THE PROPHETIC MARRIAGE

WARWICK DEEPING

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THE PROPHETIC MARRIAGE ***

THE
PROPHETIC MARRIAGE

BY

WARWICK DEEPING

Author of
SORRELL AND SON
ROPER'S ROW
KITTY, ETC.



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TO

LIEUT.-COL. ANDREW BAXTER

in memory of the
many happy days we spent together
in France

THE PROPHETIC MARRIAGE

PART ONE

Chapter One

Tod, playing some mysterious jungle game under the grubby laurels and aucubas that hedged the side walk leading to No. 13 Spaniards Row, heard two respectable loiterers passing judgment upon his father.

“That silly fool Western will never make any money.”

Tod was a combative child and very clannish, and he pushed a solid round head through the laurel leaves, and retorted upon these Pentworth financiers.

“Boo! Only a silly fool wants to make money!”

The elder of the two, it was Mr. Joab Twain of Twain’s Stores, turned an enormous and angry face on the child.

“Who’s that?”

“Me,” said Tod.

“The Western brat! Sort of language you’d expect

from a little atheist."

"I'm not a brat," said Tod, "and three of the eggs Mother bought of you yesterday was rotten."

He made a rapid, backward retreat through the shrubbery, scrambled over the little, low red-brick wall, descended into the garden, and found his father in his shirt-sleeves preparing to beat the parlour carpet.

Tod flew at him and then stopped dead, solemn as a professor of political economy.

"I say, Daddy——"

"My son——?"

"Jus' heard ol' Twain say you was a silly fool and couldn't make money."

Western threw up his head and laughed.

"It's true—confound him. We haven't the penny-three-farthing soul, Tod, my boy. Come on and beat carpets."

If ever a child loved his father, and had good cause to love him, that child was Tod Western. In later years he never lost the very vivid memory of the man, the memory that many such incidents had left him, glimpsing him in the mirror of a boy's devoted hero worship, a tall man with a Spanish air, head up, black hair waved back, blue eyes a little fierce and ironical. The old velvet coat, soft shirt and collar, cherry coloured tie, knickers and stockings, were part of the beloved picture. For William Western was an original, in that he had not bowed the knee to the gods of Pentworth town, had refused the black coat and the commercial credo, and dressed himself in the Lincoln green of the merry

men of Sherwood. He was generous and he was always short of money. He had the mischievous and affectionate heart of a boy, and a genius for getting the last drop of happiness out of the simplest things of life. Smugness and the dull materialism of Pentworth bored him, but he was never conquered by them. Tod could remember occasional strange rages, times when that boy father of his seemed to mount a big horse and go galloping around and flashing a sword at queer, intangible beasts of slime and shadow. Then he would come down off that horse and laugh, kiss Tod's mother, and perhaps chase Tod round the garden.

There were two whacking the dust of that parlour carpet. William Western using a hollystick, Tod a little bamboo cane, when Tod leant forward on all fours, regarding a frayed patch in front of him.

"Here's where your chair has the fidgets, Daddy."

"Get's excited, does it? 'Wish this chap wouldn't talk so much—and such tosh!' It's a respectable, middle-class chair, Tod, and likes comfortable sermons on a Sunday before the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding."

"My chair fidgets a bit," said Tod.

"There are signs of it elsewhere, my boy."

Then the other voice chimed in:

"Oh, Tod, where did you do that?"

Tod twisted round to face his mother—mother with the gold brown hair and eyes that were so calm and yet always ready to smile.

"Done what, Mummy?"

"Frayed your particular bit of carpet, my son,"

said his father.

Tod ran a tentative hand over a certain portion of his figure.

“Yes, that’s a fragment of shirt, my child.”

“Must have happened sliding down the wall by the church steps,” said Tod, very solemn.

“Oh, Tod!” said his mother.

Tod got up and kissed her.

“Couldn’t you put in a nice bit of leavver, Mummy? I’m so sorry.”

Western struck the carpet a resounding smack.

“That’s what a wanton destruction of good shoddy deserves! Great Jehovah, I’ve forgotten to develop Miss Trilby’s plates!”

“I’ve done it, Will,” said his wife with a mother smile.

Western arose and imitated his son.

“There never was anyone like your mother, Tod,” he confessed.

No man knew better than William Western that it was his wife who had held the gates and walls of this Château Gaillard of a home.

Western’s Photographic Studio was the only temple of its kind in Pentworth town, and Western was a most irresponsible and autocratic priest. The shop had been built in front of one of the little old red houses in Spaniards Row, and its two bulging bow-windows with the white door in between looked like a pair of high-powered spectacles perched on the blunt nose of Western’s house. Tod’s father had a reckless sense of humour. He could take a good

picture, if the subject pleased him; he loved children and would spend an hour playing with some shy child till he had surprised it in a moment of naturalness. The adults of Pentworth gave him no such romantic possibilities, and he did not ask for them.

"Jam 'em in chairs up against a bit of rockery. That's all that's wanted. See they've got their cuffs down and their gold chains showing."

And that was all he did. He plastered his walls and windows with the obviousness of Pentworth, its staring stolidity, its bony head and bucolic gawkishness, its absurd Sabbath clothes all put on for the occasion. There were various mayors of Pentworth in robes and chains; family groups looking thoroughly stiff and uncomfortable; girls sitting in the same Louis Quinze chair with young men posed rather sheepishly behind them; other young men trying to look negligent and at ease while perched on a flat-topped bit of rustic furniture; old ladies with dogs and cats, and their laps and bosoms very much in the foreground; young women who simpered or looked sternly stolid; boys with cricket bats; brides and bridegrooms who did not seem quite sure whether they belonged to each other.

"Slap 'em up against a bit of rockery. Jam their heads in a vice and let 'em stare. Give 'em something to hold—a prayer book, a Malacca cane, somebody else's hand—anything. Give 'em something obvious, something they needn't trouble to understand."

Now and again he caught a temperament, a face, a naturalness that piqued him, and then he made a picture of it, and would spoil a dozen plates in the adventure. Perhaps it was a little country girl with something of the Tess about her, or a sailorman who

had forgotten to worry about being respectable, or an old shepherd who lived with his sheep and the weather. He painted pictures too, rather wild water-colours of marsh, and downlands, and mysterious thundercloud smitten woods. They hung in the studio, but nobody ever bought them. He also catalogued himself as a painter of miniatures, and he had painted several of his wife, and one of Tod. Miss Timperley of Gore Hall had once given him a commission and had then accused him of making her squint.

"But you do squint, madam," he had said in self-defence.

Such sincerity is not made for this world.

The house in Spaniards Row held the heart of Tod's childhood. It was a queer house, a Puck's palace that played tricks on you and always got the best of the game. The front of it was all red, the back all white, but it did not deign to be divided so dogmatically. It had queer gables, juttings out of odd wings and outhouses, little brick excrescences, unexpected chimneys, windows that winked at you goblin fashion. There were two back doors, a side door and a front door, all painted a blurred bluish green. No. 13 delighted in little yards and passages, and funny poky outhouses and cellars that just existed on mystery and did nothing for a living. There was a pump, a rain-water cistern that suggested all sorts of subterranean and watery horrors if you lifted the stone slab; a brick baking-oven fit to hold forty thieves; a coal-cellar that any decent dragon might have coveted. The interior of the house was just as mysterious and unexpected. It was full of passages and cupboards and odd bits of staircase, and every room had a different mood. The

shabby old furniture that Nancy Western had brought with her marriage, the white chintz curtains, faded rose-bud wall-papers, were part of the same picture. Tod used to play at Bogey by hiding in the oak chest on the landing, or he would barricade the attic stairs with a couple of old trunks, a derelict towel-horse, and an assortment of cardboard boxes, and await attack by his father. His father would advance up the stairs with the fur rug from the parlour over his head and shoulders, and armed with a battered dish-cover and rolling pin. Tod held the stairs with paper darts and a curtain pole. There would be great excursions, shouts, battle cries, clashing of dish-cover and curtain pole, and some disorganisation of the lumber forming the barricade.

"I'm King Borrabarroo, the terrible—terrible sabbige, Wahoo, Borrabarroo! I smell the blood of Tod—the Englishman."

"I'm Tod, the giant-killer. I've cut off the heads of ten sabbiges, and I've killed hundreds of Frenchmen."

Sometimes the fort was stormed, but King Borrabarroo never survived the adventure.

Then there were those rambling pilgrimages afield, when Tod learnt about wild birds, and trees, and flowers. There were half days in the Pentworth woods, and Tod could remember spending one whole night under the stars, cuddling close up to his father, with Western's old brown mackintosh drawn over him beside a gipsy fire.

Mummy had looked rather grave next day.

"Will, you shouldn't!"

"It was dry as a haystack, dear. And we had a fire

to frighten the bears and wolves. Hadn't we, Tod?"

"And we cooked pertaters in it, Mummy."

Nancy Western had kissed both her savages and fed them on tea and boiled eggs.

It was not given to the Tod of those days to understand the beloved soul of his mother. Finance did not affect him and if there were worries at No. 13 Spaniards Row, they were not clouds to the child. Nancy Western was a happy woman. Her irresponsible, lovable boy of a man was worth the little contriving frowns that his originalities sometimes placed upon her forehead. She was his mother and his mistress and his wife. She managed his house, performed miracles with his money, made good his casual attitude towards the commercial part of Pentworth, and yet kept him as a lover. Western was no fool, but a very human and wise rebel. He knew what life had given him in his wife's shining eyes, and her soft, full-hearted laughter. He knew that she had had every right to be exasperated—how much she forgave, and how greatly he loved her for that smiling, understanding, human soul of hers. She was Romance, and had never ceased to be Romance, and his home had never been sordid.

Tod had glimpses of his father as a lover. Those summer Sundays were the great days. The picnic basket would be packed the night before, and they would catch the train that always started so adventurously and inconveniently early and landed them at Yerrow or Wivelsea in time for a second breakfast. There were sea days and woodland days, days on the chalk hills with lunch and tea under some windblown thorn. Sometimes it rained, but Western was a genius with a couple of mackintoshes and an umbrella, and life was always a bit of

Crusoe's island. Tod noticed that his mother laughed more, and looked pinker, and brighter about the eyes on those days. She wore her pretty frocks—the white frock with the pink ribbons, or the green one edged with white. Most of the time Tod's father had an arm round her, or he was sitting so that he could touch her or give a playful tweak to the hair. Tod remembered a day in the Yerrow woods when he had trundled off to look at an ant-hill near the camping ground, and had come back to find his mother in his father's arms and being kissed, as he—Tod—was never kissed. Tod had sneaked off again, and spent half an hour stirring up the ant-heap with a stick.

Six days out of seven Mummy was cooking, or cleaning, or mending clothes, or shut up in that funny little dark-room where Daddy messed about with bottles and dishes and things. Tod never remembered seeing her out of temper, except on one of those Saturday afternoons when Uncle Remus drove over from Lydhurst. Tod came on them in the garden, down by the three old apple trees, and his mother was very white and Uncle Remus very red.

"Never dare to say that to me again."

"You needn't flare out like that, Nan. There's no denying that Will's a poor hand at business."

"I didn't marry him for that, did I? He's the best man in the world, and he has made me happy."

Tod did not like Uncle Remus. He was long and meagre, with a figure that had concavities where bulges should have been. He had weak, shifty eyes, a fringe of grey hair, a neck like a turkey's and a wonderful blue and everted lower lip. That lip used to fascinate Tod, especially when Uncle Remus ate peas with a knife.

"Doesn't it get cut, Uncle?"

"Get cut, boy? What?"

"Your lip."

Uncle Remus made some sort of remark about a strap and its uses.

He was a farmer, pretty well-to-do, and he wore a hard felt hat, green with age, and black clothes that looked rusty. The last thing Uncle Remus ever did was to part with money. He avoided the sacrifice, dodged it, walked round it, ignored it unless it was too obviously part of the day's business. Never once did Tod get a sixpence out of him, and Uncle Remus got nothing out of Tod. He thought him a bold and cheeky little beast, and Tod christened his uncle "Old-bug-in-the-Bed," though how he had come by the phrase no one ever knew! His father roared when he first heard it; his mother went red, began a reproof, and then laughed like her husband.

Even at the age of seven Tod had some understanding of his father's attitude towards the world of Pentworth town. Pentworth thought William Western an eccentric fool; it also disliked him, because it had an unpleasant suspicion that Western managed to laugh at Pentworth's opinion. When you have labelled a man as a fool, it is most improper for him to turn round and laugh at you. There had been occasions, of which Tod, of course, knew nothing, when his father had got up at public meetings and said the most ironical, scathing and truthful things with a happy smile on his face. Pentworth, especially the commercial part of Pentworth, did not like that sort of man. He was an uncomfortable neighbour, the kind of person who upsets the middle-class "Christian," who talked about

money-changers and scourages, and who reminded fat people that their God's feet had been washed by a harlot.

That his father was at war with Pentworth Tod guessed quite shrewdly, but the spiritual inspiration of the feud was beyond the grasp of the child.

Tod remembered quite a number of Western's queer sayings, and they stuck in his memory, to be pulled out and used in after years.

"I'm not a penny-in-the-slot machine."

"Christ was born before the commercial traveller."

"Black-coated, slimy slaves!"

"Up with Ruskin, down with the robbers."

"You never need fear playing dirty tricks so long as you keep them out of the newspapers."

"This country with a penny-three-farthing soul."

Chapter Two

Tod had been out stalking imaginary tigers in a jungle growth of runner beans, artichokes and gooseberry bushes, his weapon the deadly spring-gun that would eject a mild pea at a velocity calculated to make a dog think that a fly had tickled him. It was growing dark, and Tod had tracked an elephant out of the artichoke forest. The tracks led Tod to the brick wall and the front shrubbery, that most dismal and dangerous spot in all Pentworth, where a boy had to be infinitely daring and infinitely cautious or lose his life. Tod's boa-constrictor lived in the

shrubbery, and fed upon the various Pentworth worthies whom Tod's imagination consigned to it. The Rector of St. Jude's, Mr. Joab Twain, the Police Inspector, old Mrs. Clutterbuck who kept the sweet shop, had all been devoured by the great snake. Tod's father had pretended to wonder what the snake could have done with Mrs. Clutterbuck's boots and the Police Inspector's buttons.

Tod had his head above the wall when the two men came out of the house and stood talking in the alley-way between the railings and the shrubs. One of the men was Tod's father, the other a rather wild-eyed, hunted looking little man who kept a bootshop, and whose name was Mr. Jacks. The street lamp had been lit, and Tod could see that Mr. Jacks was strangely excited. He held his hat in one hand, and a long black forelock had fallen over his forehead, and he stammered slightly when he talked.

Tod's father had taken some white things out of his pocket, bits of white paper that crinkled.

"It's made to be used, old man."

Tod's father handed the white things to Mr. Jacks, and Mr. Jacks seemed extraordinarily upset about something. He pocketed the paper, grabbed at Western's hand, and made funny noises in his throat.

"God bless you, Western. God bless you."

Tod saw him cram his hat on his head and make a dash for the street. Western re-entered the house.

Tod forgot the boa-constrictor, scuttled back, and went in by the garden door. His father had just strolled into the parlour where his wife was laying the table for supper. Tod hung back in the hall and listened.

“Poor Jacks,” said his mother.

“Poor devil! Such a good chap, and so fond of those kiddies. What an accursed and sordid slaving this commercialism of ours can be!”

“Did you help him?”

“Yes”

“Much?”

“Ten pounds,” said Tod’s father laconically.

Tod saw his mother’s blue eyes look at his father with a moment’s tragic dismay.

“Oh, Will!”

“I had to, dear. The poor beggar was so——”

Tod’s mother came quickly round the table and kissed Tod’s father.

“You dear? I didn’t mean——”

Western caught his wife’s hands and held them against his mouth.

“No wonder I’m always in love with you, Nan.”

No. 13 Spaniards Row had its periodic financial crisis, and Western’s generosity to Mr. Jacks inaugurated a season of lean months. Tod noticed various things. His father spent more time in the studio and in the dark room, and even consented to paint the portrait of Miss Glandinning’s fat fox-terrier. The daily glass of beer disappeared from the dinner table. Margarine replaced butter, and jam and margarine were not allowed to meet on the same piece of bread. The Sunday excursions were cut down to two a month, and Tod had to wait for a new summer suit. Yet Château Gaillard held out bravely and lost none of its happy good temper. His mother

sang or whistled softly while she worked, and she found time to give Tod his lessons. Western had bought an old bicycle and was touring the country, taking pictures of Heddingly Castle and Bramber Abbey, “Sunset on Downs” and “Dawn over the Weald.” He had ideas about developing the picture postcard trade. It was a little less obvious and boring than photographing Pentworth in its Sunday clothes.

About that time a Mr. Hogg obtruded himself on Tod’s notice. He was a square, red-faced man who walked with his feet set rather wide apart and his toes turned in, rather like a duck. He had little, alert, evil eyes, and a nose like the nose of one of those indiarubber faces that you can flatten as you please. The young animal in Tod did not like the smell of the man. Mr. Hogg was always turning up when Tod’s father was away, and hanging about in the shop or the studio, making googly eyes at Tod’s mother.

One autumn evening, just about dusk, Tod heard his mother calling him.

“Tod—Tod——”

Tod was in the garden, and there was a cry in his mother’s voice that made him race for the house. He found her in the parlour, lighting a candle with hands that shook a little; something black and heavy and straight lay on the table. But Tod’s mother was not alone. A man seemed to have fallen over one of the rush-bottomed chairs; he was picking himself up, and as his head appeared Tod saw that his forehead was all bloody. But it was his mother’s face that astonished and bewildered Tod. She was angry, with an anger that was new to the child; her face was all stark and white and blazing, and her eyes looked like two bits of shining glass.

“This man has insulted your mother, Tod. Never forget it.”

Then Tod’s father appeared out of the sudden dusk, like Ulysses from out of the sea.

“Hallo, what’s this, Nan?”

“We owe this man money, Will. He has got to be paid.”

“Of course, he’ll be paid.”

Tod’s mother blazed at them both.

“To-night, at once—now! He came here and asked me to pay him with—myself. Tod, dear—come to me.”

Tod saw his mother’s anger leap to his father and set him afire. He had never glimpsed his father like that before, and it made him afraid. He ran to his mother, and was caught up and carried out of the room.

The affair ended there, so far as Tod was concerned. He heard strange noises in the house, a voice that howled, the sound of heavy blows. The street door banged. Then there was silence.

Tod’s father had lit the lamp when Tod and his mother returned to the parlour. A broken chair lay in a corner, and the cloth had been dragged from the table. Western was whistling softly. Tod saw his eyes light up strangely directly his mother entered the room.

“That was all my fault, Nan. And, by God, I shan’t forget it.”

Tod felt rather forgotten for a moment. His mother was weeping, and Tod’s father was saying all manner of strange things, and holding her as though

he never meant to let her go again. Tod noticed that the knuckles of his father's right hand were all red and raw.

"Now, what about supper? Sit down, dearest. Come along, Tod, my man; we'll lay the table."

In the pantry Tod asked his father a question.

"What did the man say to Mother, Daddy?"

"I hope you will never know, my boy. Now then, hand out the bread from that pan."

Various familiar pieces of furniture disappeared from No. 13 Spaniards Row during the next two weeks. The oak chest on the landing was carried away by two men in dirty white aprons, and placed in a cart. The grand father clock went with it, looking very moon-faced and melancholy and ready to break into tears. Tod lost his temper over the rape of the poor grandfather clock, and challenged the two men.

"What are you doin' with our furniture?"

"You go and ask that respec'ble father of yours, cocky," said one of the men roughly.

Tod glared at him.

"Your teeth's all black," he retorted, "why don't you clean 'em like a gentleman?"

His mother looked rather sad for two days, but Tod noticed that his father was very loving with her, and could hardly bear her out of sight. Tod's father had all sorts of pet names for his mother, and some of the names seemed to come out of the Bible—at least Tod thought so. His mother's eyes would grow all strange and deep and shimmery when Tod's father called her by these names: Sometimes she

would answer him with, “You dear old Quixote,” and Tod tried to find out what a Quixote was.

He asked Mrs. Clutterbuck at the sweet shop, the lady who had been devoured by the imaginary snake, but Mrs. Clutterbuck did not help him.

“Aven’t got any. We don’t stock it.”

Which was a subtle and innocent gibe at the psychology of Pentworth.

The first tragedy of Tod’s life followed swiftly upon the brown heels of the autumn. Western, pedalling that old bicycle of his down Castle Hill, collided at the crossroads with Pentworth’s latest mechanical sensation, the motor-car from Pavitt’s Brewery. William Western was rushed home to Spaniards Row in the car that had smashed him, and that night he lay in the long, low room that overlooked the street, dying. Tod had not seen him. The dazed and uncomprehending child had been seized on by Mr. Jacks and carried off to that gentleman’s bootshop. Mr. Jacks seemed very upset about something, and kept pulling that forelock of his and uttering strange blasphemies. He stodged Tod with sweets, and talked all sorts of comforting and mendacious nonsense to the child.

“Yes, Daddy’s all right. See him to-night, Tod, old man. Best man in the world your daddy; best chap that ever was.”

About seven o’clock somebody rang Mr. Jacks’ bell, and Mr. Jacks went to answer it.

“Western wants to see his boy,” said a voice.

“I’ll bring him myself,” said the keeper of the bootshop.

Tod did not realise what was happening to the life of No. 13 Spaniards Row. Mr. Jacks held his hand and appeared unable to speak coherently when he delivered Tod to his mother. Nancy Western bent down and kissed Tod, and her mouth felt very cold. Her eyes had a strange look, as though they were frozen, and her face was all stiff and expressionless. Tod did not understand how great and piteous his mother's courage was.

She took Tod to his father, and Tod was a little frightened. His father's face was the colour of linen, and the big eyes all big and misty. He lay with the clothes turned back off his chest, and just breathed and looked, and there was a queer spasm in his breathing.

"Oh, Daddy!"

His mother held him back.

"You must be very quiet, dear. Sit down. Daddy wants to talk."

The dying man's eyes were all anguish and tenderness.

"Let him kiss me, Nan."

Tod kissed his father, and Western spoke to him in a small and husky voice.

"Take care of Mummy, Tod; there never was such a mother as Mummy. She's been the Faery Queen to me. I'm going away on a long journey, Tod, and you've got to be a man."

Tod choked a little.

"I'll look after Mummy till you come back, Daddy."

"Nan, I can't bear it," said Tod's father, and

Mother took Tod away.

Mr. Jacks was waiting, and trying to light a pipe that kept going out.

“Will you keep him to-night?”

“Anything,” said Mr. Jacks; “much better if it had been me. Silly sort of world, anyway. Tod, ol’ man; let’s go and have some toffee.”

“I can see Daddy in the morning,” said Tod.

“Yes, dear.”

Mr. Jacks carried him off, seeing that Tod’s mother was breaking, and that her thoughts were with her man.

Tod would eat neither sweets nor supper that night, and sat in the shopkeeper’s own chair, asking interminable questions. “Where’s Daddy going? Will he be away long? What’s Daddy in bed for? Has he broken his leg? What’ll they do to the man who did it?” Mr. Jacks had always known himself to be a coward, but he felt more afraid of hurting that child than he had feared anything in his life before. Little Tod Western would have to be told the truth, and Mr. Jacks saw himself breaking the news to the boy.

Tod fell asleep at last in the arm-chair, and Mr. Jacks spent the night on the hard and shining black sofa, dozing off and waking with a start, to find the child still sleeping. It was one of the longest nights of the man’s life. He crept out of the room before daylight, and pottered about in the kitchen, lighting the fire and getting breakfast ready. About seven someone rang the bell, and Mr. Jacks went to the side door.

“Mr. Western’s dead,” said a voice.

"Is he?" said Mr. Jacks blankly.

"Mrs. Western wants you to tell the boy."

"Damn," said Mr. Jacks. "Yes, I'll do it."

He kept Tod in the sitting-room, and his own children in the kitchen. Tod ate quite a good breakfast, and Mr. Jacks gave him buttered toast, sardines, and an egg. Tod kept asking when he might go and see his father, and old Jacks, seizing the desperate courage of a tender-hearted man, lit a pipe and dragged Tod on to his knee.

"Tod, ol' man—damn this pipe! The smoke gets into a chap's eyes. Tod, ol' man, your father has gone away."

"Gone away? Where's he gone to?"

"Heaven, Tod, ol' man. And you'll go there some day and see him."

The child's eyes were round and staring. He did not speak for a moment, and then he clutched one of Jacks' hands.

"Daddy's dead!"

"Yes, dear; he's gone to heaven."

Before Mr. Jacks could grapple the crisis, the child was off his knee and out of the door.

"Tod, ol' man, Tod——"

But the boy did not heed him. The street door stood open at the end of the passage, and Tod dashed out into the misty November sunlight, a strangely silent child with the face of an old man. Mr. Jacks faltered at the street door.

"He's gone to his mother," he said to himself; "she'll want him."

But Tod had not gone to his mother. He ran out of the town and down the hill to the meadows along the river. The grass was all wet and grizzled with early frost, and the great elms were dropping their yellow leaves to a light breeze. And Tod ran wild along those meadows, silent no longer, but wailing and calling his father. “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy. Come back, Daddy, oh, come back.” His child’s anguish seemed tireless and unending, and even when the movement of grief ebbed in him, he lay on the wet grass under an elm tree and sobbed.

Tod remained lost all that day, but about dusk someone saw him toddling like a little ghost up the lane to Spaniards Row. He went in by the garden door, and there were no lights in the house. His hands fumbled at the door of the parlour and opened it, almost without a sound.

Someone was sitting by the window, a shadowy figure, with a white face. It was Tod’s mother, and she was alone, and of a sudden Tod’s little heart went out to her like a bird to its mate.

“Mummy!”

“Tod!”

He ran to her, and was caught in her arms. She asked no questions, but held him to her and kissed him again and again. Her tears were on his face, and her breath came in great gasps. Tod had never been kissed in such a way before. Somehow it made him think of that day in the Yerrow woods when he had seen his father kissing his mother like that. Strange, passionate kisses, beyond the soul of a child.

“Mummy!”

Her broken words fell on him like her tears.

"His boy! You are him. O God, how can I bear it!"

Chapter Three

A week after William Western's death, an old lady took up her abode in the kitchen, and Tod's mother went out of it and accepted the responsibilities of the studio and the shop. She had grown familiar with the technique of the business during her husband's lifetime, and a neat little notice posted up in the window warned Pentworth that it could be photographed as before. Nancy Western had inherited two five hundred pound mortgages which gave her forty pounds a year. She meant to make a fight of it in Pentworth for the sake of her boy, and not to be pushed off the narrow shelf of her commercial opportunity.

Tod would not be parted from his mother those days. He slept in her bed, and more than once he woke at night to find her clasping him and kissing him with passionate tenderness.

"Oh, little Will."

Tod's arms clung round her neck.

"I'm a man now, Mummy," and so he was, in spite of his years.

He had developed a sudden new self-consciousness and a new ideal. He stayed with her in the shop, sat with her in the dark-room, watching and learning with an intense seriousness that helped the broken woman beside him back to her smiles. Mrs. Western was looking very pale and comely and pathetic in her black dress, and other people noticed

this, as well as Tod. Quite a considerable part of Pentworth expressed its sympathy by coming to be photographed. Mr. Jacks headed the procession, and the Mayor and Mayoress gave the impulse public recognition.

Nancy Western had as much as she could do. Tod, the child, was challenged and worried. He ran about after her like a dog, but a very intelligent, quick-eyed dog, who soon learnt to fetch and carry. His devotedness overtopped all difficulties. He learnt where every thing was to be found; he brushed out the shop and dusted the shelves and counter, tied up parcels, went on errands, even insisted on being allowed to make solemn, round-handed entries in the ledger and day-book. He began to pick up the technique of the dark-room where his mother worked with the light from the little red lamp shining on her soft hair and pale face. And he developed a quaint and autocratic fatherliness towards her that issued orders and saw them obeyed.

“Mummy must come to dinner.”

And Mummy went.

“Mummy’s eyes are tired. Mummy must come and lie down on the sofa.”

How much his queer and authoritative little tendernesses helped his mother, Tod never guessed. His child’s love stanched the blood-flow of those bitter weeks, and turned her anguish into a duller pain. He made a complete and splendid conquest of old Mrs. Bunce who functioned in the kitchen. She would have let him turn her rolling-pin into a cricket bat, or play football with her Sunday cap.

“That there child’s a marvel,” she announced to her friends; “there must ’ave been a lot of good,

somehow, in William Western."

A year passed away, and Nancy Western was able to look about her and estimate her success. She found that it had been very considerable, so considerable that she was able to pay a young woman to help her in the business, and to send Tod to school. Uncle Remus, who still drove in regularly from Lydhurst, and whose contribution to Nancy's assistance had been a great deal of pessimistic advice, a few potatoes, and a bundle or two of acid rhubarb, suggested the Grammar School at Marychurch.

"A solid sort o' school," he called it; "nothing new-fangled about it. Turn a boy out sensible and solid."

"And stupid," added Tod's mother.

She pointed out to Uncle Remus that the Grammar School at Marychurch meant Tod's board, and that she could not afford it, and Uncle Remus did not offer to accept any responsibility.

Moreover, Tod absolutely and utterly refused to be parted from his mother, and her heart was with him in his obstinacy. He was such a sturdy, spirited child, she could find no signs of the incipient milksop in him. A Mr. Chipperton conducted a private school in Pentworth, and Nancy Western called on Mr. Chipperton.

He was a tall man of forty or so, with a high bumpy forehead, pince-nez, and an air of vivacious benignity. Mr. Chipperton "conducted" his school; any other method of expressing his mastership would have been vulgar, and Mr. Chipperton was never vulgar. He was a good soul who had concentrated in his person all the ideals and prejudices of middle-

class Pentworth, and to whom everything in life was either “nice or nasty,” “proper or improper.” He studied refinement, and kept a rather bleary and mistrustful eye on all girls. Sex scared him to death, made him chatter all sorts of fanatical and pathetic nonsense. Mr. Chipperton was English middle-class prudishness stuck on a stool and wagging a long forefinger. He was a bachelor; Miss Victoria Chipperton, his sister, kept his house and helped him to guard the world’s virtue.

“My dear madam, the note of my school is refinement—refinement, and a religious education. I try to remember, madam, that character comes before the multiplication table. I try to be a father to my boys.”

Nancy Western, judging him by her dead husband, thought Mr. Chipperton an honest but harmless sort of fool. She felt quite capable of looking after Tod’s character; she wanted Mr. Chipperton to educate him, and she said so.

“Certainly, madam, our curriculum is up-to-date in every department. We can give a scientific and commercial training. I am not a bigoted classic.”

“I want him to learn what is sensible and useful.”

“And poetry, madam, music, and lit-er-a-ture?”

“I’ll see to the romance,” said Nancy Western.

So Clarence Todhunter Western trudged daily to Prospect House and sat under Mr. Chipperton and Mr. Chipperton’s two assistant masters. Tod began by being rather shy and solemn, and he seemed to know very little about arithmetic and grammar, and his knowledge of Latin was nil. He was placed in the lowest class, and though he was no Paladin in the

class-room, he was a force to be reckoned with in the playground.

“Western, how do you spell pork?”

“Pig’s meat, sir?”

Mr. Chipperton inclined his head in the affirmative.

“P-a-l-k, sir,” said Tod.

The master blinked.

“Very ingenious, Western, but incorrect. Think of fork and not chalk.”

Tod heard about pork in the playground. Little Cocky Walker, that snub-nosed, pallid, supercilious bit of infallibility, selected Tod for the day’s jest.

“Come here, Clarence Todhunter, and spell chalk.”

“C-h-a-l-k,” said Tod.

“Rot. It’s c-h-o-r-k, you cuckoo.”

“I’m not a cuckoo,” said Tod.

“If I say you’re a cuckoo you’re a cuckoo.”

“Then you’ll say it the other way round.”

And Tod closed with Master Walker, and after rollings and contortions that lasted three minutes, remained triumphantly uppermost, holding the infallible one’s face hard against the gravel.

“Say ‘Western’s not a cuckoo.’ ”

Further contact with the gravel persuaded Master Walker that it would be wiser to propitiate Tod.

Tod let him up.

“Cocky’s licked at last,” said one of the interested

crowd, and Tod's imaginative spelling ceased to be a subject for public criticism.

Prospect House was a very ordinary school with the usual class-rooms and the lifeless uninspired routine. The natural curiosity of the child did not survive in that pot-shop where all the pots were alike and filled with the same stodge. One or two boys remained keen, and followed Mr. Chipperton into the wilds of algebra, and found adventurous delights in Latin grammar. Nine-tenths of the school were bored, and determined to avoid learning anything that could be safely left unlearnt. So long as you could steer safely past "impots" and a whacking, what did it matter?

Tod, too, was bored, and it was his first experience of boredom. He did not understand it, and he was inclined to blame himself. The great fact that weighed with him was that his mother had sent him to this school to learn, and she was paying money for it, and he decided that it was his business to learn. He fought his boredom as though it were a deadly sin, and Mr. Jukes the junior master began to appreciate Tod.

Mr. Chipperton was an innocent and unconscious dispeller of ennui. He was the serious, impressive, dramatic clown, and the little devils mocked him. Mr. Chipperton was something of a poser, but he did not pose effectively.

"You must lead boys; you must be a boy with boys," such were his inspirations.

He played cricket with the school, going out in baggy grey flannel trousers, a white shirt, and an absurd little red and black striped cap that refused to sit down decently on his bald head. He was very

energetic and conversational in the field, but he let most of the balls through and muffed nearly all his catches. The school hung on the edge of giggles when he was batting. He sweated, and poked and flourished, and was generally bowled in the second over by some quite futile googly.

Then there were those “Christian evenings” on Fridays in the big schoolroom. Tod attended on several occasions until he disgraced himself by laughing, and was severely admonished by Miss Chipperton.

The process never seemed to vary. Mr. Chipperton would seat himself on the music-stool, lift the lid of the keyboard, and let his fingers patter over the keys. There were mice in the piano—perennial mice.

Mr. Chipperton’s handkerchief would come out.

“Dear me, nasty little animals!”

He would wipe the notes excitedly.

“Haven’t we got a cat, my dear? Disgusting little animals. Now, boys, ‘Onward, Christian Soldiers’——”

Tod grew in stature and in understanding that summer, and came by a new and rather disturbing knowledge of the great facts of life. In spite of Mr. Chipperton Tod discovered sex, and it was uncovered to him nastily—by a member of a clique of dirty little boys who had wriggled behind the mock curtain with which the English middle-class drapes the mystery.

Tod was horrified, disgusted, incredulous, because these urchins dragged his parents into the squabble, and attacked him through his mother.

"You go and ask your ma how you were born."

"I will," said Tod.

And he did.

It was one of the moments of anguish in Nancy Western's life, for the boy came to her shrinkingly, his eyes asking to be given a convincing picture of the old fairy tale. He had been shocked, and his mother had to shock him a second time; nor need it have happened, and Tod's mother blamed herself. Had she been thoughtless or a coward?

"God did give me to you, didn't he, Mummy?"

"Yes, dear."

"How did I come, then?"

It was dusk, and she drew Tod to the sofa and, feeling her face like fire, told him the truth. She had to tell him; she knew now that she ought to have told him before. The nastiness should never have been. It was England, the old England of the "little Bethels."

The child shrank from her a little, and she felt his shrinking in every fibre of her woman's soul. It could not end there, and she stripped her love and her courage to the child, and fought to regain the glamour of the lost fairy tale. She told him the whole story, simply, a little tragically, describing the long waiting, the pain, the joy. Truth and emotion will always touch and convince a child.

In the end the boy's arms were round her neck.

"Oh, Mummy, Mummy, what a lot of pain I gave you."

She had won.

One of the backyard clique challenged Tod in the

playground next morning. He was an unwholesome, spotty boy of the name of Blimmer.

“Hallo, Western, did you ask your mother?”

Tod went very white.

“Don’t you speak of my mother; she’s an angel.”

“Shucks,” said the other.

And then Tod flew at him and with such a fury that its fierceness impressed itself on all the boys who saw that fight.

Blimmer was bigger than Tod, but he was flabby, and the smaller boy’s fury scared him. Even when he flinched and tried to edge away, Tod followed him with relentless, hammering fists. It ended with Blimmer lying face downwards on the ground, snivelling, to be rescued by Mr. Chipperton who stalked with jerky solemnity across the playground, and pulled Tod off by the collar.

“For shame, Western.”

Tod blazed at the master.

“Then he shouldn’t speak of my mother. I’ll kill him another time.”

From that day all the decent boys loved Tod dearly.

Coincidences gathered to thrust a more intimate conception of the great mystery upon the boy. He overheard things, casual bits of gossip, words that passed perhaps between Mrs. Bunce and her friends.

“Pretty Mrs. Western.”

They called his mother that. Yes, of course she was pretty.

"She ought to marry again."

"There's gents who're ready to ask her."

And then the figures of Mr. Plumpton and Mr. Parfit loomed up over Tod, and threw their heavy, black-coated shadows across his life.

Mr. Parfit was a decent little man with a brisk and nervous manner. He was very black and sallow, had very small hands and feet, a hollow chest and high shoulders. His obvious niceness did not recommend him to anybody who was easily bored. He was very polite to Tod, and even brought lumps of sugar for Tod's latest friend, Gruff, a mongrel terrier. Mr. Parfit appeared to be intensely interested in artistic photography, but Tod soon realised Mr. Parfit wanted his mother.

Mr. Plumpton was a very different sort of creature. He kept the grocery shop in Stone Street, and was big and clumsy and domineering. He had a fine, egg-coloured moustache that spread and drooped like the wings of a swallow tail butterfly. When he looked at you his swollen blue eyes seemed to be saying, "We make no allowance for broken eggs." Tod had heard his scolding in the shop, and seen him turn with sudden shining and sweating urbanity to serve someone who was worth while.

"Gooday, madam, be-ootiful weather; and what can we do for you to-day, madam?"

Mr. Plumpton was a widower and he had a family of his own, half a dozen cheese-faced children with loud voices and hard eyes. The grocer may have wanted someone to manage his house—anyway he began to bulk big round about No. 13 Spaniards Row, and to make love to Tod's mother. The bigger he bulked, the more Tod hated him, and the less he

saw of Mr. Parfit. Mr. Parfit was crowded out and became a negligible shadow.

Tod had never hated anything as he hated Mr. Percy Plumpton.

“Hallo, Clarence; learnt to spell yet?”

He tried to be jocular and friendly in an arrogant sort of way. The boy had to be humoured, but Tod remained glumy and *farouche*.

“We’ll cure you of that—some day,” said Mr. Plumpton to himself.

The man was a mountain of self complacency, a strongly sexed beast who had had his way with women. There was something greasy and unclean about him, as though he was always hot and never washed. But Tod hated him most for the way he looked at his mother; she might have been something he wanted to eat.

Tod noticed that his mother remained quite calm and quiet when Mr. Plumpton was talking to her. She did not seem to be in the least afraid of him; she treated him just like other people.

Tod was worried, bewildered, frightened. He had moments of anguish, moments when he yearned to rush at his mother and cry, “O, Mummy, Mummy, don’t.”

His mother puzzled him. Mr. Plumpton might have been an old woman in a black bonnet for all the change he wrought in her. She had the same soft laugh; the same steady, tender eyes; the same pale quick-coloured prettiness. Tod realised of a sudden how pretty his mother was, far prettier than Mrs. Coghurst of the Brewery, and Mrs. Coghurst was supposed to be Pentworth’s Astarte. Tod grew almost

afraid of his mother's prettiness. He saw Mr. Plumpton's big red hands making a grab at her, and the vision filled him with sensitive horror.

Tod grew reserved and shy those days. He kept apart, thought a great deal about his father, and was often in that corner of the churchyard where William Western lay buried. His hatred of Mr. Plumpton was a great cloud over his life, a cloud that threatened to burst.

And burst it did, and the dog Gruff was the cause of the deluge.

It appeared that Mr. Plumpton had invited himself to tea. He came swelling in, making the floor boards creak, and with his usual complacent clumsiness, trod on Gruff's tail. Now Gruff was a quick-tempered dog, and his teeth tried the texture of Mr. Plumpton's grey Sunday trousers.

"Damn the dog!"

Next moment a fat leg swung out and a big boot sent Gruff head over heels into the corner.

Tod lost his whole soul at that. He went at the big man like a little white-faced fury, kicking and hitting, and his kicks hurt.

"Tod, dear!"

"You brat! I'll teach you manners."

Mr. Plumpton got Tod by the ear and twisted it with his big fingers, while with the other hand he cuffed Tod's head.

"If your mother can't manage you, it's time——"

Then Nancy Western intervened.

"How dare you touch my boy! How dare you!"

Mr. Plumpton stared at her, but he let go of Tod, who would have rushed in again had not his mother seized him. She was breathing fast, and he could feel her heart thudding, and her eyes were all ablaze.

“You cad! Get out of my house!”

“Well, I’m damned,” said the man, “and I was going to ask you to marry me.”

“You! Marry me!” she laughed. “I knew the honour was to be offered me, and I had to wait to refuse it, hadn’t I? Get out of my house, please.”

And Mr. Plumpton went.

Tod leapt up into his mother’s arms and kissed her.

“You do love me, Mummy?”

“My darling.”

“You won’t give me another daddy?”

She kissed him with passion.

“Never, never, my little Will.”

Chapter Four

It caused no sensation in Pentworth when Clarence Todhunter Western put on trousers, and became the little father of the man he was to be, a sturdy figure, not too long in the leg, and with a close-cropped, squirish and intelligent head. He was a high-spirited, passionate child, with his mother’s colouring and his father’s eyes. He looked at you squarely, and smiling if you pleased him, showing a fine row of strong white teeth. Girls called him a

"brown boy," and thought him rather plain.

Mr. Jacks and Gruff were the only creatures who showed any particular interest in Tod's trousers.

Mr. Jacks met Tod in Conduit Street, and appeared greatly impressed.

"Well, well, Tod, old man—that's fine. Funny sort of world anyway. We'll be old buffers in ten years."

Mr. Jacks' simplicity—sharp people called it foolishness—always appealed to Tod. He liked to go fishing and bird-studying with Jacks; they were just boys together; there was no talking up and down about it.

Gruff showed his interest in Tod's trousers by walking round him and sniffing at them. Gruff seemed to distrust trousers, and the change in Tod disturbed him.

"A sign of incipient and respectable dullness, old man," said the dog; "you'll get irritable and kick me some day. Or you'll be going walks with a thing in a petticoat, and I'll be gooseberry. O lord!"

There was no burking the fact that Tod discovered Romance ten days after that notable advance in costume, and Romance dawned on him in the blue eyes and yellow hair of "Giggles."

Tod first saw Miss Millie Hornblower sitting on her father's garden wall, and eating strawberries out of the hollow of a rhubarb leaf. The brick wall was old and mossy, with a mass of green orchard trees behind it, and a rose or two showing red as fire. The girl was wearing a light blue linen dress, tan shoes, and brown stockings, and her yellow hair was all fluffed out like smoke.

“Hallo, boy.”

“Hallo,” said Tod.

She slipped a strawberry between her restless red lips, tossed her hair, and threw the stalk at Tod. It hit him on the collar and made a little red mark.

“Like one?”

“Thank you.”

“Please.”

She stretched out the leaf, and then drew it back again with a mischievous giggle.

“What’s your name, first.”

“Tod.”

“What a silly name.”

“It’s short for Todhunter,” said the boy.

“Toadhunter? Oh, horrid! Haven’t you got a nicer name than that?”

“Clarence.”

She considered “Clarence,” swinging her legs and looking at him with feline curiosity. The child had a way with her, and a restless, mischievous yet lean sauciness that promised to mature and trouble many men. She was very bold at twelve, mainly because she had not learnt to hide her boldness. Sex cunning and middle-class morality were to teach her that.

Tod had his strawberry, and a chat with Miss Hornblower. The Hornblowers had but lately come to Pentworth, where Mr. Hornblower was in charge of the local management of a coal merchant’s business. It appeared that the Hornblowers had just bought a new drawing-room carpet—a very gorgeous

affair; that Dad thought of keeping a pony and trap; and that she—Miss Hornblower—was going to receive piano lessons from the organist of St. Luke's. Tod accepted all this information with proper awe and interest. Miss Hornblower had a fine appreciation of her social position, and she meant other people to appreciate it also. Humility does not pay in middle-class England, and Millie had absorbed the wisdom of her parents.

"What's your father?"

"He's dead," said Tod.

There was nothing interesting to her in the fact that Tod's father was dead.

"Where do you live?"

"Number thirteen Spaniards Row. My mother owns the photographic studio."

"Oh, you keep a shop!" said Miss Hornblower.

Her exclamatory tone challenged him.

"It's not a shop, but a studio. My dad painted pictures."

"Did he sell them?" asked the girl.

"He painted 'em for pleasure," said Tod, lured from the strict truth by her feminine fascinations.

Miss Hornblower offered him another strawberry.

"It's quite gentlemanly to paint pictures," she announced. "Where do you go to school?"

"Chipperton's. Prospect House."

"I know some of the boys there, Bertie Blimmer and Tom Cassilis."

Tod felt that he might have serious things to say

to Messrs. Blimmer and Cassilis.

That was the beginning of Tod's first romance, and it occurred in spite of Mr. Chipperton and his mother. The strange part of it was that this boy was inspired to a sensitive and adventurous chivalry by this vain and precocious little chit who had learnt all the elemental tricks of the fully sexed woman. Nature does not intend a man to have ideals, she adapts her sorcery and makes use of these ideals, and in the great game of fooling him nearly all the poets and romancers have blindly and wilfully aided her in her deceit. Tod had taken to reading boy's tales and romances, and his head was full of wonderful young women who were beautiful as angels, sweet as nectar, gentle as white pigeons, and pure as the forest dew. A boy fought for one of them, suffered for her, rescued her from all sorts of wonderful perils and iniquities, and in the end some good old man blessed them, and they loved each other for ever and ever.

Mr. Chipperton believed in that sort of tale, and in that hypothetical young heroine, but he was a bachelor, and he regarded the actual thing in petticoats with immense and cowardly suspicion. He did not like girls loitering about the playground gate. He approved most thoroughly of the "caterpillar" formation in which Miss Rumble sent her young ladies to take their daily exercise. Mr. Chipperton, that most representative English moralist, having taken up a thoroughly false and artificial position on the sex question, found himself harassed and outmanœuvered, and was always being fooled behind his back. The pity of it all is that these good people teach youth a false and lying philosophy, arm them with brittle and treacherous weapons that are

apt to break when the great truths of life put them to the test. The man and the woman who search for sincerity find themselves doomed to re-learn much of mischievous stuff that was taught them in earlier years. They are lucky if the “sugar romance” and the “pretty-pretty-happy-forever-after” school of morals have not already involved them in some sordid and tragic partnership.

Nancy Western might have helped her boy had she had more knowledge of this primitive romance, and had she lived longer. She was a woman—one of the very few women—who had been happily married and had found complete and human satisfaction in her man. The very rich and tender memories of her marriage made her perhaps a little slow in the matter of fearing for her boy. He was a child still, and the man in him seemed a long way off. She did not want to go forward and meet the man in him. She longed to keep him as a boy, hers, unshared by any other feminine thing.

It must be confessed too that Tod’s love for and admiration of his mother sent him off on life’s adventure with the notion that all women were like her. He had all the instinctive chivalry of the clean and healthy boy whose mother had given him a charming and happy childhood. He thought that all girls were like the girls he read of in those books of adventure. Wholesome books no doubt, if life were like that, and a boy were never to become a man. If Nancy Western could have foreseen the future and thought about it, in a thoroughly, un-English, honest, and intelligent way, she might have burnt those books, forgathered with other wise and devoted women and insisted on some new sort of literature for children. She might have realised that English

parents do not face the great problems, that they shrink from telling their own boys and girls the truth.

Tod was enslaved by Millie Hornblower's yellow hair and audacious eyes. He thought her a very wonderful creature, and fit to take her place in any of those romantic books. He haunted Bridge Street and Mill Lane, and was thrilled if he had a glimpse of the lady. He hung about on Sundays and waited to see her go to church, and even had the courage to take off his little bowler hat to Mrs. Hornblower and her daughter.

"Who's that little boy?"

Tod blushed shamefully. Little boy indeed! When he was in a mood to encounter and to slay dragons.

Pertinacity had its reward. He met Miss Hornblower in Bridge Street one Friday evening; she had been adopting a rather distant and ladylike attitude, and the innocent Tod imagined that he must have offended her.

He pushed his school cap over the back of his head, blushed and stopped.

"Lovely evening."

"It's quite a nice evening," said Miss Hornblower, and giggled.

Then she made that amazing suggestion.

"Let's go for a walk."

Tod stepped straight into heaven.

They went down over the bridge and along the path across the river meadows, Tod trying to make gallant and intelligent conversation, and failing abjectly. He wished a mad dog or a tramp or

something would attack Millie, so that he could express in wild action what he could not put into words.

"I liked your mother's dress on Sunday," he observed, after wondering whether this wonderful creature was interested in dogs.

"Was it a nice dress?"

"Rather. But not half as nice as yours."

Millie gave him a quick, challenging look.

"Don't believe you noticed what colour mine was."

"Yes I did—white with blue bows."

She patted his shoulder, and Tod wanted to die for her.

"What a shy boy you are!"

"I'm not shy."

"Yes, you are. You couldn't say bo! to Mr. Chipperton if he came round that corner."

"Yes, I could," said Tod.

And surely enough Mr. Chipperton did stalk round that corner, arms swinging, bumpy forehead rather moist, the serious man taking his serious exercise. He stared at Tod, and threw a disapproving and mistrustful look at Millie.

"Evening, Western."

"Good evening, sir," and Tod lifted his cap.

His enchantress showed a sudden haughtiness when Mr. Chipperton had passed.

"I don't like cowards," she said.

Tod was grieved, desolated, angry with himself, but not in the least angry with her.

“I couldn’t be rude to him, could I?” he argued. “And old Chips is quite a decent sort.”

“He ought to have taken his hat off to you,” said Miss Hornblower, “when he saw you were walking with a lady.”

She turned back with all the airs of a very superior young woman who had been piqued and offended, and Tod could find nothing to say to her.

She left him in Bridge Street.

“Good night, Mr. Western.”

“Good night,” said Tod, jerking his cap, and thinking that girls were most amazingly sensitive creatures and most easily offended.

Tod was a boy with plenty of sentiment and very little pocket-money, and it never occurred to him that pocket-money could count with so proud and peerless a creature as his lady. The Dorotheas and Lornas and Dianas in the story books never stopped to wonder whether young John Splendid had a shilling with which to buy them cakes and ale. They expected him to be strong and bold and adoring, to loiter under walls and in gardens for a glimpse of them, to treasure gloves and bits of ribbon, to throw flowers and little love letters into their windows, to smite all villains fiercely and repeatedly, to be devoted, sentimental, tender.

Poor Tod followed his new romantic instincts and the teachings of the books. He became the very son of his father, a little Quixote, who made up bunches of roses, and clove pinks and sweet peas, tagged a label to them and then tossed them with fear and

trembling over Mr. Hornblower's garden wall.

"To the most beautiful *and* lovely Queen of Pentworth."

