



# The Ten-Thirty Call

by Percy Wilson

*Pie and Platitudes Almost Prevent the Call-boy from Getting Burnside's Signature.*

**S**NAPPER was looking over the yardmaster's shoulder when the operator handed the latter the order for an extra. As was not unusual with him on very slight provocation, the yardmaster immediately "went off the iron." "Where's that call-boy?" he demanded. "What's become of that red-head? Where is— Oh!" as he turned his head and came afoul of Snapper's smirking countenance, "here you are!"

"Yes, here I are!" mocked Snapper. "Go on, go on—say what you were going to. Don't mind me! Where did you expect to find me—in your lap?" The call-boy was aggrieved.

"What's the earliest you can call this extra for?" was the brisk query. "Ten-thirty?"

With an exasperating affectation of indifference, Snapper let his eye wander to the clock, gaped a minute over the crew-board, and gradually came around to the book. "I reckon," he answered. Then, with sudden interest: "Who's to shovel smoke?"

"Oh, you take notice, do you? Now, that's what I want to impress on you. Listen."

"'Laying a hand to his ear,'" quoted Snapper from a favorite author, and suiting

action to the speech, "'he gave close heed to the fiendish disclosure.' Go on."

The yardmaster was too accustomed to these burlesques to honor them with any attention. "Go for Burnside," he directed.

"He was let off."

"I know that. Pay attention. He was to be off until midnight, unless we should need him in some emergency this morning; and this is the emergency. He promised to stay at home till nine o'clock, and not to leave town before ten." He glanced at the clock. "It's only eight-fifty-eight now. You ought to find him easily," winking to the operator.

"Sure!" returned Snapper. "If only I hadn't bent one of me wings! What was it the coal-heaver wanted off for, anyway?"

"To rob a bank, maybe. Don't bother me; but go get him."

"Put his name down," said Snapper in disgust. "I'll get him."

The yardmaster entered the name and handed the call-book over. "Now, hustle," he directed.

Snapper thrust the book in his pocket and struck an attitude. "Beware, James Burnside!" he

declaimed. "Your doom is knelled, and the avenger—"

The avenger was the yardmaster, and Snapper got through the doorway just in time to escape his foot.

"Hang that kid! " laughed the yardmaster. "He gets on my nerves, with his spouting and fool antics. But he's a good caller," he observed to the operator; "and, mind my word, he'll come back here with Burnside's signature in his book. Heaven knows where he'll find him, though, for Jim's tricky, and he'll dodge if he can. He did beg hard to be off."

In spite of his unhesitating assertion, the call-boy had very grave doubts about getting Burnside. The promise to remain at his boarding-place for a call till nine o'clock made it unlikely that he would be there one minute later, while the additional hour did not give much time for finding him in a town of fifteen thousand people. What Snapper most desired to know was, where was he intending to go at ten? He had a suspicion that it had something to do with Kitty Carnigan.

It was well known among the fireman's acquaintances that he was much enamored of this black-eyed young lady, and, taking into consideration the hours he wanted leave, from ten in the morning until midnight, Snapper at once decided that a knowledge of Miss Carnigan's plans for the day would be very helpful.

Being too wise, however, to attempt to get this from the young lady herself, as soon as he had called those two of the crew who lived most convenient, he moved directly on the engineer, whom, in the usual order of convenience for himself, he would otherwise have called last of all. His information came without his asking it.

"Who's to fire for me this trip?" the engineer inquired as he look the book.

"Can't you see?" said Snapper, laying a finger on the name.

"Ho!" laughed the engineer, "you'll not get Burnside. He's going out to Maple Park on the ten o'clock car with his girl and her folks to a basket-picnic. He's keeping an eye peeled for you."

Snapper restrained himself. "It would be a shame for him to miss seeing me," he retorted. "I'll go out and let him have a look before he goes."

