

# The Light In The Window

*The following story was written by a young student, Hugh S. McDonald of Grand Tracadie, P. E. Island a short time previous to his death.*

THE last dull glow of the setting sun was fast disappearing from the western horizon and the shadows of approaching night were stealing over the quaint little village of St Peter's, leaving the air heavy and dense in its progress. An almost oppressive silence fell with the gathering gloom, unbroken save for the dull booming of the breakers on the near shore.

This sound, low yet distinct, held an ominous warning note for the ear of old John Matthews, as he trudged homeward from the beach, where he had been securing his boat, and preparing her for rough weather. For, all the night before, and that morning it had blown a stiff breeze from the north-west, and although the wind had abated towards noon, the sea was still running high; and when the light wind clouds, which all day long had scurried hither and thither out in the offing, began to settle and approach landward at sunset, it was obvious to the old fisherman that more wind was due. And as more wind from that quarter meant a bad storm, his precautions were justified.

"It's goin' t' blow up agin, Marthy," he announced as he entered the house. "Guess it's goin' to be a reg'lar downright ole norwester. God help any craft tha's off this coast t'night," he added as he pulled off his long sea boots.

"Well, He allers does help them as trusts in Him," replied his wife. "But supper's ready 'n ye best set in fore yer tea gits cold."

John readily complied, taking his seat at the side, and his wife served the supper from her seat at the end. They proceeded to eat in silence for some time, when suddenly John's cup paused on its way to his mouth, and he sat back in his chair exclaiming,

"Bless me, 't jest struck me all 't once; it's ten year t'night sence Bob went away with thet ther' Mexican skipper; the pesky rascal must 'a cheated him with 'is smooth tongue, fer Bobbie was as good a chap as ye'd wish t' see; yes, he sure must 'a been tricked into it. Well! Well! Time's slippin' by, but it's went slow 'nuff

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this ten year, fer us two. Oh! how I've prayed t' see him once more fore I goes; Poor Bobbie"—here his voice broke and his eyes grew dim, while the tears fell unrestrained from the woman's. Both faces were regarding intensely an extra place set opposite the old man's, and as they did so a soft, yearning, expectant look filled the kind old features of both.

"And so we will see him, please God," said the woman.

"The Lord ses, 'Ask and ye sh'll receive'; and dear knows we hev asked and prayed to Him, so thet I'm hopin t' see Bobbie yet fore we dies."

Indeed it was true that they had always prayed to the Heavenly Father, to keep their son from danger and temptation and to bring him home to them.

The story of how the little fifteen year old boy had run away with an American fishing vessel, had almost become a forgotten incident. But in the minds of at least two old people, it was ever present, and they were always prepared for his homecoming; at each meal his place was prepared for him, his schoolbooks lay on a shelf of their own, all his things were as he left them, each night his couch was made ready, and always on retiring they lighted a lamp in the window to guide him home.

Tonight after the dishes were cleaned away and washed, the old couple sat gazing into the fire, absorbed by the reminiscences awakened by the anniversary of their first and only great sorrow. Outside the storm came on apace.

The North Wind, cold and drear comes tearing in from the great waste of the Gulf, driving the waves before it, lashing them into foaming, swirling billows, still driving them on, on,—whirling and tossing them more and more as it sweeps wildly forward, till finally it hur!s them fiercely onto the shore, where they break into a blinding mist of foam and spray; others, and yet others, succeed, each gaining in strength and fury, and ever the same fierce northwind sweeping them on. Shrilly whistling and shrieking, it rushes inland raising the sand into a drifting eddying whirlwind, obscuring the fishing shanties on the beach, rocking and swaying the boats at anchor, sending them bounding backward and forward, straining them the full length of their cables. Through the deafening roar



of the breakers comes the wild laughing cry of the loon, mingled with the contented murmuring of the wild geese, as they settle on the feeding grounds, up in the sheltered waters of the bay. The storm is at its height on the bleak north shore.

But to the couple by the fireside, few, if any, of these sounds penetrated, and if they heard they heeded not, but sat late into the night, gazing upon the dying embers. At last John arose, went to the door, listened a moment to the raging storm, then returned, wound the old clock, and placing a lighted lamp in the window, said with a sigh, "Bed time, Marthy."

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Out in the freezing cold waters of the Gulf, a half perished man was fighting with the ravenous sea for his life. With all his strength he clung to the rope of a spar,—one of the many remaining fragments of his vessel. Long before, he would have lost his grip, had not the rope by which he held become entangled with his hands, thus holding him fast. As he struggled with as much vigor as his chilled blood would permit, the many scenes of his life passed across his mind,—the snug home and warm fireside of his youth, the love of fond parents, the esteem of kind friends. All these he had exchanged for the deck of a fishing vessel, service under hard, driving masters, the hardships and privations of a life at sea, with the rough companionship it gave him. Everything was vividly portrayed to him, as he fought the angry buffeting waves. Then he offered up a prayer,—the first in many years, and though short it was sincere.

Suddenly he was enveloped in a fog of seething white foam in which he gasped and sputtered for breath. From the deafening noise surrounding him, he at once knew he was in breakers, and handy to some beach. Great white walls of sea rushed over him, blinding and choking him as they knocked him about, till at last one huge breaker gathered him upon its frothing crest, and carrying him along, dashed him high on the beach with such force, as to free him from the spar and deprive him of all remaining consciousness. There he was safe from the cruel sea, which receded raging and fuming at the loss of its prey.

For a long time he lay insensible, but at last raised himself to a

sitting posture, and gazed about him in bewilderment. Suddenly he started as his eye caught the glare of the lighthouse. What—a red and green light? Surely he was raving, or this was St. Peter's, his native shore. He tottered to his feet and stumbled forward; he made his way up over "Gull Hill" where in youth he had gathered eggs; he pressed forward up the beach, falling often, and resting often when he fell. After what seemed an eternity, he reached the pathway through the pine grove, and half unconsciously he followed it; once again he fell and lay there long before he arose; and when he did so, the little cottage, with the lamp dimly burning in the window, confronted him. Recognition burst on him at once and gasping for breath, he again dragged himself forward and grasped the door-latch of his home.

The old man slept lightly and hearing a noise at the door during the night, he sprang from his bed and hastily drew the bolt.

"Bobbie!" he exclaimed.

"Father,"—and the speaker, a drenched and exhausted heap, fell forward into the arms outstretched to receive him,—those arms which had nursed and carried him so often in infancy, and which now bore him tenderly to the couch by the fireside, his own couch, which so long had awaited him.

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Outside the North Wind with spitful flurries of snow swept hungrily over the desolate reach of land, carrying far inland the salty spume of the sea. From the great wastes of the Atlantic it sang and whistled, rattling the dry shingles on the cottage roof as it passed in its frenzy under a cloud-driven, starless sky.

But inside old Matthews home there was little heed to the wildness of the night. With a new fire roaring up the great chimney, and the cozy warmth of lamp and firelight filling the room, the sea-brought Prodigal drowsed in the arms of an old man, and a little lady with whitened hair and tear-dimmed eyes thanked God that this son had again returned to the house of his father.