"A little token from your loyal and devoted knight and worshipper, Tod Clarence Western."

"To the noble lady whom I love."

Also he tried his hand at poetry, and sent fragments of it with flowers.

"Your hair is like the brightest gold,
Your eyes are bluer than the sea.
But why is your sweet heart so cold
When I am sunk in misery?"

This particular appeal fell into the hands of Mr. Hornblower, who happened to be forking potatoes, and who made dreadful fun of it at the tea-table.

"Tell the little gentleman to take a Gregory powder, Millie. Your hair is like the brightest gold, is it? Gosh, he's got it badly!"

Millie giggled, but she rather liked Tod's very flattering despair. There were other boys who had fallen under her spell, but they were not so romantic and devoted as Tod. She relented, and allowed Tod an assignation at the gate under the scrubby old laurels at the end of the garden.

Tod was not so eloquent as his flowers or his poetry; he was ever rather a shy boy with girls and women, and this sudden nearness to his princess filled him with awe.

"Awfully good of you to let me come and talk to you," he said.

"You rather like talking to me, then?" sang the siren.

“It’s music,” said Tod; “and isn’t your hair wonderful?”

She shook it at him.

“Would you like a little bit to keep?”

“Would you give it me?”

“If you’ll swear on your honour.”

“What do you want me to swear?” Tod asked.

“That you’ll never look at any other girl, and that you’ll fight any other boy who wants to talk to me. There’re lots, you know.”

“I’ll do that,” said Tod. “Give me your hand to hold.”

She gave him her hand through the bars of the gate, and Tod removed his cap, knelt down, and made his vow.

“I’ll always love Millie Hornblower,” he declaimed, “and I’ll defend her from all ruffians, dogs and rivals, with all my heart and strength. I’ll be her knight and her servant till I die, please God, Amen.”

With that he kissed her brown little fingers, and got up—blushing.

“You’ll give me the lock of hair now,” he said. “I’ll put it in a little bag and carry it over my heart.”

“I’ll have to get some scissors.”

She slipped away, and Tod stood there in a prayerful and exultant mood, a mood that was suddenly disturbed by the appearance of another boy, a boy with a snub nose and freckles, wearing a disgustingly clean collar, and a silver watch chain displayed across his black waistcoat.

It was Tom Cassilis, a very sulky looking Tom Cassilis, with green jealousy in his eyes.

“Hallo.”

“Hallo,” said Tod, beginning to bristle.

“What’s the joke?” said Master Cassilis.

“What joke?”

“Bet me she’d have you here, and I owe her sixpence. You’re a gooseberry, you loony.”

“It’s a lie,” said Tod.

“Call me a liar.”

“Liar.”

They did not trouble to take off their coats, but plunged into battle like two good paladins fighting for the love of a fair lady. Tod felt a particular rage against Master Cassilis’s clean collar, and the swagger of that silver watch chain. He made haste to ruin both, while Miss Hornblower, returning with a bit of yellow hair wrapped up in a piece of pink tissue paper, watched the fray through the slats of the gate, and felt sweet and good and pleased with her own beauty.

“Oh, you bad boys!”

The boys took no notice of her; they were too busy with each other. Tod had made Master Cassilis’s nose bleed. He closed with his rival and, getting the under hold, threw the other boy and destroyed the last vestiges of vanity that challenged him in the other’s person. Tom Cassilis rolled and kicked, and began pinching, but Tod dropped that by a throttle hold that clinched his victory.

“Say ‘I’m a liar.’ ”

"Shan't," gulped Cassilis.

He let Master Cassilis up when that gentleman had recanted.

"It's my gate," said Tod. "Don't you ever come here again, or I'll thrash you worse."

The beaten one was on the edge of tears, and Tod felt a sudden pity for him.

"Couldn't help it, Tom, could I? Shake hands."

"Shan't," blubbered the other boy, walking off, dabbing his bleeding nose with a dirty handkerchief.

Miss Hornblower looked on Tod with favour after that stout proof of his devotion. He fought three more boys in the next ten days, vanquished them, and was vexed by no more rivals.

Giggles allowed him to buy her a little German-silver ring and to put it on her third finger.

"You're mine, you know, now," said Tod, "mine—for ever and ever."

Chapter Five

Tod held his place as Miss Millie Hornblower's devoted knight and servant till the coming of the summer holidays brought him an unexpected rival. Tod was not a greedy boy; he never had much pocket-money, and he had failed to understand the secret worldliness of his enchantress's affection. He gave her himself when she sometimes had a desire for caramels and chocolate creams. She liked looking at the tarts and pinky iced things in the pastrycook's shop, but Tod was no plutocrat and he rated her soul

above jam puffs and penny ices. He once had brought her a paper bag full of raspberries from his mother's garden, but Giggles had turned up her nose at them.

"Raspberries are nasty, grubby things."

And Tod had felt hurt.

The summer holidays brought Sydney Plumpton back to Pentworth from some superior sort of school where they had a sixth form and Olympian young men who were called Prefects. Sydney Plumpton was a true son of his father, a heavy, silent, boorish animal with a big wet mouth, staring eyes, and sandy hair. He walked about Pentworth with his hands in his pockets, a tuft of hair sticking out under the peak of his cap, and he never lacked sixpences or something to suck. Chipperton's thought him a very great man. He talked about his school's footer team, how he was going to get his "cap," also a scholarship at one of the Cambridge colleges. He hinted, too, that his house-master's daughter was always wanting him to kiss her, and that she gave him her father's cigarettes to smoke.

This Plumpton boy happened upon Miss Hornblower somewhere in Pentworth. He was new and he wore a stand-up collar, and carried a little stick. Miss Hornblower smiled at him, and Sydney Plumpton thought her "the stuff."

They happened on each another day when young Plumpton was buying sixpennyworth of chocolate creams at Mrs. Clutterbuck's sweetshop. Miss Hornblower was impressed. This young man could spend money.

Sydney Plumpton waited for her outside the shop.

“Come for a walk,” he said with the air of the master.

Giggles went with him, the sexed thing acknowledging its lord.

Tod became aware of a chilliness during the next ten days. Millie grew sarcastic and patronising and talked over his head of the things real men did when they entertained a lady, yet Tod had no suspicions till he met her one evening with Sydney Plumpton. They were eating sweets out of a bag.

Tod was thunderstruck. He had always hated young Plumpton, partly because he was his father’s son, but his hatred blazed with double strength because of this treachery. He sensed it at once as treachery, from the way Giggles looked at him.

The place of the meeting was the path at the foot of the Castle Mound. The mound was planted with trees, and there was an open space at the top where lovers used to sit. Tod jerked a thumb in the direction of the mound.

“Come up there and be licked,” he said to Sydney Plumpton.

They went up and found the place deserted. Millie Hornblower accompanied them. She had no prejudice against gladiatorial shows, especially when they were in her honour, though she protested half-heartedly.

“You mustn’t fight. It isn’t nice or gentlemanly. What a nasty temper you have, Tod Western. Mr. Plumpton hasn’t done anything to you.”

Tod gave her a blank and tragic look. Did women forget so quickly?

Now young Plumpton was two years older than Tod, a good head taller, and very heavy and strong. He did not take the affair very seriously until he felt Tod in action, and saw the determination in the smaller boy's eyes. They fought for a full ten minutes, savagely, stubbornly, till they were both so done that their attempts to punch were ludicrous. Tod's right eye was bulging and his lip was cut, but he had marked young Plumpton's left eye for him and given him a bloody nose. Both boys were dead pale, panting, unsteady on their feet, when two men pushed through the trees and stopped the fight.

"Well fought, little 'un."

"Why don't you take on one of your own size, Fatty?"

"I've got to beat him," said Tod, holding himself up by the man's arm.

"So you have, old sport. He's hooking it; he's had enough."

"Rot; I let him down easy," said Sydney Plumpton thickly. "Come on, Giggles."

Then that most amazing thing happened, for Miss Hornblower, who had been eating young Plumpton's sweets, hooked an arm in his and offered him her handkerchief.

"Little savage," she said, looking destroyingly at Tod; "he never had any manners."

Tod stared after them, with his romantic world toppling into ruins.

"But she's got my ring," he said aloud.

"No, I haven't," retorted the voice of the lady tartly. "Cheap German silver! Sydney's bought me a

real gold one."

Tod was a sensitive child, and he took that little tragedy of his greatly to heart, never having heard as yet of a thing called cynicism. He was humiliated, bewildered, and unable to rid himself of the belief that this trashy little yellow-haired chit with her middle-class greed and cunning was really something fine and wonderful. Those words of hers about "German silver" had reduced Tod to horrid shame. The sensitive and generous nature is always at the mercy of a bold and ingenious egotism. The girl had thought him mean, and Tod looked for the blemish in himself. Perhaps he was mean, naturally mean like Uncle Remus. He remembered the incident of the raspberries, and saw himself as a mean little boy whom no girl could love.

Tod waited till it was dusk before returning to Spaniards Row. He had a horror of meeting anyone, even his mother; he wanted to get into some lonely corner and lick himself clean like a dog. He felt that everybody would be laughing at him and saying, "There's mean little Tod Western who gave a girl a German-silver ring."

He sneaked in by the garden door, and, of course, fell straight into the arms of his mother, who was lighting the lamp in the passage.

"Oh, Tod!"

"It's all right, Mother."

"But your poor eye and lip, dear."

"I've had a bit of a fight," said Tod, "but I gave the other chap much what he gave me."

"And what were you fighting about?"

Tod looked embarrassed, abashed, and thoroughly miserable. He had never told his mother about Millie Hornblower, and he did not mean to tell her now.

“Oh, just a row with Sydney Plumpton.”

“That big boy! Why he is two years older than you are, Tod, dear. Come and let me bathe that poor lip. Was young Plumpton trying to bully you?”

“Bully me! It was an affair of honour,” said Tod with dignity.

“I see,” said Nancy Western.

She did not catechise her boy, but took him to her own room, and made a sweet fuss of him, and in the end Tod told her everything. He was very solemn and serious about it, and his mother’s heart went out to him. She happened to know more about Miss Hornblower than Tod imagined.

“I like my boy to be brave and honourable,” she told him. “But Tod, dear, lots of little girls, and women too, are just vain and greedy. They want presents and flattery out of men, and nothing else.”

“I’ve done with girls,” said Tod gravely, “and I don’t want to read any more of those silly books.”

He meditated, while his mother combed his hair.

“Suppose there are girls who grow up to be like you, Mummy?” he asked her suddenly.

“Like me, Tod?”

“Yes. You’re the most wonderful woman in the world, Mummy.”

She kissed him.

“Oh, my dear, I’m not; I loved your father very

much, and I love you. That's all. But I want you, Tod, I want you more than you think. You're the one thing I have got in the world."

Tod turned and looked at her with a sudden shine in his eyes.

"What a silly ass I've been! There's no one I love like you, and no one so pretty as you."

"I shan't be pretty long, Tod."

"Yes, you will, always and always."

She sat down suddenly on the old sofa and put an arm round him. Her face had grown very serious and sad.

"I've got to tell you, Tod, dear. I haven't been very well for quite a long time. I didn't tell you before——"

Tod's eyes had grown big and questioning. He looked at his mother as he had never looked at her before. There was fear in him, a great tenderness, an accusing selfscorn, a sudden throwing back of his memory to moments when he had been conscious of his mother as seeming thinner and paler than of yore.

"Mummy, you are not ill?"

"I don't quite know yet, dear, and the doctor isn't quite sure either. But I'm not so strong as I was, and I get a silly, tired feeling."

The memory of Millie Hornblower became blotted utterly out of Tod's mind. He knelt on the sofa, and put his arms round Nancy Western's neck.

"I've got to leave school," he said.

"No, dear, I want you to learn all you can."

"Well, I'll learn," he said almost fiercely—"I'll learn everything. But I'm going to work in the shop, too, and I'm going to take care of you, and you're going to do nothing at all."

"Tod——"

"And we'll go to picnics, and I'll carry everything. And if you get tired, Mummy, we'll have a bath-chair like Mrs. Furnival's and I'll wheel you about."

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Dear God," she said, "you have given me all that I asked for."

That was the beginning of a new season in Tod's life, perhaps the most beautiful, the saddest and the most significant season of them all. His mother had not spoken to him without good cause. She was a sick woman, and before three months had passed a doomed woman, a woman with youth in her heart and death in her body.

Tod nursed her, at least he called it nursing her, though it was more like the mingled love of a child and a man than the carefulness of a nurse. He brought her her tea in the morning, carried up her breakfast, and then dashed off to school where he tried to work as she wanted him to work, though his thoughts were in Spaniards Row. He dashed home again, tenderly irrepressible, and did all sorts of things without being told or prompted. There were flowers in her room, and Tod put them there. Once or twice she had asked him for the cut glass scent-bottle on the dressing-table, and he saved up his pocket-money and bought her scent. He interviewed Mr. Chipperton and asked to be excused homework, explaining the situation with a simplicity and a frankness that touched even that dusty pedant.

“Certainly, Western, certainly. I most thoroughly approve of your—your devotion, sir.”

But Tod was at his greatest when he waylaid the doctor, and talked to him with the anxious gravity of a father of a family.

“How is my mother to-day, sir, please?”

“Much the same, Tod, I’m afraid.”

“What about a bath-chair, sir? You would recommend fresh air?”

“Certainly, Tod. I think I can get you the loan of a chair.”

Dr. Vance went out into Spaniards Row and swore at nothing in particular.

“Wish I had a boy like that,” he said.

But he was so conscious of Tod that he found time to be worried, and he had to speak of it to Tod’s mother.

“That boy of yours is a trump,” he said, sitting on the chair beside the bed and looking thoroughly uncomfortable.

Nancy Western answered him with a strange question.

“How long am I going to live? I want you to tell me the truth.”

The doctor felt in all his pockets, scratched his cheek with his forefinger, and then looked her straight in the eyes.

“About four months, I should say.”

“Thank you,” she said; “I must tell him.”

She told Tod that evening when it was getting

dusk, making him lie curled on the bed beside her, with his head on the pillow. And Tod did not weep just then. He lay very still, fists clenched, face all screwed up, his heart full of a bitter wailing that something told him had to be suppressed.

"I've got to be a man—I've got to be a man."

And a man he was and far bigger-hearted and finer than most, fighting that chocking anguish in his throat and that sense of hopelessness and bewildering desolation.

"Oh, Mummy, why must God take you away? I won't be selfish. It's Daddy that wants you."

She was heartbroken when she thought of her boy alone, left to the negative kindness of Uncle Remus. She was dying ten years too soon, just when she could have done so much. The business was breaking up, and Tod's home was going with it. In another ten years she could have seen him settled in Pentworth, or realised those other ambitions that had been so dear to her mother's soul.

"Uncle Remus will give you a home, dear," she said; "I have spoken to him about it."

Tod did not want to go to Uncle Remus, but he managed to blurt out: "It will be jolly on the farm."

Tod wept his soul out that night when he was alone in his room. His child's anguish was so clean and poignant that its wet eyes could see nothing in the future but desperate and utter loneliness. There were moments when he rebelled, and stood in his white nightshirt at his window, and flourished a fist at the stars.

"God, you mustn't take Mother away. If you're a good God you'll let Dr. Vance make her well."

But God faded very much out of Tod's life during those next weeks when his mother began to suffer exquisite pain. The boy's heart cried out for tangible help, and in his queer, frank way he renounced a shadowy benignant divinity whom nobody had ever seen and who appeared to be of no use in those hours of bitter anguish. Dr. Vance became Tod's god, quiet, inarticulate, brown-faced Dr. Vance, with his little syringe and bottle of blessed balm. Tod utterly refused to go to school. They could hardly get him out of the house, and if morphia soothed Nancy Western's body it was Tod that soothed her soul.

He managed to blind himself to the future by throwing himself with wild tenderness into the present. Sickness, especially mortal sickness, can be very wearying and repulsive, but Tod was never tired, and there was no flinching in his eyes. He washed his mother's face for her, and brushed her hair, fed her, tidied the bed, fetched and carried, read to her, kept the fire bright, or sat and held her hand.

"That there boy's a marvel," said Mrs. Bunce; " 'e's better than any husband."

The most vivid memory of Tod's life was the memory of the night when his mother died. It had been morphia and always morphia. She was thin, horribly thin, and white as linen. Her lips were dry and pale. She could hardly swallow a teaspoonful of milk, or move herself in bed.

It was winter, and Tod had slipped out and bought a tin of peaches. He had two of them all soft and juicy ready in a saucer.

"Tod——"

Her voice was a mere whisper. Tod was with her

instantly.

“Tod, you’ve made me so happy, you and your dear daddy.”

Tod held her hand.

“I’ve been so proud, Tod. You are going to be a fine man like your father.”

“I’ll be a fine man, a great man—for you, Mummy,” said Tod with a gulp.

She lay silent awhile, and then spoke, with a faint wail in her voice, after a spasm of pain.

“Oh, I’m so thirsty.”

Tod went for the peaches, and, kneeling on the bed, and supporting her with one hand, fed her with a spoon. She took the fruit almost eagerly and with a kind of pathetic pleasure.

“That was good, Tod.”

Then she lay quiet again. It was growing dusk, and there was no light in the room save the light of the fire.

Suddenly she spoke again.

“Tod.”

“Mummy.”

“Come here and hold my hand.”

He snuggled near her. She was on the edge of the great abyss, but he did not realise it.

“Tod, never marry—till you have been in love ten times.”

“I shan’t marry—never,” he said, “unless I find somebody like you.”

She made a queer little sound, something between a sigh and a laugh, and lay there holding his hand.

It was about midnight when Mrs. Bunce, keeping vigil by the kitchen fire, heard that wailing in the room above.

“Dear God,” said she, starting up, “the poor dear’s dead! God save us, but what am I to do for that boy?”

Chapter Six

Tod was nearly fifteen when his mother died, and he was destined to spend two years under the control of the negative virtues of Uncle Remus.

Nancy Western left her boy the £1,000 she had inherited, the “business” and the furniture. The £1,000 was safe enough, invested in those two mortgages; and Uncle Remus, left sole trustee until Tod was twenty-one, had a solid faith in mortgages. The “business” and the furniture proved to be very liquid assets, so liquid that the “business” ran away through Uncle Remus’s fingers.

The commercial spirit of Pentworth was responsible for this liquefaction.

Mr. Plumpton happened to have an energetic young nephew who was a photographer’s assistant at Shaston-on-Sea, and about six months before Nancy Western’s death Mr. Plumpton sent for that young man and offered to lend him a hundred pounds.

“Look here, Gus; the woman’s done for. There’s no need to make her an offer. Set up yourself, and

you'll collar the whole business, without paying a farthing. When she's dead, there'll be a sale."

"And I can nip in and buy as much of the stuff as I want."

"Cheap, dirt cheap," said Mr. Plumpton, remembering a certain scene in Nancy Western's house.

That was Pentworth's idea of commercial morality, but in those days Tod knew nothing of the Pentworths of England.

The sale of the Westerns' furniture and shop fittings at No. 13 Spaniards Row left Tod with a few of his father's books and a little cane chair that had belonged to his mother. Tod did not go to the sale; he was resentful and glum about it, yet conscious in a vague way that he was up against a force that was stronger than his boy's sentiments.

"You've got to have two years more schooling," said Uncle Remus, "your mother left it written down. Schooling's got to be paid for."

Tod supposed that it had.

Pentworth excelled itself over that sale. It sniffed, and fingered and sneered, turned the home of the dead Westerns upside down, and snapped up "bargains." It was a day of bargains. Mrs. Bunce, who was a sentimental sort of creature, followed the sale through the first half of the catalogue and then pushed her way out into the street.

"Downright robbery, that's what it is," she said to a neighbour, "robbin' that boy. And all the poor soul's things being treated like rubbish."

Mr. Plumpton's nephew bought the shop fittings

and the outfit of the studio at a very successful figure.

“Smart bit of biz, that!”

Ten years later someone else played the same trick on him, and he asked if it was “a Christian country.”

No. 13 Spaniards Row ceased to be a little corner of romance. Tod could never bring himself to go near the house. He tried it but once, and came by such a lump in his throat and such a misery of loneliness that Spaniards Row became for him no more than a thing of dreams. He continued at Chipperton’s as in-boy, living in Mr. Chipperton’s house, and learning to connect Miss Victoria Chipperton with underdone beef and pickled cabbage. Tod was never a great desk boy, and he hated church and the Friday evening hymns almost as much as he hated Miss Chipperton. He learnt his arithmetic and how to spell; picked up some dud-Latin and a few oddments of algebra; struck queer, disjointed patches of English history and remembered a few battles, but little else. He could draw, and he absorbed some elementary science which the third master threw at the science class twice a week in a desultory sort of way. But most of his activities were of the open air. He was the best bat in the school, and he knew more about birds and trees and wild things than any other boys at Chipperton’s. As for girls, he had no use for them at all, which made him rather attractive.

His holidays were spent with Uncle Remus at Burnt Farm, a thoroughly hideous brick-and-slate house that stood up mournfully on a bare hillside. Uncle Remus was all for the practical side of life. He believed in corrugated iron and barbed wire, dirty clothes and clean land. There were no pigeon-pie,

cheese-cake, strawberry-and-cream touches about Uncle Remus's farming. He kept a housekeeper and one strong girl, and the housekeeper saw to it that Tod did not fraternise with the food in the larder. She was a very tall woman with great bony hips, a flat chest and a little dab of nose that always looked blue in winter. Tod used to fancy that she must pull herself out of bed by her own hair, so tight and thin was it. The "strong girl" was a hoyden who was always trying to make Tod wrestle, till a new ploughman came along and married her.

Tod did not love Burnt Farm. It was dreary and penurious and isolated, and Uncle Remus used to put down seed in winter and shoot the birds.

"Darned little thieves," he called them.

Uncle Remus shot everything; especially if it could be sold or eaten. When it was cheaper to trap he trapped, using the steel trap, and this economy of his led to a row with Tod. For Tod found a rabbit in a steel trap one morning, down by the ash wood, and after that all Uncle Remus's steel traps were missing. Tod had collected them and thrown the lot into the cow-pond.

He avowed it openly and with anger, and Uncle Remus made an unsuccessful attempt to whack him.

"You young varmint——"

"Don't you touch me."

"What did you do it for—jus' mischief?"

"How'd you like to be in a trap?"

Uncle Remus stared, and his lower lip hung down.

"We'll never make a farmer of you, my boy."

"I'm not going to be a farmer. I'm going to be a doctor, and mend things."

Uncle Remus gave one of his rare laughs.

"Start on your manners, young man. You a doctor! Why, Chipperton says you're a blockhead."

"I'm not a blockhead," said Tod fiercely. "Old Chipperton's a fool."

At the end of two years Uncle Remus began to think that it was high time Tod should earn some money. He was fond of the boy in a queer, grudging, cold-blooded way, but the little bit of gold exercised a wonderful fascination over Tod's uncle. He would spend hours at night, sitting smoking in his old arm-chair, scribbling figures on the backs of old envelopes and making eternal calculations. It was Uncle Remus's great game, the great game of profit and loss, turnips and haystacks reduced to the last halfpenny.

"Time a big boy like you was getting to work."

"I want to be a doctor," said Tod.

"And where's the money to come from?"

"There's the money Mother left me."

Uncle Remus gave a sardonic grin.

"That won't be touched so long as I have a say in it. Two good solid mortgages. Capital ain't come by every day of the week."

He was adamant, nor could Tod move him for a moment. Yet the boy was so obstinate that the old man took the trouble to drive over to Pentworth and get himself supported by private interviews with Dr. Vance and Mr. Chipperton.

He came back very well satisfied.

“About this doctoring idea, young man. How long do you think it takes to learn the trade?”

“I don’t know.”

“Five years. Vance says it would cost the best part of a thousand pounds to do it well. And at the end of it you might earn a hundred and fifty pounds and your keep. That’s a monkey’s game. Besides—you ain’t got the head for it.”

“Who says so?”

“Chipperton. Says you’re a good boy, but you’d never pass the exams. Money wasted. You listen to me, Tod my boy; business is the thing. There’s money in a shop—not every sort of shop of course—specially if you’ve got grit and a little capital. You drop all that black-coat nonsense. What’s a black coat against ten thousand pounds in good securities? It’s money that counts.”

Tod had no answer to give to his uncle’s shrewd materialism, no answer that mattered. Uncle Remus’s opposition was too solid. No money would be available till Tod was twenty-one, and as the farmer put it: “A young man can’t loaf for five years.” Moreover, Tod had felt discouraged by Mr. Chipperton’s scepticism with regard to those exams. Tod still had some faith in Mr. Chipperton’s intellect, if he had no belief in him as a cricketer, and Tod was a sensitive boy in spite of all his sturdiness. A sense of adventure was stirring in him; Chipperton’s school and Burnt Farm were like sucked eggs.

About that time Uncle Remus brought off one of his diplomatic triumphs; that is to say, he dispossessed himself of a responsibility without

parting with any time or money. He had a friend at Shaston-on-Sea, a Mr. Eli Flowerdew who traded in second-hand furniture, books, pictures and antiques, no hole-and-corner business, mind you, but a two-fronted shop in Ponsonby Place, a big warehouse, and a reputation. Old Flowerdew and Uncle Remus had been at school together, and Eli Flowerdew was a "warm man," a man with a fine scent for a bargain.

It happened, too, that Uncle Remus was in a position to oblige Mr. Flowerdew. The reason seemed trivial enough; it would have sounded meaningless to Tod. His uncle had a fine set of old English pewter, chargers, plates, ewers, all marked with the mark of a rather famous pewterer, and Mr. Flowerdew needed that set. He needed it so badly that he drove over one day in a gig from Shaston and tried to persuade Remus to sell.

Tod's uncle "went to market." He had an idea in his shrewd noddle, and if he obliged Eli Flowerdew, Mr. Flowerdew should oblige him. He pretended to be very unwilling to sell that pewter, paraded a quite unexpected and sentimental pride in it, and boasted of the fact that he did not want the money.

"It belonged to my grandfather," he kept repeating; "Ol' George Barter, who was the best judge of a bullock this side o' the Downs."

Mr. Flowerdew persisted.

"Look here, Remus, this isn't a matter of one bit of business to me. I have struck a new client, a wealthy and eccentric sort of fish who'll bite at anything old. He's mad on pewter, and this is the first bait. I can make hundreds out of him if I get him on the hook, and this pewter of yours would do it."

"Oh, that's it, is it," said Uncle Remus. He puffed

at his pipe, and refilled Mr. Flowerdew's glass.

"Money ain't everything," he said benignantly. "We've been friends these forty years. Yet I've a sort of kind feeling for that pewter."

The dealer in antiques played sentiment against sentiment.

"That's true. Anything I can do for you, old man?"

Uncle Remus appeared to search for the thought of something that he needed.

"No, not as I knows of."

"Don't want a bit of furniture?"

"No."

"Wish I was as contented."

Uncle Remus smiled like the beautiful and simple old peasant of some sentimental story. Life was complete; there was nothing on earth that he greedily desired. And then he removed his pipe from his mouth, pointed the stem at Mr. Flowerdew, and sat up in his chair.

"Hold on. Why, I never thought o' that before! You're a man of influence, Eli; that's a fine business of yours, and it's going to be finer. You don't want a lad in your shop, do you?"

"Why, have you got one?"

"Yes. Young Tod Western, my dead niece's son. He's leaving Chipperton's school in a month or two. He's a good boy, strong and healthy, and he'll have a thousand pounds when he comes of age."

Eli Flowerdew frowned at his boots.

"I could do with a boy in the shop to help Rook. But he'd have to be quick and nippy, and have nice manners. We get a lot of women in; you know, people with style."

"Tod's got very good manners," said Uncle Remus, "and he'd learn what solid business was with you, Eli."

"If I like the look of the lad I'll take him. I'd give him his board to start with, and then pay him as he shaped."

Uncle Remus grew quite animated.

"Why, that's an offer, a generous offer. It just entered my head sudden-like, and I hadn't thought about it one way or the other. The boy'd learn the business, and some day he could start on his own, or you might go so far as to take him in, with that little capital of his."

"I might," said Mr. Flowerdew guardedly, "supposing I see the boy?"

Tod happened to be at Burnt Farm for the half-term holiday. He was found by Uncle Remus and sent up to put on his Sunday suit and a clean collar. The farmer was solemn and mysterious about it.

"I've opened a new furrow for you, young man. Here's Mr. Eli Flowerdew, one of the leading men at Shaston, ready to take you in and teach you his business. It's a favour to me."

"What's the business?" asked Tod.

"We'll talk about that later. Mr. Flowerdew wants a young chap with good manners. Don't you forget to put on that clean collar."

So Tod was introduced to Mr. Flowerdew, a tall

man who held himself very straight, and had a sharp, red-brown face and blue eyes that made you think that he was angry. There were three deep lines on Eli Flowerdew's forehead, lines that ran down and met at the root of his nose; the skin between those lines used to bulge and grow red when anything annoyed him. Tod noticed that he had a little greyish tuft of hair on his chin; his lips looked too small to cover his teeth, so that his lips appeared tight and stretched. When he smiled he showed his fangs like a dog, and those teeth of his were long and crowded together, and all yellow.

"Here's young Tod, Eli."

Mr. Flowerdew held out a hand.

"So this is Tod. How are you, young man?"

"Very well, thank you, sir."

The "sir" settled it. Tod was of no serious importance to Mr. Flowerdew. The boy was not an oaf; he had an intelligent face, and looked well grown and strong. Also he seemed a little shy and impressed. All boys were much the same to Mr. Flowerdew; he hated the whole genus, and his attitude towards them was that of a ferocious dog.

"Seems a quiet sort of boy," he said when Tod had been inspected and dismissed.

"Takes after his mother. Mr. Chipperton, of Pentworth, thinks a lot of the lad. He ain't over quick at his lessons, but they tell me he has character."

"I hope he is a religious boy, because if I take him into my family——"

Uncle Remus side-stepped with great adroitness.

"He ain't a lad as is always after the girls."

"I'll take him," said Mr. Flowerdew, and he also took the pewter at a price that was very acceptable to Uncle Remus.

About a month later the farmer drove Tod in his market cart over to Shaston-on-Sea, and left the lad and a little old leather trunk at the house of Mr. Eli Flowerdew. It was a tall, serious-looking house in Ponsonby Place, a house that still seemed to be worrying over the fact that the lower part of its front had been turned into a shop. It stood abashed under the eyes of the house across the way, a house that retained the title of a "gentleman's residence," a swanking, arrogant sort of house with a lot of white and green paint, brass-work and bright curtains. A doctor lived there, on the sunny side of the street. Eli Flowerdew's house had its face in the shadow. It looked smutty and depressed. Its back view was a little more cheerful and prepossessing. There was a strip of garden that ended in a shrubbery, and from the top windows you could see the sea.

It was a very grey sea that day. Summer had lost itself for a week, and a south-west wind played Pan-pipes with the chimney-pots, and drenched Shaston with occasional scuds of rain. Tod's stomach felt empty. His uncle had dropped him at the door of Flowerdew's shop, and driven off to dodge the rain-storms.

Tod found a supercilious and cold-eyed young man in the shop. He wore rimless pince-nez, and had a suave but brutal mouth.

"Hallo, what do you want?"

"I'm Tod Western," said Tod, lugging that portmanteau of his through the swing doors.

"Oh, you are, are you! Get that thing round the

back. This isn't a pawnshop."

The young man went back to a desk in a far corner, and left Tod to guess what "round the back" meant. He was more depressed than annoyed by the young man's indifference.

"Not that way. Door on the left. And mind the table with the china on it."

Tod and his portmanteau bundled themselves into a dismal passage hung with old prints. He saw a flight of stairs covered with linoleum, and a landing window at the top, and he was hesitating whether he should climb the stairs when a voice descended on him.

"Who's that?" It was a sharp, shrill voice, a voice that was made for the harrying of servants.

"It's me," said Tod inelegantly.

A figure followed the voice, the figure of a girl with a lot of fluffy hair, and a face that made Tod think of the face of a horse.

"What do you want? That's the way into the shop."

"That chap sent me here. I'm Tod Western."

The girl stared at him. She was extraordinarily like her father, and had the same hard eyes and ugly mouth.

"Oh, it's young Western, is it? Your room's right at the top. Looks out on the street. You'd better carry that thing up, and don't you mark the paint."

Tod had not the heart to ask Miss Lena Flowerdew for any further directions. He discovered his room by using the method of trial by error, butting first into an apartment that was obviously

feminine, and backing out with great briskness. His own room was a dingy little tank with a stain on the ceiling and a strip of old red stair carpet down the middle. The chest of drawers and the washstand had once been yellow, but some enthusiast had streaked them over with a coat of cream paint. The chest of drawers wobbled on three legs, and was an article of severe virtue, all its drawers showing a great unreadiness to open to Tod's blandishments. There was a text over the bed which cried, "God bless our Home."

When Tod had distributed his belongings he sat down on the bed and felt acutely miserable. This heartache was reinforced by an attack of sensitive shyness, a panic mood that held him tied to his room. He did not know whether he ought to go downstairs; he felt that he would be sure to arrive in the wrong room. Moreover, he did not think he wanted to meet Miss Lena Flowerdew again, until fate or hunger brought them together.

Tod sat down for an hour, quite ready to blubber in spite of his seventeen years, wishing himself back at Burnt Farm, anywhere but where he was. He had thoughts of making a bolt for it, but that poor old brown portmanteau appealed against desertion. The thing had belonged to his father.

And then Tod heard someone coming up the stairs. The footsteps paused outside the door, and someone knocked.

"Hallo," said Tod.

Tod had never been called Mr. Western before, and the title sent a thrill through him. Moreover, the voice was quite a different sort of voice from that of Miss Lena Flowerdew. It was gentle and soft, and

rather deprecating.

Tod got up and opened the door, and found a girl standing there, a shy girl with dark eyes, brown hair, and a quick colour. She looked fragile and pretty, and not much older than Tod.

“Good afternoon,” he said.

“Tea’s ready. We have it at five.”

“Been unpacking my things,” he explained, blushing.

Her brown eyes smiled at him, the first gleam of human sympathy he had caught in that house.

“I’m Kitty.”

“My name’s Tod, short for Todhunter, Miss Flowerdew.”

“It’s quite a nice name,” she answered, “I’ll show you the way down.”

She did more than that, for she saved him from being overwhelmed by the solemnity of the Flowerdew tea-table. Mr. Flowerdew was drinking tea as though he had to catch a train. He showed his teeth at Tod in what was meant for a smile.

“Sit down, Western. My two girls, Lena and Kitty. Mr. Rook—my assistant. Pass the butter, Rook will you.”

Tod sat down next to Kitty, and was given tea by Miss Flowerdew. She also pushed a tin of sardines towards him with perfunctory suggestiveness, and Tod felt that she was watching how many he took. Edwin Rook eyed him all the while with cynical curiosity. Mr. Flowerdew took no more notice of him at all. It was Kitty who saved him from utter demoralisation and from choking himself over his

tea.

She cut bread for him.

“Have some jam, Mr. Western.”

Tod had jam, lots of jam. He began to think that he liked Kitty Flowerdew very much indeed.

Chapter Seven

The town of Shaston-on-Sea had shaped itself very much like the Nile, that Lily of the Desert with its flower-head on the sea and its stem trailing towards the equator. Shaston had flowered along the seafront in solid masses of white Georgian and grey stuccoed Victorian houses, and the Edwardian red villa craze had coloured the fringe of its petals a hard red. The high, commercial part of Shaston lay in the calyx of the flower, grouped about King William Street that joined the seafront to the stalk of the town, and there the simile ended. The Georgians had planned solidly and well, but the commercial individualists who had followed them had been men in a hurry to make money. The haste and the hideousness of it showed everywhere in the long valley behind the town. Bricks and stucco and slate had been slopped down in great yellow puddles that had trickled and met and intermingled till the ugliness was complete. There were rows upon rows of flat-faced, wall-eyed houses, crowding back to back with miserable little spaces, called “gardens,” between them. The creators of this base, cynically cheap rubbish heap may have taken Bermondsey or Bethnal Green as their models. Some sardonic humorist had flung names about. Blackberry Hill,

Alsatia, Bilson's Bottom, Rope Alley, Mug's Lane, Victoria Road, Sea View Terrace. All this nastiness was within two miles of the Whiteholt beech woods, and less than a mile from the sea.

Tod Western accepted Shaston-on-Sea as a healthy boy accepts his dinner. It was there, on the plate, waiting to be eaten, and Tod swallowed it with relish, not yet having arrived at that analytical stage when a man worries about his proteids, fats and carbohydrates. The place was new to Tod, and full of life and mystery. Mr. Flowerdew let the lad out every afternoon the first week, not from any wish that Tod should enjoy life, but rather to let him satiate himself with Shaston.

"Let a boy gorge himself with strawberries and he'll give up wanting them."

Tod explored Shaston from the fashionable quarter of St. Margarets in the West to certain picturesque slums called "The Shingles" and "Red Ruin" that lay under the shadow of the White Cliff. He went on the pier, tried the various penny-in-the-slot machines, listened to the band, went for a sail in one of the pleasure yachts, roared with laughter at Punch and Judy, got up early and bathed and made friends with a swarthy young man from Horrox & Horrox's drapery establishment who promised to teach him to swim. This Mr. Robert Twine appeared to find Tod very breezy and refreshing. He was always calling him "You kid" or "You jolly green apple." Tod was green, healthily and innocently green. He accepted life, and he accepted Shaston, putting his penny in the slot of each day and getting his chocolate or his nougat.

At the end of a week he was whole-heartedly in love with Miss Kitty Flowerdew. She was a shy girl

who had gathered up her brown hair and lengthened her skirts less than six months ago, and whose prettiness was the prettiness of a soft dark pansy. She played the piano, and sang in a pleasant, bird-like way, such songs as “The Carnival,” “Good-bye” and “Annie Laurie.” She was religious, going to the weekday services at St. Jude’s, and never missing early communion on Sunday.

Tod fell into such depths of shyness in her presence that he became very slow over his meals, and was always late for pudding. His adoration gazed and gazed, and might have gone on gazing in the same blind and devoted way had not Miss Lena Flowerdew taken it in hand.

“Wake up, moon-calf.”

There was nothing soft or subtle about Lena Flowerdew. She was as ready to rend Tod’s feelings as though they were calico, and she had no love for her sister Kitty.

Mr. Rook, who had dinner and tea with the family, seconded her in de-romancing Tod. Tod did not understand Mr. Edwin Rook in those early days. The fellow was always quizzing him in a sneering, cold-blooded sort of way. He was particularly witty if Mr. Flowerdew happened to be absent.

“Mind you don’t fall into it, Western.”

“Fall into what?” asked Tod.

“Your plate, of course. You ought to look where you’re going.”

Tod glared and blushed, while Miss Flowerdew gave a snigger.

“Expect to see them rolling round the table any

moment. Sure they are in tight, Western?"

"What d'you mean?" and Tod glanced at his buttons.

"Why, your googlies, old chap, those nice, round marble eyes of yours."

"Shut up," said Tod.

Kitty would look uncomfortable and a little frightened, and Tod began to suspect that she was afraid of her sister. He noticed too that she hardly ever looked at Edwin Rook, but that Edwin Rook often looked at her. He stared at her in a way that puzzled Tod, his lower lip thrust out, his pale eyes all big and funny behind his glasses. And once Tod happened to glance at Lena Flowerdew when Rook was looking at her sister in that way, and the elder girl's face shocked Tod. It was a face of evil hatred, jealousy and scorn, the nostrils pinched and sneering, the mouth thin and cruel, with its lips stretched tight over Miss Flowerdew's prominent teeth.

Quite a number of things began to puzzle Tod.

Why was Kitty Flowerdew so utterly unlike her father or her sister?

Why did Lena Flowerdew hate Kitty? The elder girl was very much the mistress of her father's house. She was capable, hard, domineering; she managed the housekeeping, bullied the little general servant, and paid the bills. Her voice dominated the place, and the only person whom she feared was her father. Tod often heard her sneering and gibing at her sister. She had the most sarcastic, virulent tongue; the tradesmen's boys hated her. Tod had caught Kitty with wet eyes, and had felt her brush past him in a hurry, and he more than suspected that Miss

Flowerdew was responsible.

Edwin Rook puzzled him; he was such a cold fish, such a queer, sarcastic beast. He showed extraordinary suavity to anyone entering the shop, and talked with a glibness that fascinated Tod. Rook's real self came to life again when the customer had returned to the street. He used to indulge in little snarling phrases.

"Good day, Mrs. Snobson. Vewy enervating wevver to-day, what! Yes, we have—ah—a wig-table —ah—don't ch'you know. Quite the recherché article —ah—yes. Shall we—ah—pack it in cotton-wool—ah —and dispatch it to you—madam—in a van—ah?"

As a rule he was more terse and bitter.

"Dirty shoppies, that's what we are, young Western, and don't you forget it."

"Fleeced the old fool that time! Good biz!"

"Bargains? We bargain 'em. We stuff 'em in worm-holes, or send 'em to Birmingham."

Tod was almost equally puzzled by Mr. Eli Flowerdew. There appeared to be three Mr. Flowerdews—the Flowerdew of the shop, the Flowerdew of the house, the Flowerdew of the Sabbath. The Flowerdew of the shop was bland, obliging, persuasive, spouting a Sheraton and Sheffield plate jargon that Tod had yet to learn. The Flowerdew of the house scolded, made a noise when it drank, sucked its teeth, was vulgarly hard and overbearing, kicked the cat, was greedy at meals. The Flowerdew of the Sabbath came down to breakfast in a very bad temper, put on a frock coat and a top hat, went to church as though its nostrils were closed against the smell of original sin, acted as

church-warden with an air of severe serenity, called itself a "mis-er-able sinner," came home to a hot dinner, slept on the sofa with a handkerchief over its face, had tea, went to church again, sang "Rock of Ages," and spent the rest of the evening working out the week's profits. There was yet another and more compact edition of the Sabbath Flowerdew that was issued on Wednesday evenings. It appeared at the meeting of the local Social Purity League, a very fastidious Flowerdew, one of the lily-white angels who guarded Shaston's honour.

Tod spoke of his puzzlement to that new friend of his, Bob Twine. They had just splashed back from the sea, and were drying themselves on the shingle.

"Can't make old Flowerdew out at all," said Tod

"What's worrying you, kid?"

"He's such a rum mixture. I go to church with them, you know."

Bob Twine chuckled. He was a rather *farouche* young man who had been born and bred in Shaston.

"Six days with the devil and one with God! Do you know old Flowerdew killed his wife?"

"What!" said Tod with horror. "You're rotting."

"No, I'm not. He made life so sweet for her that she went off her head and drowned herself."

"Good Lord!"

"Yes, just about here. That second girl of hers is just like her."

Tod scratched a bare leg and stared at the shingle.

"But how'd you know?"

"My mother told me."

"But he goes to church," said Tod, "and he's great at those Christian Purity Meetings, or whatever you call 'em."

"Oh, chuck it!" quoth Mr. Twine, "the society for getting searchlights fixed on the pier to prevent a man kissing a girl on the beach after dark."

Tod's last puzzlement was provided by the shop and warehouse. He was taking the business seriously, and living in a chaos of old books, oak chests and gate-legged tables, Chippendale chairs, Sheraton sideboards, Boule tables, bureaux, pictures, prints, old china, pewter, Sheffield plate, Toby jugs, grandfather clocks, brass candlesticks, warming-pans, mirrors, fire-backs, dogs, Dinanderie, Dutch tiles, knife boxes, fenders, wine coolers, samplers in frames, old pistols, blunderbusses, candelabra, Oriental plates, tall-boys, Welsh dressers. It was all very queer and confusing. Nothing seemed to have the value which you would have expected it to have. Ladies of obvious wealth and intelligence came in and paid what seemed to Tod absurd sums for ugly little pot sheep and spotted cows and snuff-boxes, and shabby old worm-eaten chairs. Tod noticed too that the prices varied most queerly. Old Flowerdew and Mr. Rook seemed to have a game of their own, a game of which Tod was destined to learn the rudiments.

Mr. Flowerdew had urged him to play the shadow to Edwin Rook.

"Knowledge is money, Western, especially in a business such as this. Rook's worth double what he was when he came to me."

Rook was no very willing instructor, and he did

not like Tod, but necessity and Mr. Flowerdew persuaded him to part with a portion of his knowledge. He tried to teach Tod the elements of value in the world of Wardour Street, and he advised Tod to specialise in old books.

"You take that catalogue of Porteous's and mug at it on your spare time. Then you'll know what to watch for and how to grab a prize when the chance comes. I've got enough to do without bothering about books."

Tod was expected to familiarise himself also with the prices of the various articles in the shop. Rook started him on furniture, and used to hold a daily viva-voce examination, running Tod from Sheraton card-tables to Jacobean chairs. Tod found it rather amusing, and would have found it more so if Rook had not been such a cold-blooded beast. He had a suspicion that Rook had never wanted him in the shop, that he was jealous of him for some reason or other, and Tod wondered why.

As for his love affair it continued to be rather shy and tentative. He had given up spilling his devotion over the tea-table, largely because he had realised that Lena Flowerdew and the shopman were ready to use it as a weapon against Kitty. And Kitty herself gave him a shy hint.

"Tod——"

She called him Tod now.

"Yes——"

"I wish you wouldn't look at me so much at meals."

Tod flared scarlet.

"Sorry—I—I didn't know I did. Of course—you wouldn't like it."

She looked at him quickly, approvingly.

"No, it isn't that, Tod. But Lena—Lena is so quick-tempered."

"She's a yellow-faced cat," said Tod, "but I'd do anything in the world you asked me to, Kitty."

Her soft face flushed prettily.

"I think you would, dear."

So Tod became a model of discretion and of chivalry. There were moments when Kitty Flowerdew reminded him of his mother, especially in the quick way her eyes lit up, in the soft wave of her hair, in the poise of her head when she was working or reading a book. But Kitty Flowerdew lacked Nancy Western's strength. She was what our fathers called a "sweet creature," sensitive, pliant, easily frightened or suppressed. She was afraid of her sister, and she was also afraid of Edwin Rook, but she had no fear of Tod.

Tod had five shillings a week pocket-money, the sum that Uncle Remus allowed him out of his yearly £40, and nearly all Tod's pocket-money found itself being spent in Kitty's service. He bought her sweets, flowers, little bottles of scent which she did not dare to use, because scent always exasperated her father. Her mother had used it.

"Faugh! I won't have these loose and filthy habits in my house."

Once or twice she let Tod take her to a concert on the pier, going with him quite publicly, but not advertising the adventure to the family. The lad was

very much in love with her, and behaved to her always like a shrewd and big-hearted man. His boyish pride and delight in her would have touched a few harder hearts than Kitty Flowerdew's. There is no doubt that she loved Tod in her shy and rather frightened way, liking his sturdiness, his brown and intelligent head, and his eyes that always looked at you as straight as the eyes of a dog, but she was afraid of her father and her sister, and she was afraid of Edwin Rook.

"I say, how pretty you look."

"Do I?"

"You've got such wonderful hair, Kitty."

"I don't think you ought to tell me I am pretty," she would say, with a secret and half guilty thrill.

"But it's the truth. You are."

Tod went to church with the Flowerdew family, and sat between Kitty and her father. He had always loathed churchgoing, but even the dismal St. Jude's at Shaston was made mysterious and beautiful by Kitty's presence. He loved to kneel beside her, feel the soft rustle of her clothes, and listen to the murmur of her voice when she joined in a public prayer. He would cast furtive and devoted glances at her soft profile; she charmed him particularly when her eyes were closed, and her long dark lashes made sweet and gentle shadows on her cheeks. He almost forgot Mr. Flowerdew, and the aggressive voice that insisted on reminding God that he was a "mis-er-able sinner."

An incident that occurred late in the autumn taught Tod to look at life and Kitty Flowerdew with a new alertness. They had arranged to meet one

Saturday afternoon and to walk along the cliffs to Melling Gap. It was one of those innocent little conspiracies so dear to the hearts of a boy and a girl, and had Tod been challenged to account for it to the Pharisees of Shaston he might have flared into that fighting mood that dares prurience to come out into the open.

It was one of those tranquil autumn days and they were sitting on a rough seat under a windblown thorn tree not far from the edge of the cliff when a man, who was strolling along the path, stopped and looked hard at them. He stood there at their backs for fully a minute, grinning now and again, but not with pleasure. He was about to walk on again, when Tod happened to look round and so discovered his presence.

"Hallo; it's Rook!"

Kitty Flowerdew went white, and remained still and motionless for a moment like a startled bird. Tod felt her shrink from him in a queer, frightened way.

"Hallo, Rook."

The shopman grinned maliciously at Tod.

"Thought you were cycling to Pentworth?"

"Did I say so?" asked Tod.

"Mind you don't fall over that cliff after such a whopper."

Tod stood up, with a red face, but Edwin Rook walked on.

"Tod——"

He glanced at Kitty and saw a blackness of fear in her soft eyes.

"He'll tell, Tod."

"Let him. What's the harm?"

"Oh, you don't understand, dear," she said.

Chapter Eight

Tod never knew when Edwin Rook blabbed of the affair at Melling Gap. He did not see the man again till the Monday, and Rook went discreetly about his business while Mr. Flowerdew was in the shop. There was a sale at a house in Virginia Gardens, at eleven, and Mr. Flowerdew had decided to attend it in quest of possible bargains.

Tod was extricating some books from under a mahogany sideboard when a man's hand struck him a resounding whack from behind.

"Hallo, Don Juan!"

Tod faced round. He had never known Rook to indulge in playfulness, and there had been a vicious sting in that smack.

"Chuck that!"

"Well, Don Juan, how's life?"

"What d'you mean?" said Tod.

Rook looked at him in a queer, mocking way, and began to rearrange some china.

"Don't be a young fool, that's all," he remarked suggestively.

Tod was getting red and combative.

"You keep your jokes to yourself, Rook."

"Right-o, my lad, I shall. Why don't you pick up a kid of fifteen; that's about your size."

"Look here, you shut up," said Tod, "don't you say anything about Miss Kitty Flowerdew."

Rook turned on him with an insolent laugh, and bobbed a china cow up and down in front of Tod's face.

"Moo-moo, cocky! The boy's on his dignity, by Jove! Why, you cuckoo, she's only practising on you."

"She's not," said Tod fiercely. "She's not that sort of girl."

Mr. Rook addressed himself confidentially to the china cow.

"Hark at him, old girl. He knows all about you women. He's a regular man about town; Beautiful Bountiful Bertie, what! All done by kindness at the age of eighteen."

"I'm old enough to punch your head, anyhow," said Tod.

And then Edwin Rook left him alone.

The man had all the cleverness of a mean beast who was jealous, and in three days he had Tod helplessly and hopelessly enraged. The lad soon discovered that there was some conspiracy between Lena Flowerdew and the shopman. Rook had blabbed to the elder sister, and Miss Flowerdew had told her father. And Tod saw that it was Kitty who was in disgrace. The condemnation of that moral household was emptied upon her head, while Tod was made to feel a silly young fool. The girl had her hair up; she was old enough to know better.

But the true maliciousness of the two conspirators betrayed itself when Eli Flowerdew happened to be out to meals. Lena hated her sister and wanted to hurt her; Rook hated Tod and wanted to disgust the girl with her lover by making the affair ridiculous and paltry.

