Home for Thanksgiving!

By Mrs. Paul E. King

Home for Thanksgiving! The words had a magic sound to them, Ted thought, as he listened to his aunt and uncle discussing something or other in the next room. What, he wondered almost bitterly, would it be like to be home for Thanksgiving? Home with one's very own parents and his brothers and sisters? Only, he didn't have any brothers and sisters. At least there were none when his father and mother had separated. But for the mercy and the
kindness of Uncle Harv and Aunt Kate, Ted often wondered where he might be. They had opened both their hearts and their arms to him when he was barely three. They had "parented" him, treating him like he was their very own and showering love in great abundance upon him. And he loved them; loved them greatly. Deeply. But at times, in the back of his mind, he longed to see his parents; longed, too, to know the joy of being home for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

He was restless. He despised the feeling; it made him miserable. And he had no reason to be either miserable nor unhappy; Uncle Harv and Aunt Kate were a delightful couple to live with and to be around.

He glanced through the window of his bedroom and suddenly felt drawn to the outside. Grabbing his warm jacket from the hanger inside the closet he slipped it on then picked up his boots on the way out of the room. The air would be good for him; it would clear his brain and help him to sort out his thoughts, he was sure. And possibly his feelings, too.

A brisk late November wind greeted him as he let himself out through the kitchen door. The sky was a drab slate-gray. More snow, he knew. He could read the clouds. Uncle Harv told him on more than one occasion that he was almost as good at cloud and sky reading as he, himself, was. Weatherwise, that is. Ted smiled wryly, love flowing from him for his uncle and aunt, whose hair he had lived long enough to see turn a silvergray. This tugged at his heart. He didn't want them to get old. He wished he could stop the aging process, somehow. But that was impossible, he knew. One generation died and passed off the scene of action; another took its place. This was life.

He walked towards the woods, his head bent. Grasses and weeds poked through the snow, only they weren't just grasses and weeds now; some were feeding stations, he saw, as indicated by tiny footprints and bits of hulls scattered at their bases. Others were lace-makers. He traced their delicate shadows against the white background.

Tramping on around the creek he startled small wintering birds, some on the ice and others in the brush. From a sheltered pool, a pair of ducks flapped upward, the blue-green of the male's head and neck iridescent as he rose toward the sky. Ted stopped long enough to watch them disappear in
the gray overhead. Then he continued on, absorbing the peace and the tranquillity like a sponge absorbing water.

He stood for a while at the edge of the woods, looking out across the land. Corn stubble showed yellow-brown on top of the snow, and the fence rows, with their summer growth of wild plum trees now brown and bare and bushy looking, were a haven for the birds that wintered over. Always, Uncle Harv let the wild blackberry and raspberry vines grow thick and full and bushy, along with whatever else would grow, along the fence rows for the wild creatures. Quaff especially. They needed the bushy overgrowth for the propagation of their species. "I like to see clean-looking fence rows," he had told Ted once, "but if I clean out my fence rows I won't have the quail anymore. Nor many of the beautiful singing birds, either," he had added. "So the overgrowth stays. I want those quail, and the song birds."

Ted breathed in the crisp, invigorating air. He loved it here. Loved this farm. He grew up on it. Since his third birthday. Even in its winter-time, it was a place of beauty. The chorus of frogs and crickets had long since fallen silent and the riotous colors of autumn were gone and the entire landscape was brushed in neutrals, except for the spruce, the pine and the hemlock in the woods.

The young man heaved a great sigh of contentment. The land had this effect upon him. It soothed his restlessness and calmed his emotions. Winter, he noted, wove its own tapestry. Beautiful in its own way. Farms and hillsides across the valley now came into view. Neighbors who had been screened off by foliage now seemed near.

The trees, shorn by wind and cold, were now a tapestry of exquisite design; a silhouette of geometric artistry; a mute testimony of nature's architect. No camera of screen on earth could capture what he saw. If only he could get above this desire of wanting to be home for Thanksgiving. Or Christmas. Or both. Home, with his parents; the parents he didn't recall nor remember at all. The parents who gave him away.

He guessed that hurt him most of all; their giving him away to his aunt and uncle. At times he felt that they had no more regard or love for him than they would have had for a dog or a cat. One gave animals away, but a human, never!
He walked into the woods. The wind didn't nip and bite him as badly now; the trees cut off its fiercest icy blast. Snow began to fall. He heard its gentle... oh, so gentle... sound as it dropped upon the dry leaves and among the trees. It was relaxing. He felt its therapy calm his mind as well as his nervous restlessness.

He walked on in silence, deeper into the woods, until he came to his favorite of all trees. He had come here for so long as he could remember to play and to pretend. The spruce tree was magnificent with age and time, having weathered the storms of summer and the onslasts of many a blizzard. In his childhood days the tree was his pretend house, spacious in its enormity of spreading branches, beautiful in its symmetry and evergreen, deliciously delightful in its clean, fresh fragrance. It sheltered and protected him much like an umbrella.

