

Young Charley yawned indifferently.

"Salivation Army," he replied.

Bill shifted his quid, and regarded the young man solemnly.

"Kid," he said at last, "where did you blow from anyways?"

"Schenectady."

"Long ago?"

"Four years."

"Folks live up there?"

"Guess so. Did, the last I knew."

Young Charley yawned again. "The old man's in the works. I was, once."

"Kid"—Missouri Bill slowly held out the newspaper and pointed to the marked item—"here's somethin' that might 'ave been wrote to you. Listen to this, now: 'My child, come home. Come home for Thanksgivin'." He read with impressive deliberation. "It's signed 'Mother,' " he added.

Young Charley shifted uneasily.

"Cut it out!" he muttered.

"Why don't you take the bet?" persisted Missouri Bill.

"Take it yourself," retorted Charley.

"Naw, kid, that's different," said Bill. "I couldn't act the part. I been livin' on husks too long. But you now—you've only been out four years. Beat it back there; give your old mother a sight of you. Enjoy the fatted turkey an' the cranb'ry sauce. Smoke a pipe with the old man. Tell 'em you got a job with J. P. Morgan, an' don't get time to run up often, but you're glad to see 'em when you can. It's a grand con, kid! It won't hurt you any, an' it may do your mother good. What say?"

Young Charley squirmed.

"What's the use?" he demanded.

"How do I know?" Missouri Bill wisely disclaimed all definite knowledge. "I got a hunch, that's all. You beat it on up there to-morrer. Hurray for the grand time! Talk big and make 'em happy. An' then, kid, cut out from 'em as soon as the dinner's over! Make your getaway while there's still somethin' left to the fatted turkey beside the bones. You know that prodigal son stuff, don't you, kid? I heard a gink talking it to a bunch o' boes one night in Union Square. It's all to the good, that spiel; but it leaves out somethin'. Take it from me, kid, if that prodigal boy was a wise one, he beat it next mornin' in a sidedoor Pullman. He wouldn't 'a' had no business to stay there an' let the old folks come to know how different he was. It wouldn't 'a' been fair."

"I guess you're talking all to the good," said Young Charley soberly.

VI.

A wisp of a woman with yellowed gray hair stood at the window of a cottage in a Connecticut village. In the room a snowy table was laid. From the pot on the back of the stove came the smell of good things simmering; but the woman stared with vague wistfulness out into the street.

The new minister, passing, saw her at the window.

"Poor widow Varnum!" he said, softly. "What a pity there's no one to eat Thanksgiving dinner with her!" And as he remembered the first time he saw her, that day in the post-office, he added: "I wonder what happened to that letter she sent?"