"Going to do a little more practising to-day, dear? Why not take Mr. Western to Melling Gap?"

Rook adopted a jocular tone and pretended to be very much afraid of Tod.

"Western's a terrible fellow. I'd advise any girl to be careful of Western. He's a fascinator. He'll be the Shah of Shaston, and you'll hear him boasting about it too."

Tod, conscious of Kitty's miserable and abashed face, and remembering that he had heard loud voices, and had caught her rushing upstairs in tears, did all that a shrewd boy could do by keeping the remnants of his temper, and accepting the business as a joke. His hatred of Lena Flowerdew was so fierce that he could not save himself from one or two frank and deadly tilts at her, and perhaps he hurt her more bitterly than he knew.

"Nice place, Melling Gap, Mr. Western. Suppose you take me there next Saturday? Mr. Rook will look after Kitty."

Tod was getting tired of the vulgarity of the thing.

"No, thank you," he said.

"Why not?"

"I don't like ugly women."

Lena Flowerdew gave him one glare of the eyes,

and laid that saying to her sister's credit.

Tod was alone in the room behind the shop that evening, sorting some second-hand books that had been bought at a sale, when the door opened and Kitty slipped in. They happened to be alone in the house for ten minutes, and Kitty had waited for that chance.

"Tod——"

She stood there, downcast, dismayed, and he could see that she had been weeping.

"Tod, don't speak to Lena like that, dear, please."

"Why not? And I couldn't help it."

"For my sake, don't. You don't know how horrible Lena can be. And Father——"

She had more to tell him, but her heart failed her, as her courage failed her in that moment of trial.

"You don't understand, Tod, how miserable they can make me."

Tod's love could hold back no longer. Here was his most dear lady, persecuted, humiliated, and all because of her kindness to him.

"Kitty! You know I love you, Kitty. I can't stand them being such beasts to you."

He crossed over to her, his blue eyes alight, and tried to take her hands, but she put them behind her suddenly, and began to weep anew.

"Tod, dear——"

"Why shouldn't we be engaged? I'm eighteen. And there's no one——"

"Don't, Tod, oh—don't—please," she said

brokenly. “You don’t understand—and I—I can’t tell you. Father would be so angry, and they would just mock at you.”

“I’m not afraid of that, dear.”

“It can’t be. And I have to ask you, Tod, not to look at me or talk to me much. We can be just friends——”

“I see how it is,” he said sturdily, “they think I’m a silly kid, and that I can’t be serious. If you would wait for me, Kitty.”

“I can’t, Tod, dear, I can’t. Father wouldn’t let me.”

“I’ll—I’ll make him,” but she fled out of the room and away up the dark stairs, and Tod could hear her sobbing as she went.

Tod was puzzled, but he suppressed the hot chivalry of his youth and the desire to do something heroic. The Flowerdews’ house was not a tilting ground for heroism, and the more Tod pondered the matter, the less sanguine he felt. Sir Galahad would have been met here with ridicule and a shower of rotten eggs. The lad began to understand Kitty’s sensitive dread and her shrinking from the malicious vulgarities of her sister’s tongue.

Tod made up his mind to dissemble. If it helped Kitty and saved her from further domestic storms, so much the better. He told himself that he would wait. In three years he would have that £1,000, and could talk to Mr. Eli Flowerdew as one man to another. And he found that his self-suppression, cheerfully and shrewdly advertised, had a very distinct influence upon the other members of the Flowerdew family. He talked more to Lena Flowerdew and made

it his business to pass her the butter and the jam, and actually allowed her to take him out to a tea-party at the Lagos's who ran a big grocery shop in King William Street.

Eli Flowerdew seemed to have made up his mind to approve of Tod, and Tod encouraged that spirit of approval, even though it led him into the dismal experience of being enrolled as a junior member of the local Social Purity League. Eli Flowerdew took him to the men's Wednesday evening meetings in the Shaston Public Hall, where he listened to sacred music as rendered by the Shaston Glee Singers, and heard sundry eloquent gentlemen give flamboyant addresses upon civic and domestic virtue.

The whole crowd made Tod think of a lot of unwholesome people getting into a stuffy corner and solemnly holding their noses because of the smell. They were so drearily unhuman and self-complacent. Tod had a feeling that they rather liked smells, and enjoyed holding their noses, and gloating self-righteously over the iniquity of the other people's drains.

He asked Bod Twine about it, because he had come to regard that swarthy young man as violently and savagely honest.

"I don't see that it does anybody any good," he argued.

"Course it doesn't kid. It's like telling a chap who's healthy that he's got a worm. They like it, you know—makes 'em feel warm and good inside like a glass of gin; they don't want things to be different, not really. Get outside; that's my motto."

"Outside what?"

"Why, out into the country, you pippin. There's nothing wrong with the sea, or the fields, or the open road, is there? And there's nothing wrong with a chap wanting to be in love with a girl. If so, what are we here for? If a man tries to come the pious over me, I always think he has got dirty feet. Say, when are you going to join our footer club?"

Twine had taught Tod to swim; he also taught him to box, and young Western began to be one of the pets of the local football club. He had shaped well as a half-back at Chipperton's, and before Christmas he was playing right-half for Shaston Town, and was beloved of the local crowd. "Worry-'em-Western" was his nickname, and even Mr. Flowerdew approved. It was an advertisement. "That's young Western from Flowerdew's." The commercial eye sees a placard everywhere, and pastes up a pious "poster" whenever it looks publicly upon its God.

Yet even Clarence Todhunter Western had his worries. The Flowerdews household had made inroads on his youth, and changed him from the irresponsible boy to the young man who was finding life rather a queer and puzzling business. His silent and restrained loyalty to Kitty made him all the more jealous and observant. He began to notice that Edwin Rook was always sneaking out of the shop and into the house when Eli Flowerdew was not about. He noticed, too, that Rook's eyes were for ever watching Kitty during meals, but that she hardly ever looked at him in return. Rook seemed to frighten her and to reduce her to silence. Moreover, Miss Lena Flowerdew grew very snappy and sarcastic towards the shopman, and Tod caught her watching him trying to ingratiate himself with her sister. Miss

Flowerdew's face was never very pleasant or amiable, but on those occasions Tod thought her the ugliest thing he had ever seen.

Then Edwin Rook took to attending St. Jude's church and sat in the Flowerdew pew, displacing Tod, who was pushed to the far end by the pillar. Tod was annoyed but contemptuous. He had a healthy scorn for Rook, a fellow who wore glasses, never played any games, and was, Tod suspected, a physical coward. Tod, the romanticist, blindly refused to accept Rook as a serious rival, which wild faith of his betrayed how ignorant he was of the real inwardness of the Flowerdew family.

But it was the shop and the business that were puzzling the sportsman in Tod. You bought as cheaply as you could and you sold as dearly as you could; that seemed fairly obvious and reasonable, and yet Tod was not satisfied. When some old woman received three and sixpence for an article which Mr. Flowerdew sold to a wealthy stockbroker's wife three days later for five guineas, the gap seemed too greedy. Tod began to see a good deal of this buying and selling, and it left him with an uneasy and guilty feeling. Also it became very plain to him that in a shop you were not supposed to tell the truth. You romanced, you exaggerated—in short, you lied.

"Those candlesticks, madam? Yes, we picked them up only a week ago and at a fancy price. They won't remain with us very long; the first connoisseur who sees them——"

Now Tod knew that these candlesticks had been bought at a sale three months ago, and that Mr. Flowerdew had given exactly seven shillings for them. The lady, a visitor to Shaston, bought them for

three pounds ten.

Moreover, for subtle reason known only to himself, Edwin Rook set himself to try and debauch and commercialise Tod. He was cynical, jocular, and facetious, and he took a delight in airing all the trade cynicisms, and flaunting them in front of Tod's eyes.

"You've got to watch your customer, my lad. If it's a 'regular' and one who knows a bit, go easy. If it's a stranger, why then you can do a bit of fibbing and push the price."

"Be jolly careful of duchessy looking ladies in fine clothes. They don't swallow things easily. They can be really nasty if they think you have cheated them."

"Always back down and eat dirt if you are found out."

"Expert knowledge! What do we want to know for? Why, it's the whole game. You can score off the people who don't know, get 'em to take sixpence for something that's worth a quid. That's business."

"Sentiment. There's no sentiment in a shop. Only oil, my boy, oil."

Tod disliked Rook all the more thoroughly for these cynicisms of his. At first, he did not take them too seriously. Rook was a glib talker, rather pleased with his own cleverness, but as the weeks went by, Tod began to realise that Rook was telling him the truth. The discovery depressed Tod very seriously. He felt that he was getting mixed up in a sordid sort of game, a game in which your main endeavour was to cheat. Tod called it "cheating" to himself, quite frankly and with no reservations. If you tried to foul in the football field, the referee dropped on you, and the crowd, if it was not too bigoted a crowd, hooted.

And then came the incident of that book.

Mr. Flowerdew had been present at one of those “sales of necessity.” A doctor had died and left a widow and three children, and a small balance at the bank. Mr. Flowerdew bought a few lots at the sale, and among them an odd number of books that cost him thirteen shillings. Tod was sorting these books two days after the sale when he came across a queer old volume that sent him running for Messrs. Porteous’s price catalogue of second-hand books.

There seemed no doubt about it. That particular book was valued at fifteen guineas.

Tod, full of enthusiasm, announced the fact to Rook.

“I say, there’s been a mistake. We have bought a valuable book mixed up in a lot of rubbish.”

“Where’s the mistake?” asked the shopman with cynical sangfroid.

“But the governor only paid thirteen bob for the lot, and this book is priced at fifteen guineas. The people who sold it didn’t know. We shall have to send it back.”

“Do what?” squealed Mr. Rook.

“Why, send it back. It wouldn’t be fair or sporting to keep it. I don’t suppose Flowerdew knew when he bought the lot.”

Rook stared at Tod, and then gave a queer laugh.

“Suggest it, old chap. If the auctioneers didn’t do their work properly, and the governor had the luck ——”

“You mean you’d keep it and say nothing?”

"You soft egg!" said Mr. Rook.

Tod was challenged. He said nothing more to Rook, but waited for Mr. Flowerdew to give a judgment of Solomon. Rook was out when the interview occurred, and he missed one of the most cynical comedies that had ever been played in Mr. Flowerdew's shop.

"Excuse me, sir, but you bought a valuable book the other day by mistake."

Mr. Flowerdew was totting up some figures in a notebook, and he looked at Tod with interested approval.

"What's that, Western? You are learning to use your wits, are you? What about it?"

Tod explained, and Eli Flowerdew listened with fatherly satisfaction until Tod made the extraordinary suggestion that the book should be returned.

Mr. Flowerdew's thin lips slipped back over his yellow teeth.

"Say that again, Western?"

Tod said it again.

And then Eli Flowerdew gave Tod a solemn and biblical description of what business was and how it should be conducted. He expatiated on the necessity for loyalty between master and assistant, and how that his—Mr. Flowerdew's—interest was Tod's. He trounced Tod's sentimental obtuseness, and assured him that commerce and civilisation would be impossible if people behaved in the way Tod had suggested.

"You have got to get the business spirit,

Western," he said grimly, "if you want to rise in this world. Competition doesn't say 'After you, please.' If you hold yourself responsible for other peoples mistakes, you are a fool, young man. Don't you mix sentiment and business. And don't let me hear any more of this nonsense."

Chapter Nine

Towards the end of the winter Tod began to be very restless. Kitty Flowerdew had been away for a month, and there had been nothing to relieve the ugliness of the house in Ponsonby Place; Tod was growing a little weary of serving like a boy Jacob for his Rachael. Edwin Rook's cynicisms, and a more intimate knowledge of Eli Flowerdew's methods of making money, had killed Tod's interest in the business. He began to hate the shop and everything in it, almost as much as he hated the atmosphere of the Flowerdew house. Some of those queer sayings of his father's cropped up like sharp flints under his feet.

"I'm not a penny-in-the-slot machine." "This country with its penny-three-farthing soul!" "Pray publicly to God, and cheat your neighbour!"

There were elements of rebellion stirring in Tod. He lost some of his frankness, and grew rather morose and thoughtful, and he showed a new fierceness towards Edwin Rook. He began to take long prowls after closing time, and forgathered with Bob Twine and two or three other young men who liked the rush of the sea air on their faces. Tod found that it was agreed that life as a shopkeeper's assistant was doomed to suck all the virility out of a man's

soul. Yet these rebels had no alternative paths of adventure to suggest, save joining the Army of running after girls. Mossup, a mild, flaxen-haired, and rather serious soul who wore spectacles, hoped to attain liberty by acquiring a shop of his own.

"You're welcome to it, old man," said Twine; "you ain't rogue enough. You'll be dodging bankruptcy till it makes you grey. I'm turning Socialist."

Tod happened to mention the word "Socialist" to Edwin Rook, and was puzzled by the shopman's slimy and secretive smile.

"So you know some Socialists, do you, Western?"

"I know one," said Tod.

The information was passed on in a casual and inconsidered manner to Mr. Flowerdew. Tod did not suspect it then, but Rook had decided that Western was in his way, and Rook set about edging Tod overboard with the methodical shrewdness of the born sneak and coward. He dropped hints that Tod was getting into loose company and loafing about the town at night. He even hinted at "girls." All girls, save his own, were anathema to Eli Flowerdew.

Two days before Kitty Flowerdew was expected home, Rook laid a deliberate trap for Tod. A couple of packing-cases had arrived from Birmingham, and Rook called Tod to help him unpack them.

"One of our confidential jobs, my son. Now what do you think of that brass door-knocker?"

"It looks old," said Tod.

They unpacked a pretty selection of mock antiques in metal—candlesticks, tinder-boxes,

sconces, and the like. Rook chatted jocularly, and in a cynically confidential way to Tod.

"The fools will have old things, so we have to get 'em."

"Aren't these old?" Tod asked.

"Fakes, reproductions, the whole lot of them."

"But we don't sell them as old?"

"Oh, don't we! You'll sell tons before you've done."

Tod was kneeling, and with two hands on the edge of the case he faced Rook across it.

"I'm dashed if I will. It's not honest."

"Just tell that to the boss."

"I will, if he asks me. And what's more, if I see you trying to sell the stuff as old—I'll—I'll——"

"Hoity-toity!" said Mr. Rook.

But he had manœuvered Tod into a desperate position, and he made haste to let Mr. Flowerdew appreciate Tod's pose of defiance and its possibilities.

"Can I have a few words with you, sir?"

"What's the matter, Rook?"

"It's about Western, sir. I don't like playing the sneak, but I'm worried about Western. Besides, I'm thinking of my loyalty to you and the business."

"Come into my room."

With a certain air of diffidence and unwillingness Rook described Tod's rebellious attitude and the threats he had used.

"Of course, I was teasing the chap really, but he's

likely to be a bit of a problem, sir. He doesn't understand being loyal, and I think Western's getting rather wild."

"Confound that boy!" said Mr. Flowerdew.

He walked up and down, cleared his throat, and then gave the assistant an enigmatic look.

"Not a word about this."

"Not a word, sir."

"I'll think it over. We don't want a row, and a boy with a reckless tongue might make trouble. Besides, I don't want to be hard."

He smiled, and moistened his lips.

"But I appreciate your attitude, Rook. You are always backing me up; making the business a personal affair."

Rook gave a simper and appeared embarrassed.

"It's a fact, sir. I owe you my job. And I'll admit I'm ambitious."

"No harm in that, man; ambition in you suits me."

And then Rook plunged and showed both his heart and his hand. Flowerdew listened to him with a slight frown, and the stare of a shrewd and unwinking bird.

"So that's it, Rook?"

"Don't take it as impertinence, sir. You have been very kind to me, and I'm human. And I'm a steady sort of chap; I mean to get on, and if Miss Kitty——"

Flowerdew patted Rook on the shoulder.

"I'll think it over, Rook. I'm not so sure you

wouldn't make me a very sound partner, some day."

Tod was destined to strike one of those adventurous and pugilistic passages in his life before he ceased from the Flowerdew household. Romance caught him, romance and a sudden glimpse of Kitty, Kitty unseen for a whole month, and drifting in like the spring with an armful of daffodils. Perhaps it was not wholly by chance that Tod happened to be there to rush out and carry in her box. This sudden meeting surprised them both into a flutter of naturalness, a quick and dear delight in each other that couldn't be hid.

"Tod——"

He was conscious of her as a creature with brown, shimmering eyes, and a quick rich colour. She gave him her hand, and he held it a moment. She looked a little wild and shy, like a bird.

"It's been such a long month," he said.

"Oh, Tod, I wish——"

But he never heard what her wish was, for Miss Flowerdew intervened, and Tod saw Kitty's happy face close up like a flower.

"Thought you were coming by the 2.30."

"No, by the four o'clock, Lena."

"Look at those messy flowers; you have let the stalks dribble all down your dress."

"Have I? Well, it doesn't matter."

Tod was playing the strong man, struggling up the narrow stairs with Kitty's trunk, and telling himself that he was not going to stand it any longer. It was somebody's business to rescue Kitty, and Tod decided that that somebody was himself.

He heard voices that night; Mr. Flowerdew's voice very hard and emphatic, much the same voice that Flowerdew used at the meetings of the Social Purity League. He was speaking to Kitty in the drawing-room and Tod left his bedroom door open in order to listen. He could not distinguish what was said, but he could hear Kitty piping occasional notes like a pathetic and appealing thrush. The duologue ended with a lengthy, harsh and emphatic grumble from Mr. Flowerdew's voice. Tod heard Kitty go to her room with the flutter of a bird escaping from a rough hand. Later Tod fancied that he could catch the sound of weeping.

Two days passed, wrathful, volcanic days, with Tod ready to erupt. Kitty went about the house with the strange air of a doomed thing in disgrace. She hardly spoke, left her food almost untouched, and her frightened eyes avoided Tod's. Tod noticed that Rook had a peculiarly sleek and bland look, like a cat in a good temper. Miss Flowerdew ignored both Rook and her sister. Old Flowerdew read the paper at meals, and made occasional snapping sounds such as "Butter," "More tea," "Pass the bread."

Tod had no business in the garden on that fateful evening just when dusk was falling. From the back-room window he glimpsed Kitty walking slowly down the path towards the shrubbery where a few scraggy lilacs were pushing out green buds and making the euonymus and the holly look black and fusty. Rook appeared to have left the place, and Tod entered the garden by the passage that led through from the street. There was a ramshackle rustic summer-house in the middle of the shrubbery, one of those bourgeois and urban touches that make the real countryman smile. Tod saw Kitty enter the

summer-house, her hands hanging limply, her brown head bowed down.

Tod was half-way across the garden when he heard the sound of a struggle, and Kitty's voice appealing with a fear that feared to protest.

"Don't, oh, don't!"

"Please let go, please, Mr. Rook."

Tod went in at the gallop like a true knight errant. He found Rook holding Kitty in his arms, and thrusting that ugly mouth of his in search of her averted face. His arms had pinned hers to her body, and she was trying to free them when Tod interfered.

"Let go, you cad!"

Tod never forgot the change that came over Rook's face. At one moment he had been a greedy, gloating thing about to suck the honey that he had long desired; the next he was looking balked, furious, sheepish, and a little afraid.

"You dirty cad! Come outside."

"Look here, young Western, boys aren't wanted. You clear out."

"Kitty," said Tod, "will you please let me——"

"Oh, Tod, dear——"

She slipped out of the summer-house, soft, pathetic, ineffectual, and Tod faced Edwin Rook.

"Come outside."

Rook did a thin bluster.

"Look here, kid, I don't want to hurt you. It's no business of yours if I'm engaged to Miss Kitty Flowerdew."

"It's a lie," said Tod, and went in after the rat since the rat would not come to him.

Rook was a weedy man and no fighter, though he patted and hooked at Tod like an angry cat. Tod smashed his glasses, split his lip, and bundled him twice against the rotten wall of the summer-house. Rook closed with the lad, and they were in an angry and dishevelled tangle on the floor when Mr. Eli Flowerdew stormed in. Tod was uppermost, with a good grip in Rook's collar, and riding his man victoriously in spite of the jerks and contortions of the shopman's legs.

"What the—— Get up, Western. Get up, Rook. What the devil——"

Old Flowerdew was very angry, and his voice rasped like a saw.

"The boy's mad," said Rook, picking himself up, panting, "he came at me like an——"

"I've thrashed you, that's all," said Tod, "for being a dirty cad."

Flowerdew caught Tod by the collar.

"Silence, you young savage. What do you mean by——"

"Mean?" said Tod, looking quite ready to deal with Mr. Flowerdew as he had dealt with Rook, "he'd insulted Kitty."

Mr. Flowerdew let go of Tod as though the lad were hot iron.

"Oh, that's it, is it! I see. Savage jealousy, I suppose. And may I ask what it has to do with you, Mr. Tod Western?"

He sneered down at Tod with grizzled and

grinning irony.

"I suppose the man who is going to marry my daughter has a right to be a little—affectionate. You are too big for your boots, my boy. Go upstairs to bed. I'll talk to you like a father to-morrow."

All the fine fury seemed to fall out of Tod's chivalry. He gave Mr. Flowerdew a blank and bewildered look, put his hands in his pockets, and disappeared.

Tod passed a Byronic and very miserable night. It was as though some Eastern giant had reached down a great hand, lifted the world's lid, and shown Tod all sorts of strange secrets and knavish devices. Tod understood the Flowerdew household as he had never understood it before. He remembered that saying of Bob Twine's that Eli Flowerdew had driven his wife to suicide, and that Kitty was the daughter of her mother. Rook wanted Kitty, he had wanted her all the while; Tod understood that now, and why Rook hated him. But Kitty did not want Edwin Rook, and the inference was obvious. Eli Flowerdew was giving the girl to Rook, compelling her, even against her great loathing, to surrender herself to this lover, this cold, weedy beast with his bland "selling" manner, and his venomous tongue.

And why?

The answer to that question stuck in Tod's throat, but he was constrained to swallow it. Rook was a useful man to Eli Flowerdew. He knew all the chicanery of the business, and practised it like a man who loved it. It was possible that he knew so much that he had to be part of the family, part of the conspiracy.

Tod tossed to and fro in bed, bit his pillow, and schemed all sorts of mad and impossible schemes for the rescuing of Kitty. He felt that he loved her as he had never loved her before, since he had seen her twisting in Rook's arms. Rook shouldn't have her! He would see her to-morrow and appeal to her to run away with him. Yes, and on what? Tod's shrewdness saved him from being a mere sentimental and adventurous young fool. He knew that he had about three shillings in his trousers pocket, no very noble purse for an eloping couple.

No, he would be perfectly straight with old Flowerdew. He would stand up to him like a man and say, "I love Kitty, and I think Kitty loves me. I'm young, but I mean to get on. You can't give Kitty to Rook."

Yes, and that would entail his staying in the business, and swallowing all the humbug and the trickery. What a slimy and clever devil that chap Rook was! Tod realised that he had been driven into a corner, and that though he had punched Rook's head, the fellow had him tied up like a fly. And the beastliness of it all, old Flowerdew of the Social Purity League, buying a man's loyalty by giving him the body of his daughter!

Tod went downstairs next morning, red-eyed, and prepared to fight, but the Flowerdew household surprised and nonplussed him, and smothered the attack. Kitty did not appear at breakfast; she was locked in her room, and Tod did not have a glimpse of her that morning. Lena Flowerdew had never been so smiling or so pleasant; Tod had buttered eggs with his bacon, and three lumps of sugar in his tea. Miss Flowerdew's friendliness held him mute. He did not

understand it, or guess that she was gloating over his trouncing of Edwin Rook. He had not heard that gibe of hers, “Nice sort of man you are, to be licked by a mere boy.” But Mr. Flowerdew himself was the surprise of the morning. It was the Sabbath Flowerdew that appeared at the breakfast-table, solemn, sententious, oracular, dressed in its Sunday clothes. It was polite and patriarchal towards Tod, a figure that took him by the elbow and marched him into an atmosphere of surplices and “mis-er-able sinners.”

“Now, Western, if you please.”

Tod found himself in the Flowerdew drawing-room, sitting opposite to Mr. Eli Flowerdew, and listening with a feeling of helplessness to arguments that he could not answer.

“I feel that I have a grave responsibility—a fatherly responsibility towards you, Western. The fact is, you are not suited to a business such as mine. You appear to have picked up a lot of queer ideas from somewhere, ideas that won’t work in this world. You have got to learn to be a practical business man. Now I don’t want to be unkind to you, my boy, but I have felt for a long while that you don’t suit me, and perhaps my business doesn’t suit you.”

Tod was nonplussed.

“Some of it doesn’t go down, sir,” he said gloomily, “but I wanted to talk to you about——”

Mr. Flowerdew caught him up.

“About my daughter. Exactly. Now let’s talk this over like men, Western. How old are you?”

“Just eighteen.”

"And my daughter is a year older than you are. And when do you expect to be able to keep a wife?"

Tod fidgeted on his chair.

"I shall have a £1,000 when I'm twenty-one. I mean to get on, sir. And she doesn't, I mean, Kitty doesn't——"

Mr. Flowerdew smiled at Tod.

"Western, my boy, you are very green and inexperienced. You think that my daughter doesn't want to marry Mr. Rook. You mustn't jump at conclusions in this world, and I may as well tell you that you did yourself a very bad service last night."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"My daughter was pained, disgusted, Western. You whom we had treated as one of the family, raising a vulgar brawl and assaulting my daughter's fiancé! Women are queer creatures, Western; they often pretend to dislike a man when they really want him. My daughter is much more attached to Mr. Rook than you imagine."

"If she would tell me so," blurted Tod.

Mr. Flowerdew sat forward in his chair, and wagged an emphatic forefinger.

"Listen to me, young man; do you think I am going to have my girl's future happiness compromised by a wild boy who isn't old enough to know his own mind? Certainly not, Western, certainly not. I have duties as a father. Mr. Rook has earned a position of trust. I know Rook—I believe in Rook; I say, 'There is a steady fellow who can give a girl a good Christian home.' And Mr. Rook is going to marry my daughter. Put all that nonsense out of

your head, my boy. I have had you in here and talked to you like a man of the world and a father, but of course you realise that you can't stay any longer in my house."

"I realise that," said Tod.

"Very well, then; that's a sensible answer. There are plenty of chances for a steady fellow in a town like this. I'm quite ready to help you, Western, or you can go back to your uncle for a while."

"I'll go back to my uncle," said Tod.

And that was the end of it. Mr. Flowerdew had his gig out that afternoon and drove Tod and his box over to Burnt Farm. He had a somewhat lengthy interview with Uncle Remus, while Tod idled about the garden and listened in a wild and rebel mood to a blackbird's singing.

He kept out of the way till Mr. Flowerdew had gone, and then went in to face his uncle.

"You darned young fool!" was all that the farmer said to him.

Chapter Ten

A month later Tod Western returned to Shaston-on-Sea and entered the establishment of John Snape, chemist, in King William Street.

Various people had had a hand in launching this new adventure.

Tod himself had initiated the idea. Balked in a second attempt to persuade Uncle Remus to let him become a student of medicine, he had piqued himself

with pleasant memories of chemists' shops, liking the scent and the cleanness of them and the idea of handing out mysterious cures to suffering humanity. He imagined that he would find nothing of the Flowerdew fraudulencies in such a place. Moreover, he had not forgotten Kitty Flowerdew. He still had dreams of indulging in some piratical excursion into the Flowerdew household, and of rescuing Kitty from the clutches of Edwin Rook.

When Tod made his suggestion to Uncle Remus, Uncle Remus said "Humph, want to mix physic and sell soap, do you? I suppose there'll always be fools who want to drink physic and wash. Toothbrushes, too." Uncle Remus never used one.

Dr. Vance was consulted, and agreed that the idea was a sound one. He happened to know John Snape of Shaston, Snape had once dispensed for him, and he wrote to the chemist and spoke highly of Tod. Mr. Snape suggested an interview, and confessed that he needed an intelligent assistant to serve in the shop and learn dispensing. Mr. Snape interviewed Tod, and then made the further suggestion that Tod should "see how he liked it" for six months, and that if he suited Mr. Snape, he could then enter on a three years' apprenticeship and train for the examinations of the Pharmaceutical Society. The reference to the "Pharmaceutical Society" rather impressed Uncle Remus; it sounded so respectable and Mesopotamian; besides, it was backed and reinforced by those indispensable articles—toothbrushes and soap.

So Tod went to Mr. Snape, and was found a bed-sitting room, food, and a smell of domesticity in the house of a certain Mrs. Budd. Mrs. Budd was a good soul, and she and Tod clasped hands at once. She had a little house in Laburnum Road, not far from

Shaston Gardens, a little cabbage-rose of a house, buxom and easy, like Mrs. Budd herself. Mrs. Budd was a widow, and her children were all launched on the world.

"You make yourself at 'ome, dear," she said to Tod; "I always believe in plenty of butter on the toast."

Mr. Snape was not quite so obvious and easy as Mrs. Budd. He was sandy and pink, and wore gold-rimmed spectacles. Tod thought him something of a dandy, and he was so polite that you wondered whether he was trying to be sarcastic. There was an air of prosperity and rosy health about John Snape and his business, and he looked like a good advertisement for somebody's shaving soap, or Rumbelow's Iron Pills.

Snape gave Tod some shrewd advice and handed him over to a middle-aged assistant, a laconic, earthy-faced man named Wisdon. Wisdon had a short brown beard and a moustache; he wore a dicky and removable cuffs, cuffs that he covered each morning with the clean white pieces of paper that were used for wrapping up bottles. His black coat was shiny at the elbows, and he had some special concoction for dealing with this shininess, but it never grew any less shiny. Wisdon's inspiration was the word "economy." He economised in razors and shaving soap, in his laundry, in his conversation, in his food. There was something rather melancholy and pathetic and suppressed about the man; he always looked tired, and he had a perennial cold in his head.

Tod nicknamed Wisdon "Mr. Any-think-else." That was the final phrase he used to each customer on handing over the customer's purchases.

The other assistant was a young man named Cook. He was a certified dispenser, and Tod disliked him from the first day. Cook was a shallow, cocky sarcastic young gentleman who never troubled to hide his contempt for the snuffy and much worried Wisdon. Tod noticed that Mr. Snape treated Cook with consideration, whereas he bullied and hectored the older man, and Wisdom took it like a quiet and depressed old dog.

Tod began by liking Mr. Snape's shop. He liked the smell of it, the airiness and cleanness, the rows and rows of mysterious bottles, the glass cases full of scent and boxes of soap, and the hundred and one articles connected with a well washed and well groomed body. Even the phraseology of the craft fascinated him, all that quaint Latinity that smelt of the Pharmacopœia and suggested old world herbalists and the romance of alchemy. There was no dust in Mr. Snape's shop. Everything glistened. And there was so much of everything. Drawers full of new white toothbrushes, of chip and cardboard pill and ointment boxes, stacks of bottles, oceans of soap, sponges by the hundred, scissors, rows of hot water bottles, and unimagined wealth of all sorts of scent, toilet powders, manicure sets; cohorts of combs, ointments, razors, shaving-brushes, siphons of potash and soda water. Then there were all the patent medicines and proprietary preparations. Tod was less interested in these, and perhaps from the first he viewed them with a slight distrust. They advertised themselves rather too blatantly, and had not the restrained solemnity of the tinctures, extracts, and infusions on the dispensing shelves. You could look up the latter in the Pharmacopœia, that Doomsday Book of the drugs, and find out just what they were and what they pretended to be. The patent medicines

were rather like women; they wore petticoats, and led you to believe that the world's most wonderful mystery was hidden upon their persons.

Tod's thoughts were constantly fluttering round that house in Ponsonby Place. He made a point of walking past it in the evening, but he had never a glimpse of Kitty, and he had no desire to meet Mr. Flowerdew or his elder daughter. They might suspect him of some possible act of piracy, and take precaution against it. Tod was cautious.

One Sunday evening he went to St. Jude's Church, and sitting in one of the back seats, saw Rook and Kitty come in together and take their places in the familiar pew. Tod shadowed them home to Ponsonby Place. They walked arm and arm, and Tod felt savage and depressed.

Chance gave him the opportunity he had so long desired. He had been wandering along the beach in an aimless sort of way, and was watching some men winding up the bathing machines under the White Cliff, when he became aware of a girl sitting on the shingle, with a book in her lap. A big hat hid her face, but she raised her head as Tod passed, and the face was the face of Kitty.

Tod turned straight towards her, trying to convince himself that it was not tears that he saw in her eyes. She sat there, staring up at him, as though she had lost both the power of speech and of movement. It struck Tod that she looked older, and that she did not flush in her old sensitive and girlish way.

"May I speak to you, Kitty?"

"Oh, please——" she began.

Tod sat down beside her, and saw her glance towards the town.

“Edwin’s coming, any moment.”

Then Tod rebelled, and talked all sorts of wild and tender nonsense that brought her to the edge of tears. There was no rebellion to be roused in Kitty Flowerdew. She had accepted the system, was terrorised by system, and her poor scared face made Tod feel a beast.

“Oh, don’t, please, Tod. I’ve promised to marry Edwin Rook. It was father’s wish.”

And suddenly Tod grew very gentle and tender.

“Poor Kitty,” he said; “I don’t want to hurt you, dear. But I wish I thought you were happy.”

“Of course I am going to be happy,” she protested; “Father has been so good to Edwin; he is a partner now, and we are going to have a dear little house near St. Jude’s.”

She showed Tod her ring, a diamond and sapphire hoop.

“Isn’t it pretty?”

“Very,” said Tod, wishing he could kill Rook.

“And we are buying the furniture, such nice furniture.”

She was talking defensively, holding Tod and her own emotion at arm’s length, and all the while she kept looking anxiously towards the town. Tod’s heart smote him. He understood at last the hopelessness and the helplessness of Kitty, and that he was only torturing her by persuading her to cry for the moon.

“I hope you will be very happy,” he said.

"Thank you, Tod."

"I think I ought to be going now."

Her look of relief was obvious to him, and with a tragic glance at her he got up and went. But he felt very miserable and very bitter, and betaking himself to Rose Cottage he poured his bitterness into the lap of Mrs. Budd, not as a confessional, but as the vague yet fiery discontent of a young man balked of his desire.

Mrs. Budd was a comfortable opportunist. She had rounded off all her angles, and if the world bumped her it bumped against something soft and elastic. She had learnt to circumvent by yielding, to flow round obstructions, to be comfortable even when you had to sit six aside in a third-class carriage.

"Don't go looking for trouble, my dear. You'll get plenty of it in the world without looking. What, you say people cheat? Of course they cheat, if it pays 'em. Not all, mind you, but most."

"It ought to be altered," said Tod; "my father used to say that anyone who made too much money was a rogue."

"Well, my dear, if you take that line, you will be up against the elephant. The elephant will tread on you. Much better give it buns."

"You are a coward, Mrs. Budd."

"No, I'm not, my dear; I've used my eyes and my ears. Unless you're a gent, it pays to be polite. Never you be too clever. Clever people ain't popular. Soft soap and stoopidity; that's the stuff that gets you along comfortable in this world."

Tod remained in a rebel mood, and consorted more than ever with Bob Twine and Mossup and one or two other young men who did not like life as it was. Twine roared with laughter when Tod gave a rather shame-faced account of how he had been bundled out of the Flowerdew household.

“What! Oh, you pippin! Wanted to send that book back, and to tell everybody that all the worm-holes in the shop were fakes! No wonder that chap Rook got a strangle-hold on you.”

“Well, wasn’t I right?” flared Tod.

“Too right, kid. I wish half the world was half as right as you. Suppose there’ll be a second suicide in the Flowerdew family?”

But Tod’s fierce face warned him to gibe no farther.

“Sorry, kid. I’m a coarse beast sometimes. And how do you like old Snape?”

“I don’t know yet,” said Tod.

“You and I’ll end in the army, kid; that’s what will happen to us. P’r’aps we’ll emigrate. And there’s poor old Mossup wanting to marry a girl at the glove counter and shove his little capital into a draper’s shop in Pondicherry Street. Poor old blighter!”

“Aren’t you going to marry, Bob?” Tod asked.

“Me marry! Not as things are, my boy, thank you. That’s the last knot the blasted system ties on you. I’m not going to make my woman eat dirt.”

“My father married, and he didn’t eat dirt,” said Tod.

“No, kid; I dare say he was a better man than I am. I’m the sort of chap that must have a girl. P’r’aps

you're too young, old man, but you'll find out in time. Let's have a swim to-night."

"All right," said Tod.

As to John Snape's, it was a serious improvement on Mr. Flowerdew's, yet, as Tod had said, he wanted to see more of it before he gave it his approval. Tod had inherited his father's love of looking facts straight in the face. There are quite a number of people who look Truth in the face and then make great haste to get away round the nearest corner. Tod was not like that. He stood and stared till he was satisfied, and if he did not like what he saw he said so. Most boys are such irresponsible creatures, absorbed in the green springtide of their own youth, that they accept the crookedness and oddities of life as a jest, a suit of motley that does not matter, but Tod had the uncomfortable knack of asking questions and of remaining unsatisfied until they were answered.

Now "Mr. Any-think-else" had a grubby little book that he used to poke his nose into at odd moments. It always lay handy on the shelf below the desk, and Tod grew curious about that book. He got hold of it one afternoon and found that it was called "How to be Your Own Doctor." Tod was interested. Perhaps Old Wisdon had ambitions and dreams of entering the great profession!

A snuffy old lady in a black bonnet and dress all covered with crape toddled into the shop the same afternoon and became engaged in a mumbling and confidential conversation with Mr. Wisdon. Both Mr. Snape and Cook were out of the shop, and Tod was wrapping up some bottles in the dispensing department.

He stood still and listened.

“My daughter’s got a pain in the chest,” said the old lady, “and she coughs something terrible. I’ve rubbed her with turps, and she’s ’ad some of that lung tonic, but it ’asn’t done her any good.”

“Where’s the pain?” asked Wisdon in a confidential voice; “in the front or the side?”

“Just about the breast-bone.”

“Does she expectorate?”

“What’s that?”

“Spit phlegm.”

“Yes, frothy stuff.”

“Doesn’t perspire at night, does she?”

“Don’t think so. She hasn’t said.”

“I expect it’s a slight attack of bronchitis. There’s been a lot dust blowing about, and an east wind. Suppose you try a bottle of our cough-cure.”

“Is it good?”

“Works like magic. It’s modelled on the prescription of a leading London doctor.”

“I’ll try a bottle. How much it is?”

“Half a crown.”

The old lady paid her half-crown, dropped the bottle of Snape’s Cough Cure into a string-bag and toddled off. Tod, emerging from the dispenser’s corner, began to ask “Mr. Any-think-else” ingenious and interested questions.

“Didn’t know you knew anything about doctoring, Mr. Wisdon.”

"Oh, didn't you?"

"Do you get it all out of that little book?"

Wisdon gave Tod a worried look.

"It's a very good book," he said.

"How do you know the old lady's daughter had bronchitis?"

"By the symptoms."

"But mightn't she have consumption or something?"

"She might, of course."

"When my mother had a cough," said Tod, "Dr. Vance listened to her chest with a thing he called a steffescope. You could hear all the bubbles and clicks, he said, and all that was going on."

"Dare say he could," said Mr. Wisdon, showing symptoms of being bored with the subject.

"Don't you think the woman ought to see a doctor, Mr. Wisdon?"

And then the patient, much enduring assistant turned on him with sudden wrath.

"Look 'ere, don't you ask so many questions."

Tod liked old Wisdon, and had no idea of hurting him.

"Sorry," he said. "I wanted to know—how——"

"You want to know too much, young Western; the less you think about things in this rotten world the better it'll be for your peace of mind, and don't you forget it."

Tod had never seen "Mr. Any-think-else" so ruffled and combative and upset about something.

He banged bottles back in their places, kicked a drawer to, and began to dust the counter with furious energy.

"Think I like it, do you? I have my orders, and I carry 'em out. You can't be saucy on eighty pounds a year."

Then he grew suddenly afraid and went down the shop to make sure that he and Tod were alone.

"But I'm not saying anything against it. I'm better off here than I was before. You have to take life as you find it, Western, and don't ask too many questions. People don't like it."

"You mean Mr. Snape wouldn't like it?"

"Look here"—and then a customer came into the shop and Mr. Wisdon escaped from Tod's inquisition.

Tod's eyes had been opened, and in the future he placed quite a different construction on those confidential little interviews that were always taking place in Mr. Snape's shop. He saw Cook studying a book like Mr. Wisdon's. He began to understand that the fatherly interest John Snape took in certain customers was not a casual asking as to their health and a polite passing of the time of day. Mr. Snape talked in a subdued voice to mothers with babies. There were occasions when he took sheepish-looking men into his back room and served them himself with an air of sleek mystery. Tod wondered what Mr. Snape gave these gentlemen. He had the curiosity to note the particular drawer from which Mr. Snape took what he wanted. Tod discovered later that the drawer contained small glass syringes.

One Thursday afternoon when business seemed very stagnant Cook hailed Tod.

"Here, Western, I've got a job for you."

"What is it?" said Tod.

"You can fill up these bottles with water, cork 'em, dry 'em, and paste on those labels. Our stock's getting low."

Cook had a couple of biggish bottles and a measuring-glass on the dispensing counter, and a whole phalanx of eight-ounce bottles ranged in two neat rows. He began to measure some brown stuff and some pink stuff into a glass, and to pour an equal amount of the mixture into each empty bottle. He worked with great rapidity and with that cynical and gay air of his that rather puzzled Tod.

"What's this?" Tod asked.

Cook gave him a wink.

"This, my boy, is Snape's Magic Cough Cure, an absolute elixir, priced at half a crown a bottle."

"Oh, is it?" said Tod, immensely interested. "What's in it?"

"What's in it! That's a trade secret, but I'll tell you. You've got to swallow the physic and get used to the taste. We give 'em a little ipecacuanha and some sugar water coloured pink. It doesn't do 'em any harm."

"Must be rather cheap," said Tod.

"Costs twopence—including the bottle, perhaps. You can work it out. Then there are those pretty labels and the corks. Yes, it's good biz."

Tod's blue eyes took on a sulky look.

"I thought it was from the prescription of a big London doctor."

"Oh, did you! Suppose you heard old Wisdon guffing."

"Well, I call it a swindle," said Tod.

Mr. Cook gave him an amused look.

"Better not say that to Snape. He'd kick you out."

"What about you?" asked Tod.

"Me? Snape can't play games with me. It wouldn't be worth his while. I could make things nasty. Besides, we're only small fry at that."

"What do you mean?"

Cook indicated a case full of patent medicines, jerking the hand that held the empty measuring-glass in their direction.

"What price all that stuff? Some of it's not so bad; most of it is just muck. Take Prettyman's Pills, for instance; twenty pills for two and six, and they've got nothing in 'em but bread and a little aloes. Prettyman must be a millionaire."

"Why, it's thieving," said Tod.

"No, it's just cheek and advertising. Besides, Prettyman's a great philanthropist. He gave £50,000 to a hospital the other day."

"It wasn't Prettyman who gave it," said Tod.

"Who, then?"

"Why, the people he'd swindled."

Cook gave one of his gay laughs.

"You'd better get into a monastery, young Western. Anyhow, what about all those bottles?"

Chapter Eleven

Tod began to be discouraged. He lost his interest in Mr. Snape's shop and in all those mysterious bottles of physic and proprietary preparations that pretended to heal the sick. It was the profit on them that troubled Tod. He still had vivid memories of his mother's last illness, and he could picture men and women buying those sure cures for poor souls in a like tragic state. It seemed to him to be heartless cheating.

"And if some people will always be fools," as Cook had put it, why didn't the wise people try to prevent them being fools? Surely it was someone's business!

He put that question to a new friend, a Mr. Burgetrode, one of Shaston's eccentrics.

"It's the Englishman's privilege to be a fool, young man, his legal right. Be careful how you interfere with it."

It was in June that Tod made the acquaintance of Mr. Burgetrode, and made it in rather a queer way. Tod had had a solitary fit, and had taken to country walks, fierce and lonely Sabbath rambles with a bottle of ginger beer in one pocket and some bread and cheese in the other. He was coming back down a wild, gorse-grown valley that cut deep into the rolling and wooded country to the west of Shaston, a valley sacred to a semi-defunct golf club and a number of sheep. It was known as Summer Valley; through it a stalwart little stream shouldered its way through masses of blackberry and brier. The bells of the Shaston churches were ringing for evening service, and down yonder on the green slopes a few scattered figures were playing golf. Tod leapt an old

rail fence, came round a couple of big thorn bushes, and found an old gentleman sitting on the grass, with one boot off, and a blue-socked foot looking rather big and funny.

The old gentleman had a queer, lean face, rather fierce and alarming, with blue eyes packed away under big eyebrows, and a little tuft of greyish black hair between his lower lip and chin. He was wearing a shapeless grey tweed hat, a brown jacket and grey flannel trousers. His red tie was passed through a big gold ring. Tod had never seen anybody or anything quite like him before. He had not the Shaston look, either working-day or Sabbath.

"Hallo, boy!"

"Hallo!" said Tod.

The old gentleman stared at him.

"Damn those church bells, and damn those golfing fools. I have been shouting and waving. Might as well be on the raft of the *Medusa*."

"You've sprained your ankle," said Tod.

"Solomon in a straw hat! What do you think made me want to jump that fence?"

"Curiosity, sir," said Tod.

The old gentleman bunched his eyebrows together, and stared at Tod still more fixedly.

"No fool like an old fool! I could clear four feet ten in my day. Well, what's to be done, young man."

Tod considered.

"You can't walk, or you wouldn't be sitting there like that. It's a good mile to the Lignor road. Tell you what, sir, I'll run down to that golf-house and

telephone for a cab to come up there. Then I'll come back and we'll do a three-legged walk down to the golf-house."

The old gentleman said "Ha!" rather fiercely. It was one of his tricks.

"You help me down to the club-house, and I'll raise the conveyance. What's your name?"

"Western. Tod Western."

"All right, Western. And you will come back and have dinner with me at the Majestic Hotel. That's a bargain. My name is Burgetrode."

Tod helped Mr. Burgetrode down to the club-house, and he had—for him—the unique experience of dining at the Hotel Majestic. Tod was rather shy and awkward; the great room was full of wonderful people—men and women in evening dress—and Tod felt that everybody was staring at him. Mr. Burgetrode had a little table in a corner near a window. A very important-looking waiter had helped the old gentleman across the room, and now stood waiting for orders.

"Dinner for two, sir?"

"Of course, Reynolds, of course."

The waiter beamed at Tod.

"Thick or clear soup, sir?"

"Whichever you like," said Tod, rather embarrassed and wanting to return the waiter's politeness.

Old Burgetrode looked up sharply.

"Clear, Reynolds, for both. Go straight through. And bring us two ginger beers."

Tod remembered that bottle in his pocket, and a surreptitious hand discovered the stopper and stone top protruding for all the world to see. He suppressed that bottle and carefully turned down the flap of his pocket.

Then Mr. Burgetrode began to talk. He talked rather jerkily, and with a sort of playful and biting ferocity that puzzled Tod. He asked Tod all sorts of questions, queer, unexpected questions that came at you all ways and danced round you like a Chinese cracker. Tod noticed that the waiter was extraordinarily polite to Mr. Burgetrode. What with eating his dinner and answering Mr. Burgetrode's questions, Tod had enough to do. Presently a very gorgeous and charming lady in black who had been sitting at another table rustled across and spoke to Mr. Burgetrode on her way out.

"I do hope you have not sprained your foot very badly, Mr. Burgetrode?"

Tod saw Mr. Burgetrode's eyes turn all red.

"I've sprained it; that ought to be good enough, I think."

The gorgeous lady purred over him.

"How witty you are. We are having a little concert in the recreation-room to-morrow night——"

"Have it, madam, have it. I shan't stop it. Put me down for a guinea."

The gorgeous lady looked at Tod as though she were ready to kiss him, and then floated away.

"Sausage and Schnapps!" said Mr. Burgetrode, irrelevantly, "and her second husband is still alive."

He dismissed Tod in a queer, curt, yet friendly

way.

"You will find me near the bandstand between six and seven, Western, on most evenings."

"We don't close till seven, sir."

"Then make it eight till nine."

"Thank you, sir."

That was all that Mr. Burgetrode said to him. In Tod's ears it had sounded strangely like an order, but Mr. Burgetrode seemed to be the sort of person who had an inherent right to issue orders. Most people were afraid of him. Tod was not.

Mr. Burgetrode came into Tod's life at a moment when young Western was fighting with a series of disillusionments. On the way home from the Hotel Majestic he met Kitty Flowerdew and Edwin Rook walking arm in arm along the Parade, and Kitty refused to see him. Not so Edwin Rook. The shopman nodded at Tod in a very complacent and patronising way, and when he had passed them Tod heard them laughing. He did not know that there was pain and shame in Kitty's laughter. The jest rankled. He thought of the way in which Mr. Burgetrode had snubbed that gorgeous lady who had come and purred round his table. Perhaps Mr. Burgetrode had no use for women and believed that anything in petticoats was made for the humiliation and enslaving of men?

Tod spent a very difficult Monday in Mr. Snape's shop. Mr. Snape was in a very bad temper about something or other, and Tod happened to be the person who got in his way. It began by Tod breaking the glass in one of the big cabinet doors just when one of the richest women in Shaston was buying

scent from “Mr. Any-think-else.”

“You clumsy young brute,” said Snape, when the lady had left the shop.

Tod coloured up.

“Don’t you speak to me like that. I’ll pay for it.”

“I guess you will,” said Mr. Snape sarcastically, “and I don’t want any impertinence from my assistants, thank you.”

Tod fell into trouble again in the afternoon. Cook was dispensing; Old Wisdon had gone to unpack some drugs, and Tod was left in charge of the shop. A woman came in and asked him if Sowerby’s Sea Salts were any use for sore feet. Tod said he didn’t know. Mr. Snape, emerging from his back room, happened to overhear Tod’s crass and futile confession of ignorance.

The woman was leaving the shop when Snape appeared behind the counter. He let her go, and then fell heavily on Tod.

“What do you mean by answering a lady like that?”

“Like what?” Tod asked. “I wasn’t rude.”

“You told her that you didn’t know whether Sowerby’s Salts were good for sore feet.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Tod.

Mr. Snape grew very pink.

“Don’t let me ever hear you say I don’t know again in my shop.”

“What am I to say?” asked Tod.

“Use your wits, you young idiot. You are here to

sell things. You can come and ask me or one of the others, can't you?"

"All right," said Tod, restraining himself; "I'm learning."

He described the incident to "Mr. Any-think-else," and appealed to him for sympathy.

"I only told the truth," Tod argued. "How was I to know whether the stuff was any good for people's feet? Is it?"

"Don't know," said Wisdon sulkily.

"Well, would you tell the truth?"

"Tell the truth! Great Scott, Western, I've got a wife and three children."

Tod said no more, but he thought a great deal about the problem of old Wisdon and his wife and children.

He fell in that evening with Arthur Mossup from Horrox and Horrox's, and Mossup, who had a shy man's affection for him, named him for an adventure.

"Like a walk, Western?"

"Right-o! Where are you going?"

Mossup showed him a handful of keys.

"House-hunting. It's the only time I've got, and an agent friend of mine obliged me with these. I'm after a little place, and we have two hours' daylight."

