

out into the great beckoning world—the great world that had taught him so many things, but none that held such gripping truth as that embodied in the lines:

"Be it ever so humble there's no place like home."

At the little sleepy station there had been none to recognize him, though a few loungers had peered curiously at the tall, military-looking man with his arm in a sling, who had said no word to anyone, but had struck out across the fields. Their eyes followed him as he took his way along the old hill road beyond the village.

Here was the old maple grove—the scene of many sap-boilings in the springs of long ago. Further along was the creek, now ice-locked in winter's grip, along the edges of which ran the willows, grown so large, though now so bare. The fishing here had been a fascinating though unprofitable sport to a ten-year-old lad with a home-made fishing rod. He paused at the spot where the old cut-vert had crossed the creek. Shaky and condemned it had been for years before he was born. Now it had been replaced by a smart cement bridge with iron railings! New cottages had sprung up everywhere, and fine brick farmhouses had come into being where before stood the old frame homesteads. He wondered if—the dear old place had gone, too, in the relentless march of time, as he drew nearer to the last hill.

HOME! From the hilltop—where his mother had stood and signalled with her old shawl some months back—the wanderer at length spied a clear bright light, the beacon that had burned unquipped in that same window each night for fifteen years. He did not know this, yet he sensed its message.

The light of home! The early winter dusk had closed in and night was come. Though stumbling often over unfamiliar hedgerows sunk in the snow, over new fences in the old fields, and being nailed continually by a nosy dog, the remaining distance was passed over unheeded by the wanderer. His foot-falls in the soft snow gave back little sound and at length he stood at the door of his old home and knocked. He was obliged to repeat the knock twice before the inmates gave any sign. Then a faint murmur of voices came to his eager ears, followed by slow fattering steps that approached the door. The wanderer's heart was stabbed by sharp remorse and he gulped down a sob. His father grown so feeble!

Slowly the door opened and a narrow gold ribbon of light shot out across the snow.

There stood disclosed a gray, bent old man whose form had once been tall and upright as his own. Pushed up on his forehead were his old steel-rimmed spectacles. One gnarled old hand held an open sheet of newspaper, the other still clutched the doorknob.

"Father!"
The old man dropped the paper and shaded his eyes with a trembling hand.

"Tom!"
He seized the wanderer by the arm and drew him into the light.

"Tom! My boy, my boy! Mary, come here!"

From her seat by the fire rose the little white-haired mother, dropping her work, while her arms flew out and she took one faltering step forward. "Danny—Danny!"

Sorrow had wrought its work upon her. But now there was to come healing and happiness in part.

"No, mother, not Danny," answered the black sheep, humbly, "only Tom, —your wild, wandering Tom. Have you got a bit of room for him in your hearts,—you and father?"

Not since the news of Danny's death had father hoped to see that light again in mother's eyes.

They stirred the fire and drew in close about its warmth, those three, Tom in the centre, holding the hand of his mother, while he told them how Danny had died, a hero of the last great victory, with his mother's name upon his lips, and the bugles far and near ringing truce.



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104

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