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HOME AGAIN BLUES

A Tragedy in one Act, by Willegby
Scene—The Southern Railway Station
Greensboro.
Time—A few days before Christmas,
1921.

Characters of the play

I. M. Phresh, '25—home from school
for the holidays.
A Cop.

Author's Foreword

All dramatic scenes should be grounded in the universal. To interest man a play must express a theme applicable to man everywhere. We cannot successfully isolate it in the particular; we must, on the other hand give articulation to a plot whose theme reaches out and seizes upon the universal.

It was, therefore, the intention of the writer of this little episode of heartrending tragedy, to give expression to a theme that may well serve as a play to be given in any land or any speech. The deep pathos of the lad returning home for the first holiday after triumphantly overmastering all obstacles in his path toward higher enlightenment, and his consequent downfall and discrediting by a cruel and unseeing home community that criminally fail

ment—all this is tragedy in the essence.

This play, then, with Aeschylus' to recognize his ability and achieve "Agamemnon," and Shakespeare's "King Lear," is a play dealing with one of the deepest and most soul-stirring themes, the sin of ingratitude.

Act I
Scene 1

As the curtain slowly rises, the noise of an approaching locomotive is heard off-stage. It steadily increases in volume until it apparently reaches its destination, evidently just off to the left of the stage, where we judge it has stopped. The stage remains unoccupied. The settings are quite bare, the stage representing as it does cover of the station between the yard and the street that runs at right angles to the track. Back stage a portion of the track cuts diagonally across. At right a corner of the station protrudes to center stage. The entrance door to the waiting room may be seen in the left section of this building. Off stage right are heard the bumpings and groanings of a trolley car, and an occasional auto as it attempts South Elm Street. The train has stopped and is letting off surplus steam.

Enter Phresh—(He looks it.—Ed.) from left, carrying suitcase. He is seventeen. Booth Tarkington would tell you so himself. He wears pinch back blue flannel overcoat that strikes him just above the knees, disclosing a part of a pair of gray tweed trousers. These in turn have a Gillette crease in them that maintains itself in spite of the fact that the straight cuff trousers flop and reflop several times over the black low quarters. (We know it isn't good playwriting, but we venture the assertion that he wears wool socks, and maybe—carries matches—in his hip pocket.—Ed.) A large gay wool scarf hides everything except the red and brown knit tie that partially shows. On the top of the front of his head there perches a cruelly treated brown chapeau that has evidently been under a steam roller and three or four pile drivers. (They say it's collegiate when you wear it that way.—Ed.)

From his overcoat pocket protrudes the latest copy of the Cosmopolitan. He walks over to the center of stage near the waiting room entrance, and sets down his suitcase. With dignity and great deliberation, he takes from his pocket his watch, disclosing a bronze 25c fob. Returning it to its place, he glances around, as if expecting some one. With a sigh and a raising of eyebrows, he expresses a boredom that would make Wally Reid green with envy.

Phresh—(Oh, Algeron, isn't he the dear!—Ed.) I wonder where the old man could be! He didn't even send the chauffeur around with the limousine to meet me. After the way I knocked those old pros off the limb, too!

His disgust is quite evident. Reaching into his vest pocket he brings forth a half dozen or so cigarette holders of various colors and sizes. Selecting one about nine inches long, he fits his Pall Mall into it, lights up, and begins to smoke rings at the dingy walls of the station.

Enter from the station room door, the Cop. He appears to be absorbed in matters of great moment and does not notice the late arrival.

Phresh (advancing)—Why, good morning, Mr. O'Reily. I'm mighty glad to see you again.

The Cop (looking up)—Hello, son! just gettin' in? Been over to High Point for a day or so?

Phresh (he has lost three inches in chest expansion.) Er—no. I've been off to school this fall, and am just getting in for the holidays.

The Cop—Oh, you are! Didn't know you'd been out of town, son. (Another inch evaporates). But you see I'm kept powerful busy with these here traffic regulations to enforce. Greensboro's such a strict town after watching this car parking in the right places. I just sorter lost track of you boys.

Phresh—Yes, it didn't take us long to grow up. It doesn't seem any time since I was only a high school lad.

The Cop—So you are off at college. How you like it? They feed you plenty?

Phresh—Oh, yes. I eat at the best boarding house in town. Most of the fraternity men eat there. I sit only four tables away from the I. Tappa Kegs. They have a table all by themselves.

The Cop—I bet they do feed you good there. Them men you are talking about are the fellows that are putting up so many buildings over there, aint they? I know they'd eat like hosses. But that's over to Chapel Hill, an' you told me you was going over here to Elon, didn't you, or was it Guilford?

Phresh (horrified)—Oh, no, no. I go to North Carolina, but the fraternity men are not the ones who are doing the work on the new development over there. They are students who belong to fraternities. They are social clubs and very select, you know. You can't join a frat—

The Cop—A what?
Phresh (with fatherly wisdom) Probably you don't understand. By "frat" I mean "fraternity." That is the short name that we apply to them. As I started to say, you can't join a fraternity until your Sophomore year.

The Cop—That's the second year, isn't it?

Phresh—Yes. And when you go back the second year you may get a bid to a frat, and then you join and you get to wear a frat pin, and if you get engaged you give it to your girl and she wears it, like a diamond ring, you know. If you get in a frat you are a big man, and everybody looks up to you when you wear a frat badge.

The Cop—Sorter like the lodge I belong to, I reckon.

Phresh—Yes. Only a frat is lots classier. Of course the Masons are good, but a frat is lots more important and stronger.

The Cop (laughs to himself)—Yes, son, I guess you're right. But it must be a powerful strong club. (chuckles) You are going to join one?

Phresh—I hope so. If I don't, life won't be worth living any more. It would be a terrible disgrace not to belong to any. Just think what you would say if the girls would say to you: "Well, I. M., let me see your pin. I know it's perfectly darling, with the pearls'n everything," and you'd have to say: "I'm not a fraternity man." But I think I'll get in one. One of the fellows that belongs to one told me how to do to get a bid, and I've been doing it. All there is to it is to take the members to the drug store once a day and to the movies at night. Then sometimes I take them to a show in Durham. This boy that told me said it was a confidential tip, and not to let it out, but you won't tell anybody, I know. None of the other first year men know about it.

The Cop—I thought you called 'em Freshmens.

Phresh— Oh, I reckon that is one name, but we prefer that people call us "first year men." It is not as well—vulgar—to say the least, you know.

Off stage band music is heard. Phresh straightens up, adjusts his necktie, sets the cigarette holder at a rakish angle, pulls his hat lower over his eyes, and with a downward movement of his hand wallops the indefensible hat another terrific blow that renders it completely "college."

The Cop—That Salvation Army certainly likes to hang out here at this station. Raise more racket than that auctioneer up at Max Rones' sale. (laughs) Well, I'll see you later, son. (He goes out.)

Phresh (crestfallen, to himself)—I might have known "Bull" Slinger was woofing about the band meeting me at the station because the News told about my being elected sub-assistant manager of the First Year Reserve Horseshoe Varsity team. (swelling to normal). But, care be gone. Next year shall my breast be adorned with the worthy badge of I. Tappa Keg, and I shall then be nothing short of the unadulated stuff! Meanwhile, to my father's house, and the fatted calf!

Heroically, he takes his suitcase, Comos, and departure, just as, with a tremendous crash, the curtain falls and awakes the audience from its sound slumber.

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