He parted one of the lower branches and stepped "inside." Looking around, he saw that very little snow had entered through the dense foliaged branches. The earth carpet was virtually free of snow; instead, he saw a carpet of dark green, splattered with brilliant spots of scarlet. Pheasant berries! he thought, as he stooped to gather a handful of the delicious berries from their beautiful, dark green vines that crawled all over the forest floor beneath the evergreen tree. How could he have forgotten about them? he wondered. Then he realized that he hadn't been back here for a long time. The silence of the woods and the utter tranquillity and peace filled him with awe. He leaned his back against the unmovable trunk and closed his eyes, wondering if he was right or wrong in wanting to see his parents; in wanting to "go home for Thanksgiving." He had formed his own mental picture of his home: It was neither large nor small, elegant nor shoddy -- just a simple white frame house wearing pale yellow shutters at its windows and a pathway with roses growing along either side, leading to a porch that seemed to beckon the traveler to come and rest a while before entering the doorway that spilled its interior warmth to the outside.

His parents, too, he had pictured in his mind; only, the mental image and the pictures of his mother and father which Aunt Kate kept among her treasured things, were never quite the same. His mental pictures always were of a soft-spoken, gentle-mannered, kind and loving mother; totally unlike the bold, brash-looking woman who stared at him from every picture in the photo album.
His mother's name was Helen, so Aunt Kate had told him. She was a sister to the aunt who had raised him. Outside of that, he knew little else, except for the fact that he had overheard another of his aunts tell Aunt Kate one day that Helen... his mother,... was going down the same route as her new husband was. What that "route" was, Ted could only imagine. But he never tried to think about it too much; it brought only pain to his heart, pain because he had heard someone say that his mother's new husband was an alcoholic.

Tears stung Ted's eyes. He had tried to pray; but, then, was he in a proper spiritual condition so he could pray? he wondered.

For a long time he battled the question and, finally, he settled it. On his knees, he emptied his soul to God and poured out his heart, full of hurt and pain and, yes, even bitterness and unanswered questions, to God. The fountain of the deep of his soul was broken up; it literally gushed out from within. Begging for forgiveness and mercy, he made contact with Heaven. Wave upon wave of glory rolled over him. For the first time in his entire better-than-eighteen-years of existence, he was happy. Deep-within-happy. And now he was at peace and at rest in his soul. He raised his hands heavenward and praised the Lord. He was finally free from the myriad things that had haunted him . . . why, and how his parents could (or should) have abandoned him; where they were and what their life-style was; why they had separated and gone their separate ways. He was free. He had placed each of the once-baffling and haunting questions in God's hands. They were all turned over to Him.

It was snowing heavier now. Ted stood beneath the sheltering branches of the tree listening to the gentle sound of snow dropping onto the trees and the ground. It was as though the whole world was praising God, he thought. He remained there for a long while, drinking in and absorbing the peace of his surroundings. Birds twittered above him as they flitted from one tree to another and crows cawed raucously nearby. Not too far away, a little stream which never ran dry, gurgled and sang on its merry way, its outer extremities shimmering in a crust of thin ice.

He walked toward the edge of the tree and, parting its fragrant branches, he stepped into a forest of white. He hadn't realized, while he was
praying and calling on God, just how much it had snowed. Now, however, his eyes met the true picture, and it was beautiful.

He walked leisurely; no need to hurry. The forest closed in around him as he walked deeper and farther into its heart. He loved it all; knew it almost like a well read or much-studied map, too. Much of it was owned by Uncle Harv and Aunt Kate, whose love for beautiful forests and mountains had caused them to buy tract after tract of the mountain and forest land as it became available or went on sale.

It was late afternoon when Ted broke out into the clearing in his uncle's back forty. The snow lay like a thick white blanket upon the fields and the roofs. The earth looked clean and light and pure and white. In little smoky-white swirls, the wind chased the snow in front of him. He watched a crow in its homeward flight toward the forest out of which he had just come. It flapped its wings cumbersomely, fighting the wind into which it was heading, every now and then giving out a loud caw, caw, caw, as if in protest.

Topping a hill, Ted stopped and looked around. The land! It was beautiful! Yes, even in winter it was very beautiful. It had a serenity and a silence' about it with which summer could never compete. Nor achieve. This silence, and this serenity, it was God-given. God ordained and God ordered, too.

His eyes focused in on the house, then, Uncle Harv's and Aunt Kate's house. And his house, too. It was neither mammoth nor small, elegant nor shoddy and shabby, but just a simple white frame house wearing sunny-warm yellow shutters at its windows with a pathway which, in summer months, spilled spicy, heady rose fragrance to the traveler heading toward the come-and-rest-awhile porch and the inviting always-welcome door into the warm kitchen.

Ted smiled. Then he threw his head back and laughed. Home for Thanksgiving! he thought, as a mental picture of a home with his own parents matched . . . in perfect duplicity . . . the house he was now viewing from the top of the hill; Uncle Harv and Aunt Kate's! The mother image, too, he realized . . . that self-formed, mental pictured mother image . . . was none other than his own beloved and gentle Aunt Kate.
Feeling truly liberated and set free, Ted ran down the hill toward the house. Home for Thanksgiving! Why, he had never left. As he hurried along the snow-covered, white-garmented rose-bordered path, the kitchen door flew open and a smiling couple with open arms welcomed him inside. He should have known they'd be watching for him. And waiting, too!