

**A HOME**

By MARY WINIFRED FORD.

"Good luck, Tom. I only wish it were possible for me to leave the sultry city behind and take the path to God's own land," and Jerry Barton shook hands with Tom Ranger, the best-hearted boy in all Newbury town at least the whole town would tell you that had you asked about Tom Ranger.

Tom was an engineer on train No. 155. All the children in Newbury raced down to Ingalls Crossing every afternoon after school to see the No. 155 flying by and to wave to their beloved "Mr. Tom." Tom always had a smile for every one, but today his heart was heavy and sad. The smile had left his eyes and his lips quivered as the train sped on its way to Ellis Falls. This time Tom was on a different mission—it was not his old No. 155 he was running, just sitting with the other passengers deep in thought.

He had just buried his best friend—his mother. It was her last request that he would take care of her childhood home in Ellis Falls. Before her death she had put it into a real estate agent's hands. Why, Tom never knew; in fact, never knew she had thought of selling the little home she had known and loved since childhood. He had worked in the city, coming home once a month to that little house at Ellis Falls where over the week-end he would find a peace too sweet to define. Now he was going to fight to get that house back.

"Poor little mother. She couldn't have been in her right mind to sell the place we loved—the home we said we would never part with!"

"Pardon, I have made a mistake. I thought I was in Mr. Hammond's office—the real estate—"

"Please be seated. I am M. Hammond but not a 'Mr.' as you can readily see." And the girl sitting at the desk near the door where Tom was standing continued writing.

"But—but—" At this moment the girl laughed heartily.

"Please don't look as though you don't credit my statement. I assure you I am M. Hammond, the real estate—well, shall I say agentess, or what?"

"Why, yes, I did sell that property to a Miss Marietta, a young girl who had lost all her own folks and wanted a nice, quiet place out in the country, so after I talked with your mother I decided I would sell it to one who would take good care of the place, as those were her last wishes, and this girl surely will take good care of your old home."

"But—but I must have that home—mother's home from infancy—my boyhood home!"

"I must see her—this girl who bought my home—tell me where I can locate her," he begged.

"She has gone away for a month, but if you will leave your address, I promise I will do my utmost to persuade her to give up your old home."

Tom, minutes later Tom was traveling back to the city.

True to Miss Hammond's word, Tom heard within a month's time:

"Dear Mr. Ranger—I wouldn't think of taking the only home you have ever known away from you, and your mother was my dearest friend. I spent many happy hours with her. Why, I took the house you will never know, but I am giving it back to you and hope you will be happy."

"MISS MARIETTA—"

The very next train out of Newbury carried Tom back to his childhood home—the girl had sent the key with the note. As he was about to fit the key to the door he noticed that it was ajar and he could hear someone moving around. He let himself in quietly and there before him was the real estate little lady enveloped in an apron with a duster in hand and humming softly as she dusted. She uttered an "Oh" as she espied Tom in the doorway. Then because she didn't know what to do or how to escape she burst into tears.

"Why, Miss Hammond, I don't understand!" and Tom waited for an explanation.

"I didn't think you would come so soon and I just wanted to have everything ready and comfy—you see your mother loved me as dearly as I loved her. I came to see her quite often, but I would never allow her to talk of me to you. I had reasons of my own. She made me promise that I— that I—"

"Please go on, Miss Hammond. Anything that concerns, or concerns, mother; you don't know how—"

This time the tears fell fast as the girl answered.

"Well, she wanted me to keep the home for—for—well for you and me, but I knew that was impossible, so I did think I could keep the home because I loved it. But now—I was trying to fix things up just as she would have done for you, and never let you know the truth; but I am Miss Marietta Hammond."

And picking up her coat, she rushed for the door.

But Tom, as she was talking to him and of his mother, felt a wonderful something come over him, and he defined it as "Love," as she was leaving.

"Don't—don't go, little girl—stay here and we'll take care of this little home together—you see we were both looking for a home."

And the little mother's wishes were fulfilled.

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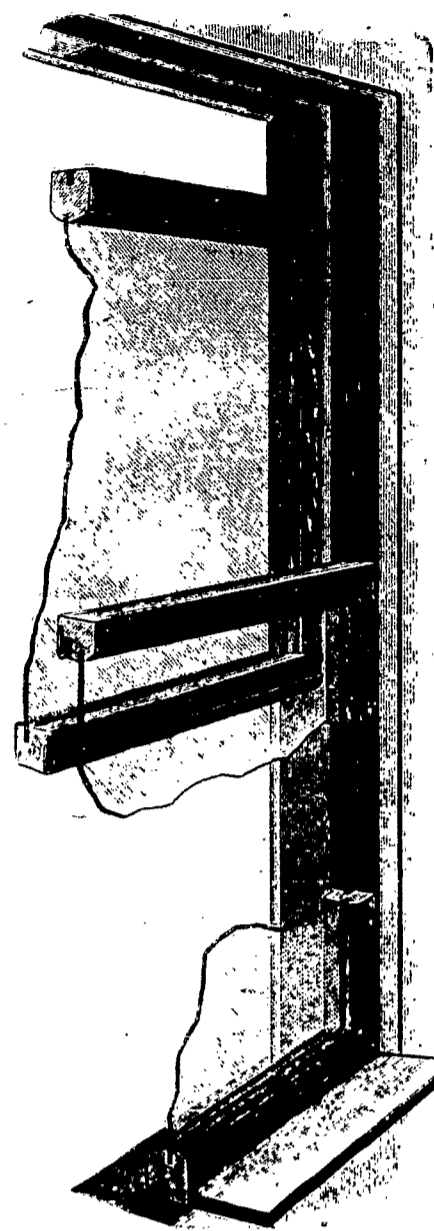
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