With joy in his heart, Snapper went on. Calling a fireman for the ten-thirty extra was merely a matter of business. Snatching Burnside from a contemplated day's happiness with his lady-love would make it a genuine pleasure. It would square up a debt, too; for when he had been surreptitiously "resting his eyes" on a bench in the roundhouse some time before this, Burnside had taken the opportunity to lampblack his face, and Snapper had wandered around an hour before discovering it. "Reveng-g-ge!" he muttered as he hurried to the northern edge of town.

Back of the row of houses, of which the Carnigan home was one, lay an open meadow stretching to adjoining fields, and on each side to partly graded streets. At the end of the street to the east stood the domicile of Mrs. Cort, where Burnside and several others of the railroad men boarded.

From here a path led through the meadow, across a little stream lined with briers and alders, along the rear of the row of houses, and then to the street through an open corner lot. It made a short cut from the boarding-house into town, and was particularly in favor with Mr. Burnside for the opportunities it gave him in passing back and forth to drop in for a word or two with Miss Kitty.

Allowing for the possibility of Burnside staying overtime at the boarding-house to make an extended toilet, Snapper went there first, only to find his room empty. Mrs. Cort could give no information. There was little hope of catching him at Carnigan's, for whichever way

the house might be approached, there was probably a close watch kept if Burnside was there, and he would get away unseen in the opposite direction.

To lie in wait and take him from his inamorata as they were starting for the car would, have suited the call-boy's dramatic longings most, but it was not an impossibility that the fireman had already forestalled this by an arrangement to meet the party somewhere along the line.

In this uncertainty the immediate thing to be done was to get on his quarry's trail. Snapper gritted his teeth and struck across the meadow. At the farther side of the run he stopped and, on a sudden thought, got down and examined both ends of the short plank that spanned it. Without doing anything more, however, he got up again and went on, and soon entered the Carnigan's rear gate. He had kept his eye sharply on the kitchen window, and flattered himself that he had stolen up unnoticed; yet, when he stopped at the kitchen door, Miss Carnigan seemed not surprised to see him.

There was something suspicious in this. To his inquiry she replied that Mr. Burnside had been there that morning, but had gone into town. Was he wanted?

Oh, no, he wasn't wanted. Snapper had merely noted that he had been looking poorly of late, and stopped to inquire about his health. "Gwan!" said Snapper, and hurried to the front gate.

He sprinted to the corner just in time to see the fireman turn to the right a block ahead. On an easy trot the call-boy followed after.

To his surprise, when he reached the turn he was still nearly a block in the rear, and Burnside was not running, but only walking fast. Snapper let himself out several notches more and put on a full head of steam, only to find when he came to this last corner that the fireman had completely disappeared. Lounging

on a step near by, however, was one of Burnside's friends, and Snapper slackened up for information.

"Burnside?" said the man. "Yep; just passed here with throttle wide open and both pops up. Hit the curve and shot up that first alley" —pointing— "and he was going some. Why, I'll bet he was half-way up the side of that house when he made the turn, and I reckon you'll find his footmarks on the wall.

"He called to me to tell you to hurry up, kid," he said with a grin; "and you want to move lively, or he'll lose you."

Snapper knew this was all gammon. He glanced at his watch. It was almost nine-thirty.

"I'll look for those footmarks some other time," he remarked dryly; "I'm in a hurry now," and he started off afresh at a jog-trot in the direction that had been indicated.

It was evident that Burnside had gone into hiding some place soon after turning the corner; and there being still time for him to get back to Carnigan's and help the party with their baskets to the car, Snapper wanted to give him every encouragement toward doing it. As for himself, as soon as he was safely out of sight he put on extra speed back toward the meadow.

Once there, he hastened across to the little creek and, unseating the farther end of the plank, dug some of the dirt from beneath it and set it up again, but resting now on a pointed stone. When he had tested it to his satisfaction, he crossed carefully back and, under cover of the bushes, made his way along to the street. Almost as he peered out he saw the fireman come warily from the corner ahead and enter the Carnigan gate.

"It seems almost a shame to do it," commented the call-boy with a grin. "He acts so nice about it."