"What fun," said Tod.

They walked in the direction of Blackberry Hill, and for the first time in his life Tod felt the lure of houses. There was something very fascinating in

poking about in those back streets, finding your house all empty and waiting, in unlocking its door and exploring all its possibilities and its secrets. Tod developed a keenness and an enthusiasm that surprised Mossup. They measured rooms, inspected rusty kitchen stoves, ferreted about in lugubrious back yards, took note of cupboards, coppers, sanitary arrangements and the invariable absence of a bath. Mossup was a serious and prematurely old young man. He would stand and meditate like a stork on one leg, his weak eyes glazed behind his spectacles, a tuft of flaxen hair standing up on his head like a plume. His ambitions were very modest. His romance ran to a rental of £20 a year, with the furniture for one bedroom and a sitting-room, and the stocking of a kitchen. There was something pathetic about his cautiousness, and the way he kept consulting a little notebook in which the adventure was tabulated to the last penny.

They were poor little houses, obvious little houses, cheap, shabby, and hopelessly ugly. All the windows looked at other houses of exactly the same type. One or two of them had a very grimed and greasy air. An occasional whiff of sewer gas sent Mossup sniffing into dark places like a solemn and suspicious dog. There seemed a lamentable absence of fresh whitewash everywhere, and Tod could not see any appetising corner where you would care to keep food. The larders and little sculleries were—well, you just said "Poof!" Yet the fascination of the quest gripped Tod. Mossup interested him. He was equally interested in the house in which Mossup might choose to live.

"We have to be very careful—very careful," said Mossup, jotting down notes in his book.

“I don’t like any of these houses.”

“Don’t you, Western?” and Mossup looked pained.

“They’re dirty and stuffy and ugly. Where’s the gardens, too? I don’t call any of those cat-walks gardens.”

“Can’t afford more than twenty pounds. You have to put up with things, sometimes.”

“I don’t see it,” said Tod. “Why can’t things be arranged differently. They could be, if somebody bothered.”

Tod spent two more evenings in house-hunting with Arthur Mossup. At last they found a little old house, in a blind lane off Paradise Row, one of those solid and unaffected little houses that had lived in the country until the splurge of the Shaston suburbs had swallowed it. It had a green latticed porch, green window frames, a tiled roof and a bit of garden. Mossup grew greatly excited. He wanted to rush down to the agents and take the place that very night.

“Somebody else may get it. Olive will just shout when she sees this cottage.”

“Plenty of time,” said Tod, “go round first thing in the morning. Rather wish I was a house agent. Must be quite jolly finding homes for people.”

The idea fermented. It was working in Tod’s head when he strolled along to the bandstand on Wednesday evening in search of Mr. Burgetrode. He found him in a bath-chair by the parade railings, and looking as though he hated it. The bath-chair man was leaning over the railing, smoking a pipe.

“Smith,” said Mr. Burgetrode.

“Sir?”

“Go and get a drink; go and get two drinks, and come back in half an hour. Here’s the money.”

Tod perched himself on the railings.

“How is your foot, sir?”

“My foot doesn’t interest me, Western; let it alone. We’ll leave it with the doctor. I expected to see you before, young man.”

Tod looked down unabashed into Mr. Burgetrode’s fierce brown face.

“Sorry, sir; I’ve been house-hunting.”

“What?”

“House-hunting with a friend who is getting married.”

“Why doesn’t he do something else! And did you find a house?”

“After three evenings at it,” said Tod; “we looked at all sorts of mouldy places where you wouldn’t expect to find anything but blackbeetles and cats. Houses are very interesting, sir, don’t you think?”

“Almost as interesting as men, Western, and not quite such fools. Houses are alive.”

“Yes, aren’t they?” said Tod. “I have begun to feel I should like to live with houses, know all about houses, put people into houses.”

Old Burgetrode gave a quick lift of his head.

“You don’t like your present place, then?”

“No,” said Tod.

"Why not?"

"They don't want you to tell the truth."

"Ha!" said Mr. Burgetrode fiercely.

Tod edged himself nearer to the bath-chair. He had a feeling that he could talk to Mr. Burgetrode.

"They want you to lie about things. It was the same in the other shop I was in, and I got chucked for that—and something else."

Mr. Burgetrode was watching him with great intentness.

"So you don't like it?"

"I loathe it," said Tod. "Why should you have to lie to people?"

"It means money, Western, more money."

"Well, we ought to get rid of money. Or supposing there was so much money that it was cheap as the shingle down there, people wouldn't tell lies to get it."

"That's a problem, young man. You seem to have discovered the trick of running your head against problems."

The Shaston Corporation Orchestra who inhabited the bandstand, woke to sudden life after an interval of twenty minutes. Mr. Burgetrode grew impatient.

"Take me away from that noise, will you?"

Tod descended from the railings and trundled the bath-chair in the direction of the Hotel Majestic.

"That will do," said Mr. Burgetrode; "it will take my friend Smith another ten minutes to find us. Do

you play any games, young Ajax?"

"Cricket," said Tod, "and I played right-half for Shaston last winter. I can swim a mile, and box a bit."

"Keep it up, Western. What did you want to be before you got trapped in a shop?"

"A doctor."

Mr. Burgetrode did not seem prejudiced in favour of such a career. He gave Tod to understand that there were doctors and doctors, and that if you wanted to become a first-class surgeon you might count on earning very little money for fifteen years. He talked rather strangely about doctors trying to patch the roof, when the foundations were rotten. He said that the doctors were not to blame, and that you could not get at the foundations, because the Vested Interest fence kept you out.

"What's a Vested Interest?" Tod asked.

"You have got to find that out," said Mr. Burgetrode.

Then he made a sudden suggestion.

"Would you like to take up houses, Western?"

"I think I should, sir."

"Study them inside out, and from top to bottom, how they are built, and how they shouldn't be built?"

"That's it," said Tod.

Mr. Burgetrode looked hard at him with those queer, fierce eyes of his.

"Very well, Ajax. I shall be at that hotel for another month. If you want me, you will know

where to find me."

Chapter Twelve

Someone had once nicknamed Mr. Burgetrode "Old Mischief." That was ten years ago, and if Shaston had been asked to place and describe Mr. Julian Burgetrode, Shaston would have stared at you uncomprehendingly, or would have asked whether you were referring to "that old chap who stayed at the Majestic?" Even the Hotel Majestic knew very little about Mr. Burgetrode. He was sarcastic, and fierce and laconic. He had an abundance of money, and he appeared to despise money, judging by the size of his tips. People gossiped about him. He was mysterious, eccentric, fabulously wealthy. The old ladies who sat in the drawing-room and read Marie Corelli, and Mr. Garvice and "The Rosary," spun all sorts of romances about Mr. Burgetrode. They said he was a misogamist, an atheist and other unwholesome and unnatural things. His wife had committed suicide, or run away with another man, and he had chronic dyspepsia, and took drugs. Mr. Burgetrode did not care at all what the old ladies said of him. He disliked old ladies, disliked them as much as a fierce dog hates cats, and he never attempted to compromise.

"Reynolds," he once said to the head waiter, "I'll give you ten pounds a week if you promise not to put one of those minute guns within ten yards of me."

"Minute guns, sir?"

"Old women, Reynolds, old women."

"Rather difficult, sir; you see——"

"Yes, I know; it rains old women and caps and artificial fringes, and bead bags and novels, in a place like this. Put something young, or something in trousers at those tables, something that doesn't want to grin at you like a Cheshire cat."

"I'll see what I can do, sir," said Reynolds.

The queer part of it was that the "staff" of the Hotel Majestic liked Mr. Burgetrode. They rather sympathised with him about the old ladies. The maid who looked after his bedroom and private sitting-room laid it down as an axiom that she would rather "do" for ten Mr. Burgetrodes than for one of those old cats. "He's a sport," she asserted; "he's got a tongue on him, but if you've got anything straight to say, he don't mind you answering back." The lift boys were Mr. Burgetrode's devoted slaves. Nor did largesse account for it all. There was something fiercely human about the old man; he could be extraordinarily severe and extraordinarily kind.

There were, however, one or two people in Shaston-on-Sea who knew who and what Mr. Julian Burgetrode was in the larger world up north. He came south to escape from the roar and the smother of the factory and the market, Shaston was a sort of toy-town to him, and he strolled about and looked down on it like an amused Colossus. Yet there was a memory behind it all, a smell of the blue sea, a glory of golden broom and white black-thorn, a girl and a boy honeymooning in one of the old white Georgian houses under the cliff. Ten days of marriage, and then death, death in the blue sea on a sweet spring morning. In one of the Old Town churchyards there was a stone that told how Elsie Burgetrode had been buried there nearly forty years ago.

Such was Shaston's sentimental hold on Julian

Burgetrode. He liked the slothfulness of the place after the hard shallowness of the North. He came south when he wanted to think, and went tramping for miles over the beech-covered hills and into the soft blueness of the Weald. Away in the north men were dominated by the idea of the machine. They had forgotten to wonder how green life started in the dim slime of primeval seas. Burgetrode was lord of many machines, but never the slave of one of them. He could still jump a fence, delight in Anatole France, and sit up thinking with Bergson.

Shaston was his toy-town. How much of it was his and what a grip his brown hands had on it, very few people suspected. One lawyer knew; so did a bank-manager; so did Rathbone Cragg of Rathbone Cragg and Son, Estate and House Agents. And when Julian Burgetrode limped into the office of Rathbone Cragg in Caroline Place, old Cragg fell from his perch of supercilious greed and flopped and squawked most unctuously upon the floor.

“Good morning, sir. Will you please come in my private room, sir.”

“I want a few words with you, Mr. Cragg.”

“Quite so, sir. Thomas, will you see that we are not disturbed?”

Burgetrode detested Mr. Cragg. The man was such a Lord Chief Justice to little people, yet he was so easily mastered by a dog bigger than himself.

“You would be able to find room in your office for a youngster of eighteen or nineteen?”

“For instruction, sir?”

“Yes, in the ordinary way of business. He would start at the bottom and work his way up. I happen to

be interested in a boy whom I want to train. When he had spent two or three years with you, I should put him to a builder."

Mr. Cragg nodded.

"It shall be done, to oblige you, Mr. Burgetrode. I presume——"

"The boy is not to know that I have any ultimate interest in his future. I want you to understand that, Mr. Cragg. Any breach of confidence——"

"You can rely on me, sir, absolutely."

"Very good. The youngster's name is Western. He will call on you one day with a letter from me. I want you to treat him as you would treat any other clerk in your office. Good morning."

Tod guessed nothing of Mr. Burgetrode's sudden interest in him. It had not struck Tod that he was something of a phenomenon, a lad in a shop who was sturdily set against the telling of lies. Mr. Burgetrode had been handling men all his life, dull men, grumbling men, good men, bad men, men who were contented provided they got beer, men who would have been discontented if they had been drowned in that beverage. Then there was the new type of man, the keen-witted, implacable revolutionist, who knew what he wanted and meant to get it. Mr. Burgetrode was making a special study of that type of man, for he saw in him the man of the future. He needed mellowing; he needed a little more honest pudding in his stomach, and less poison under his tongue. At present the new man was ugly, and Mr. Burgetrode detested ugliness.

He had been impressed at once by the unusualness of Tod. He liked the lad's intelligent

square head, his brown face, and alert unfearing eyes. The boy was sensitive too, and not in the least arrogant. He looked at life and asked questions, the very questions that a thinker like Julian Burgetrode knew to be the great questions that the world had to answer. The boy's sincerity was a thing of wonderful significance. It was like one of those magic swords, hammered out by goblins in the underworld, and then belted to some blue-eyed, innocent, fate-predestined hero.

Meanwhile Tod was feeling very unheroic in John Snape's shop. The regular dispensing of prescriptions was but a small part of the business. There was plenty of honest stuff to sell, from photographic plates to toothpicks, but Tod could never forget those quack medicines and the sham doctoring that was carried on by Snape and his assistants. Tod foresaw that his days were numbered. He was getting discredited. Some day there would be a row, and Mr. Snape would suggest his returning to the farm.

Tod felt the storm gathering. Mr. Snape had taken to bullying him, and using a dry sarcasm on every possible occasion. For a pink, well-fed man he had a most ingenious and spiteful tongue.

"Is that the way you wrap up bottles, Western? Here, let me show you. You've got no snap or neatness in your fingers, bodgering a bottle in paper till it looks as though it were dressed in a dirty nightshirt!"

"A place for everything, Western, and everything in its place. For goodness' sake get some method in that head of yours. And your hair wants cutting."

"You had better oil that voice of yours, young man. This isn't a school playground."

Tod took all this heckling as a good boxer takes punishment, but it was providing him with the justification for getting in a good straight punch to Mr. Snape's jaw. He was not like poor old Wisdon with his wife and three children and his eighty pounds a year. Wisdon was not a certified dispenser, he was just so much casual labour, living in perpetual fear of being out of work. Snape bullied Wisdon, and daily cut the throat of his hired man's self-respect, and Wisdon went like a sheep to the slaughter, offering the neck of his man's pride so that his children might live.

Tod saw Mr. Burgetrode on several evenings, and entered into long discussions with his new friend. He put forward the case of "Mr. Any-think-else," arguing hotly that a man of Wisdon's age should not be so placed in life that he could be bullied and sneered at by a man younger than himself.

"Money again," said Mr. Burgetrode; "your Mr. Snape seems something of a swashbuckler."

"I couldn't stand what old Wisdon has to stand," said Tod; "I'm just waiting, and one day I'll land Snape one and walk out of the shop."

"Just for love, young Ajax?"

"No, sir, I'm waiting till he comes at me crooked over something I should have lied about, and then I'll hit out straight."

"Ha!" said Mr. Burgetrode in his fierce way; "come and tell me about it when it happens."

It happened the very next day. About half an hour before closing time a pale woman with tired eyes walked into the shop, and it fell to Tod to serve her. Cook had left early; old Wisdon was in one of

the stock rooms upstairs looking out trusses; Tod knew that Mr. Snape was in his office at the back of the shop. Tod noticed that the pale woman looked rather shabby, and that her face made him think of his mother as he remembered her six months before her death.

"Have you got Bartrup's Consumption Cure?"

"Yes," said Tod.

"Is it—is it any good?" asked the pale woman.

Tod happened to know something about Bartrup's Consumption Cure. Cook had told him that he had seen the analysis of that very popular remedy and that the best thing to do with it was to pour it down the drain.

Tod looked straight into the woman's tired eyes.

"It's rubbish," he said.

"Rubbish!" echoed the woman.

"I'd see a doctor," Tod added, "before I touched any drugs."

The woman thanked Tod and left the shop, and it was then that Tod became aware of Mr. Snape standing at the far end of the counter like a little pink Napoleon who had caught one of his sentries giving secret information to an enemy patrol.

"So Bartrup's Consumption Cure is rubbish, Mr. Western, is it?"

"I have been told so," said Tod stubbornly.

"And who gave you that valuable information?"

"It's not my business to tell."

John Snape lost his temper, and came and stood

very close to Tod, so close that he spluttered in Tod's face.

"You're a damned fool, that's what you are, Western. Nice sort of idiot for a man to have in his shop. Get me discredited—discredited! D'you understand? Supposing Bartrups were informed that their preparation had been called rubbish in my shop? You'd get me tabooed by Bartrups; they might take legal action——"

Mr. Snape drew breath, and Tod waited, blinking a little because he did not like Mr. Snape's splutter.

"Where's your loyalty to me? Didn't I take you in here to give you a chance, and all you can do is to blab silly lies over the counter!"

"They're not lies," said Tod; "half the quack stuff we sell is just cheating."

"Cheating!"

Mr. Snape gasped, and took a deep breath, but Tod got his blow in first.

"I'm leaving this evening," he said, "this sort of business doesn't suit me."

"Well, of all the impertinent young cubs——!"

"You needn't call me names," said Tod; "I'm not going to be responsible for Bartrup and Co., that's all."

Chapter Thirteen

The intervention of Mr. Julian Burgetrode initiated one of the good seasons of Tod's career. Some big hand seemed to push open a heavy door

and draw back a curtain, and Tod stepped easily into a new and more spacious life.

The office of Rathbone Cragg and Son, Auctioneers and Estate Agents, had a certain Victorian calmness, a deliberate and leisurely way of doing things that was decent and almost pontifical. The Craggs, both father and son, were very polite people, and with a politeness that suited the more civilised end of Shaston and the ritual beloved of the symbolists who attended the church of St. Alban the Martyr. Mr. Rathbone Cragg, lean, bald-headed, round shouldered, with that emaciated and cartilaginous throat of his, and the head of a benignant vulture, served as a sidesman at St. Alban's Church, and also as a Justice of the Peace. His son, a younger and more anæmic sort of vulture, with a queer axe-shaped head, its edge fronting forwards in chin and nose, clove his way into the intellectual life of West Shaston with an indefatigable and supercilious seriousness that made more full blooded young men hate him as buoyant savages must hate your irrepressible missionary. Frederick Rathbone Cragg was for ever improving himself. He knew too much; facts and figures rolled off him like turnips off an overladen cart. He was the sort of young man who sat solemnly and grimly at breakfast with a part of Handsworth's Encylopædia in front of him, munching eggs and bacon with teeth of virgin gold.

Tod discovered a new atmosphere. If you walked down Beacon Hill with the western sun behind you, you had a vision of a fresh and vivid Shaston, Shaston as the Georgians had schemed it, shorn of its base speculative excrescences in yellow brick and grey stucco, a white town strung between the blue of

the sea and the green of the hills. In the beyond loomed the White Cliff, a little hazy with the smoke of the Old Town, the yellow sand making a dim gleam between it and the sea. There were the masts of the Shaston fishing fleet, black and crowded like the ships of the Greeks beached before Troy. Above the White Cliff the lighthouse painted a white streak against summer skies. The parade in front of the tall houses had breadth and dignity, and could stand and answer the roar of a rough sea. On the hills above the town the beeches and holm oaks and wind-beaten pines of Effingham Park, broke up and softened the firm white lines, and spread a rolling frieze between the white houses and the yet whiter clouds.

The Craggs had their office in Caroline Crescent, a bow of solid houses with the parade as its bowstring. Caroline Crescent suggested the Regency, gentlemen in gay coloured coats and white breeches, high-stepping horses, “tigers” hanging on to the backs of yellow-wheeled dog-carts, young gentlewomen with side curls, Pickwickian worthies with Hessian boots, and solid, round, white-breeched stomachs. The houses had balconies with long and steeply sloping green roofs, and from any of these balconies one of Marcus Stone’s sentimental young ladies might have thrown a red rose at some quite impossibly handsome and romantic young man on a horse. Such things had ceased to happen in Caroline Crescent. A little colony of doctors lived there, two solicitors and a dentist. Brass plates were as thick as gold teeth in the mouth of a nigger.

The Craggs were very discreet and restrained, and confined themselves to gold letters on the lower windows of No. 10. Blatancy did not pay in the west

end of Shaston. Notice boards, posters and advertisements of houses to be let and sold were to be found only in the big hall and in the main office. Once upon a time there had been litigation in Caroline Crescent over the keeping of a cockatoo that screamed. The Craggs did not scream. You were careful of your manners when you practised your profession in the company of gentlemen who felt pulses or drafted people's wills.

Tod felt all boots and hands on that first morning when he entered the establishment of the Craggs, and stood in the middle of the big office with Mr. Burgetrode's letter of introduction between thumb and forefinger. A young woman with a high forehead and pince-nez was typing at a table. Two clerks were busy at their desks, one of them making entries in a ledger, the other sorting out a chaos of keys. Tod stood and waited till the younger of the two clerks chose to discover him.

"Yes?"

"I've a letter for Mr. Cragg."

"All right. Hand it over. Any answer?"

"I'll wait and see," said Tod.

The letter and the clerk disappeared through a glazed door on which "Mr. Rathbone Cragg" was painted in black letters. Tod noticed that there was a second and similar door with Mr. Frederick Rathbone Cragg's name upon it. He stood and stared at the bills on the walls, at the maps and photographs of houses, at the typist clicking sedulously on her machine, until she stopped and stared at him in turn. Tod veered away, and felt uncomfortable. The young woman behind the table made him absurdly conscious of the fact that he was a creature that wore

clothes.

The clerk reappeared with a new geniality towards Tod.

“Mr. Cragg will see you at once, Mr. Western.”

That interview puzzled Tod. Mr. Cragg stood up behind his desk and shook hands with him, and Tod felt embarrassed. This hard-eyed old gentleman who gobbled in his throat like a turkey, and was so jerkily and parentally polite, made Tod wonder what Mr. Burgetrode had said concerning him.

“Sit down, Mr. Western. So you want to be an estate agent?”

Tod sat down.

“I’m interested in houses,” he said.

Mr. Cragg appeared to approve.

“Enthusiasm is the great secret of success. I have this little note here from Mr. Burgetrode, and it is possible that I may be able to oblige him. I understand that you are an orphan, Western.”

“Yes, sir.”

Mr. Cragg tilted his head like a benignant bird.

“A great deprivation, Western. And—about your education?”

“I was at Chipperton’s school at Pentworth for five years, sir.”

“An excellent school too. Well, let me see, you wish to enter my office immediately?”

“If you can take me, sir.”

“I think I may say that I can.”

It all seemed so absurdly easy. There were no

clouds, no complications, nothing but geniality and sunshine and an avoidance of all awkward questions; no reference to Mr. Flowerdew or Mr. Snape. Mr. Cragg suggested terms that made Tod feel a plutocrat. And then Mr. Frederick Rathbone Cragg was called in and presented to Tod as though he were a friend of the family.

Frederick Cragg gave Tod's hand a hard and earnest squeeze. He stared impressively at people when he was introduced to them, and he stared very hard at Tod.

"Very glad to meet you, Western."

Tod felt ten years older. He began to wonder whether he ought not to have come in a bowler hat.

Two months later Tod had become an enthusiastic student of houses, houses of all sorts and descriptions, stolid houses, frivolous houses, snobbish houses, houses that were disreputable yet happy. And Tod too was happy though he was in danger of being sucked over the edge of his youth into that respectable and genteel world that is death and destruction to any adventurous soul. Mr. Frederick Rathbone Cragg had taken control of Tod; he had a penchant for cultivating boys and young men as though they were puppies, and trying to teach them his own tricks. He was interested in houses, but his interest was different from Tod's. He was a bit of commercialised intelligence, yet in spite of his fish blood and flat feet he mimicked all sorts of strange people, like a vain and clever ape who copies a gesture without understanding its real meaning. Young Cragg was an intellectual. He had read Browning and Henry James, Nietzsche and Bernard Shaw. In fact he had read a little of everything, and he was the secretary of the St. Margarets Literary

Society. He posed. He liked to hand out queer and startling opinions. Nothing pleased him better than to drag around a youth like Tod, let off intellectual fireworks and see the little fellow skip and open his eyes very wide.

Tod, in his innocence, was flattered. He was impressed by "Young Supercilious," as some of the scoffers called Mr. Frederick Cragg, the energetic person who had an answer to everything. He trailed Tod round with him and talked mediæval architecture with the dogmatism of a Ruskin, and was so much the philosopher and the man of the world that Tod had ears and no tongue.

"You always want to know the right people, Western; it's just the same as going into the right sort of house."

Very soon he was criticising Tod's clothes, and telling him with an air of great impressiveness that such and such things were not worn.

"You mustn't do it, old chap. No pink or red ties, and don't wear brown boots on Sunday. Good form, you know; it counts, it counts with the right people."

Mr. Burgetrode had gone north again, and Tod was left to the earnest egotism of Mr. Frederick Cragg. Life in the office was not unpleasant, and Tod's growing enthusiasm flattered the pride of the firm. Mr. Burgetrode had hinted that Clarence Todhunter Western was an original child, and with such a sponsor life in the house of Cragg and Son was bound to be easy. They had been very ready to make the best of Tod, and Tod the learner was keen and indefatigable.

"That boy has got a future," Fred said to his sister.

Miss Bertha Cragg was always tripping up the toes of her brother's impressiveness.

"Because old Burgetrode has taken a fancy to him? Nice sort of wet nurse you make, Fred!"

"You women don't understand."

But he continued to make a sort of East End Settlement of Tod and to cultivate that young heathen. Tod went to Hanson's the gentleman's tailor, and had a suit of clothes made to measure. His ties grew more conservative and refined. He ceased to wear a cloth cap on the back of his head. Frederick Cragg rescued him from the bathos of Mrs. Budd's cottage, and persuaded him to take a bed-sitting room in St. Helen's Terrace in the house of an impoverished gentlewoman who read Tennyson and genuflected regularly at the church of St. Alban the Martyr. He lent Tod books, went for country walks with him, declaimed Keats and Rossetti, and talked a lot of nonsense that sounded very clever and rather shocking.

Caroline Crescent was teaching Tod all sorts of things about real estate. Tod had no immediate vision of the financial aspect of the business, and he had lost some of the distrust that the world of Flowerdew and Snape had roused in him. The Craggs were polite people. They were always and ever your most obedient servants, and they appeared to let or sell you a house for the pure social joy of doing you a service. They taught Tod about leases and agreements, the writing up of houses, the making of inventories, the valuing of fixtures, the business of insurance and of rent-collecting; and all the ritual of a successful sale. They had little to do with the cottage property of old Shaston. They confined their activities to the gentlemen's residences and the red

villas of St. Margarets and the Grand Parade; moreover, they were the "county people" and much county property had passed through their hands.

Young Cragg had taken Tod in to tea at "Clovelly," the Craggs' house in Salisbury Road, but Tod's real emergence from the caterpillar state dated from the day when he was invited to tennis.

"My mater wants you to come up on Saturday, Western, and play tennis. Just a little party, you know."

Tod confessed that he knew nothing about tennis.

"You'll soon learn," said his mentor with his usual impressiveness; "come up half an hour before the other people, and I'll put you up to the main points."

This was very gallant and chivalrous, but Tod was worried about clothes.

"Suppose I had better buy a racket?"

"Yes, you ought to have a racket, Western. And shoes."

"And shoes?" echoed Tod.

He wanted to ask Fred Cragg about the various details of his toilet, but shirked the confession of ignorance and in shirking it challenged his own imagination. What sort of shoes ought he to buy—white or brown?—and what should be the colour of a tennis-player's trousers and shirt? And did one wear a belt or braces? That was a devil of a dilemma. He was so pestered and baffled by the whole problem that he dashed up to the St. Margarets Tennis Club that evening, and lifting his chin over the top of a wooden fence studied the details of dress as exemplified by the gentlemen of that club. Braces

were not worn. You fastened your white flannel trousers with a coloured scarf or a leather belt. The shoes were white, so were the shirts, and any old coat that was not black seemed fit to complete the picture. Tod gave a gulp of spiritual relief. If he had turned up at the Craggs' wearing those red braces of his, what a scandal he would have created!

Tod spent quite a respectable sum on a racket, buckskin shoes, two pairs of white trousers, two white shirts and soft collars, a chocolate and light blue scarf, and a straw hat with a black band. He began to dress about half-past one on the Saturday afternoon, and the business lasted an hour. He went downstairs, swinging his new racket, and met his landlady, the gentlewoman who read Tennyson and genuflected daily at the church of St. Alban the Martyr.

She liked Tod. He was such a fresh, clean, and considerate youngster, and rather shy.

"Tennis, Mr. Western?"

"Tennis," said Tod.

"How nice. You ought to have those new clothes marked before they go to the wash."

"Suppose I ought."

"I will do it for you."

And Tod went on his way, feeling cheered, and of the opinion that life was quite good and that people were awfully decent.

At "Clovelly" a maid showed him down to the tennis lawn where Frederick Cragg was sitting under a young lime tree and reading Zola's "Paris" in French. Fred was a very shaky French scholar, but it

was rather impressive to leave a book like that about.

"Hallo, Western."

He looked Tod over comprehensively.

"Yes, that's quite all right. But just one thing, old chap, you won't mind——"

He got up, and gave a little jab to the rear portion of the brim of Tod's straw hat; for Tod had tilted that hat too much on the back of his head.

"Like that, Western; excuse me, you know."

"Don't mention it," said Tod, flushing, but the remedying of that defect dashed his self-confidence for the rest of the afternoon.

It was the first function of its kind that Tod had ever attended, and it reduced him to a state of stubborn shyness. There was that big red villa "Clovelly" in the background, a mysterious house half hidden behind a great pergola and masses of flowering shrubs. A curly path and a flight of stone steps led to the tennis lawn, and down this social highway a succession of people and things descended upon Tod, girls in summer frocks, elderly women who rustled, young men who looked surprisingly cool and unflurried, old Rathbone Cragg in a grey flannel suit and a white Panama hat, a gardener who carried deck-chairs, and later a couple of maids with tables and tea. Tod was introduced to one or two people by Frederick Cragg.

"Mr. Western, Miss Lavibond."

"Pleased to meet you," said Tod, holding out a hand, and then remembering to take off his hat.

He stood by Miss Lavibond's chair and tried to

think of something to say to her. The frocks and the chatter and the puzzling and refined correctness of the business had him stifled. The Craggs were the leaders of a definite social circle, a coterie of well-to-do middle-class people whom a connection with trade had segregated in that little world of gentlemen's residences. There were old Horrox's two daughters, the Playles, who owned the biggest grocery in Shaston, Vintners the wine merchants, and many more. It is possible that they were a little more correct and polite and stiffly self-conscious than the class just above them, for they were not such old hands at the game, and they had to take great care of their manners.

"Weren't the rhododendrons lovely this year," said Miss Lavibond to Tod.

Tod didn't know what rhododendrons were but he did not say so.

"Yes, very fine, weren't they? Do you like the band we have got this year?"

"Just a little too much brass, I think. I heard them murder a thing of Grieg's the other night."

"Hard luck!" said Tod, and wondered why Miss Lavibond stared.

He decided that it was time to get away from the lady before she discovered that he was conversing in the dark. He felt she was dangerous, that she would denounce him if he launched into any more conversational ventures, and he seized the chance of going to hunt for a tennis ball that had disappeared in a bank of laurels. Tod took a preposterously long time finding that ball, and when he did find it he was confronted with Mrs. Rathbone Cragg and the ordeal of tea.

"Now you are going to help me, Mr. Western, aren't you?"

She was a very large woman, a duchess of a woman, all black silk and white lace, and she had ideas about putting Tod at his ease. She sat at a wicker table with two big silver teapots and a crowd of cups in front of her, and all around him on other tables Tod saw a bewildering wealth of cakes, thin bread and butter in rolls, cucumber sandwiches, potted meat sandwiches, biscuits, little dishes of sweets, strawberries, cream pots, sugar bowls and plates.

"What'll I do, please?"

"If you will hand round the tea-cups as I fill them, the maids will take round the sugar and milk."

Tod disgraced himself over that tea. He spilt one of the cups over somebody's dress and over his own flannel trousers, and ended by wishing that he was dead. He was glooming in the background, and contemplating making a bolt for it, when Miss Cragg swept in from somewhere and rescued him from himself.

"Do come and have some tea, Mr. Western."

"I'm not at all hungry," he said politely.

"But I am, and I haven't had tea yet. Let's get a little table all to ourselves and be greedy. Nearly all the other people have finished."

Her frankness and her smiling brown eyes recovered the man in Tod. She was a dark girl of about five-and-twenty, neither pretty nor plain, the type of girl that is called a "good sort," the girl whom no man marries. Moreover, she had a brain, and a pair of eyes that were learning to watch life

with a rather wistful shrewdness. She had begun to realise that she had no lure for the average men of her class, nor had they any very great attraction for her. They were so obvious, and so very complacent, and so up-to-date and cheap. They had all the tricks and catchwords of the season. The weather was always “top hole” or “the limit”; “priceless” was the adjective in vogue for the moment and it was applied to everything, frocks, plays, flirtations, boots and drinks. If you were keen on tennis or golf you were a “tennis merchant” or a “golf merchant.” Everything that was unpleasant was “rotten.” Bertha Cragg had been listening for a new and original note from some unconventional male.

Tod had appealed to her. He was shy and unhappy, and there were possibilities about him that were lacking in the more complacent young men as exemplified by her brother. Bertha had a secret contempt for her brother, that infallible young man whose greatest joy was to create an impression.

“You haven’t had a game yet, have you?”

“No,” said Tod, “I can’t play tennis.”

“Let’s take this table. You’d soon learn; you are good at games. I remember seeing you play football last winter.”

Tod blushed.

“Did you?”

“You saved the match for Shaston. Yes, let’s have some of these mixed cakes, and we’ll take a teapot all to ourselves.”

Tod lost much of his palsied shyness. This girl was restoring his self-respect; she had seen him do something finely and well, and she did not make him

feel a consummate and ignorant ass. He liked her frank brown eyes, and her broad white teeth when she smiled, and that simple white dress of hers. She was not so terribly fluffy and ornate as a lot of those other women.

"Do you like games?"

"I like anything that's natural."

"So do I," said Tod; "I like my swim each morning, especially when it's a bit rough. You feel you have beaten something."

"I know just how you feel."

Tod accepted her goodwill in the frank way that it was given. He was grateful to Bertha Cragg, nor did the vanity of the self-pleased young male suggest that the girl was "making up to him." Tod was not fashioned in that way. In half an hour he was talking to her without any trace of self-consciousness, and towards the end of the afternoon he was playing tennis as her partner, and getting the feel of his racket with the natural quickness of a boy who had always been good at games.

They combined so well, and grew so merry and light-hearted over it that Tod managed to forget the incident of the tea-cup and the brown stains on his flannel trousers. And Bertha Cragg was kind to him with a new and subtle motherliness that was very pleasant to a rather plain girl of five-and-twenty. She liked Tod. The woman in her liked him very much indeed.

Her brother blundered against her at the close of the afternoon. "Thanks for looking after the kid, B. He was making rather an ass of himself. One can't always be running round can one?"

Bertha Cragg bent down and retied her shoe lace.

"He was shy, that's all. You are never shy, Fred."

"Can't say I ever felt that way."

"Yes, it's rather a pity."

Chapter Fourteen

Caroline Crescent and "Clovelly" had taken possession of Tod Western.

Through all those rapidly moving months he was being peacefully persuaded towards middle-class culture. The women had conceived an interest in Tod, Miss Truebody of St. Helen's Terrace who lent him her Tennyson and persuaded him to go occasionally to St. Alban's Church, Mrs. Rathbone Cragg, Bertha Cragg, even the girl who typed in the office. Tod had become attractive to women. He piqued the sex in them, and with an innocence that was all the more provoking in that he was not acutely conscious just then of the sex in himself.

Tod was finding life very interesting. He was so busy doing things that he did not drift into any of those sauntering moods that are apt to end in the sentimental discovery of petticoats and ribbons. He had grown to love his work, and so keen was he that he procured books on architecture and building construction and sat up at night reading. His day began with a swim or a brisk walk. He played football that winter for the West Shaston Sports Club and in the summer he spent the evenings at tennis. There were no gaps in his day, no dawdling interludes. Sex was dormant in him, waiting like a

cunning woman for the moment when the young male should tire of merely hitting a ball and developing his strength.

Sex too had relieved Tod of Mr. Frederick Rathbone Cragg's mentorship. The impressive Fred was cultivating the elder Miss Horrox, and he had no time now for the tutelage of Tod. His sister had slipped unobtrusively into his place. Tod went very often to "Clovelly," and came to look on Fred's sister as a jolly girl without any nonsense. The sex in her never touched him, and Bertha, with that unusual instinct of hers, hid her sex and played the man. She was in love with Tod, and she waited.

Yet her secret tenderness, the love of a clever yet rather plain girl for a healthy, game-playing boy, watched over Tod jealously and followed him into all the corners of his life. She knew more about Tod perhaps than Tod knew about himself. She knew how he spent his day, and how he passed his evenings; Miss Truebody told her, for Miss Truebody owed much to the Craggs. And she was at one with Mr. Julian Burgetrode in her sensing of the unusual in Tod. She knew that he was quite unlike any young male thing she had ever met; there was a directness about him, a kind of delightful simplicity, the look of going a far journey in his blue eyes, a promise of something clean and adventurous in his squarish head and brown face. For Tod was clean, and it was his cleanness that appealed to Bertha Cragg, who was a sensitive, a spiritual "sport" in that very material and middle-class world.

Tod found it very easy to talk to her. She was a comrade, just like a man friend, and he had not discovered the woman behind the frank and game-loving girl. She had very pleasant brown eyes, white

teeth, and rather a shapely figure, and she could play a fast game at tennis and swim almost as well as Tod. They made a pleasant, laughing, unselfconscious pair, and Mrs. Rathbone Cragg folded her hands over it, and did not interfere. Tod had a future and some capital. Mr. Julian Burgetrode loomed big in the North.

Tod's quaint franknesses were not unlike the sayings of his father, and Bertha caught them in her lap and then hid them away in her heart.

"What do people want to make money for? It's much jollier doing things for love."

"I should like to be able to swim across the Channel."

"I can't stand cheats."

"Wasting your time with a lot of girls!"

She laughed over that saying, with a little twinge of self-pity—yet she knew that he had spoken the truth. He did not spend his evenings loafing round the bandstand, playing with a lot of fluffy young flappers or young women with red necks and chests and sun-scorched faces. There were no huddlings into dark corners, giggles and a curiosity that might end in a little mock protesting scream. And she was glad.

Tod saw very little of old Shaston, the Shaston of the Flowerdews and the Snapes. Kitty Flowerdew was married to Edwin Rook, and was expecting a baby, but Tod knew nothing of that. Mossup was married too and settled in that little white cottage of his, and Tod went and had tea with them one Sunday afternoon. Mossup took him all over the house and garden, and simpered with pride.

"Nice little kitchen, isn't it? Olive's a wonder. Did you ever see such pots and pans? Come and see the chickens. Yes, nothing but egg-boxes, old chap; the house took six at ninepence each, not so bad. Eggs? Oh, yes, we'll get plenty of eggs."

After tea he led Tod into the garden and became mysteriously confidential.

"I'm setting up on my own this autumn. Little shop in Duke Street; just two windows and a door in between. Olive's going to do the hats. She's a wonder at hats. So if you can send anyone along, old chap ——"

Tod promised to tell all West Shaston and St. Margarets of Mossup's shop. Mossup was such a good chap, even though he did not play games.

One evening Tod met Bob Twine. He was strolling back from the St. Margarets Tennis Club, a brown young man in very white flannels, meditating deeply on the improving of his forehand drive.

"Hallo, Tod."

"Hallo, Bob, old man. Haven't seen you for years."

Bob Twine looked shabbily smart, and that black chin of his seemed blacker than ever.

"Say, you are some knut, kid! How's life?"

"Quite good," said Tod.

Bob looked him over with the eyes of a connoisseur. There was no doubt about it, Tod was "it." His flannel trousers were nicely creased, his buckskin shoes white as milk, his Oxford shirt, soft collar and tie the best productions of Messrs. Mummery, the gentleman's outfitters in Pomeroy

Place. Tod's hat was at the correct angle. He had collected and absorbed all the subtle details pertaining to costume, and he carried them with that utter lack of self-consciousness that puzzles and piques the more florid bounder.

"They are making a pukka gent of you, old man. Quite the Burlington, what!"

"Shut up," said Tod.

"It's a fact. Real West Shaston china, the genuine article. Got a dress suit, I suppose?"

"Not yet."

"It will come, old man. Play bridge and go to dances, and eat strawberries and cream in people's gardens."

"Shut up. Come and have some supper one night."

Twine refused, and refused with a kind of awkward sulkiness.

"Rather full up just now, kid. I've got a girl, and she takes some satisfying. Well, don't forget us all."

"I shan't," said Tod, "but why not bring your—your fiancée along with you."

"That's some word, old man. But she isn't that—yet; that's the trouble. Well, so long."

They parted, Tod wondering why he thought Bob Twine rather a coarse beast, and whether he—Tod—had changed as Twine said he had. Twine loafed away, smiling a queer, sensual, slightly cynical smile.

"They've got him," he thought, "he's going up into the real respectable pew. Would I swop? Damn it, no! You can't be respectable and have such a time

with the girls."

Ten minutes later he met a fair-haired, and richly coloured young woman on the parade. She had been waiting in one of the shelters, eating sweets and reading a paper novel. And the face of the young woman was the face of "Giggles," Miss Millie Hornblower, to whom Tod had once given a German-silver ring.

The greater part of a year had passed since Mr. Julian Burgetrode had last played the Colossus in his toy-town, but he reappeared one day at the Hotel Majestic, and two evenings later Miss Truebody found him on her doorstep. The bell of No. 11 St. Helen's Terrace had been rung with unnecessary vigour, and Miss Truebody's instinct was to protest. The maid was out, and she answered the door herself.

"Yes? What do you want, please?"

She had meant to remark that the inmates of No. 11 were not deaf, but people did not use sarcasm on Mr. Burgetrode. The fierce blue eyes, and the red tie, and the masterful brown face were so very vivid and arrestive. Mr. Burgetrode was always treated like a big and rather doubtful tempered dog, and Miss Truebody forgot about the bell.

"Is Tod Western in?"

"Mr. Western? No I think he is at the tennis club."

"Will he be long?"

Mr. Burgetrode's fierce manner quite agitated Miss Truebody.

"Oh, no, he may be in any minute; you see, he always comes home and has a little supper and

studies before going to bed."

"Ha!" said Mr. Burgetrode, and Miss Truebody winced.

"He studies quite hard, you know, such a nice, gentlemanly, quiet fellow."

"I'll come in and wait."

"Oh, certainly. Are you——"

"My name is Burgetrode. Will you show me his room, please?"

Miss Truebody continued her "agitato" on her way up the stairs.

"Quite a healthy, sunny room, I'm sure. I have got him a nice arm-chair; the windows look south, you know, and he has his meals in my sitting-room. Yes, it has been very hot to-day, hasn't it?"

"Very," said Mr. Burgetrode tersely, wondering if the lady was married and had a daughter. He did not believe in a man marrying before thirty, and he did not want Tod to marry any girl in Shaston. Mr. Burgetrode had unusual views on sex and marriage.

Sheer nervousness kept Miss Truebody holding the door handle of Tod's room and making polite conversation.

"I expect he'll be playing tennis with Miss Cragg, Mr. Burgetrode. Such a very nice girl, and Mrs. Cragg is one of the kindest and most Christian of women. Yes, he does smoke, just a little, poor dear boy, but such mild tobacco, I'm sure."

Mr. Burgetrode had picked up a brier pipe, and he took not the slightest notice of Miss Truebody. Believing in allowing such clockwork ladies to run themselves down, he idled round Tod's room,

looking at the books and the furniture with the interest of a man who had vivid memories of his own youth. Tod's blue bathing suit was hanging over the back of a chair, and Miss Truebody, with great decency and presence of mind, threw a towel over it, and then "chasséd" towards the door.

"You'll find that chair quite comfortable, Mr. Burgetrode."

"I have no doubt of it, madam," he said, removing the towel from the blue bathing suit, and staring at it fixedly till Miss Truebody had closed the door.

He was very interested in Tod's room. The Truebody part of it was quaint and old maidish and precise, but Tod's share was that of the healthy young male. There were glass lustre candlesticks, and a little white marble cross on the mantelpiece. The furniture was mahogany of the most obviously Victorian pattern. It appeared that Miss Truebody had dabbled much with the paint brush at some period of her life, and the splasher above the washstand showed a bunch of white Madonna lilies. A couple of tambourines that hung one on each side of the overmantel had been decorated with very wooden and wall-eyed tom-tits balancing with a grim determination on bits of twig. But the room was snug and clean and full of Tod and his possessions, tobacco tins, books, a pair of trousers thrown on the bed, a collar and tie and a pair of mauve socks on the chest of drawers, a little table in the window with ink, writing paper and notebooks. Julian Burgetrode picked up some of Tod's books, and found that he was reading architecture, and practical building, and an elementary handbook on sanitation. Mr. Burgetrode smiled. The Craggs had sent him very

flattering reports on Tod.

His protégé arrived and found Mr. Burgetrode sitting side-saddle on the window-sill, and enjoying that evening glimpse of old Shaston and the sea.

“Well, Master Ajax?”

Tod was pleased to see Mr. Burgetrode, and Mr. Burgetrode was pleased with the pleasure on the boy’s brown face.

“I’m sorry you had to wait, sir; I would have stayed in if I had known.”

“Not a bit of it. You’ve grown.”

“Have I?” laughed Tod.

“Let’s see, how old are you?”

“Nearly twenty, sir.”

“Wish I could be twenty again. You are coming out to dinner with me, Tod, yes, just as you are. This seems a clean and comfortable sort of place.”

“Miss Truebody is very kind, a good sort,” said Tod.

“And religious?”

“Very religious, sir. People are very kind—and I am having a good time, and I like the work.”

“Houses?”

“I never get tired of houses, sir, all sorts of houses. I’m reading quite a lot.”

“Excellent!” said Mr. Burgetrode, with a queer gleam of the eyes. “Now come along to dinner.”

Tod dined at the “Majestic,” and Mr. Burgetrode saw that the lad had changed. He had developed poise, and he was no longer embarrassed by waiters

and people in evening dress. He had put on new social clothes. But the real Tod was there as of old, frank, fearless quaintly direct and eager, a happier Tod perhaps, a boy who had the makings of a very big man.

He talked away to Mr. Burgetrode, and if the "Colossus" asked a few questions they were very significant and pertinent questions, and Tod responded to them with ingenuous readiness.

His talk was all of houses, not only of houses as they were, but houses as they might be and ought to be. He was interested in the conceiving and building of houses and cottages, and in the atmosphere of their surroundings. Tod had seen some of the "county" houses during the year, and the beauty and the soft serenity of many of them had left a vivid picture in his brain. He had not forgotten that house-hunting adventure with Arthur Mossup, and those stuffy and dreary little grey boxes at the back of Shaston town, and Tod, with the natural idealism of youth, believed that such mean beastliness in brick should never have been perpetrated.

"There ought to be gardens and trees," he said, "and plenty of places to play in. Why should people live in rabbit-hutches?"

"The speculator's idea of economics, my boy."

"Well, it oughtn't to be," said Tod; "and all those dirty little houses, each with a dirty little kitchen, and making more dirt and mess. And no baths."

"You would like to make a new town all out of your own head, with gardens and baths, and playing grounds, and concert halls and fine cookhouses?"

"I should," said Tod, his eyes alight, "but who'd

pay for it?"

"Exactly!" said Mr. Burgetrode; "we don't like paying for other people's health and comfort."

It was rather obvious to Mr. Burgetrode that the Craggs had not pushed Tod against the financial thorns of the business. He had not got himself pricked and exasperated as he had done in the shops of Messrs. Flowerdew and Snape. The Craggs were respectable people. They did not perpetuate the more flagrant cynicisms, and West Shaston was too comfortable and well fed and wealthy to bother about elemental economics. The Craggs had made money rather easily; they had not developed the clawing hands, the fierce masticating muscles and the canine teeth of the average Flowerdew. Tod had not yet discovered "commercial competition," that devil god of the industrial age, the god of the unprincipled and the greedy.

Mr. Burgetrode even persuaded Tod to betray his views on girls, and discovered, more by inference, that Tod was not interested in them for the moment. Mr. Burgetrode had introduced the Craggs into the conversation, and he heard all about Fred Cragg the impressive, Mrs. Cragg whose lap was full of charity, and Bertha Cragg who could swim like a man and place a back-hand volley down the side line with fine precision.

"She's a good sort," said Tod; "no nonsense, just like a man, you know. Can't stand the giggling sort, all ribbons and hat brim. The Craggs have been very kind to me, sir, very kind indeed."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mr. Burgetrode, beginning to wonder whether Miss Cragg was not a rather dangerous young woman. He did not want

Tod to marry for many years to come, and he did not want him to marry a girl of the middle classes.

Chapter Fifteen

Tod made another friend that summer, a Mr. Lavender, who kept a quiet little tobacco shop in Greek Street, behind Caroline Crescent. Mr. Lavender made a living by selling pipes and tobacco, but in the life that mattered he was a naturalist and a lover of birds. He was a big, fair, quiet man with a soft voice and blue eyes that were always ready to smile, a great placid, lovable creature, a born countryman and hunter of the woods and uplands, an idler by rivers, one of the few who cared more for life than for money. As an ornithologist he was no mean authority, and it is probable that he was the best read man in Shaston. He read because he loved good books, and not with the spirit of Fred Cragg, who wanted to collect information, borrowed stones and brilliants with which to dazzle fools. Mr. Lavender had lost his egotism in the great lap of Nature. He knew things that Frederick Cragg would never know —because Life was his book, Life that cares nothing for the intellectual vanities of the fussily clever people.

Tod bought his first pipe from Mr. Lavender, but their friendship began when Tod discovered by some chance that Mr. Lavender had known his father.

“I should think I did know him! We had a tramp’s holiday together twenty-five years ago. Your father was one of the rare birds.”

“In what way?” Tod asked, intensely interested.

"Cared for the real things. Money was dirt to your father, useful dirt, just what it should be."

"My mother used to say that my father ought to have been a great man."

"He was a great man, but he wasn't a successful one according to modern standards. There's a difference."

Tod supposed there was; and in the course of a few weeks he and Mr. Lavender became close friends.

Tom Lavender spent each Sunday in the country. He would take the early train for Bidhurst or Willoborough, and walk five and twenty miles before sunset, carrying a haversack, a pair of field-glasses and a stout ash stick. He would lie in a ditch or under a tree for an hour, watching some bird, and sometimes he turned into a village church and joined in the service. There was not a wild flower that he could not tell you the name of, and he could spin all sorts of fascinating yarns about the life of an ant or a bee. Nor was he a mere naturalist. He had a sense of colour and of atmosphere, a love of landscape and an eye for all the strangeness of beauty.

He made a disciple of Tod, and they spent many Sundays together tramping the lanes and the field-paths and watching the life of the woods. Tod learnt many things from old Tom Lavender: the tricks of the squirrel, the notes and plumage of shy and elusive birds, how the woodpecker earns his living, where bumble bees live, how trees should be grown, how to tell an adder, where to look for plovers' eggs, where trout might still be found; but the most precious picture of all was the picture of old Lavender himself. Tod was the better for having realised the

gentleness and the wisdom of the old man. Lavender gave his youth a new outlook on life, a new choice, a new understanding. Here was a man who loved things for themselves, who despised money and pitied greed, a man who was not feverish, and to whom the world could offer no bribe.

"It's up to all of us to choose," he told Tod. "There are two ways of owning things—by loving them and not wanting to put them in your pocket, or by grabbing Life and trying to sell it. It's up to all of us to choose."

"I don't want a lot of money," said Tod.

"Somebody else may."

"Who?"

"The woman you marry."

Tod had not thought of that.

"Why should she?"

"Women like a man to be successful. In the old days you got a horse and knocked over other men, or you went on a great adventure. Success and money are synonymous nowadays."

"I shan't marry a girl like that. Besides, my mother loved my father."

"She wasn't a money fool. She thought of the inside of her man before she thought of the furniture."

"That's true," said Tod.

So life promised well for Julian Burgetrode's protégé. He had his feet on the upland track and his eyes on the clear sky ahead of him. He was healthy in body and mind, and he seemed in a fair way to

escape the two things that damn a young man most, cheap women and cheap money. He played a good deal of tennis that summer, and he played much of it with Bertha Cragg. He had joined the local club and had become something of an expert.

