

scolded for it. Next Tuesday'll be the day mother'll be watching."

In the hush of the glorious light his thoughts wandered over years gone by. Far back, almost to infancy, did his memory stray, bringing up scenes vague and misty, incidents only dimly recalled; yet in all his mother's face, gentle and tender, seemed to stand out distinctly. Sometimes it bent over him in sickness, sometime he saw it in church, with the grave expression. Sometimes it bore a smile of sympathy with some of his small delights; again, perhaps, a frown, or a grieved look over his shortcomings.

"Yes, and I remember exactly how she looked when she whipped me, and how she would come to me in ten minutes afterwards, crying and begging me never to make her do it again. Poor mother," with a remorseful smile, "she didn't give it to me half hard enough."

"I wonder how she looks now." The thought came with a sharp pang. It had never before occurred to him to wonder whether his mother had changed in these years in which he had not seen her. The line of thought, once struck, seemed to lead on without his own volition. It must be that the anguish of his abrupt leave-taking, the anxiety for his welfare, and the longing for a sight of him during this weary time had written deep lines upon the patient face.

"There's Caleb back." James sprang up, as if in glad escape from the heavy thoughts, as the distant beat of hoofs smote upon his ear. "She is only his stepmother, and yet he walks right up to the business like a soldier, hating it as he does. Caleb has the making of a soldier in him, I believe."

James was many years older before he fully recognized the fact that there is nothing more heroic than the persistent standing by the duties, small or great, of every-day life.

"Hello, Caleb," he cried; "you've made a quick trip."

"Yes," said Caleb, still with the beaming face belonging to the finished letter. "Shag hasn't been at work to-day, and he's as full of jump as if—as if—he'd got a letter off himself."

James could not help joining in the boy's gleeful laugh.

"I wish I felt as good as you do, Caleb," he said.

"I'll tell you what," said Caleb, "with the air of one telling a great secret, 'I don't believe there's anything makes you feel half so good as doing something you think you ought to do.'"

"Not going to turn in?" he asked, returning from the stable after giving his little nag faithful care.

"No, I'm going to write a letter."

"I'm glad 'tisn't me," with an expressive shake of his head. "I'm tired enough to sleep for a week."

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Mother was not watching at the gate on the Tuesday on which a letter might be expected from James. Indeed, there sometimes crept over father and Susan a cold chill of fear that she might never stand there or anywhere else again.

For the feet which had taken so many steps in loving ministering, which had so patiently held to the round of small duties laid out by Him who orders all our ways, were at last taking a rest. She had been suffering from a slow fever, and the doctor shook his head with a discouraged face as day followed day, to be lengthened into week following week, and still the pulse grew weaker and the faded eyes dimmer.

"If there was anything to rouse her," the old doctor had said, sorely perplexed at the utter lack of result to all his applied remedies. "There isn't so much the matter with her; only a lack of vitality. Nothing seems to touch it."

He sat with a helpless, baffled look. During the latter weeks Susan had stolen out on Tuesday for a little season of wistful watching for the longed-for letter which had never come. But to-day she sat still, weighed down by the burden of dread of what might be, scarcely hearing the slow rumble of the wagon as father drove along the lane. A few moments later he appeared at the door and held up a letter before Susan's eyes. She forgot her caution in a glad spring toward him.

"A letter! A letter from James!"

She controlled her voice whisper, but mother had been stirred from her half stupor and had opened her eyes. The doctor was watching her.

"Read it," he said, motioning Susan to the seat at her mother's side.

"DEAR MOTHER,—I've been thinking to-night how long it is since I left home. I never thought it would be so long, really I didn't, when I got into a pet and came off. And if I've wondered once why I did it, I've wondered a thousand times, for I haven't in all these three years seen any place that was quite up to home. And if I was to stay three times three, I'd never find anybody like you and father and Susy."

"There's another thing I've been wondering, and that's whether you want to see such a good-for-nothing as me there again?"

A little sob came from mother, and Susan paused in alarm.

"Go on," said the doctor.

"But I'm 'most sure you would, and I'm coming home, mother. It won't be so very long before you see me. I've learned a lot of lessons since I left, and the one I've learned the best is that any boy who goes around the world hunting for a better place than home is a simpleton. So I'm coming to be your boy again. And if you don't find that I can be a comfort to you and father and Susy, why, all you can do is to send me away again."

"Her fever'll be up again," said Susy, bending over her mother in a flutter of joy and anxiety.

But there was a smile on mother's face, and a light of hope and peace in her eyes which had long been wanting there.

"Thank God," she whispered, "my boy's coming home."

And when James very soon followed his letter, he held his breath at learning how very near he had come to finding a desolate home, and thankfully rejoiced in the blessed privilege of winning his mother back to health and happiness.

There are many boys who put off the home-letters and the home coming until too late.—*Young Men's Era.*