



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

A Story That Never Ends

Unknown writer

Tommy was very angry. He rushed up-stairs and into his mother's room, utterly forgetting his knock or "Am I welcome, mother?"

"Bang!" echoed the door behind him with a noise that resounded over the whole house. Why he was angry was plain enough. His eye was black, nose bleeding, coat torn, collar hanging. His mother took it off as he bent over the wash-bowl.

"Oh, Tommy," she said, "you've been fighting again."

"Well, mother," he exclaimed, "what do you expect me to do? That Bob Sykes threw rocks at me again and called me names. He said I was—"

"Hush," said his mother, "you only grow more angry as you speak. Is it hard for you now to remember the rule, 'The good things about others, the naughty things about yourself'?"

"Good! There is nothing good about him. I hate him. I wish he was dead, I do. I wish I could kill him."

Sternly his mother took him by the arm and led him before the mirror. One look at the face he saw there silenced him.

"To all intents and purposes you have killed him. 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.' You cannot but remember who said it, Tommy. It is late in the afternoon. The sun is going down. To-morrow is His birthday. Hadn't you better forgive Bob?"

"The sun may go down and the sun may come up for all I care," he answered, "I'll never forgive him."

Without further word his mother bathed his heated face and led him to her bed. "Lie down and rest," she said, "you are over excited. Quiet will help you."

He lay and looked at her as she sat quietly and gravely at her work under the Picture. Ever since he could remember, her chair at this hour of the day had been in that corner, and low over it had always hung, just as it hung now, that Picture so often explained to him, "The Walk to Emmaus." How calm and quiet his mother was; and the room, how still and cool after that crowded street! Shutting his aching eyes he could see it again now; the swearing mob of boys and men shoving him on, their brutal faces and gestures, the quarrel, the

blows—those he had given and taken—he felt them again, and the burning choke of the final grip and wrestle.

Oh, how his head throbbed and ached! It seemed as if the blood would burst through.

He opened his eyes again. The room was growing darker. He almost forgot his pain for a few moments, noticing how the sunlight was straightened to a narrow lane which reached from the extreme southern end of the window to the floor in front of his mother's chair. He watched the last rays as they slowly left the floor and stole up her dress to her lap and her breast, leaving all behind and below in shadow. Now they had reached her face. It was bent over her work. Well he knew that was some Christmas gift, may be for him,—some Christmas gift, and to-morrow was Christmas! He looked again to see if he could discover what she was making, but the light had left her now, and had risen to the Picture.

Queer picture that it was! What funny clothes those men wore! Those long gabardines, mother had called them, reaching almost to the ground; shoes that showed the toes, and hoods for hats. One of them had none. How closely they looked at him!. They didn't even see which way they were going, and what a long way it was, stretching out there, dusty and hot.

The room was quite dark now save for the light on the narrow road there. What was yonder little village in the distance? What kind of a place was Emmaus? His mother had told him about it; only one street, a long and narrow one; and very few trees; and one or two trading shops only; and the houses low and flat-roofed, with no glass in them; and the sun shining down hot and straight between them,—and (oh, how his head ached!) he was out there looking for Bob Sykes. Maybe that was he lying on this rude bench with the low cedar-bush over it. If it were, he would settle matters with him quick. He would show him—but it wasn't Bob, it was only a sheep-dog asleep. So Tommy turned away and walked slowly along the middle of the street. His face burned with the heat of the sun on his bruises. He was very thirsty. Climbing a little hill over which the road lay, he saw on the other side of it another boy coming toward him. He was rather a peculiar looking boy, with a face thoughtful but pleasant. He was carrying a heavy sheepskin bag over his shoulder. Tommy determined to ask him if he knew where there was some water.

"Hello," he said, as the boy drew near.

The boy stopped and smiled at Tommy without making reply.

"Where are you going?" said Tommy.

"I am carrying this bag of tools to my father," the boy answered.

"Do you live here?" asked Tommy. "It doesn't seem like much of a place."

"No," said the boy, "it isn't much of a place, but I live here."

"What sort of tools have you got in your bag? Who is your father?"

"My father is a carpenter," answered the boy.

Tommy gave a long, low whistle. "A carpenter! Why my father owns a store, and we live in one of the best houses in town. Fairfield is the name of my town."

The boy seemed neither to notice the whistle nor the brag; but, allowing the bag to slip from his shoulders to the ground, stood, still smiling, before Tommy.

Tommy, who somehow had forgotten his pain and thirst, felt embarrassed for a moment. He never before had made that announcement without its awakening at least a little sensation, even if it were no more than a boast in return.

"This is a dull old town," he finally said. "Many jolly boys around?"

"A good many," answered the boy.

"Do you get any time to play? I suppose though, you don't—you have to work most of the time," added Tommy, encouragingly.

"I work a good deal," said the boy. "I get time to play, however. I like it."