He was known among the gossips as “Bertha’s boy.” The middle-class young women were making a jest of it, but Tod was the most innocent thing on earth just then.

Bertha knew.

But Bertha Cragg was not an average young woman. There was a fineness about her, a reticence, a shrewdness that could watch and wait. She understood Tod, glimpsed him as a healthy wholesome, delightful boy whose whole attention was concentrated on the life outside him, on doing things, and on doing them well. He was deep in his book of adventure, his Crusoe story, and there was no woman in it. Some day a ship would heave-to off Crusoe’s Island, the ship of sex, and Bertha Cragg hoped to be the young mistress of that ship.

She loved Tod very dearly, but she hid her love so well that he never caught the sheen of it. She wanted him to come to her, to open his eyes to her and find that she had played herself into his life.

“Dear Bertha is growing quite pretty.”

Old ladies made that remark to her mother, and it was true.

She had a mass of fine dark hair, good teeth, very pleasant eyes, and the bloom of her sex was upon her. She took great trouble with her dress, wore the neatest of shoes, and was never gaudy.

Yet Tod remained blind. He liked her better than

any other girl in Shaston, and he liked her so well and in such a fashion that she wondered whether he would go on liking her in that way till—— But Bertha always shrank from the thought of the other girl who might swoop in and carry Tod off in a night's flirtation. She bore with the beastly gossip and the sniggers and the knowledge that she was being watched by the merciless eyes of competing flappers. She was always frank and merry with Tod. She was his playmate, his sports-woman; and her dream was that some day he would look into her eyes and discover the woman.

They entered at the local tournament as partners in the mixed doubles, and they won.

Tod had been so keen on winning. Their last match was an uphill affair against a pair who were the local experts. Tod, over zealous, had struck an uncertain and eccentric patch, and was smashing into the net and putting his drives out of the court. It was the girl who steadied him and pulled them through.

"You're worrying too much——"

"I know. I'm a silly rabbit; I want you to win."

"I shan't be cross if we don't. Let's stonewall for a while."

They did, and Tod's serenity came back. Bertha was returning everything with that beautiful forehand drive of hers, and finding the side lines with nearly all her shots.

"Set all, four all!"

"We are going to beat them, Tod."

She wanted to call him "dear."

And beat them they did, Bertha making the finishing stroke with a crisp volley down the centre of the court. Tod had turned to her with an exultant, happy face, “Oh, great shot!” and had tossed his racket in the air.

He was almost the lover as they walked off the court together, and the woman in her thrilled.

“You won it, you know. I should have been all over the place but for you.”

She laughed softly and coloured.

“We never annoy each other, do we?”

“Rather not! I say, you must be tired. Come over here and sit down, and I’ll get you something to drink.”

She was very happy when he made her put on her white blanket-coat.

She was very happy, too, when they took the prize, and Tod made an ingenuous and half-shy little speech.

“My partner did it. She was the best player on the court.”

And some chit remarked to a friend:

“I believe she’s hooked him at last.”

But Tod remained as platonic and as innocent as ever, her playmate and nothing more. The winter arrived, and he bought a dress-suit, took dancing lessons and learnt to play bridge. He was popular and had nice manners, and it leaked out that some very influential person was interested in him. The tennis club carried on weekly subscription dances during the winter, and Tod danced a great deal with Bertha Cragg. He danced with other girls also, and

she made a point of being very gay whenever Tod had other partners. There were certain girls whom she hated, mischievous little wretches who made eyes at Tod, and were quite ready to make Bertha look a fool.

In fact, there was a game played by several of them, and they called it “Bagging Bertha’s boy.” It did not prove to be a very successful game, because Tod appeared to be so preposterously unsentimental and so loyal to his comrade.

“You dance better than anyone else,” he told her; “most girls seem to be such silly fools.”

Perhaps it was inevitable that Mrs. Rathbone Cragg should intervene. She had eyes and ears and a maternal pride, and she was very fond of her daughter. Nor had she any spite against Tod; she was quite ready for him to become engaged to her girl. That was just it: the relationship needed labelling, giving proper social significance.

She spoke to Bertha, and there was a quarrel. Mrs. Cragg had not thought of quarrelling, but it happened. Some women are very sensitive.

“But, my dear, it can’t go on like this. You must realise that you are getting talked about. It’s not nice. I know the boy is thoughtless——”

“I’m in love with him,” said the daughter with a queer, hard frankness.

“My dear child, that may be, but you ought to make him realise——”

Bertha flared out with sudden passion.

“You mean, I ought to do what most girls would do, grab him for myself and land him on the

sentimental hook. I know it could be done; he's such a dear boy, and sensitive. But I won't."

"You prefer to make a fool of yourself? Really, you are old enough——"

Bertha stood up.

"Mother, I have got a sort of pride that you don't understand. I'm not going to be clever with Tod; I love him in a better way than that. I want him to come to me, if he is to come at all. As for all the beastly gossip, it is not going to make me a little cad. I'm his friend; I can't help it—if I am not yet anything else."

She was much moved, and almost in tears when she reached the door. Her mother, a good soul in spite of all her conventionality, jumped up and held out her hands.

"Bertha dear, we ought not to quarrel. You always were such a proud child."

"I can't help it, Mother."

"Don't you think it may be that Tod doesn't realise? I know you have never helped him to realise, and he has seen so much of you. If you were to make a kind of little break—like taking something away from a child so that he missed it and found out how much he wanted it?"

Bertha looked straight into her mother's eyes.

"Perhaps. To please you, I'll try. Supposing I go and stay with Aunt Ethel for a month?"

Mrs. Cragg kissed her.

"The very thing," she said.

If Tod had had more personal vanity he might

have discovered Bertha's secret. She went away to her aunt who lived at Surbiton, and Tod managed to see her off at the station, a piece of boyish courtesy that clouded the issue. He was not conscious of any gap in his life when Bertha Cragg had gone. He did his work, played his games, took his food with the usual zest, and went out with Thomas Lavender on Sundays, for the country was never dead to old Lavender; he loved it wet and he loved it fine. Tod danced once a week, and Mrs. Cragg had him to "Clovelly" to play bridge. She was rather motherly and mysterious with Tod, but Tod remained the most healthily unsubtle young idiot, and most ingenuously blind.

The Horroxes were giving a big dance after the New Year, and Bertha wrote to Tod to ask him if he would go with her. Each girl was taking a man. Tod accepted, and thought no more about it. He liked dancing with Bertha Cragg because it always seemed so easy, and he had not to chatter; they both loved dancing for itself, the quick glide of their youth together and the lilt of the music. There had never been any mystery in it to Tod, no quiver of madness in the nearness of her, in the whiteness of her shoulders or the smell of her hair. She had not the spark to set him alight, and that was her woman's tragedy.

Bertha did not return to Shaston till the day before the dance, and she did not see Tod until he came up to "Clovelly" to share her cab. She had brought a new dress with her from town, a most beautiful rose silk thing, and she had spent more than an hour in dressing. It was her "Flaming June," her challenge of the youth in him, the conscious and romantic assertion of the sex in her. She had scented

her hair, and fastened a spray of roses in her dress, and as she came down the stairs a little pair of silver shoes flashed in and out under the rose-red skirt.

Tod was waiting for her in the hall. He was glad to see Bertha, but it was a sort of brother gladness, a cheerful "Hope-you-have-a-good-time" welcome. There was no mystery about him. He took her black velvet cloak and placed it over his shoulders.

"Very good of you to ask me to come," he said; "the cab is waiting. Do you think you'll be warm enough in that thing?"

"Quite," she answered very calmly, and smiling at her mother who had come into the hall to see them off.

"Mind you take great care of her, Tod."

"Of course I shall," said Tod.

"I think we were lucky to get her back safely from Surbiton. She was rather gay there." And Mrs. Cragg smiled mysteriously and conspiringly at Tod.

Bertha betrayed a moment's impatience. She loathed being advertised.

"Time we were off. Come along, Tod."

It is probable that that was the most unhappy evening the girl had ever spent. Tod sat like "good dog Tray" in the cab, and talked like a brother. The dance was a very sumptuous affair, for old Horrox had plenty of money and knew how to spend it. He liked "display," and the Regent's Hotel knew how to cater for people with social vanity. The string band had been brought from town, and the room was decorated with rambler roses. To do the unexpected and the expensive thing in the middle of winter was

an extravagance old Horrox loved. He had been an expert at window-dressing in the days of his youth.

"Aren't the roses lovely?"

"They are just the colour of your dress," said Tod.

That was the only suggestively personal remark he made to her during the evening. The interlude had taught him nothing. She was still his playmate and nothing more, and he was as much at his ease with her as though she were a man. She had hoped perhaps for a sudden and subtle shyness in this boy, a sense of strangeness, an unfamiliar "What has happened to you?" in his frank eyes. She gave him five dances, and he always welcomed the return of their partnership, but he did not come to her with the look of a lover, but with the air of a man calling her to a game.

She was strangely silent as they drove home in the cab, lying well back in her corner with a kind of languor. Tod was puzzled by her silence. He did not understand.

"Tired?"

"A little."

"It's nearly three, you know, and I'm called at seven."

"Poor Tod!"

She was strangely gentle with him; all her bitterness was against herself. A sort of mother pathos softened her mood. She would not let him leave the cab when it reached "Clovelly."

"No. You need not fuss about me. You can drive straight on to the terrace."

"It's been a jolly evening, hasn't it?"

"Splendid! Good night!"

The cab rolled on, and Tod felt a healthy pleasure in the prospect of going to bed. Bertha Cragg was in her room, bending forward and looking at her face in her mirror. It was a plain face—a little drawn, tired, colourless, for the joy of life had left it. She felt that she hated that face of hers, hated it as she had never hated anything on earth before.

"You fool!"

Her hands went to the shoulder straps of that exquisite dress of hers, and ripped it relentlessly from bosom to waist.

Chapter Sixteen

Three weeks later Tod met Millie Hornblower, the lady of the German-silver ring.

It was a sunny February afternoon, with a cold north-east wind blowing, the sea a deep blue ridged with white. Tod had been "writing up" a house on the seafront, and he was walking back along the Colonnade, and had stepped aside to let a perambulator pass, when some one spoke to him.

"I don't suppose you remember me, Mr. Western?"

He turned and found himself looking into the china-blue eyes of a girl who was wearing a set of black furs. Her gloves were black and so was her hat, but beneath it her hair shone out like a red-gold wreath, a flash of colour that made him forget her sombre clothes. The "Giggles" of Pentworth had grown into a perilously handsome girl. She had one

of those soft, round, glowing faces, with a complexion that old-fashioned ballad writers called "cream and roses"; moreover, it was natural. She was of middle height, deep of bosom, with a beautiful plump throat and well-shaped shoulders. But her mouth was the live flame of her beauty. It was a disastrous mouth—beautifully sensual and provoking, very red, the upper lip slightly lifted at the centre, a mouth that made men look at her with eyes of desire.

"It's Miss Hornblower," said Tod.

He had given her a little grudging lift of the hat, and he stood considering her with a shy reserve. Yes, he remembered her very well, for had she not killed the wonder-heroine of those books of adventure and most basely sold his love for a bag of chocolate creams?

"So you are at Craggs'," said the girl, sensing those memories in the stare of his eyes.

"Yes."

"Quite the man-about-town."

"Oh?" said Tod, abrupt and uneasy.

He could not think of anything to say to her, though he was acutely conscious of her as a compellingly pretty girl. He thought that she had changed, and that her face looked softer and pleasanter, and that the memories of Pentworth were no longer fit to be remembered. Physical beauty is so convincing to a young man whose ideals have not been tarnished, and who does not know that a little harlot may have the face of an angel.

"You have changed a good deal," said the girl; "I wonder if you would have spoken to me if you had

seen me first?"

"Of course I should," said Tod; "that's to say if I ____"

He got bogged there, and she did not try to help him out. His awkwardness made him stiff and difficult, and she felt that he was putting on side.

"Oh, don't explain. You're in a hurry, I expect. Of course, Wednesdays don't affect you."

"So you're in a shop?"

It was an innocent bit of blurting idiocy, and he knew at once that he had said something disastrous, though to the self in him it had meant nothing at all. She gave a little lift of the head, looked at him queerly, lips pressed together, the pupils of her eyes small and very black.

"Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Western," and she set her face westwards and walked on.

Tod saw that he had hurt her, and Tod had always hated hurting people. He walked back to the office with a furious sense of soreness inside him, and the growing realisation of the fact that the girl must have assumed him to be a snob. A remark of Bob Twine's recurred to him: "Suppose you will be getting too big for us shoppies." Tod had been indignant, but his present indignation was a chivalrous rage. The mood was miraculous. Miss Hornblower became in a moment a vision of softness, accusation and pathos. He remembered noticing that her gloves were shabby, and then he realised the suggestiveness of her black clothes and hat.

And so Tod landed on Calypso's island, and his Calypso had a tragic mouth and grieved blue eyes.

He spent the whole of the following week in trying to cross paths with Millie Hornblower, and to win a chance of wiping that rage out of his heart. His chivalry went nightly down the parade into old Shaston town, and into every likely and alluring street. He tried two churches on the Sunday, and discovered no grieved and blue-eyed girl in either of them; but Tod had a good deal of obstinacy, and the smart did not wear away from him as quickly as it melted from the hearts of most people.

When at last he did meet her she was walking down Duke Street with a girl friend, and though Tod lifted his hat and broke his step with the hesitation of a man who wanted her to stop, she swept past him, a proud young ship in full sail. She had given him a nod of the head and no smile.

"Who's that?" asked her friend.

"A boy I used to know."

"He wanted you to stop."

"He can want it a little more. I'm on my dignity, old thing."

Tod was piqued and troubled. He was such an innocent man thing in the Garden of Eden that, unlike Father Adam, he accused himself and not Eve; and he behaved as though this particular Eve was made like a male. Bertha Cragg had clouded his conception of the other sex. She played the game of life like a good man, never cheated, and had hidden all her subtlety, showing him only the face of a frank and straightforward boy. If Tod had taken up his picture of Miss Hornblower where his Pentworth memories had left it, and not let sex smudge it, he would not have been the dear fool of a sensitive imagination. When a girl uses both her sex and her

wits, the only opponent who can do her justice is a cynic or a *roué*.

Mr. Thomas Lavender had no Tod trudging with him over the Sussex hills on that first warm Sunday in March. There was spring in the air, an adventurous blueness in the sea, suggestion in the soft swish of the waves along the shingle, a "Come and find me" in the mood of the day. And Tod went forth like a pagan, with no thoughts of Miss Truebody and church bells, and the blood of St. Alban the Martyr, a young man patrolling the parade with a vague foresense of adventure tingling in his spine. In one of the glass shelters half hidden behind a hedge sat my Lady Propriety, reading a book with an air of careful and ladylike isolation. Her blue eyes looked vague and inattentive, and virginal as the sea and the sky. She was aware of nothing and of everything, and she did not appear to see Tod until his shadow was at her feet.

"Good morning!"

"Good morning!"

Her upward glance was surprised and critical. She waited, her book open on her lap, a virgin fortress with gates closed and flag flying.

Tod had to attack.

"May I sit down a moment?"

"It's not my seat."

He sat down a good yard away, very uneasy, the young male thing unconsciously full of its maleness.

"I'm afraid I offended you the other day?"

Her blue eyes held him baffled with the opaque and defensive stare of a moment.

"Oh?"

"If I did, it was quite——"

"Unimportant."

She supplied him with the word, and then returned rather obviously to her book. A moment later, like the *retiarius* of old, she made a quick throw of the net.

"I work in a shop, you know."

"So do I," said Tod.

"That's news. I shouldn't have called an estate office a shop. St. Margarets rather fancies itself."

"Do you mean I'm a snob?"

He had said it. He had sounded his trumpet, marched out his men and offered battle. The field was his.

"One can't help one's impressions, Mr. Western. I have learnt to take people as I find them. After all, it doesn't matter."

"Yes it does," said Tod obstinately.

She gave him an ironical glance.

"Oh, why?"

"Because I'm not a snob."

"Am I to take your word for it? I suppose I was a silly, impulsive ass to speak to you that afternoon."

"It was very nice of you to speak to me. And you went off in such a hurry."

She turned over a page and smiled.

"Perhaps I'm rather touchy. I just did the natural thing, and you looked over your collar like a shocked

curate. I'm not used to being snubbed."

"But I didn't mean to snub you."

"Well, I felt snubbed, anyhow. And a girl's rather touchy when things have gone wrong, and she is beastly poor."

Tod sat there in silence for a while, tapping the toe of a boot with his cane, a very serious and generously sentimental Tod. She had set the youth alight in him, and though he was still unconscious of the fire that was to be, he had no suspicion that all this was strategy and part of the campaign. Millie Hornblower had seen Tod in Shaston long before he had seen her, and the promise of the man in Tod had pleased her. He was a brown, strong, quick-moving youngster, with alert eyes and an air of adventure. And there was a glamour about Tod. He was supposed to have a little money, and what was more important, inside influence. He was going up. Millie Hornblower had learnt quite a number of things about men and life, and the sort of future a girl in a shop might expect. She intended to get out of that shop with éclat and romance, and not as the wife of some dull and semi-paternal middle-class husband vaguely fat and forty.

"I've been trying to see you ever since that day," said Tod at last.

"Have you?"

"You wouldn't stop that afternoon in Duke Street."

"Did you want me to stop?"

"Yes, I felt I'd offended you—hurt your feelings."

"Thank you," she said. "I don't know that I'm

asking for anybody's pity."

Tod fought stubbornly, like a man who was being outboxed and punished in every round.

"It's not pity. And I'm not a snob. I was in two shops before I went to the Craggs. Besides——"

"Well?"

"I want to be friends."

She gave him a quick side-glance, and then looked out to sea. She had her suppliant obstinately chastened, but those Pentworth memories needed final contradiction, and her desire was to appear somewhat unapproachable and proud, no casual girl to be picked up just as a man pleased.

"We're not a couple of kids—now," she said seriously.

"Of course not."

"I was a mischievous little wretch at Pentworth, wasn't I? I don't make friends now in five minutes; if a girl has any self-respect she keeps herself to herself, especially if she's in a shop."

Tod's answer came like an echo.

"That's it," he said; "that's why I feel that it's awfully good of you to let me sit here and talk. I'm not a cad, you know, and I'm grateful."

She let herself smile at him.

"You used to be rather a nice boy—Mr. Western, otherwise I shouldn't have let you—— Oh, well, I'm not very fond of men; they are such mean beasts."

"I should not have thought anyone could be mean to you," said Tod.

So Tod was forgiven and his conscience satisfied. He sat there with blue sea in front of him and the blue eyes beside him, and made polite conversation that tended towards the inevitably personal plane. Miss Hornblower put her book aside and allowed Tod to possess all her attention, but she was tantalisingly cool and correct, the very antithesis of the "Giggles" of Pentworth. Tod was not to be allowed to think that he could open the gate and walk into the garden just as he chose.

By one of those curious coincidences Bertha Cragg, the elder Miss Horrox and Frederick Cragg passed that shelter while Tod was absorbed in propitiating Millie Hornblower. Tod did not see them, nor did he guess what was happening in another woman's heart. Bertha had glanced at the other girl's eyes and mouth, that mouth that was like the red mouth of the woman in Rossetti's picture of "Fazio's Mistress." The thing had happened. Tod had met that other sort of woman, the woman who did not rush about in the sun, but who just sat and waited for young Adam to steal her the apples.

Chapter Seventeen

The morning dip in the sea, the smiting of a white ball down a length of green grass, marching into Sussex village with Mr. Tom Lavender, spring woods and primrose time and the watching of birds; work in the office, houses, favourite books, all the healthy ritual of a young man's open air life, gave place to a loitering at corners, a parading of the seafront, the game of the moth and the candle. A girl had taken all the colour of life for her eyes and her mouth and her

clothes. She had put on the veil of make-believe, and the real face of her soul was hidden.

Tod Western had ideals, very clean and sturdy ideals. There was nothing mawkish or decadent about them, no ladylike pre-Raphaelite milk and moonlight hyper-refinement. He had never had to analyse what he felt about women; youth and instinct go hand in hand, and it may be that instinct has the face of a boy's mother. It is the man of forty who stands and analyses, and has the subtle understanding of a mature wisdom. Tod had a sort of soul-picture of the girl a man should love. He wanted her to be beautiful and he expected her to be gentle, truthful, not greedy about money, not cheap or noisy, no player of mean tricks. All that is inside a man who has had a mother worth loving. It is part of his blood and his brain. If love and youth did not wish to make things better and finer than we know them to be, life would be a sorry business. Christ was a young man. Happy is that man who rediscovers that young Christ in himself when the hairs of his worldly head are turning grey.

And "Giggles" played the part of my Lady Propriety, a pink and white Chloe who exclaimed, "La, sir!" and who was serious, sedate and coy. In her natural and unpremeditated moments she was one of those girls who always had a finger in her mouth, or was patting her hair or looking obliquely at mirrors, shop windows or men. In Millie Hornblower's case it was the little finger of her right hand that crooked itself into the left corner of her red mouth and dragged the lower lip down very slightly. She had very fat white hands with dimples where the knuckles should be and fingers tapering to soft, blunt ends. She was very fond of sweets and of

strong scents, but her sensing of the man in Tod taught her to suppress these predilections and to eschew too much colour.

Some things were not “naice.” She was using the word “nice”—or “naice,” as she pronounced it—a great deal just then.

“I’d rather not sit on the stands, Mr. Tod.”

“Why not?”

“It’s not quite naice.”

And Tod found himself learning to make all sorts of subtle discriminations, and the natural and sensitive decency of the lad made him an apt learner. Miss Hornblower had a quick eye for all the proper formalities. She liked Tod to wear gloves and a bowler hat, and to take off his right hand glove before he shook hands with her. They walked very sedately up and down the Parade, and if they sat on a seat it was sure to be some very public seat, the sort of seat where a “naice girl” would sit with a man and advertise the niceness of her virtue to passers-by.

She softly but firmly suppressed any suggestion of walks in the country; it was still primrose time, and not quite the month of June. She let Tod take her once or twice to the pier concerts, but a girl friend went with them, and on one particular evening Tod had a great experience in trying to explain away a rather vulgar “turn” in a variety show that was running there for a week.

Miss Hornblower got up and walked out, and Tod found that the responsibility was his. She was on her dignity, a pretty prude who accused him.

“I don’t think it was naice of you to take me to that.”

"How did I know?" said Tod, honestly upset.

"Do you mean that you thought I shouldn't mind?"

"Good heavens, no, Millicent!"—she had ordered him to call her Millicent—"I didn't know there was anything in the show that would——"

"You ought to have known. A man oughtn't to chance a thing being beastly and vulgar."

"I'm awfully sorry. I ought to have gone and seen it first. I'm awfully sorry."

She had impressed him. He had liked the way she had got up and walked out, like a Christian martyr refusing to burn incense before the altar of a pagan god.

Meanwhile, she was entangling him in a net of confidences—confidences that make a passionate appeal to a generous boy. There were the disasters that had fallen upon the Hornblower family. Millie's father had died of pneumonia, a drunkard's pneumonia, but she did not tell Tod that. He had left no money, and the family had scattered. One of the boys had gone to sea; two of the girls were in London shops; Mrs. Hornblower herself was living with a brother whom Millie described as a gentleman in business. Millie had had to face the hard realities of life, and to set about procuring herself food and clothes.

"I don't think there is anything dishonourable in a girl having to work," she said to Tod, with touching simplicity.

"Dishonourable! I respect you so much for doing it."

“And then, of course, there’s Mother,” she explained. “I have to help Mother.”

She allowed Tod to understand that Mrs. Hornblower’s impecuniosity was almost a joy to a loving daughter.

“I don’t grudge the little I can give her. Uncle Alfred is quite well off, but Ma has her pride, and so have I.”

“I think you are splendid,” said Tod, with shining eyes.

But she refused to be regarded as a heroine.

“It’s nothing to boast about. It’s little enough after all the years Mother looked after me. But it’s beastly being poor.”

“How do you find it beastly?”

“Well, there’s Horrox’s—the shop. You don’t know perhaps how a girl can get treated in a shop. A naice boy like you wouldn’t believe it.”

“What do they do?” Tod asked.

She looked at her shoes with an air of rich embarrassment.

“Oh, I couldn’t talk about it; it’s too beastly. Some of the men are such cads; they expect a girl to let them do things.”

“What things?”

Tod was getting up on his horse, the same gallant war-horse that had been ridden by his father.

“Oh, I couldn’t tell you. Sometimes the shopwalkers, or even the ‘heads’ want a girl to sell herself, and if she’s a naice girl and respectable, she gets dismissed for putting a cad in his place.”

Tod flamed up.

"I'd like to talk to a cad like that. I'd give him such a thrashing!"

Her blue eyes held his.

"Would you?"

"I should think I would. I never knew there were such cads about."

"And they are such liars, too. If a girl flouts them they tell all sorts of horrid lies about her, and what can a girl do?"

"The cowards! But has it ever happened to you?"

She became confused—almost frightened.

"Don't! Don't talk about it, Tod. There was someone who—well, I don't think he'll try it again."

"If he does, you'll tell me?"

"Perhaps."

"Promise to tell me; a cad like that wants a lesson."

"You'd thrash him?" she asked, with flattering simplicity and wonder.

"I'd tear the heart out of him," said Tod.

Knowing that Mr. Robert Twine still served at Horrox's Tod had referred to him as a friend, but Miss Hornblower had spoken discouragingly of Mr. Twine.

"That black man? Yes, he's in the glove department, but he's not my style."

"Bob's not a bad sort."

"I don't like him," she had insisted; "not that I

know much about him, but he is the kind of man a naice girl doesn't trust."

Tod had said no more. He remembered having felt that Bob Twine was rather a coarse beast in his attitude towards women.

Tod was on the way to getting himself talked about in West Shaston. He was breaking with his old haunts and habits. He had been seen but rarely at the tennis club, and people noticed his absence from "Clovelly." "Bertha's boy" had become a bandstand and seafront devotee, and the inference was obvious. Some flapper soon discovered that Mr. Western was always walking about with one of the girls from Horrox's shop, a girl whose beauty had made her undisguisable, for Millicent Hornblower was one of those sun-women whom everybody notices and whom nobody forgets. People wondered what the Craggs thought about it, and Bertha Cragg in particular, Bertha who had been so conspicuously interested in Mr. Burgetrode's protégé, but the Craggs satisfied nobody's curiosity. Tod lapsed gradually from their circle—that was all.

Bertha Cragg dominated the family during that obscure social crisis, and impressed her spirit upon them. She bathed and played tennis with more than her old enthusiasm, and went about with such an air of healthy cheerfulness that people had no excuse for referring to her as "poor Bertha." She snubbed her brother when he thought it his duty to be confidential and impressive. After all, it was a very trivial matter, a boy of twenty falling in love with a golden-haired shop-girl, very trivial and very natural. You did not stand on the seafront and draw everybody's attention to the remarkable fact that the sea was coming in.

When she met Tod she showed him the same old frankness, and Tod's eyes were never opened to the woman in her. She forgave him because she realised his innocence, and because she was rather unusual. The bitter jest was against herself, and she accepted it, making no moan and showing no malice; but she hated the girl who had captured Tod—hated her almost as much as she hated her own plain face.

She had been ambitious for the boy—her boy.

"I think I could have made him happy, and I know I could have helped him," she said in her own heart.

But that other girl? What would she make of Tod?

So poignant and strong was her curiosity that she went more than once to the shop of Horrox & Horrox, and contrived to be served by the girl with the red mouth and the flamboyant hair, the girl whom she had seen sitting with Tod in that shelter. These two women were antipathetic, fire and snow, even across a haberdashery counter.

"I want a silk scarf, please."

"Yes, madam. Any particular colour?"

"A soft yellow."

Scarves were brought, and Miss Hornblower betrayed all the faults of the bad saleswoman. She was casual, superior, ready with a vague sneer if a purchaser asked for something that was less expensive. She was Venus caged behind a counter, bored, absorbed in the cult of her own comeliness.

"Madame should never wear yellow."

Bertha Cragg flushed and let the impertinence pass.

"How much is this one?"

"Nineteen and sevenpence halfpenny."

"Have you anything cheaper?"

Millie stared at the plain girl.

"Oh, yes, madam, we have a cheap line for customers who don't want the best article, but the colours are not so naice."

"Will you show me some, please?"

Miss Hornblower's languor was extreme. She went in search of the "cheaper line," chattered for a half a minute to another assistant, gave the glad eye to a shopwalker, and then returned to her customer. Bertha had been watching the girl, and watching her with a jealous intentness, and her imagination saw Tod lying in the lap of this glowingly selfish and red sexed thing, this little haberdashery Delilah whose soul was a box of sweets and a sealskin coat. Bertha Cragg was too subtle a woman to be deceived. The scent was so pronounced, the colour so vivid. This was no case of a pretty, wholesome, commonplace girl transfigured and become an angel in the eyes of a boy, a little romance that makes the world a little cleaner and less mercenary, a romance that ends in a beautiful comradeship and children. There was a glint of green in the goddess's eyes, and that soft red mouth could scream and utter soul-killing blasphemies. The plain woman saw it all so clearly.

Yet she was quite helpless, and she knew it. A sensitive girl cannot go and tell a man that he is in love with a trashy woman, especially if she happens to be in love with him herself. It was possible that Tod might save himself. The affair might prove to be a mere incident, one of those chapters in a young

man's life that is written in a summer night and soon forgotten. Tod was so clean and wholesome, and, in spite of his innocence, so shrewd, that she saw him tiring of this passion in a petticoat and rushing off to wash himself in the sea. This was a girl who held a man for a day, a month or a year, and Tod was a man who would want to be held for life.

Someone else in Horrox's shop was interested in Tod's love affair. Horrox's junior employees lived in. The girls slept over the main shop, the men over a sort of annexe across an alley; they met for meals in the big dining room under the furniture department. Horrox's had its etiquette and its autocrats. The autocracy of Miss Harbord, the housekeeper, dominated all the lesser tyrannies. She was a big woman with a swollen, waxy face, a black moustache and a merciless and moral eye; and Horrox's—with some irony—had nicknamed her "Mother." Her duties were that of a Watch Committee, of a supervisor of morals. There had been scandals in Horrox's, and one of the partners, who subsidised Missionary Societies and loved the Memorial Hall, had fallen into such a pious and quite honest rage over it that Miss Harbord had been imported to act as mother superior. Miss Harbord saw to it that the sex adventure was not cultivated in the establishment. She was fearless and devilishly sly, yet no unkind friend to girls and men who did not try to fool her. Miss Harbord was at her best when someone was ill.

Miss Harbord and Millicent Hornblower did not appreciate each other. There had been a breeze, and something more than a breeze.

"If this happens again, Miss Hornblower, I'll report you."

"It wasn't my fault. Why don't you speak to the man? It's always the girl who gets the blame."

"She needn't do, my dear. And the man hasn't got off without hearing about it."

This breeze had blown over months ago, but it had been so blusterous and menacing that the man in question had given up walking recklessly round exposed corners, and he was no longer the lover of Millie Hornblower. Another storm had blown them apart. But he was not the utter cad that Miss Harbord thought him; he was just the warm-blooded, reckless sort of being who took what he could from a woman who chose to give it, but the sort of man who would have given a wounded pal the last drop of water in a desert. A man will be straight and generous with men and crooked with women. You can't trust him in the sweetshop, but in the street he will get knocked over stopping a runaway horse.

"Say!"

It was rather dark at the head of the stairs leading down to the dining room.

"I told you not to speak to me."

"That's true," said Bob Twine, "but it's got to be. I'll meet you down beyond the White Cliff at nine."

"I shan't go."

"Yes you will. It's about young Tod."

She went.

Sitting on the shingle under the shelter of an old black fishing boat, they fought each other with words while the dusk came down.

"What are you doing playing with young Tod?" asked the man.

"I'm not playing with him. Besides, it's no business of yours."

"Oh, isn't it?"

"You're jealous, I suppose?"

Bob Twine kept throwing stones at an old tin that the sea had left on the shingle. He was dour and menacing, but curiously cool.

"Nothing of the kind. I don't care a snap of the fingers for you now, and you know it."

"Thank you."

"Look here"—and he turned to her with a kind of pleading solemnity—"I taught that kid to swim just here. I taught him to box. He's a good kid, one of the best. You let him alone."

The girl looked at him haughtily. "What d'you mean?"

"Don't put on airs; you know what I mean. You are not the girl for that kid. He's not like me, the sort of chap that knocks about the seafront——"

"How dare you!" she said.

"Don't put on airs. I know you a bit too well, old girl. You let Tod alone, or I shall tell him."

"Tell him?"

"Yes."

"You cad!"

And then she burst into tears and sat leaning against the boat's black timbers, while Bob Twine threw stones at the tin and never hit it.

"What beasts men are! You—you made a—a fool of me, you—you know you did. I had to find out

what—what a cad you were, and now, when I've met a naice boy, you want to drag me down in the—the mud."

"Bosh!" said the man, affected in spite of himself.

"Yes, you do. It's mean and beastly. He's not like you; he's a little gentleman."

Bob Twine leant over and grabbed savagely at her wrist.

"Look here, I know all that; but I'm not going to let you play with that kid."

"I'm not playing with him."

"Sure?"

"I'm—I'm in love with him. I want him to marry me."

Bob Twine twisted away from her, and sat with his knees drawn up, staring at the sea. She was drying her eyes and smothering an occasional sob, and waiting watchfully upon his silence. The man's face looked swarthy and dark and troubled.

"Yes, and what sort of wife will you make him?" he said at last.

"I'm in love with him," she repeated, "and I know he's in love with me."

Twine picked up a handful of shingle and sent the stones scattering savagely over the beach.

"Damn! Suppose I'm a silly fool! But, look here, if I ever catch you running crooked——"

"Thank you," she said haughtily, "you taught me the difference between a cad and a gentleman."

But Millie Hornblower was in a panic mood, and

she was afraid of this swashbuckler of a man with his swarthy passions and his moments of generous rage. It was possible that he might change his mind, tell Tod that most disastrous tale, and the stars would fall out of the sky of her new romance. She wanted Tod. She was very much in love with him, and the indiscipline of her love was growing greater than her shyness. She had got to slip into Tod's arms before Bob Twine or any other man could interfere.

She met him next evening at the St. Margarets' end of the Parade, a rather anxious Tod who had watched for her in vain the night before.

"I missed you last night."

He was concerned, tender, just a little shy.

"I wasn't very well," she said; "something happened, and I stayed in."

It struck him that she looked strange and unhappy, and his heart was out to discover the reason.

"I'm sorry. Perhaps you don't care to walk far?"

"It's not that. I'd like a walk; I'd like to get away from all these people."

"What about Summer Valley? The wild roses are out in the hedges."

"Yes, let's go there," she said.

But she was not herself. She did not talk much, and was quiet and strange and unsmiling, and now and again she would give Tod a shrinking, yet half-appealing look. Something had happened, and in the Summer Valley Tod watched her face and the sunset. It was very sweet and still there, the wild roses white in the hedges, the long grass full of dim light, the

woods on the ground growing black against the yellow sky. A June evening, soft, mysterious and fragrant, a lover's evening, subtle and strange and sad.

"I wish you would tell me," said Tod.

"Tell you what, Tod dear?"

He groped shyly for her hand.

"What's worrying you. You know I——"

She looked frightened, piteous.

"I—I can't. It's all so horrid. It has made me feel so cheap and beastly, and not fit to talk to a naice man."

Tod put a sudden arm round her.

"But I'm just the man you have got to tell. Let's sit down here under this may tree."

She let him have his way, and, unpinning her hat, she sat and pulled bits of grass to pieces, while Tod worshipped and waited for her to trust in him.

"Tell me, dear."

"It's all that horrid shop life. A pretty girl gets persecuted in a shop."

"Some man has been saying beastly things to you," flamed Tod.

She turned her head away.

"Yes."

"Just tell me his name."

"I can't, Tod. It's better that I shouldn't."

"I'll kill him."

"Oh, don't! I don't want it spread about that I'm

the sort of girl men say vile things to. Besides, I gave him his answer, the best answer a girl could give."

Tod was bending towards her, his young face stern yet glowing.

"What did you tell him?"

"I said I was—oh, I can't! I can't tell you what I told him."

"Yes you can, because I love you, dear; I've loved you for weeks and weeks."

She gave him one quick look, and then hung her head.

"Oh, Tod, I told him——"

"Well?"

"That I was in love with a dear, naice boy, and that I didn't want a cad to make love to me."

"Millie, is it me you love?"

"Tod, dear Tod, perhaps."

His arms went round her, and her arms folded about his neck. They clung close and kissed, looked in each other's eyes, and kissed again.

"You'll marry me?" said Tod, with his eyes alight and his heart beating fast and hard.

"Yes, dear."

"Then we're engaged. You are coming out of that shop."

Chapter Eighteen

So Tod and Millicent Hornblower became engaged, and Tod bought a diamond and ruby ring at Gildersleeve's in King William Street. It was a very handsome ring, and it absorbed all the money that he had saved for a summer holiday; but since Shaston had become a place of delicious enchantment Tod thought no more of holidays.

He had become absurdly and delightfully old of a sudden, a little, solemn John Bull carrying new and pleasant responsibilities. Life had undreamt-of problems and interests, and finance ceased to be a matter of no importance. Tod took a survey of his finances, and he began to wonder how much he would be worth to Mr. Rathbone Cragg at the end of another year. In a month or two he would be the master of a thousand pounds—those two mortgages that Uncle Remus had guarded so tenaciously.

"I've got to see about it," said Tod.

He went solemnly into Mr. Rathbone Cragg's inner room, and announced his engagement.

"Thought I ought to tell you, sir. You have been very kind to me."

Mr. Cragg looked embarrassed.

"Quite so, Western. And who is——"

"Her name is Miss Hornblower. She is one of the ladies in Horrox's. I knew her when I was a boy."

"An old romance," said Mr. Cragg, smiling as though he had a pain, and wondering what Mr. Burgetrode would say about it. "And how old is the lady, Western?"

"About my age, sir. I'm just on twenty-one. And I wanted to ask you about the future."

"Quite so, Western. Prospects, eh?"

"I have new responsibilities, sir."

"Let me see, you are getting twenty-one shillings a week?"

"Yes."

Mr. Rathbone Cragg found himself in a subtle situation. Mr. Julian Burgetrode was the man who mattered, and Mr. Burgetrode was the god behind the gods. He was not on the stage, and Mr. Cragg had no right to call upon him, or to betray to Tod how much depended upon the great man's pleasure. Therefore he temporised, and decided to write a letter.

"I should like to consider your future, Western, if you will give me a day or two."

"Of course, sir."

"I have nothing but praise for your work here."

Mr. Cragg wrote to Mr. Julian Burgetrode and explained the situation. When he went home to lunch he told his wife much that he had said to Mr. Burgetrode, but he said it in a different and more domesticated way.

"That young fool has got engaged to a shop-girl. Of course it's no business of mine, but with his prospects it's a disaster."

"And B. was so fond of him," said the wife resentfully; "you know that, Edward?"

"She had better forget all about it—at once."

"She has. I shan't have the boy up here again."

“Don’t be hasty, my dear; it never pays to be hasty.”

Mr. Julian Burgetrode replied by return to Mr. Cragg’s letter.

“Please carry on in exactly the same way,” he wrote, “and consider the boy as your clerk and nothing else. Offer him his market value. I shall be in Shaston very shortly.”

Mr. Cragg carried out these instructions, and his “market value” was a shock to Tod. It suggested an addition of five shillings to his weekly wage at the end of the present year, an income of sixty-seven pounds twelve shillings.

Tod began to consider economies. The moment had arrived when he found time to dawdle in front of furniture shops, and to understand Arthur Mossup’s preoccupation over the quest of a house. He decided that he would buy no more new clothes, that he was eating too much, and that his room at Miss Truebody’s was needlessly expensive.

Meanwhile Miss Millicent Hornblower was very much engaged, and enjoying the sensation. Nearly everybody in the establishment of Messrs. Horrox & Horrox became aware of that ruby and diamond ring, and it was flashed in the eyes of lady customers who made boring demands for reels of cotton and hanks of silk. It was shown to Miss Harbord, and that grim woman’s congratulations were characteristically frank.

“It’s the best thing that could have happened to you, my dear. And a bit of plain gold will be worth more than all those pretty stones.”

Millie warned her friends and gossips that her

sojourn would be short in the house of Horrox and Horrox.

“He’s such a dear boy, and hates the idea of my being in a shop. He thinks it isn’t naice. Yet, he’s got money, you know. I don’t see him staying with the Craggs. Someone’s interested in him, a gentleman who is supposed to be a millionaire.”

Her gossips listened, and agreed that Millie was becoming a snob.

As for economy, it was not part of the landscape. She had spacious ideas and a brilliant sense of chiaroscuro, and little sumptuous ambitions as to houses and clothes. Tod was going up in the world. He had capital and influence, and Millie did not see herself making beds and sweeping floors or washing up dishes in some little back kitchen. She was going to be a lady and give tea parties, walk into Horrox and Horrox’s and issue orders across the counter, and take her morning cup of coffee at Judson’s café. Tod was a dear boy. She was sure that he would make a lovely husband.

Various people congratulated Tod. He met Bob Twine one Wednesday afternoon, and the swarthy man lounged in front of Tod and offered him sheepish and glum felicitations.

“Fancy a kid like you getting married! Suppose you’re as pleased as Punch?”

“She’s such a dear girl,” said Tod; “we are going to be very happy.”

Twine looked at him queerly and seemed to be struggling with some inward pain.

“A long time yet, I suppose?”

"I want to get married this year."

"Oh, cheese it! What's the hurry?"

"I don't like Millie being in a shop."

Twine went for a long prowl, the savage prowl of a man who was at war with the world.

"Damn! I ought to tell the kid, but somehow I can't. Perhaps she'll run straight with him. God knows!"

Someone came out of Miss Truebody's sitting-room one evening as Tod was running down the stairs, and stood in the dusk-filled passage waiting. It was Bertha Cragg.

"I want to congratulate you, Tod," she said; "I'm so glad."

Her voice was very steady and quiet, but she did not look at him, and her eyes were set between bitterness and tears. Tod took her good wishes as he would have taken an "Oh, well played!" at tennis. He was quite unsubtle towards Bertha Cragg, and he never knew that he had lost the greatest thing in the world.

"I'm awfully happy," he told her ingenuously.

"I hope you will always be happy, Tod. I should like to have met your fiancée, but I am going away."

"Are you?"

"Yes. An aunt of mine is going abroad for a year, and she has asked me to go with her."

"I hope you'll have a jolly time," said Tod; "you deserve it."

And Bertha Cragg passed out of his life.

Tod made several pilgrimages to Arthur Mossup's green and white cottage in the Old Town, and sat at the feet of those authorities on domestic science. Mossup was rather worried about the little shop; business was not as brisk as it might be, but he forgot all his worries in prompting Tod. He had a great love of detail, kept most elaborate accounts, and was ready to tell Tod the cost of anything, from a second-hand mangle to a stair-rod.

"It's all here, Western, every tintack in the house. Nothing like knowing where sixpence goes. Olive can tell you all about the food."

"How many tons of coal do you burn a year?" asked Tod.

"Here you are—five tons, three hundredweight. And you get a Peerless oil-stove. Saves pounds. Ask Olive."

Olive, a pleasant, dark little woman, agreed.

Tod made a note of the Peerless oil-stove. He made notes of everything that Mossup told him. Never did a man have a more earnest and attentive disciple.

"Bring your fiancée up here, old man; she and Olive can have a talk. My wife's a marvel, Western; there never was such a woman; I'm the luckiest man that ever was. She does the hats and the house, and she's prettier to look at than ever she was."

"I think she's very happy," said Tod.

Mossup blinked his short-sighted blue eyes.

"Do you, Western? I'm glad. I'm such a quiet sort of chap, and do you know, I never thought she'd marry me. Amazing, wasn't it?"

"You're a brick, old man. May I bring Millicent up on Sunday?"

"Come up to tea; we have tea in the garden on Sundays. Come up about four o'clock."

But Miss Hornblower was not interested in the Mossups or in their way of doing things. Tod took her down to tea, with ingenuous praise of Olive and her cleverness, but Millie did not sit and listen. She led the conversation, and led it to a level above the careful economies of a Mossup's day, touching upon such luxuries as parlour-maids, late dinner, Turkey carpets, at-home days, and whether you should have a double bed in your spare bedroom. She depressed the Mossups and impressed Tod. Millicent had ideas; she knew how things ought to be done in a successful household, and Tod felt challenged by her optimism.

She referred to the Mossups' cottage as a "stuffy little place," and in such a horrid neighbourhood, too.

"And did you see her poor hands?"

"What was the matter with them?" Tod asked.

"They don't keep a servant!"

To judge by her tone there was something mysteriously shocking in such social degradation.

"Perhaps they can't afford it."

"Fancy a man letting his wife slave like that. I think it's disgraceful."

And Tod—the lover—was too much in love to disagree.

Mr. Julian Burgetrode arrived in Shaston towards the end of the same week. He did not come by train, but in a car which he drove himself, a great grey car

that slid along noiselessly, but could say “perr-rump” if challenged, and go streaking up a hill like a huge grey lizard up a wall. This car swung into Caroline Crescent and stopped in front of the Craggs’ office. Mr. Burgetrode sent in a message by his chauffeur, and Tod came out.

“Get in,” said Mr. Burgetrode, “in here.”

Tod got in.

“Shall I want a coat, sir?”

“No. I don’t need you, Griggs. Get back to the hotel.”

“Right, sir!”

Mr. Burgetrode swung the car into Church Road, went up the steep hill at thirty miles an hour, squeezed through between a tram and a railway van, scraped past a fool of a wagon that was crawling all over the road, cut round Post Corner, and drove a group of loafers hurriedly on to the pavement. Going up the steep hill from Post Corner to the Ridge they overtook another car that was piqued at being hooted at and tried to show its pace. Mr. Burgetrode’s car went by it with a rude snort from the exhaust, crowded in front, and smothered its defeated rival with dust.

Tod had spent a rather breathless five minutes. They had seemed on the edge of hitting things, but had never quite hit them, and Mr. Burgetrode sat there as imperturbable as sin, looking straight ahead and not bothering about anything. He had not spoken a word, and he ignored Tod until they were on the straight and swinging road that lept through the woods along the ridge towards Bidhurst.

“What do you think of that bit of driving, young

Ajax?"

"You made things move, sir," said Tod.

"Beastliness, sheer beastliness. But Power can be beastly."

"People have to get out of the way?"

"The sleepy fools. Power, young man, Power's like this car; it can glide along and leave everything behind, and so softly that the sleepy fools hardly feel the power. Or it can drive them into the ditch, kick dust in their faces. It depends how you use it. But—Power!"

Tod felt those blue eyes on him, and he was puzzled.

"Rather fine—to have Power, sir."

"What for?"

"To keep bullies from bullying; to put wrong things right."

"That's the ideal, is it?"

"What's wrong with it?" asked Tod.

"Nothing, so long as you keep fierce and fit. No sentimental slosh, mind you. And don't let any woman cut your hair."

Tod gave a quick glance at Mr. Burgetrode.

"Like Samson?" he asked.

"Exactly."

Tod cogitated.

"You mean—any woman?"

"There is only one woman in a thousand fit to be a comrade and use Power. They make props and

prigs; get round a man like ivy. So you're engaged?"

"Yes, sir," said Tod.

"Young fool!" reflected Mr. Burgetrode.

Then he smiled at Tod.

"Dreams, eh? I had 'em myself, but the only one that was worth while died. I married Power after that, Tod, and I have been married to her ever since. You will come and dine with me to-morrow night?"

"Thank you, sir."

"With your fiancée. Horrible word! Seven-thirty at the Majestic. Give the lady my compliments and say I shall be charmed and honoured to meet her. What's her name?"

"Millicent Hornblower," said Tod.

"A good self-advertising name! Don't be a young fool and think yourself offended. Only the little people strut on dunghills."

Mr. Burgetrode turned the car at the Bidhurst crossroads and drove back to Shaston with extraordinary mildness.

There is no more blind and obstinate creature than a young man in love, and Tod did not foresee the coming crisis in his career. He failed to appreciate Mr. Burgetrode's power or his point of view, and his infatuation was so serene and utter that it did not occur to him that Mr. Burgetrode might not like Miss Millicent Hornblower. The possibility of it never entered Tod's head. He was so much in love with Millie.

It was a rather excited and confident Tod who met her that evening on the Parade.

"Mr. Burgetrode's here. I've been out in his car."

The girl's eyes were on the alert.

"What's he want?"

"He asked us to dinner at the Majestic to-morrow evening."

"Asked me?"

"Why, of course."

Tod's dear lady went very pink.

"How naice of him!"

And then she added breathlessly:

"I must get back at once, Tod—at once."

"What for, dear?"

"My dress. I've got a dress, but it wants touching up for the Majestic. You'll be in your dress-suit."

"Shall I?" Tod asked. "Mr. Burgetrode doesn't bother."

"Of course, we must dress. It would be rude to him if we didn't."

"Hang it!" said Tod. "Have I got to wear white gloves?"

"No, you dear silly. A dinner jacket and a black tie. Have you got a dinner jacket?"

"A thing without tails? Yes."

"And we must have a taxi."

"I'll see about the taxi," said Tod.

Tod called at Horrox's with his taxi at about twenty minutes past seven, and waited at the side door that was used by the shop assistants. He became

aware of three merry and fluffy heads at an open window above, the heads of three irresponsible young women who were interested in life.

"Hallo, Tod!" said one of them.

Tod took off his hat and began to blush, being very conscious of his white shirt front and black tie.

"Doesn't he look sweet!"

"Hallo, here's Majestic Millie!"

Miss Hornblower appeared, wearing a black velvet cloak, and a length of white filmy stuff over her head. Her shoes were of yellow satin, and Tod had a glimpse of a yellow silk stocking. The three young ladies at the window sent up a cheer, but Miss Hornblower's dignity refused to be disturbed. Tod opened the door of the taxi for her, and they drove off.

"Teases, those girls," he said.

"They are jealous, that's all."

Tod thought he had never seen anything more beautiful than the girl at his side, and most certainly she was very lovely. She let her black cloak float open, and showed a gleam of white shoulders and arms shining out from a mass of black lace. She had pinned a yellow rose over her bosom, a little point of glowing colour between her shiny hair and her yellow shoes. Tod contemplated the complete and utter conquest of Mr. Burgetrode, an immediate surrender to this most charming and seductive young woman. It was fate.

"Do I look naice?"

"Lovely," said Tod; "just perfect."

She patted his knee and, looking critically at his

tie, told herself that Tod Western was quite a gentlemanly youngster. His dinner jacket fitted him well, and his head looked sleek and wet.

“It’s rather jolly, isn’t it?” she said.

“What?”

“Being engaged. I hope your Mr. Burgetrode will like me.”

“Could he help it?” quoth the lover.

Mr. Julian Burgetrode was sitting in the white loggia of the Hotel Majestic, sinfully comfortable in an old Norfolk jacket and a pair of grey flannel trousers. He saw the taxi drive up, and Tod giving his gallant hand to a very handsome, golden-haired young woman in black. And Mr. Burgetrode was annoyed with himself.

