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Peter the Great Goes Home

By MAY HOOVER MUMAW.

PART II.

Then he saw Mother. He was just a boy again coming up through the woods for her to turn his troubles into peace.

Mother had sung as far as "There let the way appear," when she stepped out the back door and saw Peter—Peter G. Blaine—city man of affairs—her boy—"sonny!"

It was the same old kitchen and yet there was a difference. A fireless cooker had just been opened from which savory odors were issuing forth. It stood beside an electric range. There was an electric fan over the kitchen cabinet. But still he would have known it to be the kitchen in which he grew up. He could have closed his eyes and put his hand on the cookie crock.

His mother led him into the living room. Was there any spot on earth so cool and restful? Home Keeping Hearts Are Happiest hung in the same place over the piano; Father's big leather chair was by his end of the living room table as always. There were more books—another whole book case of them—and electric lights instead of the old oil lamp. It was home to Peter—the home he had carried in his heart all these years and had had homesick for.

How comfortable it made one feel to hear Mother singing as she added the finishing touches to the dinner for the men. He had come in the back door, just as he used to do, dirty, tired, out of sorts with himself and the world, and although this coming was after an absence of twenty years, it had not disturbed for long the even tenor of her way. One would think he had been away only over night! Mother's hair was white. Her face was serene. Time had left no lines on her placid brow and Peter knew, as he watched her lay an extra plate for her son, that she had found the choice things of life.

"Peter!" she said, holding up a platter for him to see, "I spent the cheque you sent us last Christmas for these dishes. I have always wanted a beautiful set of real Haviland and now I have them and I use them every day."

The men, six of them, came laughing and talking from the horse barn. Mother beamed and introduced "my son." They took him as a matter of course. What were his millions to them? Then came Father, who shouted, laughed and blew his nose and was "terrible glad" Peter could get away to "look in on the old place."

Hay seemed the most important

thing in the universe and Father's face glowed as he told Peter of the enormous crop. The barns would be full to bursting. And they were going to have it all made before they realized they had a good start. The men laughed and were quite concerned as to the number of loads they would get in that day, sorry they were not going to have more of Mother's meals. Howe, on an adjoining farm with six men and two teams, had put in twenty loads the day before. Father and his crew would "go them two better" if Mother could furnish enough fuel to keep them going. One of the younger fellows proudly told Peter that Mr. Blaine made the best loads of anyone in town. Peter asked his Father if that were not too hard work for one of his years. The man seated next to Peter G. gave him a dig in the ribs and another gave him a sly kick under the table as Mr. Blaine with straightened shoulders said incisively, "Son, I will pitch hay with you any day from daylight till dark!"

The fried spring chicken disappeared like magic. Peter had never tasted anything quite so good as those peas fresh from the garden. Home-like bread with freshly churned butter and new strawberry preserves—how had he ever eaten restaurant stuff? When the cherry pie came Peter groaned. He was the "old" one in that circle of hearty eaters. Then came ice cream and whipped cream cake—Peter could have wept for the boy's capacity of long ago. He went wearily to the couch on the porch and knew no more until he wakened to find Mother in her rocker at his side with her Bible in her lap. "I knew you would come, dear," she said. "I just could not stand it any longer without my boy." Her hand lovingly touched his curly head. He was just a boy again. After awhile she said: "I have an errand over at Minnie's. You remember Minnie?" Come along with me."

Minnie lived in the village. Peter went with his mother to the garage. She took the driver's seat, but the self-starter refused to work. Fat old Peter whizzed and puffed, but crank it he could not. His mother came to the rescue laughingly saying, "It sometimes acts like that," and calmly cranked the car out of the garage.

It was the Collins place into which they drove—the one Peter had thoughts of buying—but not the Collins place of boyhood days. Minnie, now a mature woman, was in the garden. She was delighted to see Peter and took them to her cool verandah and served cakes and iced tea. Mrs.

Blaine and Minnie had a great deal to talk about and Peter listened, a little amazed.

"Yes, Peter, I surely do write books!" she said, in answer to his question. "Did you think no one outside of Montreal was doing anything?" And she laughed mockingly at him. "And Peter! In case you do not know it, which you do not seem to, you are the hero of my last book." His mother looked disapprovingly at his embarrassment. "Don't tell me that you had not known Minnie was writing, Peter?" Peter confessed his ignorance and his Mother informed him that her "Peter book" was a best seller, "and," she added dryly, "it might be good for you to read it." Then they talked of hay and corn and wheat and oats and potatoes and cows and butter and, once more, of gardens. Peter was sadly out of the conversation. Soon he was introduced to Minnie's sixteen-year-old daughter, Jean, twirling a pink sunbonnet by the string. Jean, her mother said, had been driving the hay wagon all day. Jean's brother, a Varsity freshman, with sleeves rolled back, greeted Peter G. as man to man.

Peter did not try to buy the Collins place. Tactful Peter. That night, Mrs. Blaine said to her son, "I have laid out a work shirt and a pair of overalls for you to put on in the morning. See if you can milk a cow!"

