

'That's good, Ben,' with a suggestive look that half bewildered him. 'Don't forget your tally strap in the push.'

While Bently was helping out a stout old lady at the next corner, Ferris slipped off the car on the other side. He boarded the next Sixteenth street car passing and rode over to the power house to fill out his order blanks for tomorrow.

Tom Bently was meantime brooding sorrowfully over Ferris' suggestive, 'Don't forget your tally strap in the push.' It was the first reflection, direct or indirect, upon his own honesty that he had ever heard from man or woman. Coming from his friend Ferris, whom he would trust with uncounted millions were they his, and whom he had hitherto believed would trust him likewise, the sting of the poisoned hint became momentarily more painful.

'What in the world's happened, Tom?' questioned Miss Leisurely, one of his regular patrons, as he helped her gallantly on the car. 'Mother ain't seriously ill again, I hope? Never saw you looking so woebegone like.'

'She's real well just now, thank you, Miss Leisurely,' he almost whispered, his mouth close to her ear, as he handed her up the top step and rang his car ahead. 'Fact is, I put in an extra hour last night at my Correspondence University studies, and it was a bit too much for me.'

'Mussn't burn the candle too long at both ends, Tom,' she corrected jocularly, sitting down on an outside seat near his usual stand.

'Only way to get any light out of the candle in my fix, Miss Leisurely,' was his rejoinder.

The lady spotter, in 'Salvation Army' uniform and a bundle of *War Cries* under her arm, sitting inside, had a sharp casual eye on the pair. It had been hinted by Goodwin that an occasional free ride to some of his most admiring lady passengers might account for somewhat of Bently's popularity. So there was a reward in sight for the spotter first detecting him in the act of bestowing such favors. But, to their increasing chagrin, Bently collected and rung in his fares from the fairest and most intimate of his passengers with unerring alacrity.

For months together they had watched Bently as cats watch mice without being able to pick a flaw in his work. Nothing could convince Mr. Goodwin that there was not a big leak there somewhere, and he at last told Ferris that he would take a hand in the business himself. He could scarcely support a family decently on his own salary, yet some of their conductors were laying up money hand over fist on one-tenth his wages and building big houses at that.

'I rather like to see a man getting on, Mr. Goodwin, even though I can't—shows he's not losing his rest in carousing away his wages, an' he comes on duty clear-headed and with a steady nerve.'

'Better get right in and join the Purity League, Ferris,' stepping abruptly into his private office and shutting himself in.

Next morning Mr. Goodwin gave Ferris orders to shift Bently on to the Ruralton run, car forty-nine, and to put Snider in his place. The change, instead of being a discomfiture or loss to Bently, was, on the contrary, a benefit in more ways than one. His new run took him well out of town over a pleasant stretch of open country, dotted with mostly fine homes, half hidden in tall palm, camphor, magnolia, rubber, blossoming acacia, and other trees. In this fresher fragrant air he began to brace up and take on flesh almost immediately. There were not one-quarter the fares to collect, and he found most of his passengers agreeable and pleasant people to meet.

So Bently's popularity soon followed him to his new ground of activity. Mr. Goodwin, in a month's time, began to marvel at the increase of travel on their Ruralton branch. The attractive residence suburb was, of course growing fast, but that was not all. Nor did the returns of Bently quite come up to the travel on his car, though it was 10 per cent. more than that of the other conductor on that run.

Goodwin had kept his own counsel of late regarding this matter, and was doing a bit of private spotting on his own account. He had, in fact, come to almost suspect Ferris of being in some sort of league with Bently in cozening the company.

One afternoon about half-past 5, when Bently came, on his in-run, a little distance within the city limits, a rather delicate-looking young woman with a feeble child in her arms got on the car. Her woebegone look and generally careworn, pinched aspect, seen at closer range, attracted the attention of the other passengers. The frequent long-drawn sobs of the poor child told of its suffering. Mother and child were rather poorly clothed, and the poor maternal heart seemed to be almost breaking in the fruitless effort to soothe and quiet it. There were a score or more of other passengers on the car, and eyes

were focussed on Bently when he stepped up to the woman to collect her fare.