“A lapse on your part, my friend,” he thought; “only a cad makes children feel uncomfortable.”

He went and met them on the steps, the old sahib, suppressing all that was queer and discordant in that masterful soul of his. Tod, looking flushed and happy, presented Miss Millicent Hornblower.

“I really must apologise to you young people,” said the great man; “I was late—too late to change.”

“Please don’t mention it,” said the girl, thinking that Tod’s friend looked very snuffy, and not the sort of figure she had expected.

Mr. Burgetrode gave her a sharp stare of his blue eyes. He saw the whole of her in five seconds—red mouth, satin shoes, golden hair, engagement ring. Here was a hard young pippin with a rosy skin and a deceptive promise of much juice and sweetness. Mr. Burgetrode became very polite.

"Supposing we go in? Smith, take the lady's cloak, will you? What a pleasant day we have had."

"Yes, the weather's quite naice," said the girl, "specially when you've got an autocar. What's yours, Mr. Burgetrode?"

"My little thing? A Graham Rolt. I like speed, you know."

He shepherded them into the dining room, and to a far corner where a table had been laid for three. There were roses on the table, red and white roses in a big bowl. The head waiter, treading softly, wished Mr. Burgetrode a "good evening, sir," pulled back Miss Hornblower's chair for her, and waited discreetly; with the wine list.

"Veuve Cliquot," said Mr. Burgetrode.

He felt that Tod's young woman was dressed and scented for champagne.

A sudden and unexplainable shyness had fallen upon Tod. He was a little awed by his fiancée's talkative sangfroid and by the bold way she sat there and attacked Mr. Burgetrode. Tod had expected her to be rather coy and mute, and perhaps—in his heart of hearts—he was just a little disappointed. He knew that Mr. Burgetrode did not like women, but Tod had never been able to discover what sort of women the great man did like. Perhaps the shy, gentle, rather silent type? And Tod had an uncomfortable feeling that Mr. Burgetrode was being extraordinarily polite, that he would have been much less polite and much more the Mr. Burgetrode as Tod knew him, if Millie had seemed a little frightened and in need of help. But she was a young woman armed, out to attack, her head full of the impression she intended to make, unable to forget that the great man had thought of

her as a “shop-girl,” that it was her business to show him that she was no fool. Her blue eyes looked hard and alert, and she was very careful in the ordering of her hands. Yet Tod had a horrid feeling that Mr. Burgetrode was not pleased.

“Quite a crowd here to-night,” she observed, staring round the room.

“Quite—a number—of people,” echoed Mr. Burgetrode. “Shaston is getting—fashionable.”

“It’s very dowdy this year, don’t you think?”

“Is it?”

“One doesn’t see such naice people; so trippery, you know. We have got quite a naice band this year, but it’s quite spoilt by all the common girls and knuts. I’m so glad Tod isn’t a knut.”

“No, it’s a great blessing; I’m glad you realise that, Miss Hornblower. Though I have seen him in mauve socks.”

“Oh, Tod!” said his fiancée.

Tod blushed.

“I like old clothes,” he began; “my dad always looked shabby.”

“Some men can afford to look shabby,” said the girl.

Mr. Burgetrode smiled.

“Two points of view,” he remarked meaningly; “and what sort of music do you like?”

“I can’t bear ragtime.”

“No?”

“Mendelssohn is quite naice, don’t you think?”

"Well, Tod, what do you say?"

"I don't know anything about it," said Tod, "but I like marches, and music that makes you feel all funny inside."

"Stick to that," quoth the great man. "Don't try and train yourself to look in a mirror."

Tod was glad when the dinner came to an end, and they went and sat outside in the loggia and drank coffee. Mr. Burgetrode sent for Millicent's cloak, and offered Tod a cigarette. They watched the people walking up and down the Parade, and Tod tried to feel that he belonged to the Majestic, and that he had no fear of the hall porter. He wished Millie would not talk quite so much, and all about things of which she knew nothing. Mr. Burgetrode had lit a pipe. He was bored.

Tod had ordered the taxi at half-past nine. It was five minutes late, and Tod had begun to fidget. Millie was talking politics to Mr. Burgetrode—politics! It appeared that she was interested in the Primrose League, that society cherished by old ladies in memory of a brilliant and cynical Jew.

Tod got up.

"Here's our taxi."

Millie gathered herself, and did the "so charmed to have met you" to Mr. Burgetrode. He glanced at Tod.

"I want to see you to-morrow, Western."

"What time, sir?"

"Here, after dinner."

Tod handed the amateur gentlewoman into the taxi, and had a glimpse of Mr. Burgetrode knocking

out his pipe irritably against one of the white pillars. Mr. Burgetrode went up the steps and into the hotel, and did not turn his head to look back. Tod felt that the great man was not pleased.

"What a queer old stick! I did my best, Tod, didn't I?"

Her warm hand snuggled into his, and Tod was swept by a gust of sudden tenderness and chivalrous contrition. She had been making a brave show for his sake, playing her best game, against that difficult old man! Darn Mr. Burgetrode! This girl was worth twenty Mr. Burgetrodes.

Tod bent and kissed her hand.

"You were great," he said. "I'm awfully proud of you, Millie."

She smiled, for she was rather proud of herself.

Old Burgetrode had carried a chair on to the little balcony outside his bedroom, and was refilling his pipe with the slow hands of a thinker. He sat there for half an hour, straddling the chair, his arms crossed on the chair-back, watching the sea. Once or twice he smiled, the smile of a man who saw that the jest of life was against himself, and that his power and his cleverness were as so much sand when the tide of Nature came rolling in. You chose a boy, set him to work, planned all sorts of great happenings for him, and one day some little yellow-haired chit crooked a finger at him, and the boy ran wild, chasing a petticoat.

Mr. Burgetrode laughed.

"You old fool," he said, "of course it was bound to happen. The child has to pass through its mother's womb, the man has to pass through the womb of the

world. We all start afresh, we all have to learn the same old sorry things, we all make the same mistakes and have to pay for them. Whoever listens, or takes advice from an old man? What chance has Fate when a boy gets a glimpse of a girl's bosom?"

Yet the inevitableness did not reconcile him to the particular fate that had overtaken Tod. He had hoped that Tod might escape the sex lure, or escape it until his sinews were set and his head involved in the great adventure, when a woman might not matter. But this little shop-girl was a tragedy. She was pulling Tod into a parlour, fastening him to the grocer's and to the draper's bills, making a little middle-class gentleman of him, a thing that lusted to live in a red villa, to grow geraniums in the front garden, and to tottle out on a motor-bike with a side-car on Sundays. She was clever, and she was cheap.

"Damn her!" said Mr. Burgetrode, "damn her—and her red mouth! The succulent young hussy!"

And yet he was sorry for the shop-girl and sorry for Tod. He had a shrewd glimpse of them making all the old sorry mistakes, floundering, quarrelling, filling their lives with little sordid ambitions, envies, pathetic make-believes. That girl was no mate for Tod. When he had grown tired of her body——!

Mr. Burgetrode knocked out his pipe and went to bed.

Tod came to the Hotel Majestic about half-past eight next evening, a square-headed and obstinate-eyed young man, vaguely aware of clouds on the horizon. Mr. Burgetrode was waiting in the lounge. He took Tod up to his sitting-room, made him sit down in the most comfortable chair, offered him his cigarette-case, and lit his own pipe. The great man

was unusually reposeful and quiet, almost gentle. Youth does not react to a scolding tongue, nor had Mr. Burgetrode any intention of trying to coerce a thing that is stronger than any man's philosophy. Tod should go his way, but he should choose the path with his eyes open.

"So you are going to get married, Western?"

"I am, sir," said Tod.

"Very well; that settles it."

And then he told Tod all that he had planned for him, all that he thought to make of him. He was more frank than any father to a son, and his frankness was without prejudice or guile.

"That's how matters were to shape, Western. I wanted you to have two years at Cragg's just to see how you shaped, and the rest would have followed. I should have put you with an architect for a year, with a firm of builders for two years, and then sent you on a tour through some of the big industries to get an idea of the general scheme of things. After that I should have sent you round the world. And what for? Because you took my fancy—because I thought you had it in you to make a big man of yourself. But I did not want to influence you in any way, tie you to a stick, and warp your growth. As it is, your lady friend has intervened."

Tod sat there, very stubborn and grave.

"I couldn't help it, sir. I didn't know."

"Boy, it was I who was the idiot to dream dreams for a young man."

"But are—they—dead, sir?"

Mr. Burgetrode smiled queerly.

"Of course. My young superman was to spread his wings and fly. He had to think of nothing but flying, climbing, getting to the peak, and of getting there alone. A man can't fly with a woman clinging to his legs—a young woman who doesn't want him to fly."

"My fiancée——" Tod began.

"I am saying nothing, Western, against the girl. You are doing the most natural thing in the world, both of you. I did it myself, once. But she wants you to marry her and live in a little red villa, and go to the pier concerts, and keep a cat and buy her a new hat every month. She can't help it, nor can you."

"I asked her," said Tod; "I'm in love with her. I suppose, sir, you're not interested in me any more?"

Mr. Burgetrode relit his pipe.

"There's the old saying, that a young man married is a young man marred. In this case, it seems to be applicable. You can't do all that I had planned for you. You can't strap a knapsack on your back and go out to conquer the world. A young man who is married has one hand tied behind him, and cowardice trots at his elbow. He's afraid of the big adventure, the great risks, and that the dragon may devour his wife. It's his business to kill the dragon for the sake of his wife? Quite so. But it's so much easier to stay at home in a little house with thousands of little people in thousands of other little houses, and not go out into places where dragons rage. I'm sorry, but there it is."

"So it's all over?" said Tod, keeping a stiff lip.

"Exactly. You have to make your choice between a girl and a career, and knowing what you are——"

"I can't break a promise. I'm not a cad."

"Boy, that was what I was going to say. You have promised to marry the girl, and I know you will marry her. My young Ajax would marry her, if it meant hunting for cabbage-stalks in dust-bins. There is nothing more to be said. You have to live your life and to learn. No soldier is worth his pay who hasn't seen his own blood. I should like you to write to me now and again."

Tod got up, but his knees felt shaky.

"Am I to stay on with the Craggs, sir?"

"Of course. It's a career, of sorts. I shall write to Mr. Cragg, and arrange that for you. If ever you are a free man again, Western, you can come to me."

"Thank you, sir. I think I'll be going now."

"Good night. Don't forget that most men and women cheat in the great game."

"I'll never cheat, sir."

"Give them a straight drive on the jaw, and good luck to you. Good-bye!"

Tod went down the great staircase of the Majestic, a very sober and rather sorrowful Tod. He did not guess then that three years would pass before he would see Mr. Julian Burgetrode again.

But he did not tell Millie that he had lost his great patron. He did not think that it would be fair to tell her.

Mr. Burgetrode was walking up and down his bedroom.

"Damn!" he said, "the boy has grit. I knew it was hopeless. If that girl only had a nose like Cyrano de Bergerac's! Faces, faces, always faces! A fine man sucked dry by a pair of red lips! Good lord, I think

I'll adopt a eunuch!"

Chapter Nineteen

A change had come over Tod's career. He had ceased to be one of the young gods of the world with the light of the morning shining in his face. He became a serious and contriving Tod, a young man whose thoughts were in shop windows and furniture catalogues, who refused to buy himself new ties, and who was very careful of the pennies in his pockets.

"I've got responsibilities," he explained to Mr. Lavender; "no more Turkish cigarettes, you know."

Mr. Lavender, being an old bachelor, was a romanticist.

"Giving up is gaining," he told Tod, "and yet nature is a spendthrift. I always did believe in young people marrying in May, a bit of spring recklessness."

Tod was not feeling reckless. Every page of his day-book carried those uncompromising figures —"£67 12s. a year." The immediate and unfailing retort of his youth was "Yes, and the mortgages make another forty. We shall have to manage on a hundred or so to start with." He was making grim efforts to save money out of his weekly pay, money that was necessary for the equipping of a little house, but Millie was so alive and so gay, so fond of chocolates and sweet cakes and the best seats in the Pier Pavilion! Tod had never forgotten the incident of that German-silver ring. Besides, he had a lover's pride and the generous man's hatred of miserliness. He was engaged to marry the prettiest girl in

Shaston, and if she liked chocolates and fine clothes —well, there was some excuse for it, and even Tod's shrewdness could not kill the love of a fine and swaggering gesture.

"Two stalls, please," or "A pound of the best in the shop."

Before many weeks had passed Tod realised that Millicent had ambitions. Her social ideas were not to be expressed by an income of one hundred pounds a year.

"I want a suite like that for the drawing-room."

They were standing in front of a furniture shop window and looking at a mahogany suite, whose chairs were upholstered in pink brocade. Tod was heard to say something about the price.

"Oh, your Mr. Burgetrode will help."

That was her answer to everything, and Tod began to grow rather weary of Mr. Burgetrode's empty name. There were times when he wished that he had told Millie that the great man had cast them off, and that he—Tod—had had to choose between a girl and a career, but he shirked making the confession. He did not like the idea of presenting himself as a martyr, and perhaps his pride was piqued. Confound Mr. Burgetrode! He could manage his own adventure without being haunted by that old man of the sea.

"I couldn't expect him to do that, you know."

"Why not?"

"I want to be independent," said Tod.

Houses inspired the same social dream. They used to walk about Shaston in the long summer evenings,

and look at houses, but not the sort of houses Tod had seen himself inhabiting. Millie had a particular affection for a little red villa called “Carnarvon” in Guildford Lane, a villa with casement windows and a sort of little pepper-pot of a turret stuck on at one corner, and gables that were filled with imitation oak. There were two little lawns in front, with beds of geranium and calceolaria, and six standard roses on each side of the gravel path.

“Isn’t it sweet?”

“It’s bigger than we should want, dear.”

“Oh, Tod, we don’t want a shabby, poky little place.”

Tod squeezed her arm.

“Nothing’s too good for you.”

She had begun to debauch him.

He showed a new touchiness and the faint suspicion of a swagger in the office of Rathbone Cragg & Son, for it was evident to Tod that the favour of the gods had changed. Old Cragg showed him a new curtness, a peremptoriness that made Tod know himself to be an underling. Frederick Cragg had long refrained from cultivating Mr. Julian Burgetrode’s protégé, and his attitude towards Tod was one of casual and superior indifference. Tod had lapsed. And Tod did not feel humble; he resented the subtle insult to his personal pride. They had been obliging Mr. Burgetrode, had they? Some day he would show them a thing or two. The woman was teaching him to strut and to crow.

In August Tod became one-and-twenty, and the hands of Uncle Remus became impotent and obsolete. Tod went over to see his uncle, and spent a

night at Burnt Farm. Uncle Remus talked a good deal about Tod's "little bit o' property," what an asset it was, and how a wise man never gambled with his capital. "Suppose you'll be leaving the money where it is?"

"At present," said Tod, "but I'm going to be married. I may want a little of it for furnishing."

Uncle Remus sat up stiff and straight in his chair.

"You're goin' to be married?"

"Yes."

"And only just turned twenty-one."

"Why shouldn't I get married?" Tod asked.

"Who's the girl?"

"A young lady in Shaston. She was in Horrox's shop."

"A shop-girl?"

"Yes."

A cunning look came over Uncle Remus's thin face. He leant forward, and pointed the stem of his pipe at Tod.

"She ain't drivin' you, is she?"

"What do you mean?"

"You ain't got her into trouble?"

Tod lost his temper, and said angry things to Uncle Remus, but Uncle Remus was quite unmoved.

" 'Tain't no use losing your temper," he said; "pity is it ain't as I hinted. Five bob a week's cheaper than a wife. I ain't no believer in gels."

"What about my mother?"

"Your mother was a pedigree," said Uncle Remus; "you'll never find a gel like her."

The heavens looked like falling when Tod made his fiancée realise the truth, that they would have to live on about a hundred pounds a year. She wept, and Tod behaved like a guilty fool.

"I don't want to stay in a shop, Tod; they are all so horrid to me."

"But you are not going to stay at Horrox's, my darling; we are going to get married quite soon."

"I—I couldn't ask you to keep me when you have only a hundred a year. And I do want you, Tod—I want you awful bad at times."

They were lying in the bracken of one of the little woods in Summer Valley, and Tod took the girl in his arms.

"I want you—too."

They kissed, and Millie pulled Tod over to her and lay with him very close.

"Oh, I want to be married! Why can't you get that old Mr. Burgetrode to help us?"

"Because I can't," said Tod, obstinate even in her arms; "he expects me to be independent, and not to cadge. We have got to manage somehow."

"Perhaps he's only waiting to see how we get on?"

"Perhaps."

"Putting us on our trial."

"Perhaps."

"Oh, Tod, why can't you have a business of your

own?”

“Well, why not? What sort of business?”

“Let’s think. You have some capital. Lots of chaps have succeeded with half your money and half your brains.”

“It’s an idea,” said Tod, sitting up rather flushed and excited. “Why shouldn’t we do something on our own?”

Eve had suggested the adventure, and it was Eve who discovered the inevitable inspiration. Tod lay awake half the night, thinking of all the possible ways of making money, and of how he could apply that £1,000 of his so that it should give him a share of gold pieces to pour into the lap of his beloved. Tod’s experience was very limited, but imagination rushed in where his experience failed him. Farming? No, he could not imagine Millicent living on a farm. A shop? But what sort of shop? And his bile rose at the thought of a life behind the counter. He might become an agent for something—what he could not quite say. He had heard of men making quite a lot of money by starting a big boarding-house or a small hotel, but he did not think that Millie would approve of the idea. He knew a good deal about houses, and a little about the building of houses, and he wondered whether any of the Shaston builders would be willing to take an enterprising partner? There were so many possibilities, but they were so vague and nebulous that Tod continued to grope and to grasp nothing.

“I’m going to take you for a walk,” said Millie.

“Looking at houses?”

“No; just a walk.”

It was a Wednesday afternoon, a hot and

sweltering day in the thick of the Shaston holiday season. The town was full of young women in white dresses, young women with red arms and necks, and sun patterns scorched on their chests, and wearing white stockings that looked tired and overworked. Youths lounged about in badly washed flannel trousers, hatless, working up a manly tan. Perspiring people from London, fat women with shiny faces, bored men in Sunday clothes carrying buckets and spades, swarms of children, all looking for the joy of life that was pappy and soft as a stale cucumber. Hawkers pushing barrows of fruit. Dirty women with very white aprons selling shrimps. Motors and human things that smelt. All the tawdriness and trash and pathos of a "holiday resort" in August.

Miss Hornblower led her lover towards the railway station.

"What's the idea?" he asked her.

"Nothing. Just watching the crowds."

She looked very cool and comely in a white dress flecked with touches of cerise. Tod compared her with all these overheated, sun-scorched, unstarched women, and his pride in her challenged the spirit of adventure. How could a man fail to succeed with such a charming young woman to fight for? His love was yearning to take the world by the throat and compel it to surrender happiness and riches.

A London train had just poured its crowd into Shaston station, not the cheapest of crowds, but people who travelled by an afternoon train and meant to stay more than a week. A couple of taxis were loading up luggage, and three or four flies had been fought for by pushful fathers of families. There were little piles of luggage and groups of impatient

humans dotted about the pavement. Even outside porters had an artificial importance.

"I-want-a-taxi," a fat man was saying to a porter, a fat man in grey tweeds and a Homburg hat, an emphatic man, a swollenly self-important man. "I tell you-I-want-a-taxi. What's the matter with this confounded town?"

"There ain't no taxis, sir; all engaged."

"I've seen two, just two," said the fat man truculently, "two taxis to meet a London train. It's a damned scandal!"

Miss Hornblower and Tod overheard the man's accusation, and his damning of the enterprise of Shaston.

"Seems to feel the heat," said Tod.

"He's right. There ought to be more taxis."

She watched Tod's face, but her hero had not caught the inspiration.

They wandered back down the town, but there was a purpose in the girl's pilgrimage. She led Tod down Queen Street to where a certain Pumpelly kept a shop and garage, a rather dingy place that always seemed packed with a chaotic mass of cars, and where irritable amateur drivers wanted to know how they were to get in or how they were to get out.

Six or seven private cars were lined up along the pavement. A very greasy young man in dirty overalls was doing something to one of them. One long, grey touring car was full of very superior gentlewomen who were inciting their man to find out, and find out with vigour, why they were not being attended to. A fat man, rather like the fat man at the railway

station, was standing at the garage entrance and making his presence felt.

“Is there anybody in charge here?”

“Try the office, sir,” said a small boy.

The fat man tried the office, and met Mr. Pumpelly in person.

“I have been waiting here for ten minutes.”

“Sorry, sir, no more petrol till this evening.”

“No petrol! I call it a scandal in a town like this. Up north—we know how to do things.”

“You had better get back up north, sir,” said Mr. Pumpelly.

Millicent Hornblower and Tod had more than a glimpse of all this stultified prosperity, and Tod stood on the opposite sidewalk, with his hands in his pocket, and his eyes at gaze. There was a very distinct block in the flow of Mr. Pumpelly’s functions. It was obvious that he wanted more enterprise, more men, more accommodation.

“Do you see it now?” asked the voice of the girl.

Tod turned on her with a flash of his blue eyes.

“Taxis—a garage—of course!”

And then, in that public highway, he pinched Millie’s ear.

“You clever darling; you’ve got a head! Why didn’t I think of it before?”

Chapter Twenty

So Tod plunged.

There was an empty shop in Duke Street, a long tunnel of a shop that had been the home of a local iron-monger who had failed to meet his creditors. The owner of the premises showed himself to be a very adaptable and progressive person. He agreed to spend a hundred pounds on the place, refit it, put in a new front with big glass doors, and knock down part of a back wall so that cars could circulate by way of a backyard and side lane. He added ten pounds to the rent—but Tod was delighted; he did not grudge his landlord his ten per cent.

Western's Garage was opened on New Year's Day. The shop front was painted red; and a big blue-and-white sign jutted out on an iron bracket and let everybody know that there was a garage in Duke Street. Tod, under Miss Hornblower's inspiration, had been very lavish with his gold lettering on the plate-glass windows. Orders were "promptly attended to"—"All trains met"—"Touring cars for hire." The shop window was full of lamps, horns, tools, an assortment of tyres, jacks, oil cans, and the like. The garage held one taxi and one American touring car, both obtained under a system of deferred payments. The staff consisted of Tod, a driver-mechanic, and a boy.

Tod had learnt to drive a car. He had read all the automobile journals with great diligence, and paid various visits to London and the Midlands. Someone in Wardour Street offered him certain commercial facilities, one of those keen gentlemen who are so clever at making money out of other people's enterprise and energy. Tod was "advised" by this Semite in Wardour Street. He obtained various agencies, but they were agencies for rather second-

rate firms who built the cheaper and more dubious sort of car. Old Pumpelly had snaffled all the others. But the business moved; Tod's taxi snorted about quite busily, took people to the station and to theatres, and staggered home again without an accident. The American touring car had a rather more gentlemanly and luxurious life, but then it was a summer car, and Tod had no spare driver. Miss Hornblower would commandeer it on occasions, and make Tod drive her up and down the front. He had bought her a fur coat, and all the young women in Horrox & Horrox's were aware of Millie and her coat.

But the business moved. People came into the shop and bought things, tyres, petrol, oil, grease, repairing outfits, French chalk, sparking plugs, oil cans. Tod advertised himself as ready to undertake repairs, and Love—his driver-mechanic—was put to the test. Love was a fat little man, sallow, greasy, with a slight squint and an immense display of superficial self-assurance. He talked Tod into believing him an expert, pouring out streams of technical jargon with a sort of biblical gusto. "The mag" needed attention, or the "brasspot had a bit o' fluff in its tummy." Somebody's "gears were bottoming," or "she wanted her big-end rebushing." Mr. Love always spoke of a car as "she," and with an intimate and affectionate shrewdness that embraced the whole sex. Tod got a little breathless in trying to follow Mr. Love through all these feminine details and subtleties, poring over motor-manuals at night, and going to bed with his head full of "crown wheels" and "short circuits," "lay shafts" and "forced-feed lubrication." He did not desire this man Love to be a Mumbo-Jumbo, a Witch-doctor, a Priest of all the Mysteries in his business. He wanted to keep a grip on the greasy seat of Mr. Love's trousers.

The driver-mechanic appeared to perform quite creditably upon one or two ramshackle machines that were entrusted to “Western’s Garage” for repairs. They ran when they left the repair shop, and that was good enough for Mr. Love.

“Good enough.” That was his great phrase, containing a philosophy so dear to the heart of the lazier sort of English artisan. If a car came back again at the end of a week, Mr. Love insinuated his greasy person into its entrails, spat, rubbed his hands on his trousers, and was ready with a learned explanation.

“Old, bag o’ bolts. She’d shake something loose every hundred miles.”

He talked the owners into dazed acquiescence.

“She wants ’er timing-wheels resetting, sir. Had ’em done by the village blacksmith—what? Of course. And the universal joint wants looking to, and her water-pipes are all fur and muck. There’s not much I don’t know about cars.”

Tod was very busy and very happy, and business shaped so well those first few months that Tod began to buy furniture and to think of marriage. He wanted Milly, and he wanted her very badly, for she had begun to provoke the natural man in him and spring was in the air.

She came hurrying into the garage one Wednesday afternoon, and found Tod in the little glass box of an office, entering up his books. Last month’s receipts were more than respectable, and Tod was remembering that he needed a summer suit.

“Oh, Toddy, dear!”

“Hallo!”

"It's free—it's to let."

"What's to let?"

"Why, our little house—that ducky house in Guildford Lane."

She was flushed and greatly excited, and her enthusiasm had all the seduction of her sex.

"I've just seen the board up. The people are going out next week. I went in and asked."

Tod got off his stool and kissed her.

"You want it, dear?"

She snuggled in close, ignoring Mr. Love, who was deep in the "innards" of a derelict car.

"Of course I want it. Don't you, Toddy?"

"I want all sorts of things, and I want them so badly——"

"Oh, naughty boy! But it will be rather nice, won't it, just you and me in that dinky house?"

"Let's go and look at it," said Tod, putting business behind him.

Needless to say, they took "Carnarvon," with its pepper-pot turret, mock oak, casement windows, gravel path, and standard roses. Tod prepared to be married in June. The sun shone. All the pessimism of Uncle Remus and Mr. Rathbone Cragg seemed like so much senile snivelling.

About a week before Tod's marriage Bob Twine strolled up Guildford Lane and slouched self-consciously through the gate of "Carnarvon." It was six o'clock and he found Tod pottering about the house. Tod was in his shirt-sleeves, and his hair was rumpled, and Bob Twine caught him on his hands

and knees in the kitchen, nailing down linoleum.

"Hallo, kid."

Tod looked hot and happy, but quite pleased to see Twine.

"Hallo, Bob. What do you think of this pattern?"

"Classy. All alone, are you, and learning to be the handy man?"

"Come and look at the house," said Tod, getting up with all the enthusiasm of a house-proud husband; "I've got the carpets down and most of the furniture in."

"Hire purchase, system, old chap?"

"Well, it's easier to begin with. I hope to wipe off the lot by next Christmas. Now look at this dining room suite. Millie chose it."

"She did, did she? Mind if I light a cigarette?"

"Have one of mine. Aren't those chairs jolly? And I think the carpet's just splendid."

They strolled over the house, and even the obtusely happy Tod could not help noticing that Bob Twine seemed glum and uneasy. The generous and innocent Tod explained his friend's depression by wondering whether he was rubbing his own happiness into the raw of some discontent, and whether Bob Twine yearned greatly for a home of his own.

"Why don't you get married and settle down?"

Twine stared, swallowed something, and laughed.

"I'm not made that way, old chap, and I haven't the money."

"But you'll want to get married some day."

"Talk about something else," said Twine flippantly. "Wish I was in the army, somewhere east of Suez. God, that chap Kipling knows a bit."

He threw the fag end of his cigarette into an empty grate, and became boisterously cheerful.

"Well, kid, you'll be the solemn father of a family in ten years. Taking 'em down to paddle, and teaching 'em to swim. Queer, isn't it, and you're only a kid yourself. But—damn it—I wish you the best of luck, and I hope the girl knows you deserve it. Think I'll be toddling. So long."

Tod, holding a hammer in one hand and a box of tin-tacks in the other, watched the swarthy man slouch down the path.

"Poor old Bob," he thought; "he wants a home and won't say so."

Twine was cursing women and himself.

"I ought to have told him, but, damn it—how could I? He's like a blessed cherub blowing about with a hammer and a box of nails. Happy? My God! Oh, you little devil, I hope you'll play game by him."

A week later Tod was married. It was a quiet wedding, not nearly so decorative as Millie Hornblower would have desired. Her mother was the only relative who attended it, and Tod wondered why Mrs. Hornblower smelt of drink. The two bridesmaids came from Horrox's, and Mr. Mann of the Furnishing Department gave Miss Hornblower away.

Old Tom Lavender served as Tod's best man. Millie had said that he was far too old for it, but Tod

had proved obstinate, for Tom Lavender had a younger heart than most young men. Uncle Remus was not there, and he sent no present. And away in the north the great Mr. Burgetrode was as silent as death.

The honeymoon lasted four days, Tod not caring to leave the business to Mr. Love and the garage boy. They spent the days at Maidenhead, Millie Hornblower's choice, and they did much lolling in a punt on the river, a punt that refused to humour Tod's first activities with a punt pole. But who cared about progress? There were over-hanging and shadowy trees, cushions, and a girl, a girl like a soft, white, sensuous flower with lips tinted red.

For the first six months of his marriage Tod was supremely happy. He had married a highly sexed young woman, a young woman who woke the dormant man in him and taught him to delight in new physical experiences. During those months Tod was the most passionate and uxorious of young husbands, and his wife's sensual frankness rather pleased him. She wanted him and she wanted him with passion. His habits changed. His early morning swim became a thing of the past. He ceased to play games, for sex was the game of the moment, and Millie played it in all its variations. But she did not want children.

"Just you and me together—for a while—Toddy. Besides, we can't afford them."

They couldn't.

The fact became very obvious to Tod. "Carnarvon" was a thirsty little house, and Tod had begun to glimpse his wife's social ambitions. He was astonished at the number of things that appeared to

be required for the efficient functioning of a genteel house. They had no piano, but a piano seemed to be a sign and symbol of grace, even though Millie could not play it. People were beginning to call, and Millie gave little afternoon bridge parties, and the cakes these people ate, and the cost of them, worried Tod. His wife's clothes became a problem. Two good suits were sufficient for Tod, but the hunger of a woman's wardrobe appeared to be insatiable. She wheedled Tod into sundry extravagances; but that was not the end of the tale, for when the finery had been bought, it had to be displayed. Tod found himself taking stalls at the local theatre and going there in evening dress. He even discovered himself in church, walking up the aisle with a young woman who rustled, a young woman who would never have set foot in the place had she been dressed in sackcloth.

That red mouth and those plump white arms dominated him during the first months of his marriage. He was proud of his wife, and rather proud of "Carnarvon," and the calceolarias and the dog, and the maid in white cap and apron.

At the end of six months Tod began "doing figures." The business was prospering, but Tod realised that its prosperity was not commensurate with Millie's ideas upon expenditure.

Tod saw that he would have to expand.

He travelled up to town and saw the Semite of Wardour Street, produced figures, and stated his reasons for believing in a possible expansion of his venture. The result was the addition of two more taxis to Tod's stud, supplied on a system of deferred payments; and the hiring of two more drivers. Tod had a weekly advertisement in the *Shaston Gazette*. The red-fronted garage in Duke Street had an air of

industrious prosperity, and the garage boy began to call him “sir.”

But the surest proof of Tod’s success was the coming of Mr. Pumpelly. He was a succulent and cheerful old Christian with a facial resemblance to Father Christmas, and a partiality for loud check suits. Mr. Pumpelly had been the principal jobmaster in Shaston before the birth of the autocar, and he looked more the man of the horse than of the machine. Geniality was his great weapon. “Good old Josh—one of the best, do anything for anybody.” That was how Mr. Pumpelly glimpsed himself, and there was a bland and worldly cunning under his rosy good humour, a shrewdness that stood broad-bellied in the sunlight, and smiled.

Pumpelly strolled into Tod’s garage, and looked round with an air of obvious approval, and then discovered Tod, Tod who had just booked an order that spelt fifty pounds.

“Morning, Mr. Western. Nice little place you’ve got here.”

“It’s not bad,” said Tod.

“I was passing, and I dropped in to see whether you happened to have a couple of 700 by 85 Avons in stock. I’m out; they’re wanted urgently.”

“Afraid I haven’t. I could let you have a pair of Speedwells.”

“No thanks. Don’t touch ’em. This your office, is it? Mind me strolling in?”

Mr. Pumpelly strolled in with the genial casualness of a friend. He looked at everything with interest, even at Tod’s stool. Then he lit a cigarette.

"I'll wire my London agents. Yes, a snug little place, and quite handy."

And suddenly Mr. Pumpelly's face beamed with the light of inspiration.

"Look here, Western, here's an idea. Why shouldn't we two fix up Shaston between us? We'd tap different ends, and we'd keep other people out. It's an idea, ain't it?"

"You mean we should go into partnership?" said Tod.

"That's it. Why not?"

There was something in Tod that did not like Mr. Pumpelly, and he made one of those swift decisions that was to prove catastrophic so far as his future was concerned.

"Thanks, I prefer being on my own, but I'm obliged for the suggestion."

"Think it over," said Mr. Pumpelly with fatherly impressiveness; "it would be a good thing for you."

Tod thought it over, and two days later he wrote a private letter to Mr. Pumpelly, refusing the offer of partnership. Mr. Pumpelly showed the letter to a nasty, dark, dapper little fellow who had become interested in Mr. Pumpelly's business and was acting as manager.

"He's one of the independent sort, Britt."

Mr. Charles Britt passed a dirty forefinger across his little black moustache.

"If he wants competition he'll get it. I didn't work five years with the Solomons for nothing."

Chapter Twenty-one

So Tod's boyhood died. It just faded away and left him, and he hardly noticed that it had gone, and that it lay in the grave of his dead mother. With it had passed all that was fine and adventurous and free in Tod, that light of the morning look, the spirit of the boy bathing in the sea.

He was a preoccupied young man, sometimes with a frown on his face, and an air of sulky puzzlement. The business had begun to be irritating; it absorbed the whole of Tod, was never satisfied, kept him awake at night, and yet—like a fractious baby—was none the better for all the fussiness lavished on it. All sorts of exasperating things happened, and they happened in a way that made Tod feel very angry and very helpless.

Tod had become commercialised. Delilah had shorn the young Sampson, and he had become the slave of the Philistines. The curse of the civilisation of the West was upon him, the superstition that man was born to make things, sell things, and to accumulate money, that nothing mattered but money. And Tod was getting himself tangled up in the system just as thousands of other young men get entangled in it and come to believe that modern commercialism has been and is and will be for ever.

"Carnarvon" drove him daily into the scuffle with little half-petulant, half-wheedling cries.

"Oh, Toddy, we must have a Chesterfield sofa."

Or "Clara Brown has got one of those new musquash coats."

Display had meant expansion, and expansion had brought Tod into the presence of the economic god—

Competition.

Mr. Julian Burgetrode could have lectured Tod on the subject of competition. He would have said that it was part of Nature, a heritage inherent in man, even wrapped up in his subconscious soul. It was emulation, virile pride, the spirit of adventure, the beads and feathers of the amorous savage, the jewel in the hilt of the sword of the hero. He would have told Tod that the wrong sort of people had got hold of the competition spirit. In other days there had been the Competition of Prophets, the Competition of Knights, the Competition of Poets, Painters and Scholars, the Competition of Cities over something finer than a herd of swine, the Competition of Builders in the soaring spires of their churches. These were noble emulations, emulations that the commercial man had trodden into the hog-wash of his sty. Mr. Julian Burgetrode had a ferocious contempt for the purely commercial man, and for the spirit of industrialism of nineteenth-century England. He had fought his way to the summit of things, he was a great captain of industry, he had explored the great barrack from cellar to roof. And that is what he called it: “A barrack.” “It won’t last,” he wrote to an American friend, “and if we try to make it last, it will come down and bury us. And I’m not so sure that I shall not be one of the first to get at the rotten brickwork with a pick.”

There were other sayings of Mr. Burgetrode’s that might have reminded Tod of his own father.

“We have created another sphinx and another riddle. The industrial revolution and our concentration on purely material things made us overpopulate ourselves with a swarm of slaves. The slaves are waking up, only to find that we are still

the slaves of the god we have created. Too many millions of people—and food to be got for all! Our materialism is a chain round our necks. No wonder the Sphinx grins like a cynic."

"Competition, yes—it's necessary—as things are. It may be brutal and sordid, but it is the plain man's only defence against greedy commercialists. These gentlemen have to use their knives on each other. Thanks to competition, they cannot give all their attention to cutting their pounds of flesh off the poor ass."

"Trusts and Combines. There should be no trust or combine that is not state-owned for the benefit of everybody. I would have all trust magnates treated as highwaymen or pirates."

"The joy in the job. We have got to get back to that, or perish."

Tod Western was just beginning to butt his head blindly against all these problems, like a young man who was conscious of obstacles—and rivals. Man does a lot of butting before he learns to stand still, to reflect and to think. Most men can do nothing but butt all their lives, till Death comes behind and kicks them into oblivion. And Tod was getting well down and into the thick of it; but he played fair; that was his great disadvantage.

He was generous to his wife, and she wasted his money and worried him with her petty extravagances.

He trusted Love his mechanic, and Love robbed him in ingenious little ways that Tod was too big to notice.

He trusted his two new drivers, and they too

robbed him, filching petrol, tools and oil, for Tod was an "employer," and there is a certain sort of new citizen who thinks that it is his right to perpetrate any meanness upon the man who employs him.

These were minor matters. Tod did not notice them, for his consciousness was absorbed in sensing a vague obstruction that baffled the expansion of his business.

He began to remark all sorts of queer things.

None of the leading hotels ever 'phoned to Western's garage for a car.

He had been unable to get himself appointed as agent by any of the bigger manufacturing firms, and he inferred that old Pumpelly had sucked that melon dry.

Nor was Tod satisfied with the work his taxis did at the station. So dissatisfied was he during the second summer that he played private investigator, and made the curious discovery that the porters appeared to hail a Pumpelly taxi before one of Western's. His own drivers loafed in their seats, and did not seem concerned over the possible loss of fares and tips, but Tod saw that it was bad business if Pumpelly did three journeys to his two. And Pumpelly's cars were more smartly kept than Tod's; there was no doubt about it all.

Tod tackled his men. He was generous and hated accusing other men of slackness, but he had yet to learn that there is a type of man that responds only to necessity and fear.

"Look here, you chaps, I want you to be brisker. What about that dirty radiator? Take out your cushions, Smith, and let's have a look at them."

Smith's cushions were a disgrace, and he roused Tod's bile by being insolent over it.

"Look here, Smith, if you've got no conscience, find one, or I'll sack you."

Smith found a lick-and-a-scrape apology for a conscience, but he made up his mind to do Tod down. He was that sort of man.

Tod happened to be out on the London Road one evening, and he saw a big new boarding standing on a bank above the road. It warned tourists to Shaston that Pumpelly's Garage was the best, and the only garage usable by a gentleman who respected his car. In fact Mr. Pumpelly lifted his leg over Tod and any other rival in the town. He was the leading agent for everything; he kept expert mechanics, even a consulting engineer. And Tod was annoyed.

He had an even larger board erected higher up the London Road, so that Western's should be read before Pumpelly's.

About that time Tod had his first quarrel with his wife, and like most first quarrels it was an absurd affair. Millie had indulged in some particular bit of selfish extravagance, and the arrival of the bill coincided with the rise in the level of Tod's financial worries.

"It isn't sport," he told her hotly. "Haven't I enough worry without this gorgeous waste of money?"

Millie passed from sulkiness to a fine, ranting fury, and from fury to tears, and the fool man was beaten when that dear dew ran down into her red mouth. It was the first time she had used the device against Tod, and he surrendered instantly on that

occasion.

There was a reconciliation of sorts, and they sat on the sofa with Tod's arm round his wife's waist, and he tried to explain to her that he was puzzled and worried. And Millie was vaguely alarmed. She had regarded the business as booming, and Tod had never hinted at the malign influence that appeared to be checking its expansion.

"Of course it's old Pumpelly," she said.

"But there is plenty of room for both of us. I can't see myself going out to spoil another man's pitch."

Tod's wife had far more cunning than her man, and far more of the suspicious business spirit, the spirit that applauds honesty when honesty happens to pay.

"It's business," she told him; "any fool could tell you that. I'll find out."

She was as good as her word, and she discovered more in a week than Tod would have discovered in a year. Intuition helped her, the intuition of a young woman who had no false ideas on public morality, and who could put a plump forefinger unerringly on the sore that was eating into Western's prosperity. Moreover, she had certain gossips and friends, and among them the wives of the local station-master and of a manager of one of the smaller hotels. They told her just what she had expected them to tell her. It was all so simple and so obvious that she thought Tod a fool for not having used the same methods of persuasion, and she was amazed with him for his lack of "smartness."

"You are a kid," she said a little contemptuously; "you have got a lot to learn, Toddy."

"What's wrong?" he asked good-temperedly.

"You don't look after your own interests. Suppose you've gone round the hotels?"

"I sent them my card."

She tittered, a vulgar little expression of scorn.

"Your card! You ought to have gone and seen all the hotel porters."

"What for?"

"Who rings up for taxis? Why, the hotel porters, of course! Old Pumpelly tips them all, and that's why he gets the orders."

"I don't believe it," said Tod.

"Well, if you are so green as all that——! And I've found out that old Pumpelly has a ten-pound note divided up among the station porters each Christmas. You see, they are smarter than you each time."

"It depends on how you look at it."

"Does it? I thought you wanted to make the business a success! I shouldn't be surprised, too, if Pumpelly hasn't got at your drivers."

"What d'you mean?" said Tod, with the battle-light in his blue eyes.

"Bribes 'em to be slack and let you down. Don't be so simple. What you've got to do is to out-tip old Pumpelly. Go round to the hotels and tip the hotel porters a quid a-piece. You'll get orders, and it will pay. And I'd sack Love and the others."

Tod flared up as his father had flared up before him.

"Go round and bribe people! No, thank you. I'm

hanged if I'll do it."

"You're a fool," she said tartly; "it's money that counts."

Chapter Twenty-two

Mr. Charlie Britt, the nasty, dark, dapper little fellow, now junior partner of the firm of Pumpelly & Britt, had set out to smash Western's Garage. He had no spite against Tod as Tod, but Britt was combative and greedy, and he belonged to the cut-throat school of business men who believed in showing no mercy, and in tolerating no rival, if that rival could be eliminated. Charles Britt's methods were the methods of the garrotter. Even political economists have admitted that business is non-moral and that the man who sets out to be nothing but a trader has logic on his side when he shuts up his Sunday conscience in his safe and uses his wits as a wrestler uses his cunning. But Britt was one of those men who work in the dark. He met Tod once or twice and was particularly pleasant and polite to him, and Tod's nature was too generous and open for him to suspect of deliberately fouling him.

Western's Garage had a run of bad luck. Two of Tod's taxis were out of action during the summer's busiest month, one with a seized engine, the other with a badly broken back axle. Smith was the offender in the matter of the seized engine, a deliberate offender perhaps, and Tod sacked him, but the mischief was done. Then Tod had trouble with a private owner whose car was said to have lost a couple of electric headlights in Western's garage. The owner was so positive and so combative that Tod

paid him the value of the headlights, but the incident worried him more than the loss of the money. He hated suspecting people, especially men who worked with and about him every day of the week. He spoke to Love about it, and Love's self-assurance frothed like beer.

"I have an idea where they went all right. No, it wasn't Sid Smith. D'you remember a tourin' car with a dirty little Belgian chofer—stayed 'ere two nights? I guess the Belgian had 'em."

Tod had to be satisfied with that.

The hoped-for expansion did not develop, and Tod began to realise that he was living beyond his means. He had his monthly payments to make to the Semite of Wardour Street, and these payments competed with the demands of "Carnarvon." Tod saw that the obvious and sensible thing to do was to cut down his domestic expenses, concentrate everything on the business, and to bide his time.

He walked home one evening, having made up his mind that Millie would have to economise, and for the first time since his marriage he found himself driven into a critical attitude towards his wife. Something within him foresaw a "scene," and Tod hated scenes, and in hating them, asked himself why they should be necessary. Surely it was his wife's duty to back him up, and not to pout those red lips of hers whenever he tried to talk about money?

And suddenly he became aware of the stranger in his wife, a woman whom he did not know. Tod had been very much the slave of the business during the past year; he had met Millie across the table, behaved as the natural man to the natural woman, and yet he felt that they had drifted apart. He had

glimpses of Millie as a golden-haired young woman floating about in a blue or cerise-coloured knitted coat, playing tennis, eating chocolates, reading cheap novels, gadding about to other women's houses, and receiving other women into hers. She was out a very great deal, and knew people whom Tod had never met. There were phases of her life and of her day of which he was completely ignorant; he had never troubled his head about how she passed her time or where she went, not because he did not care, but because the world seemed good when she was happy. Yet, of late, there had been less sunshine at "Carnarvon," less of that rhapsodic childishness and those melting exclamations of "Oh, Toddy, how lovely!" Clouds? Yes, Tod had been conscious of clouds, but he had not realised their significance.

He left that serious talk till after supper, and then lighting his pipe, began with the jocular air of a man who felt uncomfortable.

"I say, Old Thing, I want to have a talk with you."

Millie was instantly on the alert. When a man pretends to be cheerful he is about to speak on those horrid subjects, retrenchment and reform.

"Oh? What about?"

"The business and the house. Come and sit on the sofa."

But Millie preferred to stay where she was, and to hold sentiment and emotion in reserve.

"I knew you were going to be a sport, dear. The fact is we have had a run of bad luck, and I have got to go easy until I have paid off old Goldstein. What we must do is to live quietly until we have the business solidly established, and all the cars paid

for."

Millie asked him a question.

"What's living quietly? Aren't we living quietly now?"

It was a flank attack, an ambuscade, and Tod was thrown on the defensive.

"We seem to spend a lot. There must be some things we can cut out."

"Supposing you tell me what they are."

"You ought to know more about it than I do. Besides, I don't want to be mean, dear; but you ought to be able to help."

She held aloof and left him the responsibility of suggesting economies, knowing that she held Tod at a disadvantage.

"If you think I'm extravagant, I'd like you to say how I might do things differently."

"We seem to spend a lot on cakes and stuff like that," Tod blurted. "Couldn't you make them at home?"

"With only one servant?"

"You might make them yourself, dear."

"And my clothes, too, I suppose?"

"Some of them. Hang it all, it has got to be done, Old Thing. I'm saving every penny I can in the shop."

She regarded him coldly.

"Have you been round the hotels yet?"

"No, and I don't mean to."

She shrugged.

"There you are; it's always the way; a man expects a woman to do all the dirty work and the scraping."

"Don't," said Tod. "Don't talk like that, dear. It hurts."

She had meant it to hurt, but she let him kiss her.

"All right; we'll cut things down in the house, but don't grumble if——"

"I shan't grumble."

He didn't, even though his wife advertised her economies, and served them like a bad egg under his nose. Millicent's theory was that if you make a man uncomfortable and deprive him of his little luxuries, he will develop energy and show a more aggressive spirit in the acquisition of money. She cut off Tod's egg at breakfast, served him up unsavoury sorts of hashes, limited him to milk puddings, and warned him against wasting the gas. She made herself a dress, a flagrantly ugly and dowdy dress, and wore it like a martyr when Tod was there to see. Once or twice when he came home in the evening he found her lying on the sofa and complaining that she had a headache, and Tod was the tender husband.

"Poor wifey! How did it happen?"

"I'm tired. It's the work in the house. I've been doing the washing."

She had washed three handkerchiefs and a camisole; Bella—the maid—had dealt with the rest. But Tod was impressed, and he accepted his reduced rations and all the main discomforts of his wife's economies, and he never murmured. His patience and his good temper annoyed Millie. The primitive woman in her would have had more respect for a

man who got up and raged, and then rushed out with violence to spoil his neighbour. She did not understand Tod; she began to think him a fool.

But Millie's personal economies were not prominent. She did not curtail her own pleasures, her gossips and her gaddings about, the little social excitements of which Tod knew nothing. She ate her sweet cakes at tea, when Tod had a sloppy cup and a couple of dry biscuits at the shop; she bought her chocolates, went to the theatre and the cinema, and ran bills at the drapers. She did not wear that home-made dress on any of her expeditions, and her vanity found Shaston seafront a mirror of delight.

Tod had friends in Shaston who were wiser in the ways of Western's wife than the husband who stood grimly to business in his garage. Mrs. Western was "fast." She was not fastidious, and not too proud to amuse herself with "pick-ups" on the front, strange young men who were out for the sex adventure during their holidays by the sea. Millie bathed. She went to the beach concerts, and struck up an acquaintance with the funny man of the troupe, a swarthy person with a look of sensual self-assurance and a prominent lower lip. Millie thought him "frightfully funny and so smart." Also, he was rather deliciously bold and gave her guilty thrills.

People noticed her. It was part of her tragedy that she could never escape notice, with that red mouth and that shining head of hair. It was not the girl's fault. Nature had designed her to be a woman of pleasure, a creature of strong appetites, and, provoking the same appetites in others, richly coloured creature to be captured and embraced. In Millie's case it was marriage that was wrong. She was a provider of pleasure, not for one man, but

many.

Bob Twine had taken an interest in Tod's marriage, and he was one of those who beheld the ripening of Tod's wife. Twine hated her as a man often hates a woman when he has had his will of her and then sees her fool his friend. Twine was a moocher, a "parade monger," an expert in his knowledge of "girls." He avoided Millie, and yet held her in view, and that roving soldier's eye of his saw all that was happening.

Bob Twine had yet another man inside himself. He was a lovable reprobate, amusing, cynical, generous, an admirer of the virtues that he himself would not cultivate. He had an affection for Mossup and a clear admiration for Mossup's wife. "She's straight," that was all he had to say of her, "and it takes something for a pretty woman to be straight." He went often to the Mossups' cottage, and sometimes they talked of Tod and Tod's marriage, seriously and like good friends who wished Tod nothing but happiness.

"The kid's made a mess of it," Twine confided to Mossup. "How do I know? Because I'm a bad lot myself, and you want to be a bad lot to know anything about women."

"How about me, Bob?"

"You! You know as much about women as I know about the Bible. One of the few good ones took you by the collar and you ought to be grateful."

"I am, Twine, I'm very grateful," and his weak eyes grew moist; "but do you think that Tod's wife is —is immoral?"

Twine gave one of his short laughs.

"Same as me. I can't keep away from the women, old chap; they're so gorgeous. And Millie Western is just like me—with a difference. She can't keep away from the men, the men who can bite. But she's a liar, I'm not a liar."

Arthur Mossup looked worried, and worry had tended to become a fixed factor in his life during the last six months. Like Tod, he was struggling in the world of unbridled competition, and the little business was like a half stifled plant making a pathetic struggle to get at the light and the public. Mossup was hard up, desperately hard up, and Olive was expecting a baby. The good fellow was not only a much harassed draper but a household drudge, and his wife adored him.

"Arthur's such a dear," she told Twine. "If only we could have a little bit of luck!"