Feeling queer and "out of it," Peter joined the milkers next morning and his father dared him to milk the big white cow. Could he do it? Surely! He milked and he puffed and he groaned—inwardly—and his hands cramped. Sometimes he got a stream of milk—sometimes he did not. When the pail was two-thirds full, he gasped, "Father, you will have to finish her! The old fool is giving a river of milk!"

Father chuckled. "I milk 'em like her, son. Next year we'll have a milking machine. Are you ready to pitch a load of hay?" he asked.

When Peter stepped out from the barn his nostrils were filled with the fragrance of locust blossoms. The whiff filled him and thrilled him. All in a blinding flash he knew. The discontent he felt was because he had been hungering and thirsting for the old farm—it was a part of his very life and he could never get away from it. The city was all right—it represented gigantic human effort and power. There was nothing wrong with it. It was simply human nature on a big scale. But the Being who had made human nature and man had also made the country. Had he only known years before! It was too late now to give up city business altogether, but at least he need not be its slave. With buoyant step he went back to the house and sent a telegram speeding to his wife: "Come at once. Very important. Bring children."

As he stepped out to the verandah where breakfast was spread, he looked across the fields to a little knoll shaded by graceful elms. There he would build a bungalow—if Father would sell him the land. Sara should plan it. Their summers should be spent there, at least until he was ready to turn the business in town over to Tom. His heart swelled with emotion.

There was a catch in his throat when he thought of his wife. He remembered the night that Tom was born; the feast she had prepared when he had been made president of his company; how she had clung to him the first time he had to leave her on an extended business trip. Love him? Of course she loved him! Poor child, she had to find something to take up her attention when he became absolutely absorbed in business. But from now on—

At the close of that memorable First of July, one year ago, Peter G. Blaine had telegraphed Mary and the young folks to "come at once." Mary arrived alone. She was excited and perplexed, but something in her husband's face and voice stilled her complaints. For one whole day, out under the old home trees, they talked things over, and when the sun set over the hills, husband and wife were closer than they had been for years. Mary loved him still and had been no better satisfied with the old life than he—only she had not known exactly what was wrong nor if there were a remedy.

The next day Peter G. peremptorily telegraphed to Sara and Tom to throw up all plans and join their parents. They obeyed—wonderingly. It took more than a day to make them see a certain point of view, but finally the lure of the farm and the new spirit of their parents began to get under the veneer imposed by city luxury and indolence.

Tom had a natural love for the country and Granny had always been a favorite of Sara's. So it was Tom and Granny who helped Sara and her mother to try a "spell" on the homestead.

A month from the day "Peter the Great" had taken his way back to his mother, jaded and worn with the cares of life, a better man, physically and mentally, he reluctantly left farm and folks and went back to the city to gather up the reins of business.

It was a new Peter G. Blaine who moved among his staff of workers and asked as man to man about the families and the children and the homes. And this new Peter G., more truly "great" than mere money could make him, experienced the deepest thrill he had had in years when the newest man in the office, in a sudden burst of friendliness, asked his employer out to his tiny house to see his new bride and eat a strictly home dinner. Later, this same Peter G. had laboriously written by hand, a ten page letter to his wife to tell her all about it.

Great things were going on down on the farm. Plans were under way for the bungalow on the knoll. Father had sold the land and Peter had met his figure. It was to be one summer,

at least, for the Montreal family. The plans were drawn up by the whole family. Grandfather was particular about the location of the woodshed. Sara wanted the whole house built in relation to the fireplace.

"But Sara, we are not to be out here in the winter!" Mother protested.

"But Mother, you never can tell how things are going to work out," answered the daughter. "We better have that fireplace."

(To be continued.)

Trees That Own Themselves.

In the United States there are two trees that own themselves and the ground on which they stand.

One of these famous trees is an oak in Georgia—where everything is peaches, by the way—and the other a sycamore in Kentucky. The former stood upon the land of a colonial named Jackson, who left the following paragraph in his will:

"I, W. H. Jackson, of the County of Clarke, State of Georgia, of the one part, and this oak tree (giving location) of the other part, witness that the said W. H. Jackson, in consideration of the great affection he bears said tree, and his desire to see it protected, has conveyed unto the said tree entire possession of itself and the land within eight feet of it on all sides."

The sycamore is an even larger landowner, for thirty-six feet all round it were bequeathed to it by a certain Miss Lloyd, whose will contained the following:

"The said tree is conveyed, in consideration of the value of itself as a resting-place of the weary under its shade, itself, together with the terra-firma beneath, and said tree are to belong to themselves absolutely, and to each other, for all the purposes for which God and man intended them, among which is the purpose of the soil to nurture and feed the tree, and that of the tree to shade, grace and beautify the said terra-firma."

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The Proverb Exemplified.

Young Wife—"How do you like my cooking, dear? Don't you think I have begun well?"

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