the east corner—smoke—fire!"

He had not seen the smoke nor the fire just breaking through the east corner under the roof until he was abreast with the house. The terror of it ran down his nerves and spoke in the tremors on the whistle cord.

He could not stop his train and go to the aid of his lonely wife. The nearest neighbor was three blocks away and might not see the fire until too late. Perhaps they might hear the erratic signals given out by his nervous manipulation of the whistle-cord, perhaps they did not listen to signals at all. More likely not, since they were not railroaders.

How did it start? The question assailed him like a hot arrow. The gas

gas! The house would be filled with it. Jessie would be suffocated!

"Here I am all safe," he murmured. "She will be burned to death unless some action is taken quick. And I'm calmly running away!" Goodness knows he was not calm. "Oh, it's horrible." His fireman tried to sympathize with him but he paid no attention to him at all. A mile passed. Another. They were exceeding the speed limit. Running away! No—not now. He was driving with method though breaking another rule. He would make Ringboro two minutes ahead of time and stop. He was not scheduled to stop there and there was no operator, but he could talk to the dispatcher. He made a quick stop in front of the station. He grabbed the fireman's lantern and rushed for the door, shoulder-on. It crashed in without resistance. He reached for the dispatching phone. Clamping the receivers to his ears he could hear the dispatcher droning

a thirty-one order. He interrupted. The dispatcher was Jim Desson.

"Jim! Jim Desson," he called, frantically. "Tom Burnside talking from Ringboro. My house at Bury is on fire. Ring alarm quick and call the house on 'phone. I'll wait."

The dispatcher cut short the order and departed. The operator took up the alarm and fired questions at Tom. They were sixty miles apart, but a fire is news and the operator at Juncona seldom heard anything stirring. Presently Jim Desson returned.

"Alarm's in, Tom, but I can't raise your house on 'phone. But don't worry. Leave it to me. I'll order the yard engine to go down and turn on the fire fighting equipment—they can reach your house from the track all right. Go ahead, J.O., repeat that order."

Tom knew that further conversation was off. He hurled an earnest thanks huskily back to Desson. He understood

that no interruption might be prolonged to the detriment of the business of train dispatching.

He glanced at his watch as he went back to his engine. One minute and thirty-five seconds! It seemed hours. He was still ahead of time. He would keep ahead of time and fall back when approaching the point where the slow order was on.

"Desson's a brick. But can he save her?" he worried. "It'll take time to get the yard engine on the job. It may be too late. It will," he decided. He saw the worst at every turn of the argument until he had an indelible picture in his mind of the terrible holocaust. Every mile brought fresh vividness to the picture. A maniac was driving that engine by the time it had reached the terminal, Oskoska.

First aid men on the spot had never a case like his to deal with before. All they could do was to carry him to a cab and



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