"You deserve it," he said, and added savagely, "some day I'll go round with a red flag and a hatchet."

He left half a sovereign in Mossup's pocket after they had come near quarrelling over that piece of gold.

"Take it, you silly blighter. What do I want it for? It would only be thrown away."

"You're a good chap, Twine; you don't do yourself justice."

"Don't I? You go and ask some of the girls."

Now poor Mossup's worries culminated in a crisis that caught his pale pride shivering like a half starved saint in a winter wind. Olive had given birth to a boy; she had been very near death in the anguish of that night, and her husband had about

five shillings in his cashbox. They were in debt, too, to the tradesmen, and Olive wanted coal and delicacies. Poor Mossup's heart was sore.

Tod was smoking his pipe in his den at "Carnarvon" and reading a trade journal, when he heard the door-bell ring. It was the maid's evening out, and Millie was posing on the sofa with one of her headaches, so Tod went to the front door. He found Arthur Mossup standing there, a melancholy figure in the raw murk of a November evening, his spectacles wet with rain and his seedy old black mackintosh flapping open at the throat.

"Hallo, Arthur! Come in."

Mossup was nervous and confidential.

"Can I have a few words with you, Western—alone, I mean?"

"Come along to my den, old chap."

The drawing-room door opened while Mossup was making a great business of wiping his boots on the door-mat, and Tod's wife came to see to whom Tod was speaking in the hall. Mossup looked frightened directly she appeared.

"Oh, it's you!"

"Good evening, Mrs. Western."

"Arthur has just strolled in for a chat. We are going to have a smoke in my den."

Tod carried him off, and Tod's wife sat in the drawing-room and listened to the sound of their voices. It was Mossup who did most of the talking, and in a jerky, excited and yet apologetic way, Tod's voice breaking in sympathetically from time to time. Mossup did not stay long. Millie heard the two men

come into the hall, and Tod opened the front door while Mossup was putting on his mackintosh.

“God bless you, Western, God bless you, old man.”

Poor Mossup gulped out his gratitude, made a blind grab at Tod’s hand, shook it, and blundered out into the night.

Tod was the son of his father, and perhaps he remembered that evening so many years ago when Mr. Jacks had taken away those crisp notes from No. 13 Spaniards Row. Tod turned back with a glow at the heart and found his wife standing in the doorway of the drawing-room. Her part was to play the part of Tod’s mother; but her hands were not the hands of Nancy Western, but the greedy paws of a selfish and sensual young woman.

“What did he want?”

Her voice was sharp and suspicious.

“Olive has just had a baby, and the poor old chap’s hard up.”

“I thought he had sneaked in to cadge. You didn’t give him anything?”

“Of course I did,” said Tod.

“How much?”

“Ten pounds.”

“You fool!” she said, “you silly fool!”

She was furious, and her mean fury astonished Tod.

“Chucking money away like that, and then expecting me to scrape in the house! You soft-headed idiot! He’ll never pay you back.”

"I don't expect him to," said Tod. "I suppose I can do what I like with my own money."

The glow had gone out of his heart, and there was a frost in his blue eyes. He remembered suddenly how his mother had kissed his father on that night. And the pride fell out of Tod's enterprise, his pride in the business and the home. He walked past his wife, slammed the door of his den, lit a pipe and smoked furiously. The woman had revealed herself, and the revelation was the beginning of Tod's disillusionment.

Chapter Twenty-three

That winter saw the beginning of an unlovely home.

Tod's wife had called him a fool for being generous to an old friend, and those bitter words of hers were never recalled. Millie had all the obtuseness of the little egoist. She did not know how deeply she had wounded her man, that she had challenged and affronted all that was best in him, and that such an insult is not forgotten. Tod might have forgiven her, but she did not seem to realise that she had sinned against the man in him, and that forgiveness was necessary.

And so they entered upon that most damnable of all states, a state of silent and gradual hostility and of spiritual estrangement. The sex spell had passed; the glamour of it had ceased to blind the man's eyes, and there was no beautiful comradeship to take its place. The boy and girl affair was dead, and Tod found himself living with a woman who began to betray a

moral obtuseness that shocked his secret soul. The "Giggles" of Pentworth had reappeared, and Tod stared at the apparition with eyes of profound dismay.

She had called him a fool because his heart had gone out to poor old Mossup, who wanted coal and food for a sick wife!

There were moments when Tod struggled passionately against this disillusionment. He was lonely, worried, troubled about the future, and he tried to get the woman in Millie back into his arms, but she had grown strangely cold, and Tod was sensitive.

"Oh, shut up; I don't want to be worried."

So he left her alone, wondering why she had changed towards him, and searching his own heart on the chance that the fault might be his own. He could not help dating her change of temper from the time when the business had ceased to thrive and money had become difficult. He had forced economies upon her, and he remembered so well that the "Giggles" of Pentworth had scorned the boy who had no pocket-money to spend.

Tod did a foolish but lovable thing. He went out into King William Street one afternoon, bought a set of silver fox furs, and took them home with him that night. He would show her that, though he had to be careful, he was not mean, and that he had not forgotten her economies.

He hid the box under the sofa, and played the lover's game.

"Someone has left a parcel," he told her, with a touch of his old affectionate shyness.

"Oh, what parcel?"

"You had better look."

She glanced round the room, and then at Tod's mock solemn face.

"What's the joke?"

"I think it's rather a nice joke."

"I'm not good at guessing," she said tartly.

Tod winced, and made haste to see something under the sofa.

"What's that—a cardboard box?"

He had expected her to dash at it like a child, tear off the string, and turn back the tissue paper; but she put a slow hand under the sofa, drew out the box, and her face was the face of a woman preparing to tell a lie.

"Gifford's! I haven't bought anything at Gifford's for six months."

"But I have," said Tod.

And then she understood.

"Oh, Toddy!"

She had the fur stole round her throat, and her hands in the muff, and she was looking in the mirror. She ran and kissed Tod.

"Aren't they just lovely! You are a dear boy."

That night they were lovers again, and her red mouth gave him kisses.

Tod's fragment of a St. Luke's summer lasted just three days. He was opening his letters in the office when he came across one that made him feel strangely sick at heart. It was a bill from Horrox &

Horrox's for thirty-three pounds five shillings and sixpence, and it was accompanied by a curt note that galled Tod's pride. "We beg to remind you that this account has been outstanding for over a year, and has been rendered to Mrs. Western thrice previously. Unless it is settled immediately we regret to say we shall be compelled to take other measures."

Tod pulled out his cheque book, set his teeth, wrote a cheque for the amount, and sent it round to Horrox & Horrox's by the hands of the garage boy. The paying of that bill necessitated his drawing upon money that he had been scraping together to pay his quarterly tribute to the Semite of Wardour Street. Tod was angry, and with the anger of a man who felt that he had been deceived. Why had she hidden that bill? Why hadn't she told him?

He did not go home till late in the evening, for he had not the heart to go home. And yet, after all, it was such a petty thing. Perhaps she had forgotten, perhaps she had been saving money out of her housekeeping allowance in order to pay that bill. Tod walked five miles before he turned in at his own gate; he had been trying to invent excuses for Millie, to save that little warmth of summer that had come back into their lives.

Millie had been playing bridge at a house across the road. He found her sitting in front of the fire, her shoes lying by the fender, and a box of chocolates in her lap. She had been annoyed by something that had happened during the evening, and Tod's glum and worried face suggested bad news.

He pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Tired, little girl?"

He was quite gentle, hating that bit of paper in

his pocket, and hoping with all heart that she would be able to explain it away.

"Where have you been? I thought you were coming to the Spencers' with me?"

"I've been rather worried, and I stayed late at the shop."

"You always are worried," she said peevishly.

And then Tod pulled out Horrox & Horrox's receipted bill.

"I got this to-day, Millie. It rather upset my calculations."

"What is it?" she asked him sharply, with a narrowing of the eyes and one hand outstretched.

"A bill."

Her whole face hardened.

"Nothing very wonderful in that, is there?"

"I didn't expect it, that's all. You might have told me, Millie."

He passed her the bill, and she sat up and stared at it, pulling at her lower lip with a crooked forefinger. She was angry—angry with Horrox's and angry with Tod.

"The fools shouldn't have sent it to you."

His eyes brightened.

"You were going to pay it?"

"Me?"

Her hard and sulky eyes killed the light in Tod's.

"How was I going to pay it? Save farthings out of the grocer's bill! I wanted it kept back till things

were going better."

"Well, I've paid it," said Tod grimly, "but it hasn't made things easier for me."

And then he softened to her, hating to see her face so hard and sullen.

"I wish you'd tell me things, dear. I haven't kept anything back from you. Besides, it's not good for the business to be threatened for not paying your bills. Horrox's letter made me mad."

She gave him a quick, appraising glance, and then stared sulkily at the fire.

"It's not the only one," she said; "you may as well know."

He looked at her blankly, mastered a sudden spasm of anger, and became more quietly and grimly serious. Tod was no whimperer. Games had taught him not to squeal when he was hurt.

"You had better tell me. How much do you owe?"

She jigged a foot.

"About seventy pounds."

"As much as that! It's got to be settled."

She expected him to explode, make a scene, and she would have understood such a storm and known how to meet it; but Tod did not explode. He seemed to grow quieter. And his self-control irritated his wife and baffled her. It was like storming at a man who kept reading a book.

"I want you to realise what all this means."

He pulled his chair close to hers, picked up a book, and, using the back of Horrox's bill, he began to jot down figures. His deliberation and his

calmness frightened her a little. She had no complete understanding of the real Tod in her husband, and she noticed his compressed lips and the intent steadiness of his blue eyes, and almost hated him for his self-restraint. There was no flurry, no jerking movement of the hand that was pencilling figures on the back of Horrox's bill. In the words of the vulgarly undisciplined: "I could have screamed." That was the effect Tod's patience had upon his wife. What a silly, serious fool he was! Why didn't he stamp about and swear? Why didn't he hit her in the face—master her with his man's strength? Her sensual nature would have reacted to physical violence. She might have fought back at him like a wild cat, but she would have ended by wiping his shoes.

Tod was too finely made to be the mate or master of such a woman, but he succeeded in frightening her, and she hated him for the grave and dispassionate way in which he did it.

"I want to go through these figures with you, Millie."

"Oh, all right!"

He bent sideways towards her, using the pencil as a pointer.

"This shows what we have in hand, and what the business brings in roughly each month. This column here shows what I owe, and what the business and the house cost each month. It makes a pretty serious sum on the wrong side. I had kept a hundred pounds out of the thousand as a reserve in case of emergencies. I shall have to use it to pay these bills."

She stared at the pencilled figures, and swung a restless and rebellious foot.

"I thought you were going to make such a success of it," she said.

Tod held his temper fast by the throat.

"And so I may. This is going to cripple me for a time. Can't you realise, dear, that a young business has to be nursed, that it can't carry bills like this? We are sailing on the edge of bankruptcy. If matters don't mend we shall have to give up this house."

He had frightened her, and frightened her so seriously that she began to hate him. She was sullen, and quite untouched by his gentleness, the gentleness of a man who was utterly in earnest. But she did not want to give up "Carnarvon." Her fear roused in her a strange spirit of comradeship, the comradeship that unites two people who are in danger of being swamped in an open boat. She began to look round for something that she could use as a baler, while Tod stuck to the oars and kept the boat's nose towards the shore.

It is more than probable that Tod's wife could have saved the business if she had been given full authority and allowed to use her cunning. She had an instinctive appreciation of what "business" meant in a town like Shaston, and she had none of Tod's scruples. Messrs. Pumpelly and Britt would have found her a very notable rival, a handsome young woman with a complete and natural knowledge of how to bribe men and make them serve her. Had Tod been a man with a commercial imagination and a cynical determination to make money, he would have stuck to the office and the garage, put Millie in a car and let her play the part of out-of-door partner. No sly women touting for votes at an election would have shown more ingenuity. And she would have had no mercy on the men whom she employed. Tod

was too generous and too straight.

She even proposed some such adventure, seeing herself as a golden-haired young fascinatress, interviewing hotel managers and dropping smiles and half-sovereigns into the hands of persuadable porters.

"I bet I'd make things hum."

But Tod would not have it. He was not inclined to see his wife turning herself into a business tout.

Then Tod caught "flu," and lay worrying himself to death over the quarterly tribute that was due to the Semite of Wardour Street. He was short of the money by ten pounds, and he could think of nothing else. Worry and aspirin scuffled together over the question of his temperature, and the drug had the worst of the squabble.

He kept babbling about selling things, and in the weakness of his fever he allowed the truth about Mr. Burgetrode to slip into his wife's hands. She had wanted him to write to Mr. Burgetrode.

"I can't. He cut me off, you know."

"When you married me?"

"What's it matter? I want an orange, dear. I want to suck an orange."

The woman in her was touched for the moment, but much of her tenderness was swallowed up in her anger against Mr. Burgetrode. "Thought I wasn't good enough, did he? Mean old beast!"

Tod talked delirious nonsense half the night.

"Ten pounds—I want ten pounds. Arthur had it; can't ask Arthur. Beastly Jew. Sell the piano and send him a cheque. Oh, darling, my head aches so!"

Listening to his child's anguish, Millie came by an idea. Tod was better next morning, but utterly miserable and weak.

"I am going up to see that man in Wardour Street," she said.

He protested. "But you can't."

"Of course I can. What's his name—Goldstein?"

"Yes—Maurice Goldstein. But—Millie——"

"Don't you worry, old dear. I'll talk him around and explain things. I dare say he's not a bad sort, some bald-headed old blighter——"

"He's quite young," said Tod, "not more than forty. If he'd give me another month——"

"You leave it to me," laughed the young woman.

So Millie dressed herself in those silver fox furs and her most fashionable hat, scented herself, gave her eyelashes the faintest of touches, and travelled up to town to interview Mr. Goldstein.

Chapter Twenty-four

Tod's wife found Mr. Maurice Goldstein sitting in a revolving chair in front of a rolled-top desk. She had been kept waiting in the outer office for half an hour before Mr. Goldstein troubled to see her, and he did not look up when the clerk showed her into his private room.

Maurice Goldstein was writing a letter.

"Excuse me a moment."

The politeness was purely perfunctory. He sat at

the desk like a gourmand absorbed in a meal, his chin thrust forward with a queer suggestion of truculence, the penholder looking lost in his fat white hand. Millie, the woman, collected her impressions. The man was prematurely bald, a ring of curly black hair running like a wreath round an egg-shaped head. His neck was the neck of middle age, with an incipient overflow where it met his collar. He wore white spats, and his thighs and buttocks were huge. Millie had only a partial view of his face, a glimpse of thick pouting lips between the full curve of nose and chin.

He was deliberate. The letter was put into an envelope, addressed, and the pen laid on its brass holder before his fat thighs swung round in the pedestal chair. He had begun to speak while the chair was still swinging and before he had seen Millie's face.

"What is it you want? I've got an appointment in ten minutes."

And then his sensual brown eyes seemed to set in a surprised stare.

Millie, the woman, smiled at him.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Goldstein, but I have come to see you for my husband."

The Jew looked and said nothing. The sex in her was flowing into him like wine.

"My husband is ill with influenza. He owes you a cheque or something. I don't know anything about money; and he was worrying, so I said I would come and see you."

Mr. Goldstein's eyes filled suddenly with an amused, brown light.

"So many people owe me money, but it is not often, madam, that I see their wives."

"Do they? How jolly to be owed money."

He made a fat movement of his chin.

"And not to get it—what!"

"Oh, you get it all right," she said audaciously.

The Jew was pleased.

"My husband's too easy, you know," she went on with confidential friendliness. "I know you helped to start him, but he wants a few straight talks from a man who can make money. I've tried——"

He was rubbing one big fist in the palm of his other hand.

"And you said you knew nothing."

"Did I?" and she laughed. "Anyhow, I do the economising. No, I don't like it."

"You wouldn't," he said with an insolent and intimate gleam of the eyes.

He sat there and basked while she told him of Tod's difficulties. In fact, Tod cut a sorry figure in Maurice Goldstein's office, having all his money assets exposed to the cynical eyes of the Jew, and his moral parts figured and discussed by a young woman who did not know the meaning of the word loyalty. Goldstein was amused, more than amused. He was astride of a great advantage, and he made the most of his mount.

"Excuse me. I'll look up the transaction."

He did not ring for a clerk, but turned up "Western's Garage" in a private ledger of his own. The figures seemed to amuse him, for Millie saw him

smiling over the book.

"You come from Shaston-on-Sea, Mrs. Western. I happen to be interested in Shaston."

"Oh?" said Millie. "How?"

Goldstein pulled out his watch.

"Lunching anywhere?" he asked curtly.

"Somewhere, by myself."

"I'd like the honour of giving you lunch."

"What about that appointment?"

His brown eyes held hers.

"It's off. Will you come?"

"It's very nice of you, Mr. Goldstein, but I——"

"Please yourself," he said, with a sensual smile and a bluntness that she understood. "I want to have a talk about Shaston and your husband's business."

"I really am rather hungry," she allowed, looking up at him under mischievous lashes.

He rang the bell.

"Smith, get a taxi. I shan't be back till three."

Tod's wife returned to Shaston like a cat that has been lapping cream. It appeared that Maurice Goldstein was interested financially in the new Regent's Hotel that was to be opened on the seafront. It was a very big hotel, one among half a dozen that were being floated by a syndicate in various south coast towns. Goldstein had his big hands in the business; he had his big hands in many businesses, and the smell of his money had entered Millie' nostrils. He was the sort of powerful and cynically sensual man who can be very attractive to a sensual

woman. The Assyrian bull in him was more than symbolical.

Tod was eating an orange when his wife opened the bedroom door. He looked gaunt and grey in the gaslight; his head an untidy mop, his chin all brown stubble. And, somehow, he looked poor.

"I settled it," she began, vaguely patronising. "Goldstein's not a bad sort. He won't press you."

Tod's big eyes filled with relief.

"That's good. I've been lying here all day, worrying my head off. How did you manage it?"

"Just common sense. Besides, you old silly, it's the first time you have been late with the money, and Goldstein's out to back you, and not smash you up. It's just common sense."

She did not tell Tod that she had lunched with Goldstein, or that the man was interested in the new Regent's Hotel. It was no business of Tod's to know that Goldstein was coming down to stay at Shaston. Millie foresaw possibilities in the situation, a chance of dabbling with her own hands in financial experiments. She knew that men could be very useful, but Tod was too touchy a fool to be told about such diplomacies. She fancied she knew how to manipulate Maurice Goldstein.

Of that very sinister period in Tod's life there is little that is worth the telling. Its culminating incident collected the whole glare of the affair's significance. Some three months passed, and in spite of all his efforts Tod still owed the Semite of Wardour Street some sixty pounds, but the summer season was at hand, and Tod forecasted a new briskness in the business. He had not been swamped

by any more unexpected bills, and Millie appeared to be spending less money. She had developed a new penchant for going up to town once a week and buying her groceries and household necessaries at the Stores, and Tod had nothing to say against it, since she could prove that it saved money. Also, she seemed more contented, more satisfied with something.

Early in May Tod went North to take the delivery of a client's new car at the Sangster Company's works, and to drive it down to Shaston. He told Millie that he expected to be away for two nights, as the new car was rather an expensive production, and he had no intention of pushing her through a speed trial on the way down. He meant to stay a night in the North, and break the journey somewhere near Oxford. Millie said that she envied him the drive, gave him a packet of sandwiches to put in his little black handbag, and then darted out and sent a telegram.

The Regent's Hotel had just opened for the summer season, and she dined there that night with Maurice Goldstein. The Jew had a big car with him, and after dinner they went out in the car, Goldstein driving himself, and they got lost in the lanes among the Bramber woods. The lights were out when they drove back to Shaston.

Now if Tod had kept to his programme, and not bustled the new "Sangster" southwards on the afternoon of his arrival, he might have remained the blind man in the home for months to come. "You can take her away at once," said the works manager, "she's O.K., and won't want touching for a hundred miles." So Tod took her away, knocked a hundred and fifty miles off the journey before putting up for

the night, and at five o'clock next afternoon he was within ten miles of Shaston and speeding along the London road with the woods all green under a clean, spring sky.

"Wonder if she'd do Furnace Hill on second?" thought Tod.

The experiment challenged him. He swung the car to the left at the next lane, and saw an A. A. scout peddling up the hill, looking very hot and thirsty.

The man got off his machine and signalled to Tod to stop.

"Not going Shaston way are you, sir?"

"I am," said Tod.

"I just got a message from a boy that there's a car broke down the other side of Furnace Hill. I'm going to 'phone up a garage."

"I'm your man," said Tod. "I'm Western of Western's Garage. I'm going round by Furnace Hill, and I can stop and see what's wrong."

"Then I can leave it to you," said the scout; "I want my tea. Get it at Lamb's Corner."

Tod drove blindly towards his disillusionment. The new car soared up Furnace Hill on second speed, and Tod let her "free wheel" down the opposite slope, delighting in the noiseless glide of her and the taut silence of her youth. Furnace Hill had formed part of the old forest, yet had remained a wilderness of gorse, broom, bracken and brambles, with thickets of Scots fir and groves of straggling oaks. Tod knew it well, and by the bend where a famous old yew sent its black plumes up into the blue Tod came upon a

yellow car standing derelict at the side of the road. Tod's car had come coasting silently round the corner. He pulled up, got out, and looked about for some sign of the owner of the yellow car.

Then he heard voices, and a woman's laugh—a laugh that ended in an ecstatic and giggling scream. There was a little wood here, full of bluebells and surrounded by masses of yellow broom. Tod pushed through a gap in the brushwood, and came upon a grassy space, a smooth trickle of green that lost itself like water in the shadows of the wood. He saw a girl and a man here. The man was bending over the girl, kissing her throat with a sort of savage violence. Her bright hair and face were visible above his dark and gluttonous head, and her eyes were closed like the eyes of a dreaming, sensual cat. Her arms were round the man's neck.

And Tod recognised his wife.

He remembered making some sort of noise in his throat. He remembered the two figures disentangling themselves, the man getting up clumsily on his hands and knees, and turning a savage and sheepish jowl. The woman sat up, dead white, patting her hair with her hands, and staring at nothing with expressionless blue eyes.

Tod recognised Maurice Goldstein.

"What do you mean by kissing my wife?"

Even in the thick of his anger he felt the paltriness of it all, the sordid smear on the face of his wrath.

The man grinned. He looked yellow, but there was a savage tawniness in his eyes.

"Because she asked me to."

"You cad!" said Tod.

He felt that nothing mattered—nothing but the necessity for hammering this bulk of blackguardism with his fists. And hammer him he did, though Goldstein made a fight of it with a heavy, blundering ferocity that panted and got out of breath. Tod smashed him in the face till the white bulge of it was all blood, and his big mouth a dripping thing full of teeth and redness.

Tod's wife stood and watched, pulling at her lower lip with her forefinger, her nostrils quivering. There was something in Tod's eyes that fascinated her, a blue glare, a quick, calculating fury. She heard the smashes he landed on the other man's face.

Goldstein went down, dazed, his teeth showing in a bloody, snarling grin.

Tod's wife fawned suddenly upon her man.

"Oh, Tod, you licked him."

Tod just turned his head slightly, and gave her an oblique stare.

"Come on," he said, "come on, damn you!"

She followed him with extraordinary meekness, but loitered a moment by the yellow car.

"My coat's in here."

She reached for a fur coat, but Tod's eyes had become the merciless eyes of a man who had been shocked out of all illusions.

"Leave that alone. I didn't give it you."

She left it alone, and, following him into the other car, sat staring stiffly in front of her.

Tod drove down the hill, that blue glare still in

his eyes, and Goldstein's blood showing on his knuckles. He felt that he had come to the end of the world, that all the conscious pride had gone out of his life, and that there was nothing left to him now that he had thrashed the man who had debauched his wife. He had trusted her, and the reaction was all the more fierce.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked her suddenly.

He was the master for the moment, and there was a whimpering note in her voice.

"Oh, Tod, don't be so horrid! I couldn't help it. He took me by surprise."

"How?"

"I'd been out with him in the car, and we had a breakdown, and we were just waiting for help. He seemed to go mad suddenly just before you came."

Tod did not believe her.

"Did he give you that fur coat?"

"He made me take it. I didn't want to offend him."

"But what were you with him for at all? It can't have been the first time."

"How beastly you are! I was trying to help you and the business. He's got such influence. Don't you see?"

"Good God!"

His nausea was complete. Her moral obliquity, the coarse cynicism of her confession shocked the very deeps of his manhood. And he did not believe her. He could not forget that look of sensual rapture

he had seen upon her face.

"Well, that's the end of it," he said.

"What d'you mean?"

"I have got to pay that blackguard what I owe him. I shall sell things and give up the house. I don't see that the business is much use—now."

She said nothing. Tod's face convinced her that there was nothing to be said. But she began to hate him again, this inopportune, straightforward fool who had blundered in and spoilt the cunning of her intrigue. She would have looked at it as a "bit of fun," fooling two men and getting what she wanted. Lots of women did it.

She told him so, and he flashed round at her with sudden fury.

"Shut up—damn you! You don't understand."

He drove with cool recklessness into Shaston, and pulled up at the end of Duke Street.

"You'd better go—back to the house."

He had refused to say "home," and she noticed it.

"All right. Are you coming?"

He drove on as though he had not heard her.

Chapter Twenty-five

Tod drove the new car into his garage and switched off the engine, and when the steel heart of the machine ceased to beat, something in Tod gave up also. He felt tired, unstrung, yet curiously callous. He mooned vacantly about the place for five

minutes, like a man on the edge of some great sickness, and then habit caught him and sent him into the little office to see if there were any letters.

He was opening an envelope when he noticed Maurice Goldstein's blood on his hands.

"Filth!"

Strangely nauseated, he went out and shouted to Love, who was changing a burst tyre on one of the taxis.

"Get me a bucket of water and some soap, will you?"

He stood there and washed, and the act of washing touched some live memory in him, a memory of his father's bloody knuckles and all the passionate idealism of his own childhood. He remembered his mother and the white flame of her scorn and her anger, and how that other blackguard had been thrashed and paid. A sudden surge of emotion rose in Tod's throat. He straightened and stood wiping his clenched hands on his handkerchief, realising this money-shop of his and the things that it had made him suffer. He seemed to see everywhere the fat white face of that Jew, the face he had punched into a bloody pulp. The white cans of oil on the shelf had the colour of it; the greasy smears on the floor were like the slimy marks of a beast's track.

"Good God!" said Tod; "it's his, it belongs to him. I wouldn't touch it again."

He turned to Love.

"Here, you can leave that tyre; I want to lock up."

Love scratched his nose with a black thumb.

"Jim's out, at the station. And there's a theatre to

do at eight."

"All right. That can finish the day."

He walked back into the office and wrote a letter to the owner of the new car. He wrote also to a firm of solicitors in Shaston, Newton and Smythe, and asked for an appointment with the senior partner at eleven o'clock next morning. Later, he locked up the shop, posted the letters at the general office, and loitered a moment as though undecided where to go.

Some impulse sent him wandering into old Shaston, the Shaston of his early days, the Shaston of the Flowerdews and of Kitty of the soft eyes. And Tod wandered and dreamed. He knew that something tragic had happened to his life, that all the little strivings and ambitions of the last three years had left him at the crossroads, with a stick and a bundle in his hand. "Carnarvon" had come tumbling down like a child's house of bricks. "Giggles," the little minx of Pentworth, had proved herself the mother of the woman.

Tod's mind was like a room hung with many pictures—memories; memories that were so vivid and so significant that he marvelled at his own blindness. Had not his mother said to him: "Tod, never marry until you have been in love ten times." Yet what a wonderful comradeship it had been, that marriage of his mother and his father, and Tod's heart yearned that night towards the memory of those parents who were dead. If only his mother had been alive, if he could have talked to her, put his head on her knees! Yes, he felt like that.

And Mr. Burgetrode! Mr. Burgetrode had told him the truth. What had he got out of marriage, anyway? It had made a money slave of him, tempted him to

do mean and cowardly things, and ended by mocking the elemental pride of his manhood. His woman had ——! But Tod fought the vile thoughts off and thrust them aside, realising even in the depths of his disillusionment, that foul thoughts make a man cruel and a coward. He did not mean to be either cruel or a coward, even if life had proved him a fool.

Tod wandered down Ponsonby Place, looking up at Mr. Eli Flowerdew's name on the familiar shop. He found himself wondering whether he would have been happy with Kitty, and some boyish instinct cried out that she would have loved him as his mother had loved his father. Memories, memories; they were big and heavy in this throat! Dusk was falling, and he saw the White Cliff, like a great grey ghost watching over the black fishing boats and the sea. Bob Twine had taught him to swim down yonder, and under the White Cliff he had spoken his last words to Kitty Flowerdew.

Tod crunched along the shingle towards the blue hollow of the night, past the black fishing boats, till there was nothing but the lonely sweep of the beach and the swish of the sea. An old hull lay derelict here with shingle banked high about its black rump, and Tod sat down with his back to the boat and watched the tide come in. It was very dark now, and darkness lay upon the waters, but a stealthy sheen of silver in the east told him the moon was rising.

He did not want to go back to that house; he did not want to move; he felt he could sit there all night. It was clean and beautiful and still, and Shaston seemed far away. Good God! how he hated the place, how he hated everything save the quiet sea and the rising moon. What beasts people were! And then he thought again of his mother and little Kitty

Flowerdew. No, there were good people in the world, and Tod's sturdiness stiffened its back. He had got to make a fresh start, somehow, get out of that doll's-house. And Millie——? He felt a great loathing and a great pity for his wife.

Tod had dreamed there for an hour, and the moon was a great white shield over the sea, when he heard someone walking on the shingle. The footsteps came his way; slow, heedless footsteps that seemed to take no account of distance or of time. Tod looked up and saw the black shape of a girl. Her face was turned towards the sea, and there was something poignantly familiar to him in the slim shape of her, the slight droop of her head, and the curve of her throat. She stood there a moment, a figure of indescribable hopelessness and desolation, not seeing the man sitting with his back against the boat, conscious of nothing but herself and the sea.

"Oh, Mother, Mother!"

Tod heard the words quite distinctly, and the voice was the voice of Kitty Flowerdew. She seemed to hesitate a moment, and Tod's heart seemed to stand still. It was Edwin Rook's wife, Kitty of the soft eyes, following in the footsteps of her mother, that mother who had drowned herself on Shaston beach.

Suddenly, he saw her unpin her hat, drop it on the shingle, and walk towards the soft swish of the incoming tide. Tod was up instantly, the moonlight in his face.

"Kitty!"

She stopped dead and stood in an anguish of terror and helplessness, but she did not turn to see who had called her by name. She heard Tod's footsteps on the shingle, and shivered like a woman

who has borne a child and is weak and cold with pain.

"Kitty. It's Tod."

She drooped, and suddenly began to weep, and Tod stood there, greatly shocked, and wanting to hold her hand. The bitterness of his own tragedy lost itself in her tears.

"Kitty, what's the matter, dear?"

She wept unrestrainedly and with the frank anguish of a child.

"Oh—don't—please—Tod."

He remembered so well that little, helpless cry of hers. He had taken her hand.

"Come and sit down, dear. It's so quiet and peaceful."

She let him take her to the old boat, and they sat down in its shadow, Tod deep in the waters of pity, the girl still weeping out her heart.

"I want to drown myself—oh—I want to drown myself," she said, with an anguish that was naked and unconcealed.

Tod's upper lip quivered.

"Tell me all about it—dear. I came here because I was miserable, and you came here too."

"I can't bear it," she said, "I can't bear it any longer. Let me drown myself, Tod—dear Tod. I'm only in the way."

Tod felt torn between a sense of his own helplessness and a fierce desire to go and smash somebody, the man who had been a brute to this child.

"You mustn't, dear. Try and talk to me. I've been very unhappy, Kitty. It ought to make us friends."

"I can't talk about it," she said brokenly; "they want me out of the way."

"Who are 'they'?" Tod asked very gently.

"Edwin—and——"

"Don't tell me if it hurts too much."

"And—my sister."

"Good God!" said Tod.

A second sex horror thrust itself upon him, a horror that was more brutal than the tragedy of his own marriage. So Rook had tired of this dark-eyed child, and found that vixen of a sister ready to intrigue with him? Lena Flowerdew had always been jealous of Kitty, and Tod had fancied that she had wanted Edwin Rook, but how had it happened, how could two people have been so devilishly callous?

He did not know what to say to Kitty. There seemed nothing to be said.

"Are you sure, dear?" he asked her.

She caught her breath and shuddered.

"Yes, I saw them. Oh, I can't talk about it! And Edwin hates me now; he thinks me a fool, and he was angry when baby died. He was only angry—but it broke my heart."

"Poor Kitty!" said Tod, putting an arm round her.

She whimpered again, for she had been a lonely and frightened little woman with no one to talk to.

"Of course he ought to have married Lena. Lena always wanted him, and hated me because he

wanted me then. She's more suited to him; she's hard, and thinks of nothing but business and money; and she wouldn't be afraid of him."

Tod's teeth came together. So she was afraid of Rook; he bullied her. It seemed like torturing a caged bird.

"I don't understand," he said; "I couldn't understand anybody being rough to you, Kitty. What's to be done?"

"There's nothing to be done," she answered, with tragic simplicity. "I ought to do what Mother did. If baby had lived I might have borne it, but now——"

She broke down again, and Tod sat and stared fiercely at the sea.

"Have you told your father?"

"He wouldn't believe me, and Lena's his favourite."

"Haven't you any friends, dear?"

"Not real friends. I couldn't talk to anybody as I've talked to you."

He lifted one of her hands and kissed it.

"That's the finest thing I have ever had said to me, Kitty. Well, I'm going to be your friend, and you can always trust me, dear. I'll think it all over. Now I want you to let me take you home."

"Oh, Tod, I can't!"

"But, dear, try and bear it till something can be done. You know, I used to be in love with you; I wanted to marry you."

"I wish I had married you, Tod," she said; "you wouldn't have been cruel."

He tried to talk to her calmly and sensibly, and to make her realise that he was in utter earnest when he said he meant to be her friend, and so broken was she in spirit that she obeyed him with a meekness that touched his heart. He led her back to Shaston along the shingle, trying to speak to her as he thought his own mother would have spoken. He felt her flinch when they reached the street in which she lived, but she went on, and then paused a little way from the house.

"Don't come any farther, Tod."

"I must see you again, Kitty. I'll walk out there every night till you come."

"Dear Tod," she said, and slipped away in the darkness.

Tod walked home with the soul of him purged and strengthened. There was no light in "Carnarvon," and Tod let himself in silently, lit the gas in the hall, and looked into the empty rooms. Millie had gone to her bedroom; Tod could hear her moving about in the room above, and the thought of her nearness and of her share in his life brought back the vivid presence of his own problem. Kitty Rook's misery had softened him, but he felt that he could not go near his own wife. The physical man in him rebelled.

But he went up and knocked at Millie's door.

"Yes?" said her voice, toneless and sulky; "the door's locked."

"Good night," Tod said mechanically.

He improvised himself a bed in the little spare room, and lay awake thinking of the future. Poor Kitty's tragedy outbid his own. She was so helpless, so humiliated, so much the child hungry for

affection, and Tod wondered what he could do to help her.

But his chivalry was a thing of the air, a dream that was to die with the news of the morning.

Kitty Rook had drowned herself, and in spite of Tod. Some fresh impulse of despair had seized her after he had left her and when the comfort of his comradeship had been withdrawn. She had gone back to the beach, and some boys who were bathing found her body floating next morning under the White Cliff.

Chapter Twenty-six

Tod breakfasted alone. Millie had shirked meeting the expected challenge of his face, and she took her meal in bed, and waited for the sound of Tod's going.

Habit kept him to the clock. He walked down to Duke Street, smoking his favourite bull-dog pipe, and thinking over the things that he had to do. Goldstein would have to be paid at once, some of the furniture sold, and a prospective tenant found for "Carnarvon." Tod was still in doubt about the business, whether he should go on fighting, and trust to the summer season to pull it through. Kitty's eyes seemed to be watching him, and he remembered that he had posed as the strong friend, and had urged her to make a fight for it, while he—Tod—thought over the possibilities. He could not tell a girl to make a fight of it, and then back down himself.

Tod found a letter waiting for him from Newton and Smythe. Love handed it to him with his usually

dirty hand.

"A boy brought it."

Tod was asked to see Mr. Newton at twelve o'clock. The senior partner was engaged at eleven.

Then the owner of the new car called, a middle-aged person who was as excited as a boy.

"She's smart, Western, isn't she? Nice lines, what? And she's fast, I suppose?"

"Climbed Furnace Hill on second," said Tod, wearily.

"Some car! Let's have a look at the engine. I want to take her out and try her."

It was a quarter to twelve when Tod walked down Duke Street on his way to the office of Newton and Smythe. By the clock tower where Duke Street met King William Street and Marlborough Crescent, Tod's path crossed that of a newsboy who was selling the early edition of a local paper.

"Lady drowned at Shaston," shouted the boy.

Tod stopped with a jerk.

"Paper."

"Right, sir."

He stopped by the clock tower and read the news of Kitty's death.

"We regret to announce that the body of Mrs. Kitty Rook was found in the sea this morning near the White Cliff. Mrs. Rook was the younger daughter of our well-known townsman Mr. Eli Flowerdew," &c.

Tod was shocked, shocked to the deeps. So she had drowned herself after all, poor, wounded, broken Kitty, even as her mother had drowned herself fifteen years ago?

"There's nothing else to do, Tod."

Was she right?

Tod had a lump in his throat and the wandering steps of a man who saw nothing for the moment. The driver of one of Mr. Pumpelly's new motor-buses swung the steering-wheel round and bawled at him.

" 'Ere, wake up! Are you going to market?"

"Sorry," said Tod.

"With blokes like you about a man's life ain't worth livin'."

Tod laughed with laughter that was near to tears.

But somehow Kitty's death had shocked the last remnants of commercial vanity out of him. What a sorry game it was, a scramble with men like Flowerdew and Edwin Rook, that fat old cynic Pumpelly, and such money-beasts as Goldstein! There were some men who played the game cleanly, but there were others who would foul you whenever they could do it safely or with advantage, and Tod had an idea that the men who fouled were the men who won. How was it that he had let himself be drawn into this little back-street, swindling business, when he might have been soldiering or sailoring or out in the wilds somewhere, living like a man? Mr. Burgetrode was right, damnably right. He remembered his father's saying about people with penny-three-farthing souls.

So Tod walked into the office of Newton and

Smythe, and presented a new and steel-bright decision to a phlegmatic old solicitor whose creed in life was compromise.

"I want to get out of this business and pay everybody, and I want to get out of it at once," said Tod, "and I want to pay this chap Goldstein to-day."

Mr. Sobersides tried to smooth Tod down.

"There is no need to do anything rash, Mr. Western."

"I'm not doing anything rash," said Tod; "I'm only having a wash and getting rid of my dirty clothes. The furniture in my house is all paid for; so is one of the taxis. Can't you raise money on that?"

"Certainly, when the security has been looked into. Am I to understand that you want us to act between you and this Goldstein, to wind up the business, settle with all your creditors, and reserve as much of your capital as we can?"

"I want everybody paid," said Tod, "and the thing done cleanly. There might be a clear hundred or two left over, but I'm not counting on anything."

Mr. Newton scratched his chin with the end of a pen.

"Look here, my young friend," he said; "let me advise you to hold your tongue for a week and say nothing about selling. Leave it to us. The business is a going concern, and we can sell it as such. You can let us have your books?"

"Of course."

"And perhaps you would like us to hold the matter up for a day or two while you think it over?"

"If I thought it over for ten years," said Tod, "it

wouldn't make any difference. It's a question of conscience."

Old Mr. Newton thought Tod an excitable and rather overinflated young man, but there appeared to be a woman in the case, though Tod had said very little about his wife.

"So you will let me have your books, Mr. Western, and all outstanding accounts, and your pass-book, and the copy of any agreement with this Mr. Goldstein?"

"You shall have them to-night," said Tod.

He walked out of Mr. Newton's office, feeling that he had flung something off his shoulders and that the day was the better for it. He wanted to be conscious of nothing but Kitty, Kitty who in her anguish had refused to accept any compromise and who had carried her secret with her to the sea. There was only one street in Shaston for Tod that morning, the street where she had lived and where he had parted with her only a few hours ago, and he walked down it, and saw the drawn blinds of the house and a few people gaping at it with vulgar curiosity.

Tod stood a moment against the railings of the house opposite, and wondered what Edwin Rook thought of his wife's death. He felt that he wanted to get Rook by the collar, and drag him into the most crowded street of Shaston and thrash him as he deserved to be thrashed. And then someone bumped against Tod, a silly old woman with a vacant face and a claw-like hand clutching a bag.

"Beg pardon. She's in there, isn't she?"

"Who?" Tod asked.

"Why, the woman who drowned herself. Suppose

she'd got into some sort of trouble."

Tod froze. The old woman was looking at the drawn blinds and smiling as though death and life were a mere circus procession.

"They say she had all her clothes on, so it must have been sooicide."

"You old beast," said Tod and walked on.

But in spite of his anger, his heart was softened, and any thought of dramatic and physical interference melted out of his mind. Kitty lay asleep somewhere in that house, the long sleep that even the hands of silly old women could not jeopardise. She was beyond all recriminations, humiliations, anguish, shame. She had kept her secret, and if there were a merciful God, Tod knew that God held her soul, and that these people who had killed her would have to answer for it to Him. And Tod told himself that he would hold her secret sacred. It was too tragic and poignant a thing to be brawled over and advertised by using the toe of a boot. What was the use of telling Rook and the Flowerdews that they were swine? If Kitty's death had not made them realise it, no human words would ever do so.

Tod walked on along the beach to where the old black boat lay half buried in shingle under the White Cliff. He sat down there just where he and Kitty had sat the night before, and the sun shone on him full and clear. It was an exquisite May day, a soft turquoise sky and a calm grey-blue sea, with just the gentlest swish of little waves along the shingle; and the fishing fleet was out, the brown sails dark on the horizon. Far out an old tramp steamer trailed a plume of black smoke, an old blackguard of a boat contentedly smoking its pipe.

Tod sat there in the sun, and suffered this tragedy of a girl's life to turn the edge of his own bitterness. Dead Kitty seemed to plead with him for that other woman, and Tod's heart was softened towards his wife.

"I married her," he said to himself, "and perhaps I have been to blame. People are made differently and want different things. I'm responsible for her in a way. It's no use making a worse mess of it, and being mean; we have got to try and make a fresh start and be patient with each other."

In some such mood as this he returned to "Carnarvon," where the little red may tree and the two laburnums were in bloom. There were buds on the standard roses, and Ginger the sandy cat was asleep in the sun on the drawing-room window-sill. Tod realised "Carnarvon" as he had never realised it before; it was a little chocolate-box of a home, the house of a woman whose ideals were all wrong.

"It's got to go," said Tod; "we'll start differently next time."

He found Millie in the drawing-room, sewing aimlessly at some superfluous bit of finery. She gave him a momentary and sulky stare of her blue eyes, and Tod saw that she was afraid.

"Sorry I have been away so long. I had a lot to do."

She gave him a second glance, a look of surprise. She had been puzzled by the unexpectedness of Tod, and she liked men to be obvious.

"Don't apologise, please."

He sat down, and sat down with an air of a man who was in no hurry, a man who had made himself

master of the situation. His bull-dog pipe came out. He filled it, lit the tobacco, and puffed with obvious enjoyment.

"I want to talk to you, Millie."

She bent her head over her work, and remained in that attitude during all the time that he was speaking.

And Tod was gentle, extraordinarily gentle.

"We seem to have got adrift, somehow," he told her, "and I want to make a new beginning. I don't think that we have understood each other, or made allowances for each other. I want to get away from the money idea, the idea that money and show matter more than anything else in the world."

She remained with bent head, saying nothing, astonished by his gentleness, waiting to hear what he had to offer her in the way of life and a home.

"We shall have to leave this house and sell most of the furniture, and the business will have to go too. I have put everything in the hands of Newton and Smythe. We'll take rooms and live quietly and I'll get a job somewhere; I might even go back to the Craggs."

Her silence betrayed nothing.

"We shall have to face it, Millie, and the only thing is to try and face it like pals. We've drifted apart these last months, and all sorts of things happen when people drift apart. I'm thinking how happy we were three years ago."

"Three years is a long time," she said.

And she despised him for his gentleness. If he had thrashed her as he had thrashed that Jew, he would

have regained all his physical ascendancy, and she would have been his woman. Spiritual fineness had no meaning for Tod's wife.

Chapter Twenty-seven

On the day that Kitty was buried Tod went to see Mr. Rathbone Cragg. He coerced his pride, and walked with an air of briskness in the direction of West Shaston, but when he reached the familiar doorway in Caroline Crescent, Tod's pride was taken sick and caused him a moment's anguish and indecision on the doorstep.

He was staring at the glass swing doors and at the notices of sales pasted on the walls of the vestibule, when a girl's figure appeared, and pushing through, came face to face with Tod.

"Why—it's Tod!"

And then she corrected herself.

"It's a long time since we met, Mr. Western."

Tod lifted his hat and looked into the fresh eyes of his old playmate. Bertha Cragg had aged a little, not in any physical sense, for her pleasantly plain face was still the face of a girl, but there was a maturity about her, the purposefulness of a clever woman who had work to do, work that she had learnt to love.

"It is a long time," said Tod awkwardly. "Are you still in Shaston?"

"For a holiday. I work, you know; I'm helping to run a girls' club in London. Were you going in to see

Father?"

"Yes," said Tod, "I had thought of doing so."

His eyes were the eyes of a man who was unhappy. Nor was he the Tod whom she had known, the Tod of the sea and the tennis-court and the wild tramps through Sussex gorse, but a troubled Tod, a man who was shouldering his way through disillusionment, and looking for something that he had lost.

She wanted to talk to him; she wanted him to tell her why he was unhappy, but life had taught her the finer reticences of life, and to be careful how she laid a meddling hand on other people's pride.

"You'll find Father in his room. I'll take you in."

It was a generous thought, a sensitive bit of intuition, a glimpsing of Tod as a man who had fallen on evil times and who had come to ask some sort of favour. She saved him the wait in the outer office, and all those little paltry details that a proud man resents, and more especially did she save him from falling into the supercilious hands of her brother Fred. By her own judging "Fred had become impossible." His intellectual priggishness fitted him like a well-cut coat.

"Here is Mr. Western, Father. We just met on the doorstep. He wants to see you."

She smiled Tod into the inner office, closed the door on him, and walked calmly past her brother, who was looking at her with the irritable eyes of a man who had been too late to intervene.

Mr. Rathbone Cragg was embarrassed, but he was less embarrassed than Tod.

"Sit down, Western. What can we do for you? Find you a house?"

"You can let mine if you like," said Tod; "I'm getting out of it, and selling the business."

"Tired of it?"

"Partly that. I have private reasons for getting out of it."

There was a pause. Mr. Cragg's hands were fidgeting with his watch chain, and Tod seemed to be interested in his own boots. Both men were shy of each other, but Mr. Cragg was a tough old worldling and had learnt not to mix sentiment with business.

"I was sorry when you left here, Western, but, of course, conditions are different now. I should have liked you back in the office."

Tod's brightening eyes betrayed him to Mr. Cragg.

"I was very happy here," said Tod, "and I was keen on houses, but I suppose you have no room now?"

"None—none at all. Besides—I expect you are feeling too big for the old terms, Western?"

"I couldn't expect anything better."

Mr. Cragg saw how it was with him. Old Cragg was a far better man than his son, and he had mellowed of late years, but he was extraordinarily cautious. Big Mr. Julian Burgetrode was still of considerable importance.

"Why don't you write to Mr. Burgetrode?" he asked Tod with sudden directness.

Tod stared at him.

"What for?"

"Well, he was a little interested in you, Western."

Tod's eyes grew obstinate.

"I couldn't do it; private reasons. I thought I would just come and see if there was any chance."

Tod got up, feeling himself mortified and superfluous.

"I don't foresee anything at the moment, Western, but there is just a chance that we may be opening a branch agency at Pentworth."

"Pentworth! Why, I was born there," said Tod.

"But it's quite undecided," Mr. Cragg went on, ignoring the sentimental possibilities of Tod's remark. "If anything materialises and there happens to be an opening, I'll write to you, Western."

"Thank you," said Tod, and made his escape, receiving a casual nod from Fred Cragg as he passed through the outer office.

But old Rathbone Cragg was not suffered to go to bed before he had reconsidered his attitude towards Tod. After dinner Bertha followed him into the library, and sat on the edge of the table and smoked her cigarette. Old Cragg was very fond of Bertha; also—he was a little afraid of her. She was a young woman of surprise, a young woman with a heart that was bigger and a head that was broader than the hearts and heads of the Cragg family. She made her brother appear just a cocky, conceited "swat" from school, and old Cragg loved her little finger better than Fred's whole body.

"What did Tod Western want, Father?"

Old Cragg tried to take refuge in the daily paper,

but Bertha extracted him from its paragraphs and made him pay attention. There were times when she "managed" him, and the hard old boy chuckled in secret, and rather liked it. He disapproved of that cigarette of hers; but then—it was Bertha's cigarette.

"Western? Oh, young Western? Business—that's all."

"I wondered—I had an idea—and I'm just wondering whether I was right. He wanted to come back to you?"

Mr. Cragg gave a little heave in his chin, a heave that said, "Confound the girl!"

"Of course, I could not take him," he admitted; "Reeves is very satisfactory, and there is no room."

"So he *did* want to come back! He's very unhappy, Daddy, about something."

"I don't wonder," said her father; "they say he's bankrupt. That fool of a wife of his."

Bertha's memories winced.

"I'm going away to-morrow, Daddy, you know. It would rather please me if you tried to take Tod back."

Old Cragg showed a certain testiness.

"I don't think it is your—your business—to interest yourself in Western, my dear. After all——"

"After all, I used to be rather fond of him, Daddy. You see, I'm not ashamed of it. He had the making of rather a fine man."

"Well, he shouldn't have married that little——"

"We all do things we shouldn't do. What about that new office at Pentworth?"

"My dear Bertha!"

"There"—and she went over and kissed him —"I'm not going to worry you. We have always been such good friends, you and I, and you can be—rather generous sometimes."

Mr. Cragg disbelieved her. He was not generous, and never had been generous, but he supposed he would have to reconsider his attitude towards Tod.

"If Reeves goes to Pentworth I might take Western in."

"I don't think you would regret it," she said.

"There's Fred to be considered. I don't think that Fred would approve."

"Fred approves of nothing but himself, Daddy."

Old Cragg chuckled. There were times when he disliked his son.

Tod, meanwhile, was in search of rooms. He had arranged to have his furniture sold, and to leave "Carnarvon" at the end of the month, and in his quest for rooms he appealed to Tom Lavender, sitting on one of the cane-topped stools in Mr. Lavender's little shop and talking to him as to a friend who understood.

The big, blond lover of birds was the very man to lay a cooling hand on Tod's feverishness.

"What kind of rooms do you want?"

"Something simple and cheap, with a bit of garden to look at. We should have to do our own cooking."

Mr. Lavender smiled at Tod.

"I have a couple of rooms upstairs that I never

use; they would want a little extra furniture. If you care to look at them——"

Tod's worried face lit up eagerly.