Having no longer any necessity for concealment, Snapper got up on the sidewalk and walked on toward the house, whistling cheerfully.

"There's that long-legged kid again!" ejaculated Burnside. "If he comes back here to the kitchen, I'll slip out the front door and join you on the car somewhere. If he comes to the front, keep him till I can get to the other side of the run; and after he's gone, I'll come around by the street."

Snapper's schedule took him to the front door. There was no answer to his first ring, so he rang again; and shortly Miss Carnigan answered.

"Oh! it's you, is it?" was her tart greeting. "What do you want now? It's a pity you couldn't have come around to the kitchen door."

"That's the fault of me tender heart, Kitty," returned the unabashed Snapper. "I want Jimmy Burnside, and I couldn't bear to break it to him sudden. You tell him."

"Didn't I tell you he had left here?"

"Aw, quit it, Kitty! Ain't he going on the picnic with you? Sure!"

"Well," was the admission, "he came back after you left, but he's gone again. You might find him at his boarding-house."

Snapper struggled to keep a straight face.

"I've been there once," he returned; "and the book of rules says" —he held his call-book close to his nose and thumbed over some blank pages— "it says, here: 'Rule 106—In all cases of doubt or uncertainty, see for yourself.' I've got to do it, Kitty," and he pushed past into the house.

"Oh, very well!" retorted the young lady, and followed through to where her mother and a younger sister were finishing the packing of the picnic-baskets in the kitchen. "Now! are you satisfied?"

Snapper made no reply. Something of more immediate interest absorbed all his faculties, for his eyes had lighted on the top layer in one of the baskets. "Are those some of your own pies, Mrs. Carnigan?" he inquired in

awed tones.

"Sure!" was the answer. "Whose would they be?"

"But, some that you baked yourself?" he persisted with an air of strong disbelief.

"Of course!"

"Mrs. Carnigan" —he wanted a calm, judicial answer to this question— "are your pies as good as they used to be?"

"Well, I never!" cried Mrs. Carnigan, flinging up her hands. "If you ain't the blarneyer!"

Snapper was not a beauty. He was still growing; his joints were too loose, his feet too big, his clothes too small; yet when he opened his mouth to take in the piece of pie that was immediately cut for him, expanding until his freckles ran together and his whole countenance resembled nothing so much as a wedge disappearing through a large, rusty washer, he became for the moment a sight that gave true joy to Mrs. Carnigan's domestic heart.

"That certainly was good," he murmured in heartfelt commendation as he swallowed the last of it. Then he met Miss Carnigan's anxious eye and gave a sudden impish start. "Gee, Kitty!" he exclaimed. "Some one's fell in the creek."

Kitty jumped. "Nonsense!" she retorted. "You couldn't hear that from here."

"No," admitted Snapper, Then, with a prodigious wink: "But I bet it's happened, just the same." And, darting out the door, he ran back through the yard.

Stopping at the creek merely long enough to pull the plank out of the water and set it roughly in place, he hastened to the boarding-house and went softly up to the fireman's room. He snickered to himself at hearing Burnside muttering objurgations inside and thrashing wet clothes about.

He tried to peek through the keyhole, but the key was in it. He felt sure the door was locked, and he was afraid to try it for fear. his

quarry might take warning and even yet escape by going out the window and down over a convenient shed-roof.

In this dilemma the pie furnished him a hint, for, as it sought a cozy corner of his anatomy in which to dispose itself comfortably, it gave him a gentle internal tweak, in an instant he had doubled up as though taken with a violent cramp and, falling against the door with a horrible groan, seized the knob.

The door was locked, but as he sank on down to the floor he kept up a piteous moaning. In another moment the door opened and he fell

half inside.

“You—” began the fireman, then lost speech.

“Aw! sign the book,” said Snapper, thrusting it at him. “And be quick about it, too.” he added sternly. “I can’t be fooling all my time on you.”

Burnside mechanically signed.

“I hated to wet you up, Jimmy,” said Snapper as he took back the book. “but—”

He slammed the door and raced down the stairs from the irate fireman.