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Above Circumstances

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Roger heard the impersonal sounding voice of the nurse float over the loud-speaking system, announcing to the many on the floor that visiting hours were now over and asking the visitors to please leave as quickly as possible. He turned his head on the pillow and looked toward the window, where city lights were blinking and twinkling in the deep darkness outside.

What a wretched way to begin the new year, he thought, wiggling his free foot out from beneath the sheet and surveying the heavy cast which encased the other leg and foot and hung suspended in mid-air by so many metal bars and pieces.



He groaned, trying to change the position of his body. Lying flat on his back was never his favorite way of sleeping or relaxing, he mused silently, dreading the hour when the lights would be turned off in the room and the long night would stretch in a seemingly endless way before him. What a nuisance the cumbersome cast was! It kept him bound to one position and only one. He felt like he was a prisoner of the bed.

The man in the bed next to him moved his hand slightly and Roger, fascinated by the movement, watched for any further signs of life. For the moment, he forgot his own misery in observing the still and lifeless form of the accident victim who seemed more dead than alive. Then, losing interest when nothing further happened, he was reminded again of his own misfortune and, groaning loudly, he buried his head in the pillow and shut his eyes.

"Feeling sorry for yourself again, I see," Mrs. Cameron remarked as, tweaking the uncovered toes, she began straightening the sheet on Roger's bed.

"If you were me, you'd feel sorry, too," Roger declared emphatically, opening his eyes and looking the silver-haired head nurse full in her kind face. "After all," he continued, "it's no fun for a seventeen-year-old to be confined to a bed with his leg chained to some ridiculous-looking contraption so he can't even change body positions."

Mrs. Cameron continued to smooth the wrinkles out of the bed sheet, tucking the bottom in tightly and bringing the sheet up beneath Roger's chin. "Maybe you'd prefer being in his shape," she said, gesturing to the bed beside him, "I rather believe, if it were possible, that Mr. Kennuchi would gladly and willingly exchange places with you..." Her sentence trailed meaningfully.

Roger turned his head.

"We're really quite a breed of ingrates," the kindly-faced woman continued, "taking too much for granted. The Lord sends His rain on the just and the unjust. Always, we feel we should have only the best possible things come our way. We have never learned the invaluable lessons which come by living above our circumstances. Of course, the only way one can do this joyfully is to have a proper and right relationship with his God. Then, by the enabling grace and power of the Divine, one is able to accept whatever the Saviour sends as the perfect will of God for his life."

Mrs. Cameron hurried over to Mr. Kennuchi's bed and, after checking the life-sustaining tubes and machines, she left the room, her footsteps fading with the shadows down the hallway.

Roger grabbed hold of the metal bar above him and tried to ease his back off the mattress for a brief moment. Regardless of what Mrs. Cameron said or thought, he decided, it was still bum luck for a healthy, robust teenager.., a boy especially! . . . to be laid up on a hospital bed at the entrance of a new year. His parents (at this very minute), and his sisters, were all sitting in the pew inside the church enjoying the preaching and singing of the Watch Night service. And here he was, a prisoner to a bunch of metal contraptions . . . rods and bars and such. It wasn't fair; no, it wasn't. He should be with his family.

A sudden sharp pain shooting through his leg made him wince with pain. Grabbing hold of the metal bar above him, and squeezing it for all he was worth, he groaned.

Mrs. Cameron came back into the room, a chart in her hand and a bag of I V solution for the immobile man. Giving Roger a quick sideways glance, she asked, "Are you in pain?"

"Am I ever!" came the quick reply. "It's bad enough to be laid up; but oh, this pain! That's double trouble."

Fastening the bag of solution in its proper place, the nurse remarked sadly, "You don't know what pain is. I wish it were possible for you to make the rounds with me . . ."

Again her sentence trailed meaningfully and her eyes shimmered with tears. "You have so much to be thankful for," she added, checking the flow of solution. "Yes, so very, very much! But of course, until one learns to appreciate the many blessings of God, and until he is thankful in all things, he will never believe that there are others whose lot is far worse and more critical than his own. Self-pity is a treacherous thing," she added by way of warning as she passed through the doorway and out into the silent hall.

She was back in a little while with a pain pill for Roger. "Now take this," she ordered kindly, "and then try to think beautiful thoughts. Your breaks will mend faster."