The appeal in her look up into his face was something that would 'pierce the heart of a stone.'

'I haven't a penny in the world, conductor,' she wailed. 'Me poor husband is dead six months gone, an' ye see the state the poor child is in and—'

'We're not running a benevolent society on this line, madam. Fare, please.'

'I'm on my way to the dispensary for some medicine for the poor, dyin' crachure, an' God's me judge, I'm not able to walk.' She saw that Bently's words belied his feelings. 'And if ye put me off the car, we'll both perhaps die on the heartless street.'

The other passengers had by this become deeply interested, as Bently stopped his car to help on a young couple beaming with the pleasure of being in one another's company. 'Come, my good woman,' he continued, on ringing in the two fares, 'you pay your fare or get off at the next corner.'

The woman broke completely down in a fit of lamentation. Bently looked suggestively around at the commiserating passengers as he rang to stop the car. There being no practical response to the cries of mother or child, he was about to take hold of her to eject her from the car when a faint scream from the child unnerved his arm from such inhuman act.

'I can't do it,' he told himself inaudibly. 'I'll turn in her fare myself first. I could never look a woman or child square in the face again if I did.'

In the engrossing watchfulness of the rest of that run through the heart of the turbulent city Bently forgot the poor woman and her woes. He was, however, presently reminded of them on coming near the end of his run, when there were only a couple of other passengers left on his car, yet there seemed to be less sorrow in the woman's face and the child rested and breathed easier. Then his heart thrilled with a great joy at having had the manhood to break for once the iron rule of the company. Both might have died in the street, as she said, had he put her off. He shifted a nickel of his own from his vest pocket to his jacket pouch with the trip's fares and rung it in.

He was now coming close to the power house, and was presently amazed at seeing the feeble woman brace herself up in the seat to an erect, vigorous posture. Her eyes, too, after wiping them a bit with her handkerchief, darted a luminous look of perplexing inquiry at him, as much as to say, 'Now, then, my smart conductor, what do you think of yourself?' What under heaven could it all mean? Had he been sold? He had somewhere, sometime seen those strangely-bright eyes before. But ere he had time to answer himself the gripman stopped the car in front of the power-house and the woman got off, spry as a kitten, hastening into the office with the child in her arms. Bently, steadying himself, followed her into empty his pocket of the trip's fares. But she had disappeared with Goodwin into the private office ere he reached the door of the front one.

'Nothing new, Bently. You can start out on time,' Ferris directed, wondering what new strange incident had befallen him on that last trip.

On his next forenoon's run Bently, from the start, found himself the target of the sinister remark and oblique look of every conductor and gripman he passed. Such painful change in the attitude of his fellow-workmen, among whom he had hitherto been something of a hero, half maddened him. Something terribly damaging to his name must have happened quite unknown to himself. He could not even think clearly on what it could possibly be. Yet he somehow could not get rid of the notion that the woman and sick child of last night had something to do with it.

'What's the matter with you, Jim?' he demanded sharply of his gripman as he jumped on the forward platform with the bar after shifting a switch. 'What ye staring so at me for?'

'Dun know, Ben,' curtly. 'The cat can look at the king, I guess, can't he?'

At 1 o'clock, when they were relieved by the afternoon crew, Bently was summoned to appear in the main up-town office at 3 o'clock. Mr. Goodwin wished to see him.

'Do try and eat something, son,' the mother urged, as Bently sat with her at the little kitchen dinner table. 'You ain't been yourself since last night. Your eyes are swollen as if you hadn't slept none for a week.'

'Nothing but a slight bilious attack, mother. I'll be all over it in a day or two.'

Ferris was in the office waiting when Bently went in. The certainty of his innocence of any violation of the company's rules or other neglect of duty nerved Bently up and gave his countenance a look of fearless innocence. Ferris met this look with an almost pitiful sympathy, which was far from pleasing to Bently.