

IN THE SPRING.

The morning sun silvered the long grass in broad meadows and glimmered on the large fields of dark earth and of fresh young grain.

Tommy Williams rolled his bare toes in the dust of the path which ran along the hedge, and flung his books from one shoulder to the other. He gazed across the meadows at the left to the line of hanging woods in the valley beyond and the long row of bushy willows which marks the course of the creek. Across the valley, high against the horizon, the huge masses of the hills rose blue and hazy in the morning air. In front, the big woods were, dark green, cool and thick. Tommy whistled loud as he hurried along, stopping now and then to pick a grass flower; to pull up some sheep sorrel which he chewed with great delight; or to watch the building of a new ant hill. He was suddenly aroused by the clang of the school bell and started on a run for the little building set on the edge of the woods. As he entered the low door he gave a wistful look toward the fresh, moss-carpeted wood, and down at the shimmer of water through the willows on the creek's bank.

"Thomas Williams, late," the teacher said in a loud voice, and added, frowning, "This makes five late marks, Thomas. I shall be compelled to give you some severe punishment if you are not on time after this." And he set the long whip a little straighter in its corner.

Tommy glanced fearfully at him and pulled at a loose button on his brown coat nervously. Then, he slipped into his seat.

The lessons began and the monotonous hum of the children's voices with the everlasting buzz of a blue-bottle fly near the raised window, made everything dull and sleepy. Tommy leaned both elbows on his geography and began with a long list of questions. "What is the capital of Vermont?" he read slowly to himself. "What is the Capital of Vermont? What is capital of Vermont?—Vermont." Tommy's head nodded low over the open book and the letters jumbled themselves together in a black blurr. Ned Jones, across the aisle, watched the sleepy head fall lower and lower, and, leaning over, quietly pricked Tommy's bare leg with a bent pin. Tommy sat up very straight and looked quickly and round-eyed at Ned who was intently bent on his own geography.

Tommy gazed at him a moment and then bent over and administered a vicious punch in Ned's side with his small fist recovering himself just in time to escape the teacher's vigilant glance which swept over his row at that moment.

Tommy leaned back and setting his geography up in front of him, gazed thoughtfully out of the window. On the little slope which led down to the spring, a wild rose-bush was in full bloom and near to it, under the shade of a crooked tree, a wild morning-glory climbed and spread itself above, covering the green grass with its white bell-flowers. Down the valley Tommy could hear faintly the mellow sound of two or three cow bells, and he knew that the cows were going to the creek for water. He sighed deeply and then began to watch an oriole which had perched itself on a limb of a tree outside and had begun to sing. He thought eagerly that he knew where the nest was and that he had not seen it for a day. He cast a longing glance at the woods and then at the nearness of the low window-sill beside him. Up in the corner, by the teacher's desk, the long whip leaned straight against the wall. Tommy looked hastily away. His geography slipped from his desk and fell on his bare feet. He bent over for it and cast a quick look at the teacher's broad

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There was a soft footfall and a little scratch of finger nails and Tommy had left school for that day. He ran softly down to the spring and throwing himself upon his stomach, drank some of the clear, cold water. Then he pushed his torn, straw hat down on his head and walked away into the shady trees.

Well into the woods, by the busy, rustling little brook, was a tall pine tree. A wild grape vine had twined and twisted itself around the trunk and entangled every bough. Then, in its further growth, it had caught the branches of neighboring trees and fastened itself firmly there. Into this seemingly imperious mass of foliage Tommy clambered and was soon in his nest. Some of the pine branches had decayed and the vine had lined the little chamber left by their death, with its own soft green leaves. Tommy leaned back comfortably and half closed his eyes. A squirrel chattered busily in the branches of a neighboring tree and spying the intruder, paused silent for a moment, and scurried noisily away. The two orioles, his next neighbors, eyed him askance at first and then settled down busily to their nest-building, stopping now and then to break the stillness with a song.

Down below the brook splashed cheerily along. A very light little breeze moved the leaves above and occasionally a little sunbeam found its way into the nook. Tommy took out his penknife and began lazily to make a whistle. Far away a single cow-bell rang and now and then the distant sound of the "Gee! Haw!" of some plowman could be faintly heard.

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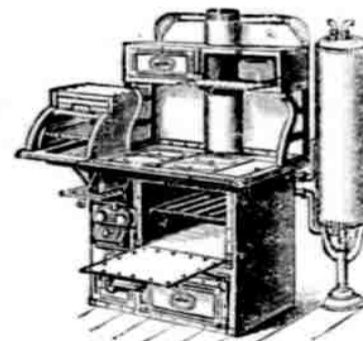
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