When she was gone, Roger felt a surge of pity wash over him for her. The hospital was short handed tonight, he knew -- so many who wanted to spend New Year's Eve with their family and friends. And while Mrs. Cameron's talk nettled him considerably, he realized that he owed much to the deeply spiritual woman whose life was lived as consistently the same at home as it was while she was on duty. He knew this; she attended the same church as he.

Roger wiggled his foot free of the .carefully tucked-in sheet and let the air hit it. Hospitals were stuffy enough, generally, without having the covers holding one in place like a straight jacket, he thought, relishing the coolness of the top of the sheet.

The machine on Mr. Kennuchi's side of the room clicked several times -- to let the world know that it was still in good working order, Roger guessed. Then all settled down to quietness in the room. He had grown accustomed to the little sound and rarely gave it more than a passing glance anymore. At first, though, it had bothered him. It gave him the creeps. In the stillness of the night, especially. But not anymore.

Then he thought about his roommate. What made him do it he didn't know exactly. Mrs. Cameron's words? Perhaps. Yes, it could be. Was the man a Christian? Where would he go when, and if, he died? Eternity! That was forever and ever. Such a long, long time; endless really.

Roger felt suddenly hot. Giving the sheet a toss, he lay in his pajamas, uncovered. He hadn't prayed one prayer for Mr. Kennuchi and his salvation and restoration to health, he realized with alarm. And he had professed to love the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, body and spirit, too. What's more, he was the assistant young people's leader.

The revelation was startling and frightening to the young man. Maybe Mrs. Cameron was right; he was full of self-pity. And (true again) he hadn't learned the lesson of living above his circumstances. He had allowed his circumstances to get above him.

For once, Roger was thankful that the light was turned off inside the room; he could cry without being seen. He couldn't kneel, that was certain, but prayer, he suddenly realized, was not necessarily the posture in which one was found or seen. It was a matter of one's heart. And in his heart, he was kneeling.

The fountains of the deep were broken; he saw himself as God saw him: full of pride and conceit and self-righteousness. Terrified by the divine revelation and uncovering, he cried to God for help, begging forgiveness for his heart full of self-pity then seeking diligently for heart-cleansing and purity.

He had no idea how long he prayed; he only knew that somewhere in the wee hours of the morning, he was wholly sanctified. His heart, emptied of all self, was made perfect and holy in love . . . Divine Love. Billows of holy joy flooded his happy and now-at-rest soul. With a peace like he never experienced before rolling over him, he finally fell asleep.

The new shift of nurses had come on duty when he awoke. He hadn't slept much, but his soul felt wonderfully rested, refreshed and relaxed. His body, too.

Mrs. Cameron, checking on him and sticking her head around the door before going home, remarked kindly, "I hope you don't feel badly toward me, Roger .. for all I said to you last night. But I do want God's best for you, and His best is holiness of heart. You have great potential, but God can never use you fully until the death blow of the Holy Ghost has been struck to your heart.., your inmost self."

Roger smiled. "You mean you haven't seen the difference!" he exclaimed with shining eyes. "It happened in my heart. Somewhere between the time you left my room and the early morning hours, I got sanctified wholly. I'm glad you told me what you did; I needed it. God used your words to open my eyes to my carnal condition. Thanks, Mrs. Cameron. Yes, thanks . . much."

"Now I can go home and get some much-needed sleep and rest, Roger. I've been praying and fasting many days for you -- that God would reveal your heart's condition to you and burn out all the impure."

Tweaking him on his uncovered toes, she said, "You have made a certain nurse very happy. Until tonight's shift, God bless you."

After she had gone, Roger closed his eyes in prayer for Mr. Kennuchi and his salvation. Then he thought of the cumbersome cast and the metal contraptions holding his leg up in mid-air and he laughed out loud."

"And what's so funny?" one of the pert nurses asked, coming into the room just then.

Pointing to the up-raised leg, Roger remarked, "You won't understand, I'm sure, but I'm finally above my circumstances."

"It looks like the other way around to me," the blonde-haired nurse remarked with a chuckle.

"Not really," the young man replied, thinking of all the time he would be having in which to get Scripture-based subjects for the Young People's meetings. Finally, he could work for the Lord with all self out of the way.

The thought filled his heart with joy; waves of glory washed over him and the new year spread itself before him with glory and splendor.

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THE END