"Which, the work or the play?"

"Both."

"Well," said Tommy after a pause, "do you ever have any trouble with the boys you play with?"

"No," said the boy, "I don't think I do."

"Well, you must be a queer sort of a boy! Now, there's Bob Sykes,—perhaps you've noticed that my eye is hurt, and my face scratched some. Well, we had a little difficulty just a few moments ago; he insulted me, and I won't take an insult from any one. And I told him to shut up his mouth, and he sassed me back, and called me names, and said I was stuck up and thought I was better than the other boys, and he'd show me that I wasn't. Of course, I wouldn't stand that, so I've had a fight,—and it isn't the first one either."



"Yes," said the boy, "I know that. I feel very sorry for Bob. He hasn't any mother to go to, you know. He had to wash the blood and dirt off his face as best he could at the town pump; and then wait around the streets until his father came

from work. It is pretty hard for a boy to have no place to lay his head."

"Why, do you know Bob Sykes?" asked Tommy.

"Yes," answered the boy, "I've been with him a good deal."

"Queer now," mused Tommy. "I don't remember of ever seeing you around. But now tell me what you would have done if he had provoked you, and insulted you, too?"

"I would have forgiven him," answered the boy.

"Well, I did. There was one spell I just started in and forgave him every day for a week, that was seven times."

"I would have forgiven him seventy times seven."

"That is just what my mother always says. Perhaps you know my mother?"

"She knows me, too," replied the boy.

"That is odd. I didn't think she knew any of the boys Bob knows."

"Bob does not know me," replied the boy; "I know him."

Just then Tommy's attention was attracted by a flock of little brown birds passing over their heads. One of the birds flew low and fluttered as if wounded, and fell in the dust near, where it lay beating its little wings, panting and dying. The boy tenderly picked it up.

"Somebody's hit him with a sling-shot," said Tommy, carelessly.

The boy smoothed the bruised wing, and straightened the crushed and broken body. The bird ceased fluttering.

"I'm most sorry," said Tommy, "I didn't forgive Bob. It makes me feel bad, what you told me about his having no home. Now, mother is something like you. She don't mind one's being poor. Why, if I took Bob home with me, mother wouldn't seem to see his clothes and ragged shoes. She'd just talk to him and treat him like he was the best dressed boy in town. There's Bill Logan came home to dinner with me once. Mother made me ask him. He is a real poor boy; has to work. His mother washes. He didn't know what to do nor how to act. He kept his hands in his pockets most all the time. Aunt Lilly said it was shocking. But mother said, 'Never mind.' She said she was glad he had his pockets; for his hands were rough and not too clean, and she thought they mortified him. Father went and kissed her then. Don't tell this. I don't know what makes me run on and tell you all these things. I never spoke of them before. But I know father was a poor, young working man when he married mother."

The boy raised his hand, and the sparrow gave a twitter of delight and flew

heavenward.

"Why," exclaimed Tommy in amazement, "you've cured him! He is all right. How did you do it? Do you feel sorry for the sparrows as well as Bob?"

"I pity every sparrow that is hurt," said the boy, "and isn't Bob of more consequence than a sparrow?"

"I wish," said Tommy, "I hadn't fought with Bob. It was most all my fault. I've a good mind to tell him so. I wish I was better acquainted with you. If I played with such a boy as you are, now, I'd be better I am certain. Suppose you come after school nights and play in our yard. Never mind your clothes. Can't you come?"

"Yes, I will come if you want me to," answered the boy, looking steadfastly at him a moment; "but now I must be about my father's business."

He stooped, lifted the bag of tools to his shoulders, and before Tommy could stay him had moved some steps away.

"Don't go yet, tell me some more about what you'd do," and Tommy turned to follow him.

But was it the boy? And was that a bag of tools on his back? It had grown strangely longer and heavier now, so that it dragged on the ground, and the face was the face of the Picture, and lo, it turned toward him, and the hand was raised in benediction and farewell, "I am with you always," and he was gone.

"Oh! come back, come back," sobbed Tommy, reaching out his arms and struggling to run after him.

"Poor boy," said his mother, wiping the blinding tears from his eyes, "your sleep didn't do you much good."

"I've not been asleep," said Tommy; "I've been talking with—with—Him," and he spoke low with a longing reverence and pointed to the Picture.

"It was a dream, my child."

"Mother, it was a vision. I saw Him, when He was a little boy in His own town, Nazareth. And, mother, I even told Him it wasn't much of a place to live in. He talked to me about Bob. He said you knew Him. I saw him cure a little bird. And oh, mother, He said He would be with me always. He is a little boy like me! I know what to do now. He showed me. I must find Bob; I must have him forgive me. I want to bring him home with me into my bed for to-night."

He stopped. "Mother," he said solemnly, "to-morrow is His birthday."

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