"It's awfully good of you, Tom. I'd try not to be any trouble."

"Come up and have a look."

They were pleasant rooms at the top of Mr. Lavender's old house, with lilacs in bloom in the garden below, and all Mr. Lavender's roses ready to celebrate June. The carpets were worn and the furniture casual and decrepit, but Tod saw the possibilities of such a home. The atmosphere of the house was so calm and clean, for it held the soul of a man who was happy.

"Your wife could use the kitchen. I'll arrange that with Mrs. Jelf."

"And what shall I pay you, Tom?" Tod asked.

"I don't see that you need pay me anything; just your share of the coal and gas."

"That won't do, old man," said Tod.

"Well, I don't know what to ask?" smiled the lover of birds.

"Let Mrs. Jelf settle it."

Mrs. Jelf was Tom Lavender's cook-housekeeper. So Mrs. Jelf was asked to arbitrate, after Tod had explained to her she was not to be called upon to do any extra work, and that if she disapproved of Millie using the kitchen for a short time each day, he—Tod—would buy an oil-cooker.

"Beastly things," said Mrs. Jelf. "I don't mind a little company."

For Mrs. Jelf happened to be a foolish old woman who thought Mr. Tom Lavender one of the greatest men on earth. Everything he did was right, and everything he said was the essence of wisdom, nor were Mrs. Jelf's prejudices wholly contemptible. "He's always doing kind things," she said, "and I've never known him out of temper, never even cross over his food." Mrs. Jelf thought him a saint.

Tod walked out of Mr. Lavender's shop a very much happier man. He had had a long talk with Tom, and he felt as though he had been for one of those long tramps through the green ways of Sussex or climbing the downs with the sea wind in his face. Tom Lavender was a healer. He lived for the love of living and the love of all living things, and not for money.

When Tod returned to the garage in Duke Street, he found a bumptious little man very busy in his shirt-sleeves, standing by one of the taxis, with his right hand all grease. It was Mr. Charlie Britt of the firm of Pumpelly and Britt, who had been puddling in the car's gear-box to satisfy himself as to the state of the gears. Love was crouching at the back of the car unscrewing the nuts holding the inspection plate of the differential, so that Mr. Britt could take a look at the crown wheel.

"Morning, Western. Don't mind me poking my nose into things, I suppose."

"What's the reason?" Tod asked.

"We may make an offer for your show. It's for sale, isn't it?"

"It is," said Tod.

Mr. Britt wiped his hands on a lump of cotton

waste.

“No pig in a poke for me, thank you. Those gears aren’t so bad, but your man tells me one big-end wants seeing to.”

“She knocks awful,” said Love from behind the car.

Tod felt annoyed, and yet he realised the inevitableness of Mr. Britt's suspicions. Moreover, he was not pleased to think of old Pumpelly buying up his business. The thing smacked of defeat and of failure, and Tod's teeth were on edge.

"There's not much wrong with the cars. I'd tell you if there were."

"Oh, no doubt," said the little man, pushing rudely past Tod and joining Love at the rear of the car.

Tod stood there listlessly, telling himself that it was sheer foolishness for him to resent Charlie Britt's casual scepticism. Britt believed in disbelieving everybody and trusting to his own sharp wits; and he had found that it paid. Especially was it necessary to believe that most of the men who worked for you were liars.

"Yes, not so bad," said the brisk voice from behind the car, "but those back springs look a little bit wheezy. Rock her, will you?"

This was to Tod, but Tod did not move. Britt stood up and gave him a quick look.

"Sulky," he thought. "Well, we've smashed you, anyway."

When Pumpelly's partner had looked at the cars, he bustled round the whole place with the air of a prospective proprietor. Tod went into the office and sat down at his desk. Charles Britt was making him feel very sore.

The little man hunted him out.

"You've let your chaps slack pretty badly, Western."

"Have I?" said Tod, resenting the tone of patronage.

"Some of your petrol cans are only two-thirds full. A bit of private trade been going on somewhere. And I should think half your tools must be missing."

"Well, you're not buying the missing ones."

Britt pulled out a pair of nail-scissors and cleaned his nails. He believed in a smart exterior.

"There's only one way to handle the English workingman, and that's to keep him under, Western, keep him afraid. Fear's the only thing that keeps 'em afraid. You've been too soft on your men."

"Much obliged," said Tod. "Have a cigarette."

Britt polished the nails of his left hand by rubbing them on the back of his right-hand fingers.

"Always calling themselves skilled men too, and their bally trade union tosh! Why, I learnt more than most of 'em know and learnt it in two months. Booze and no-brain-piece; that's what's wrong with most of them. Good morning to you."

"Good morning," said Tod, realising in a dull sort of way why he had been unable to compete with such an alert and cynical little devil.

At "Carnarvon" that evening Tod was able to tell Millie that he had found rooms, and she received the news with the sulky bitterness that had characterised her since his discovery of her intrigue with Maurice Goldstein. She accepted all Tod's plans for the future, apathetically and without comment, as depressed as a cat that had been turned out into the rain. A natural indolence made her surrender all the more easy. She had no alternative to offer. She would sit at

the closed window of her fate till someone came and opened it.

"Tom Lavender's such a sportsman, and they're quite jolly rooms," said Tod, "a sitting-room and a bedroom, and the use of the kitchen."

"I can't cook," said his wife.

Tod stared. He had thought that all women could cook.

"Well, you'll soon learn, and I dare say Mrs. Jelf will help you to begin with. We can live quite quietly there, while I look around. No more building of top stories until we have made sure of the foundations."

His cheerfulness amazed her, even though she guessed that his cheerfulness was artificial. To the sensual and richly coloured young woman the picture that he painted of life in Shaston lodgings was utterly dreary and banal. Making beds, emptying slops, messing in the kitchen, going out with a basket to buy food, getting meals ready, always meals with a hungry man waiting for them, and then the disgusting business of washing up. It was plain that Tod expected her to do all this and saw nothing strange in her doing it.

And then—her clothes. Where was she going to put them all? For her wardrobe had been something of a Pandora's box, and Tod was not supposed to know the whole extent of her extravagance. And he would always be messing about in her bedroom. Even at Horrox and Horrox's she had had a little room of her own.

"Beastly!" was her verdict.

But to Tod she said nothing. For the future she would sit like a cat, waiting.

Chapter Twenty-eight

Tod's chief recollection of those first days in Tom Lavender's house was the badness of Millie's cooking. The very execrableness of it was a protest against the economies he had planned for her, and though Tod tried to smile over some of her unsavoury messes, his interior refused to retain one particular meal. Millie had had trouble with her saucepans, or to be more correct she had not troubled about them at all, and Tod was most gloriously sick.

"I told you I couldn't cook," she said stubbornly, when he reproached her with the queer taste of that particularly poisonous and dirty hash, "and that woman makes things as awkward as she can."

"What, Mrs. Jelf? I thought——"

"She's an old cat."

"I'm sorry," said Tod.

But Mrs. Jelf was equally emphatic in her opinion of Millie. Tom Lavender hauled Tod into his little study, and with an air of disquieted shyness, proceeded to make a suggestion.

"Mrs. Jelf wants to do your cooking. She says she can manage it better."

"Very good of her," said Tod; "the fact is—my wife——"

Tom Lavender nodded.

"She hasn't got the hands for it. Supposing——"

"I'll pay Mrs. Jelf so much a week, Tom. Besides—I was a bit doubtful about interfering in your kitchen."

"That's all right, old chap. But that old lady is a

born cook; she loves it."

So it was arranged that Mrs. Jelf should cook for the Westerns, and Millie dispossessed herself of that piece of feminine responsibility. But Tom Lavender could not tell Tod what Mrs. Jelf had said of his wife, that she had called her "a dirty, lazy, stuck-up slut with silk stockings and no conscience."

The larger part of Tod's life was running in smoother and more pleasant fashion. He was back at Caroline Crescent, sitting in the familiar room and working with enthusiasm, and continuing to ignore the impertinences of Frederick Cragg. Father and son had had a skirmish over the return of Tod; Fred's opposition had roused the older man's obstinacy and had made Tod's return more sure, yet Western did not suspect that a woman had stretched out a hand to help him, and that Bertha had armed the father against the son's sneers. As to Western's Garage, it had passed into the power of Pumpelly and Britt, but Tod's lawyers had salved a portion of their client's capital, and Tod found that he was the owner of about three hundred pounds. He invested the money in New Zealand Government stock. Moreover he was living in the same house as Tom Lavender. They smoked their pipes together at night, sitting out under the laburnums and lilacs, talking about life and books and birds. Tod was to go out tramping with Tom on alternate Sundays; the other days he gave to Millie.

Tod was trying very hard to understand his wife. The innate chivalry that Nancy Western had given to her boy refused to let itself be seduced into accepting a purely cynical and materialistic view of marriage. Tod was affectionate, and he felt responsible, and he tried to put that memory of Maurice Goldstein out of

his head. There was always the thought that he had been to blame, that he had let himself get absorbed in the business, and that he had forgotten that his wife was a woman.

For Tod was cursed or blessed with ideals, and very sturdy ideals, and poor Kitty's death had opened a vein of deep tenderness in him. He treated Millie as he would have treated a sick woman or a hurt child, taking her out to occasional concerts, trying to persuade her to like boyish adventures in the country, buying her chocolates once a week. He had very happy memories of those Pentworth picnics, and how sweet those simple country days had seemed to his father and mother. Nancy Western was living in her son, shedding a soft radiance over him, inspiring him to try and reach that wife of his to use the ways of a freer youth, but Tod's wife did not wish for wings, the innocent, unsmirched wings he sought to give her.

She seemed apathetic, casual, bored.

She had not forgiven him for his failure to make money. She would never forgive him for having blundered in upon her affair with Maurice Goldstein, and Tod did not realise the elemental antipathy the incident had roused in her. Tod had ceased to be sexually attractive to his wife. She resented this stuffy life in a couple of rooms; she resented Tod's kindness. He was trying to fasten his ideals upon her and they galled her like a girdle of thorns. Tod's wife was no saint.

Admiration, colour, thrills, movement, pretty frocks! How could a young man working in an estate office give her these? Tod was dull; and so disgustingly kind and good tempered when she was ripe and almost yearning for a row. She was a fierce

young animal in her sex cravings, and there was no fierceness about Tod. He kissed her as though he were kissing his mother.

"It's beastly!" was her favourite expression, uttered in the monotony of her long silence.

And so it was, beastly for both of them, though a second blindness had fallen upon Tod. His thoughts were set upon being kind to his wife, and she detested him for it, and longed to use her claws. His good temper threw her back upon a negative sulkiness, and smothered her when her inclination was to scream.

A man who is trying to save a drowning girl is conscious of but few things: the nearness of the shore, the sea, her struggles, her wet hair, his efforts to calm her, perhaps the deadly weakening of his own strength. Watchers on the cliff above have a more complete and a more pregnant view of the struggle, and so it was in Tod's blind effort to pull his marriage out of the sea. Even casual spectators saw more than he did.

Mrs. Jelf saw as much as anybody. She had her glimpses of Millie, the Millie who put on her clothes and went out, "Just to show off," as Mrs. Jelf expressed it, "while her young man's working." And such clothes too! "Pink stockings and white shoes, and an 'at for every day in the week." She knew, too, that Tod's wife scuffled home in time to change these clothes and lay the table for her husband. When Millie was out Mrs. Jelf would make a tour of inspection, and her woman's eyes saw all the slackness of Tod's home, the frowsy bed left unaired and unmade, the slops not cleared, dirt everywhere.

"Dear me, what a fine lady we are!" said

Lavender's housekeeper. "Too fine to be the poor boy's wife."

The ubiquitous Bob Twine saw Tod's wife as the deckchair girl, sunning herself on the parade and collecting the homage of casual males. Twine wondered whether Tod knew of it. One man could not tell another man that his wife was little better than a woman of pleasure, but he did attack Millie one Wednesday afternoon, planting himself on the chair next to her.

"Same old game, madam!"

"You shut up," said the girl.

"Suppose Tod knows? I guess not! Why don't you play the game by the kid? He's the best little sportsman you'll ever meet."

"He's too good," said the girl viciously; "he's so good that he's dull. It's no use you snarling at me, Bob; I never ought to have married him."

Twine softened to her at this flash of sincerity.

"True enough. But, hang it all, why not have a shot at making him happy? I never told him, you know."

"You can tell him—if you like. I'm so sick of it, I don't care."

"Good lord!" said Twine, "is it as bad as that! I tried to tell him once, and couldn't. I'm not going to now."

"Well, what are you fussing about? If you are afraid to tell him you had better leave me alone."

"I will," said Twine. "Good day," and he got up and left her.

Tod was making desperate struggles to get beauty and a sense of goodness of things back into his life. He felt that he wanted to remain a boy, the boy he had remembered at Pentworth, for Tod knew that he had changed and that the soul of him had grown worried and wrinkled. Also there was less of the smile of the shrewd and happy boxer. There were times when Tod had a scowl, and he knew it, and there were times when he lost his temper. Little things irritated him most absurdly. He could remember smashing the little green-topped card-table that never would stand squarely on four legs.

Millie had looked up at him quite hopefully.

“Oh, temper!”

“Sorry,” said Tod, contrite and flabby.

He had spent the rest of the evening trying to mend that table and even Millie could have told him that some things are better broken, unhappy marriages as well as rickety tables.

He talked to old Lavender on one of the Sunday rambles, but he was loyal and said nothing about his wife.

“Do you remember a time, Tom, when it began to hurt you to live?”

Lavender lied.

“I remember it quite well,” he said.

Tod smiled.

“You have a queer, sore feeling inside you, and the things outside you seem to take pleasure in going wrong. You are always knocking your soul’s shins against something.”

“You’ll get over it,” said Lavender gravely, “you

are bound to get over it. Don't fret. Work, work like the devil, and set your teeth when the storm comes."

"What storm?" Tod asked.

But Lavender hid himself in symbolical excuses. He knew that Tod's marriage was all wrong, and that the woman was hurting the soul of him. And Lavender prayed that she would go off with some other man, some fine Assyrian bull, and leave Tod holding the hand of his own youth.

Early in July Tod had a second vivid glimpse into the heart of his wife. There was a new little bungalow town squatting beyond West Shaston like a flock of geese on a village green, and to get to it you walked along the sea wall with the shingle on one side of you and dyked meadows on the other. Tod had the keys of two of the new bungalows, and he was to make a list of the fixtures.

The blue sweep of the sky, the breadth of the sea and the meadowland, and the curve of the white foam along the shingle, brought back a memory to Tod's heart. He could remember walking with his father in some such place on a breezy day in the spring of the year, and his father had gone along waving his hat and shouting the words of some song. Tod remembered how they had thrown stones at an old tin can that his father had set afloat, and Tod had sunk it. And suddenly the spirit of fatherhood entered Tod. He wanted a boy, a boy of his own, something to play with, something to work for, something that mattered.

A girl in a white dress and a cerise-coloured jersey was sitting on the beach, reading. She looked up as Tod came along the seawall, and Tod recognized his wife. Surely this was a God-given

coincidence, the secret key for the opening of a woman's heart, the prattler's gate leading into the great playground!

Tod sprang down, forgetting all about the bungalows. His wife looked with quick eyes at his suddenly radiant face. She had been expecting a man, another man, not Tod.

"I say, dear, I'm coming to sit down for ten minutes. Isn't it gorgeous out here, so clean and big."

"It's quite nice," said the wife, wondering why he had turned up, and whether he suspected.

"Bungalow Town can wait for half an hour."

"Oh, you are going there?"

"Making lists of fixtures. Oh, hang business! Millie—I want something; it has just come to me; perhaps you have been wanting it too."

He leant over towards her with bright eyes.

"What is it?" she asked him.

"Millie, I want a child, a kid, just what I may have been to my dad. Perhaps all this time—you have been wanting one—too."

Her face hardened. What a fool he was!

"Rot!" she said. "What are you getting sentimental about children for?"

"It's a sort of hunger," he began.

"We can't afford that sort of hunger." She sneered at him: "Fancy having a kid and living in two rooms. We haven't got the money. Be sensible."

"But other people have children, with less money than we have."

"Well, I'm not going to be one of them. Very nice of you, I dare say, but who has all the pain and all the work, and the economising? I'm not having babies on eighty pounds a year, thank you."

Tod left her and went on his way, and all the joy had gone out of the morning. Money, always money, and a woman who had to be bribed!

Chapter Twenty-nine

A week later Tod met Mr. Burgetrode.

He was standing with his hands in his pockets on the edge of a little crowd of holiday folk who were watching a Punch and Judy show on the beach below the parade. It was a Saturday afternoon, and Tod was alone, so much alone that he envied that busy old Blackguard of a doll who appeared to spend his life hammering other dolls with a stick. Mrs. Judy had just been dealt with, and tossed into oblivion on the end of the aforesaid stick. The crowd laughed, but Tod was frowning, frowning over the problem that was eating into his vitals, his thoughts arrested by the broad and human cynicism of the puppet show. The moral of the thing was as old as time. This hook-nosed, hunchbacked scoundrel had studied the philosophy of the big stick. The only doll who scored off him was the clown, the merry fool who was never serious.

Mr. Burgetrode saw Tod before Tod saw Mr. Burgetrode, and Mr. Burgetrode watched Tod while Tod was watching the puppet show. He had a complete view of the young man's "thinking" face, of his faded tie and clean collar frayed slightly in the

wash. Tod's blue eyes were sullen and unhappy; he looked hungry, and the food that he lacked was not bread and meat.

Mr. Burgetrode edged his way to Tod's side.

"Curious, isn't it," he said as though he had been talking to Tod for hours, "that the only really successful person is the clown?"

Tod's chin gave a jerk. He looked into "Old Mischief's" lean brown face, and then looked away again.

"It's a puzzle," he confessed; "what is success?"

"Ah, there you have me," said Mr. Burgetrode; "I have been looking for it all my life. People say I have found it. Have I? Now, a merely happy, unserious animal like that clown——!"

They stood side by side till the show was over, very conscious of each other, yet part of the crowd.

"Suppose we go and see the place where I sprained my ankle," said the big man with a sort of fantastic irrelevancy.

Tod turned with him.

"I'm back in Craggs' office, you know," he said with a sensitive boy's abruptness.

"I—did—know. I'm boxing you to-day, Tod, and I'm hitting hard. What about these wasted years?"

"Is anything wasted?" said Tod.

"Never."

"I've learnt things. I couldn't have learnt them in any other way. But it's when you get tied up in them like a rabbit in a ferreting net."

"The great thing is to try and avoid being a rabbit. It's better to be the ferret, better still to be the man who owns and sets the nets."

"But why nets, sir?"

"You used the word yourself, young man. There always will be nets. Your net may cover a rabbit hole or half a continent, but it's there."

"Seems rather hopeless," said Tod.

"Not a bit of it. Think of that clown. If your birdcage is the whole world, and the stars are just gold blobs on it, isn't it big enough? The moral is, don't be a canary."

"Canaries may be happy," said Tod.

"Oh, happiness!" quoth Mr. Burgetrode with scorn. "What happiness is there for man but doing things and trying to do them well? Does Nature go round asking the canary if it is happy, or request the Hottentot to inform her if the climate is just what he desires? Nature doesn't care a hang. She's got bigger things to do. If we don't please her she scraps us."

"That seems rather hopeless too," said Tod.

"Nonsense. Nature is always doing things. She sets the nets for us; she wants us to learn. Think about it, and you'll see it must be so. You talk about Nature being cruel. She's not; she's big; she can't help treading on people sometimes. You have trodden on lots of ants and worms, my boy, and never known about it. As for calculating cruelty, men beat her at it every time. Nature's always at work, improving things, trying a new world or a new sort of beast. I suppose she's been trying man, and he's not done so badly. Who spun the fable about the Garden of Eden, a man having to go out and work?

Adam must have been a dull dog till God set him digging. And there is a sort of modern fool who thinks it would be rather fine and Utopian to get back to the workless, loafing Adam. Nature will tread on such people; snuff 'em out, that's all."

They swung along the parade together, Tod having to step out to keep pace with "the Tiger's" long, agile legs. There was something invigorating about walking with Mr. Burgetrode. He made you think of an east wind blowing on a cold sunny morning. No sitting under a banyan tree, no Oriental quietism for Mr. Burgetrode.

"We're northerners," he told Tod, "we've got to work or die. Nature's way, my man; she has shoved us up against necessity, just a whim perhaps, as an experiment. She may think that the future is with the Patagonians, and we're one of her amusing side-shows, her after-dinner jest. Who knows? Anyway, we are here, and there is plenty of good work to do."

"Some things might be done better," said Tod.

"Well, do them better; don't talk about it."

"If it wasn't such a dirty scramble for money——"

"Get money, and then you won't abuse it; not too much money, mind you."

"That's all very well," said Tod, "but it seems to me that if you're a sportsman, the mean people have you beaten every time."

"Not always. And if it is so, it's your own fault, the fault of Tod Western, citizen, and every other Tod Western in the world. If all the Tod Westerns got together and proceeded to sit on the heads of the Semites; if every decent Englishman, instead of praying or grumbling, daily kicked the rump of some

commercial tout—well, things might happen. The whole trouble began when we mixed up work and money. Work's the great necessity, the blood tax we have to pay to Nature. It's no use offering her a five-pound note."

"What about the rich people?"

"They buy other people's work, some of 'em. But don't imagine, young man, that because a man is rich he is a slacker. He may be one of Nature's vitalisers, and she pays him well, either with the joy of work he does or the power she gives him. Do you think Nature cares twopence about a goods-porter, so long as he is nothing but a goods-porter? She treads on such people as you tread on an ant. Let them strike for ever and ever. Nature says, 'Work—you slave.' There's nothing of the ca'-canny about Nature. She wants energy, movement, change, not a pair of sulky hob-nail boots and a mouth that blabs the stuff out of the halfpenny papers."

"Then we are slaves?" said Tod.

"Just so long as we feel like it. Damn it, boy, the wide world is not a bad playground, and even your plain sailor man can see a good deal of it. You can't get off the earth, you know, but Nature has given the best of us a pretty long rope."

"I'd like to see all men big," said Tod.

"They have got to learn to be big first. You are never big without work. Shove that in the mouths of the trade union bosses. I've worked sixteen hours a day in my time."

"But then you had brains," said Tod.

Mr. Burgetrode laughed.

"We are getting personal, are we? And here are our old friends playing golf just as usual, though the European situation is what the journalists call threatening. Let's sit down under this thorn bush."

They sat down, Tod looking morose and puzzled.

"Life's queer," he said slowly. "One seems to get shoved into things without any plan. Oh—I'm sick, sick of the whole business!"

Mr. Burgetrode lay flat, his hands under his head, his hat flung aside on the grass. Tod saw that his eyes were closed, and that his face had the flicker of a smile hidden somewhere.

"Why did you throw up the motor business?"

Tod frowned. It was news to him that Mr. Burgetrode knew anything about Western's Garage.

"I had to," said Tod; "self-respect. I wanted to pay people before I smashed."

"Didn't it pay?"

"It paid, but it didn't pay enough. You see——"

"Extravagance," said the great man tersely.

And Tod could say nothing. He began to suspect that "the Tiger" knew everything that was to be known.

"I dare say it was my fault," he confessed.

"One of the oldest faults on earth, Tod. I warned you. But you had to fight your first fight, and get blooded—and beaten. Nature again. One of her ways of eliminating weaklings. Well, what about it, now?"

"About what?" said Tod.

"Ambition, the man's game, or office life in a

sleepy, sea coast town."

Tod's eyes flashed. He sat with his chin in his fists, thinking.

"You mean that what you said to me that night in the hotel, about my training for some big job?"

"Exactly," said Mr. Burgetrode, sitting up and watching Tod's eyes and mouth.

Tod said nothing for nearly a minute.

"It was a mistake," he said gruffly, digging one heel into the grass.

"Where was the mistake?"

"My marrying. I have never said so before to any living soul, but it's the truth. I've known it for months. She killed the last bit of love in me last week."

"How?" asked the big one softly.

"I—I wanted a kid," said Tod. "I've been so lonely, and she wouldn't do it. I know it means pain and work for a woman, but, after all, what's marriage for?"

Mr. Burgetrode smiled.

"I've often wanted a kid, Tod," he said, "but the want didn't come to me till I was old. I'd been too busy doing things. Supposing—you think it over."

"What about my wife?" Tod asked.

"Will she complain if your income doubles?"

"I don't think so," said Tod.

They walked back to Shaston, and Tod had tea at the familiar old Hotel Majestic. He sat on the balcony of Mr. Burgetrode's sitting-room, saying little, but

looking over the sea with eyes that had sighted the sails of a strange ship rising above the horizon.

“I’ve got him,” said Mr. Burgetrode to himself; “I thought I should get him some day.”

When Tod went back to his rooms at Tom Lavender’s, he found Millie sulking over a book. He had promised to take her on the pier, and he had forgotten all about it.

“Where’ve you been?” she asked suspiciously.

“Walking with a friend?”

“A man, I suppose?”

“Yes, a man I used to know years ago; met him by chance.”

He did not tell her that it was Mr. Burgetrode, and his wife thought that he had been philandering with a girl.

Tod stayed up late that night talking to Tom Lavender. He wanted the cool hand of Tom’s wisdom to touch him after that strenuous bout with Mr. Burgetrode, and he developed to Tom all the vigour of the great man’s creed of work and the joy of work. The lover of birds had no selfish net to spread for Tod, though he was sadder than Tod knew at the thought of losing him.

“It’s a great opportunity,” he said, “and opportunity’s a horse so few men ever get a lift on. I’d take it, old chap!”

Tod lunched next day with Mr. Burgetrode.

* * * * *

Yet this plan of the great man was overset by

circumstances that were stronger than Mr. Burgetrode, and he—like Tod—was to be but a fierce striving figure in the huge fresco of a world upheaval, a figure out of the brain of Michael Angelo the great. Julian Burgetrode met the inevitable, and smiled at it with some of the pride of a father. The man he had chosen could but prove himself a man.

In the sunlight of an August morning these two met on the white steps of the hotel; Tod with a deep light in his eyes and the tense fire of youth touched with a new heroism; Mr. Burgetrode with the day's paper in his hand, and a kind of grimness about his mouth.

He looked at Tod, and he knew at once what Tod had come to say.

"Well, young Ajax?"

"I must go," said Tod; "I wanted to come and tell you, sir. It's right, isn't it, even if I have to throw up everything? I am going round to the drill hall to sign on."

Mr. Burgetrode held out a hand to Tod.

"Ajax couldn't do anything else, boy. You're right, utterly right. But when you come back, I shall want you to come to me."

"I'll come," said Tod, much moved; "but there's just one thing."

"Out with it, boy. What is worrying you?"

"My wife," said Tod. "I have some money left, but it's capital; and army pay won't keep a wife. If I handed you the money, sir?"

Mr. Burgetrode's eyes had lost all their fierceness.

"I'll see to your wife, Tod; she shan't suffer."

"God bless you, sir," said Tod; "I don't suppose I shall have much trouble with the doctor."

"But the Germans will with you," said Mr. Burgetrode to himself. "Ave triumphans, little Great Heart—and may thousands of the same breed go with you. Why didn't this happen when I was young!"

PART TWO

Chapter Thirty

The village of Myonville, like many of the old Picardy villages in what had once been Ponthieu, hid itself in trees. You rode between the flat fields and the orchards, as young Seymour, the billeting officer, rode that May morning, and saw ahead of you a mass of towering elms and beeches, with a bit of white plastered wall showing here and there like a patch of light sky at the end of a wood. Even the church steeple was invisible, when the leaves were out, and the roads leading into the village were great green tunnels.

"It's good," said young Seymour to himself, "It's damned good."

And so it was.

For Myonville was a virgin village; troops had rarely been quartered there during the three and a half years of the war. It had had its sorrows, but they, like the village, were secret and beautiful, part of the low, white-walled and red-roofed houses; part of its orchards and bits of garden and great pensive trees. And the spring was in Myonville, an

indescribable greenness, a glimpse of lush blue-grass under the pink and white of the apple trees, perhaps a clump of daffodils—goblin gold under the blue sky.

Young Seymour found the secretary of Monsieur le Maire. He was the schoolmaster, big, stately, with the baggy black clothes of a French civilian, shabby, but rather proud.

"Billets? Yes. For a battalion, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"Eight officers and seventy-three men and three horses," said Seymour.

The schoolmaster raised his eyebrows.

"It is very small."

"Well, you see," said Seymour, "during the retreat the Boches were so loving that there wasn't much left of us. Now, where am I to put the colonel?"

The placing of the colonel seemed to be the most sacred act in Seymour's ritual.

"A big house, perhaps, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"The colonel does not love big houses. A little house—with a garden."

"There is the Café de la Paix."

"Noisy?"

"Very quiet, monsieur."

"Any children? The colonel loves children."

"There are plenty of children in Myonville," said the schoolmaster with an amused twinkle.

So young Seymour went off with his list, and called first at the Café de la Paix. The choosing of the colonel's billet appeared to be a very serious

business, but as a matter of fact, it was a labour of love.

“Madame Lorellard? Bonjour, madame. I want to place Monsieur le Colonel in your house, with your good permission.”

Seymour was a pink and white boy, and very polite.

“Josephine,” called the old lady, “ici,” and she smiled like a red apple upon Seymour.

Josephine, the black, handsome Josephine, Josephine the talkative, the temperamental, came gliding out of the inner room.

“My daughter, monsieur. She manages everything.”

Seymour paid the colonel’s court to Josephine. She was put out, annoyed, haughty, yet polite. Strange officers were a nuisance. Besides, André, her brother, was expected home on leave, and she wanted the room for him.

“It is a very small room, monsieur.”

“The colonel loves a small room mademoiselle. May I see it?”

Josephine took him upstairs, and was yet more annoyed when Seymour looked at the sheets.

“Monsieur, you insult me!”

“Oh, mademoiselle, I do not; I was admiring the linen.”

Someone had shown some sense in selecting Seymour as billeting officer.

He chalked the outer door and went about the rest of his business. Josephine was walking up and

down the kitchen, talking in her excitable way to her mother and Cousin Claire. Claire taught in the school. She had been a solemn child, addicted to wild bouts of elfin mischief, a child with brown gold hair and great grey eyes.

"A colonel! Oh, la, la, he will be old and fussy, and he will want hot water at all hours, and baths, and he will stamp about the clean floors and scold. I know all about English colonels. Gabrielle had one at Doullens, cross and red as a lobster."

"He can't eat us," said Claire, thrusting her needle into one of madame's stockings she was darning.

"No, but he will be cross, and he will be rude, and he will always be calling for red wine."

"Josephine, the stew is boiling over," said Madame Lorellard.

Josephine dealt with the stew, and Claire's eyes had a little mischievous glimmer of light in them.

"What a monster you expect! But then, if he is old he will not be a nuisance in other ways."

"Tiens!" said the black girl. "They are worse than the young ones sometimes. Old pigs!"

About three o'clock that afternoon Claire was washing lace in the little backyard and splashing soapsuds from her tub on to the leaves of the old pear tree trained against the wall. Madame had gone out into the fields to help old Lorellard with his hoeing; Josephine was in the garden picking herbs. Claire heard someone open the door of the café and walk in, and then an English voice called: "Madame!"

Claire went through the kitchen with a ball of wet

lace in her two hands. The glass door leading into the café room was open. She saw an officer standing there.

"Monsieur?"

He turned, smiled and saluted. Claire was strangely conscious of his eyes; they were blue eyes, rather sad, rather tired, but brave, very brave and so honest.

"I am billeted here, mam'selle."

He spoke quite good French. She looked at his sleeve and Tod Western looked at her arms. Somehow he saw something very beautiful and peaceful and good in those plump arms of hers, the two strong little hands holding the ball of wet lace.

"But monsieur is so young!"

And Tod laughed.

"Mam'selle, did you expect a grandfather?"

"But we thought—and the young officer was so careful."

Tod was still smiling, and she understood of a sudden why the tired but smiling eyes had brought an atmosphere into the house. As a woman she was quick to feel, though very slow to like. She noticed that he was wearing two ribbons, and that his left arm looked stiff.

"Monsieur would like to see his room?"

She was pressing the ball of lace between her two hands; a drop of water fell on the floor.

"If you please," said Tod, as though he were listening to some soft voice speaking inside him.

She put down the lace and dried her hands.

"It is a very small room, monsieur."

Tod was absorbing all the pleasant homeliness of the place, the table scrubbed white as hollywood, the red-tiled floor, the black stove standing out into the room with the inevitable coffee-pot warming on it, the bright pots and jars, the plain wooden chairs. It was simple, austere, exquisitely clean. The doorway opening on to the yard showed Tod a garden and a great green orchard beyond it, and in the orchard a blackbird was singing.

His silence made Claire glance around at him as she dried her hands. He was looking out into the orchard and smiling, and his blue eyes were full of light. And again she understood; this was a man who loved simple things, children, dogs, a green tree in leaf, the singing of a bird, a field of corn rippling in the wind, red apples on a bough, a warm place by the fire.

"I beg your pardon, mam'selle," said Tod abruptly, "but all this is so very good."

She crossed the kitchen and raised the latch of the door that opened on the stairs.

"Monsieur has suffered," she said.

She ran up the steep stairs, a sturdy, graceful little figure, full throated, her old shoes making a merry clatter. Tod followed her, noticing the cleanness of that carpetless house, a row of shoes and sabots lined up on a shelf, a couple of mauve linen bonnets hanging on a nail, a table with clean linen laid out on it on the landing above. He had a glimpse of a room, a woman's room with clothes hanging under a curtain and a red *duvet* on the bed. Claire had opened a door, and she went before him into the room.

"It is a comfortable bed, monsieur, and the room is quiet, for, as you see, the window looks out on the orchard."

She was quite natural and unembarrassed, without a trace of coquettish false modesty.

"It is a very nice room," said Tod.

"Is there anything that monsieur desires?"

"A table—a table to write on, if it will cause you no trouble. My servant will carry it in."

"We will find you a table, and it is no trouble."

She left him and met Tod's servant in the kitchen, a shy, rosy-faced boy playing at Atlas with the colonel's brown valise on his back. She pointed him up the stairs, picked up the lace, and went back to her washing. She could hear the voices of the two men in the room above, and a sound of devoted activity on the part of the boy with the rosy face.

"You'll have some hot water, sir?"

"If you can get it, Cane. Don't worry the people."

"I've got out a clean pair of pyjamas, sir. And your slacks."

"They have promised me another table, Cane. I shall want it to-night."

"It will be here, sir," said the boy.

He spoke the truth, for Tod was a man who was loved with a very great love by all men who had faced death with him.

There were other voices now in the kitchen. Josephine had returned, and so had the old people, for Père Lorellard had hoed all the weeds.

"He is quite young," said Claire calmly, drying her hands on a towel.

"Oh, la la, the young ones can be a nuisance."

Her cousin said nothing.

And then Tod descended upon them, a quiet man, very much at his ease, a man without guile.

He bowed to *grand'mère*.

"It is very good of you to take me in, madame. I shall give you no trouble."

He bowed to Josephine, but a little more stiffly.

"My room is charming."

That mercurial and handsome young woman became instantly the coquette. Would Monsieur le Colonel take a cup of coffee or a glass of red wine? Yes, the war, the terrible war! How much longer was it going to last, and would the Germans ever come to Myonville? Claire was busy hanging her lace on a little line near the stove. She appeared to be absorbed in what she was doing, and she took no part in the conversation.

Tod sat down and drank a cup of coffee, and talked to Josephine, whose elbows were on the table. She was leaning forward, her handsome and expressive face upturned, her black eyes looking straight into Tod's blue ones. She liked homage, did Josephine; she liked to have a man *impressione*, interested in her and in her alone.

Tod gave it as his opinion that the Germans would never come to Myonville, and that they would go on fighting till the Germans were beaten. Josephine became voluble and eloquent on what France had suffered, how her brother André had

been wounded three times, and how it was impossible to buy new clothes. Claire went on hanging up her lace, and saying nothing.

Tod looked at Josephine because he was a gentleman, but he looked now and again at Claire because he wanted to. A ray of sunlight was stealing through the window, and it fell upon her brown gold hair and white neck and plain black dress. She was a little woman, *la petite* Claire, but Tod had a feeling that there was nothing little about her. He liked her calmness, her quietude, those enigmatically frank grey eyes of hers, and the way she went on doing things.

"The aeroplanes, we hear them each night now," said the dark girl, "and the bombs! Oh, la la! And Abbeville is being destroyed. I cannot sleep. I walk up and down, or run into the fields. It is so much safer in the fields."

Claire spoke for the first time.

"If I am to be killed at night, I will be killed in my bed," she said; "it will just happen so."

Tod looked at her.

"You will not be killed," he said, "but you are very wise."

Tod had work to do, a fatherly care for this battered remnant of his battalion, part of the battered remnant of a division. No one knew what they were doing in Myonville; Tod did not know, nor did the red men at D.H.Q. They had been pushed about the country, thrust into any odd corner, left on the rubbish heap so to speak, while over yonder men fought with their backs to the sea. Rumour had it that they were to train Americans; but neither the

war, nor the Americans, nor the great spring offensive concern this tale—this green season in the village of Myonville in Ponthieu by the sea.

Tod spent an hour in the orderly-room, went round the men's billets, inspected the kitchen, and was taken by Seymour to the officer's mess.

"Is your billet all right, sir?"

"Just what I wanted, Jack. By Jove, aren't those beech trees fine?"

"Gorgeous!" said the boy.

Tod wandered out after dinner into the lanes of Myonville. He had two letters in his pocket, but he did not want to read them yet. For Tod was sad, sad with the brave sadness of a strong man who had seen defeat, and whose heart was full of the thought of the men—his men—who were dead. He was sick of the war, soul-sick and very weary; there seemed no end to the bloody business, no end to the hopes that were dashed.

"We've got to beat them," was all that Tod would ever say; "we'll go on till we do it."

He was not a man of rhetoric, a man of phrases or of elaborate theories, one of your clever little people who sit in chairs in London and spill ink in wrangling over things they do not understand. Tod had no use for the war news of the journalists.

"Just tosh for the old women."

He left it at that.

But these beech trees and orchards—these hills and little old houses and these rich fields! How good they were! Such gentle lights on the green grass, such mystery in the dim alleys of the orchards, such

a smell of growth, such human tenderness! Tod's heart had been made bigger by the war. The change in him could be summed up in those few words; while over in England! What had those damned "leaves" of his given him? Nothing, nothing at all.

It was growing dark when he returned to the Rue de l'Eglise and the Café de la Paix. Peasants were sitting at their doors, and Tod found the Lorellards grouped in the doorway of the café. It was a plain old brick house standing on the street, next door to the schoolhouse where Claire Vignard taught her children.

The whole family rose.

"Please don't get up," said Tod.

He was introduced to Père Lorellard, a ruddy old man who kept an everlasting chuckle under his waistcoat, and whose blue eyes were full of mischief.

Tod sat down between Josephine and Claire. There was no embarrassment, no English awkwardness about these people. They accepted Tod, treated him with the exquisite and intelligent politeness of the French peasant, found their chairs just as comfortable although he had joined them. And Tod felt happily at home, the simplest of men chatting to two girls and two old people.

They praised his French.

"I'm half a Frenchman," he laughed, passing his cigarette-case to old Lorellard.

Josephine was the ready coquette, making her dark eyes mysterious and mischievous in the dark.

"Monsieur will stay in France after the war, perhaps?"

"I'm married," said Tod, glancing instinctively at Claire.

The fair girl did not look at him, but she had noticed a quick change in his voice.

"And how many children have you?" madame wanted to know.

"None," said Tod, like a man rebutting an accusation.

"Oh, mon Dieu!"—this was Josephine—"but the lines on my hand say that I am to have seven. Seven children, monsieur! Oh, la la!"

Little Claire broke in in that queer, abrupt way of hers.

"Why work if you are to have no children? What is the good of it—just for yourself?"

Her eyes met Tod's in the dark, but she turned her head away almost immediately, and a silence fell upon Tod. A vague sadness seemed to steal in at the open doorway; and Tod rose and said "Good night."

"I have letters," he said.

Josephine lit him a candle, and waited for him to smile at her, but Tod did not smile.

"He is thinking of his home," she said, when Tod had gone upstairs. "He is not happy."

But Claire had a feeling that Tod was not happy because of his home.

The colonel was sitting at his table, and he had pulled those two letters out of his pocket. One was from Mr. Burgetrode; the other from his wife. He read Mr. Burgetrode's who had grown even bigger with the war, a creative giant labouring to beat the

Boche. It was a long letter, an intimate letter, almost fatherly in some of its touches. Tod spent half of each leave with Mr. Julian Burgetrode; they had grown fond of each other for there was the same bigness in them both.

His wife's letter brought a touch of grimness to Tod's face. He was happy with his men, but miserable with those other memories. Millie had a little flat in town, and even a lieutenant-colonel's pay was inadequate to explain her palpable opulence. Those "leaves" of his had worried Tod, sent him back to France with intolerance and suspicion in his heart. He suspected her of slyness, and of more than slyness.

"Have her watched," some very merciless Stoic had said to him.

"I can't," Tod answered. "How can I? I'm up against death out here. That changes a man. Set some sneak to spy on her? Damn it—I can't do it! I couldn't do it—somehow—even if I felt sure——"

A woman would have said that Tod was right.

Chapter Thirty-one

The Lorellards owned a little shop, the café, and a farm. The shop was next to the café, and you entered it by a separate glass-panelled door. Tod had to pass through the public room every time he left or entered his billet; it was a biggish room with a queer little bar, half a dozen clean white tables, a set of shelves almost barren of bottles, a dozen chairs, and a bracket clock. This room was nearly always empty. Sometimes Tod saw two or three old Frenchmen

sitting at one of the tables; his own men never came there, for the Lorellards had no need to be very enthusiastic about the café. The shop was a more serious proposition, but the child of their hearts was the farm.

It lay beyond the orchard and a row of tall beeches, and Tod discovered it in company with Madame Lorellard. There were two little meadows surrounded with willows, a broad strip of arable land green with young wheat, a small wood of poplars, and a little field beyond the wood where old Lorellard grew potatoes and Indian corn. The barn and his stables were near the house.

Old Lorellard was always working. The back of his neck was all seamed with wrinkles, and the colour of leather. His hands were knotty and strong. In his old blue breeches and striped shirt, with a hoe in his hands, he was the very soul of France, shrewd, cheerful, ready with a mischievous gleam of the eyes under their badger grey eyebrows. He was a philosopher, and in his way—a thinker.

Old Lorellard astonished Tod. He could talk unexpectedly about so many unexpected things.

“Socialism, monsieur? We do not need socialism in Myonville. Look, you, we all work here; there are no rich in Myonville.”

This was true.

“Moreover, there are no factories. It is the factories that make the trouble.”

And then he asked Tod a question.

“Is it true, monsieur, that in your war factories you pay the workers, even girls and boys, very much money?”

"That's so," said Tod.

"Then you will have much trouble after the war," said old Lorellard; "no one will know the value of money or the value of good sweat. But in France we shall not have so much trouble."

"Why?" Tod asked him.

Old Lorellard pointed to his crops.

"We grow things. We live close to Nature, and we know that she does not give if we do not work. And work is good. They say we peasants are misanthropes; sometimes it may be true. Look you, this land is mine; there are thousands of little farms like mine in France. We work; we do not waste money on things that do not matter. Paris is not France, monsieur."

"Are you happy?"

Old Lorellard gave him one of his shrewd, smiling looks.

"Well, what would you say, monsieur?"

"I hope I shall be as happy at your age," said Tod.

Madame was like her man, only she went to church and he did not. Her old sun-bonnet shaded a contented face, the face of a woman who had borne strong children, and who had a right to be proud. Even the war had not shaken her. Her boy's three wounds were like red badges of honour over her heart.

She talked quite frankly to Tod, sensing him as a man without guile.

"My other girl is married, monsieur. They are good girls, both of them, though Josephine is a coquette. We do not spoil our girls, monsieur. They

understand what is expected of a woman."

"And your niece?" Tod asked with a certain shyness.

Madame's eyes lit up. Her heart was very warm towards Claire.

"A good girl, a very good girl, and so wise! She is an orphan, monsieur; her father was a railway official; she had a good education."

"And she is not—not engaged?" Tod asked.

"Oh, no, monsieur. It is unfortunate, but her dot will be very small. Not but that men have asked for her, but she is very hard to please, is Claire. She looks with those grey eyes of hers and waits and listens. A good girl, so very strong yet gentle, and warm of heart, though she seems so quiet. Such a wife for some man."

And Tod wandered off into the orchard with a sad and very thoughtful face. Why hadn't he had the luck to find such a mate? There was something mysterious and fine and compelling about Claire.

The staircase of the house led down into the kitchen, and Tod had to pass through the kitchen whenever he went in and out. The Lorellards made but little use of the sitting-room. Tod would always be passing Claire. The school took but five days of her week, nor were the hours long, and she sat by the kitchen window with her workbox on the window-sill, and some work or other in her lap. She wore a rather shabby black skirt, a white blouse with a faint blue stripe on it, and cut low at the throat. On Sundays she wore a blouse with a pattern of little mauve flowers, and a black cotton apron covered with blue pansies.

Sometimes she smiled at Tod, sometimes she looked at him with a baffling seriousness and did not smile at all. She was not talkative; and though her fingers were always busy, she had an air of pleasant repose.

“Always working, mam’selle,” Tod would say to her.

Her replies were never obvious.

“I think while I work,” or

“A woman is not all fingers.”

“Do you ever go out?” he asked her.

She laughed.

“Has not Monsieur le Colonel seen me sitting in the orchard? And I walk every evening. There are always the children to walk with.”

“I wish——” said Tod, and then smothered the wish.

She guessed that he had wanted children.

Sometimes her face would glow with sudden light, and she would grow animated. She had a very charming and expressive mouth, and the most perfect white teeth; and when her eyes lit up Tod thought her beautiful, beautiful in a way that was new to him. There seemed so much behind those eyes.

Yet she baffled him, this daintily shabby, silent, children-teaching Claire. She had such a sturdy poise of her own, the soft mystery of woodlands that do not rush to you but wait for you to come to them, and still remain mysterious. Tod found her serene, practical, strangely quick to understand him, ready to listen, slow to speak. She seemed to hold him at a

distance. She was always a little way off.

He did not understand it then, that it was her strength, the strength of a Frenchwoman who knew the passion latent within her, not the Frenchwoman of the English idea, a woman far finer and more humanly wise than that. She had something sacred within her, a passionate spirit that no man should touch—until—— Until! That was the soft aloofness, Tod saw in her eyes.

Each evening Tod became part of the family. Sometimes they sat in the doorway, sometimes in the kitchen, sometimes in the orchard. Tod liked the orchard best. He lay on the grass and watched the last sunlight on the green boughs of the old trees and upon Claire's face and hair. Josephine was the talker, and Tod could fly a gaiety that would match hers, but he did not look at Josephine as he looked at Claire.

Josephine made him talk.

"Were you always an officer, Monsieur le Colonel?"

Tod explained that he had begun the war as a private.

"And such a boy! And what are the ribbons for?"

He told them, looking at Claire as he spoke.

"Just luck, you know."

"And in England I suppose you are rich? I should like to be rich. I should have breakfast in bed each morning and in the winter I should go to Nice."

"And you would be none the happier," said Claire, with one of her quick flashes of aggressive truthfulness. "Too much money is like having too

many aprons; you never know which one to wear."

Old Lorellard chuckled.

"Did you ever hear such wisdom? Quite a female Solomon."

Claire blushed.

"I'm a poor man," said Tod; "I never expect to be anything else. I agree with Mademoiselle Vignard."

Josephine gave Tod a gleam of her dark eyes, the look of a woman who says in her heart: "Ah, it is like that, is it?" But if Josephine was a coquette she was no cat. She was jealous for Claire when the real heart of her was touched. Good women hold together.

These evenings left Tod astonished and full of pleasure in his own astonishment. These people were peasants, substantial peasants, it is true, but the fineness of their manners and the refinement of their culture were unlike anything he had known in England. They made most middle-class English families seem vulgar and ignorantly boorish. There was no ostentation, no swelling up of the social frog, no fidgeting, no giggling. Tod knew that the average Englishman is apt to be either servile or insolent, and inclined to bray like a jackass at anything that startles his complacent ignorance.

"They must be more civilised than we are," he said to himself. "I know I'm an ignorant beast."

He learnt many things concerning Claire. She had been to school at Tourcoing, a good school. She could read English, but speak it barely at all, perhaps because Tod made her strangely shy. She could play the violin. "But I play it very badly," she confessed; "the war broke the strings." Her reading flustered Tod, who had never been much of a reader. He did

not know anything about the French classics, and he had never heard of Ronsard, Montaigue, Pascal, Chateaubriand, Daudet or Anatole France. She was surprised that he was ignorant of Balzac, and Tod made a desperate grab and pulled up Dumas and Zola to impress her. He could think of no other names. She had the advantage of him even in the English classics, and she could have taught him his own history. And yet there was nothing of the prig about her, nothing of the schoolmistress. She could cook, sew, manage a house, and she had a practical knowledge of farming and gardening. She had ideas about spiral nebulæ and electrons and Mendelism, but such erudition struck Tod as charmingly and wonderfully ridiculous.

"What do you want to know such things for?" he asked her.

"I don't," she said, "but it does not do me any harm, monsieur, so long as I love children. A woman knows with her heart, a man with his head."

And Tod's consciousness began to be full of the eyes and the voice and the soul of Claire.

Chapter Thirty-two

That month of May in Myonville was the most wonderful month in Tod's life, full of the sadness of beauty and the beauty of sadness, exquisite and strange. The war had been with Tod for more than three and a half years. He had lived only with men, a very simple and big-hearted soldier, taking the dirt and the wounds with them, boasting no poignant memories of home, a very lonely man in that inner

life where only women and children and a few friends matter. He had given up his soul to the war and his heart to his men, and they adored him. The clever little people who wriggled into the safe corners at home do not understand these things. How should they? They would have criticised that word "adoration," and they would have been bored by Tod's simplicity. They remained clever, with all the meanness of cleverness, while simpler men became great.

Tod had had nothing to sweeten the war, save his success as a soldier, the love of his men, and the big heartedness of Julian Burgetrode. His memories of his wife were sordid and painful, memories of an overblown young woman living in a London flat, a young woman of expensive habits and extravagant clothes, hard, restless and sinister. There was a smear on the face of Tod's marriage. It was a thing of suspicion, horrible in its dubiousness, its sly suggestion of disloyalty, its too obvious materialism. And yet something restrained him, a sensitive generosity, a reticence that kept a grimly shut mouth, perhaps that spirit of discipline that Tod had taught to his men, for Tod could be very stern to the shirker and the slacker. There were a few bad men who hated him, because he had made them afraid, and was their master. They did not matter. The battalion had faith in Tod, and a kind of schoolboy delight in his shrewdness and his exposure of tricksters. "He'll sweat blood for you," was the saying, "raise hell if anybody tries to do you down, but if you run crooked with him, look out."

In Myonville Tod found all that the heart of him had hungered for, green leaves and cloth of gold, the smell of lilacs in a garden, red thorns in bloom, the

dear grey eyes of a girl. It was all so good, so wholesome, so beautiful. He loved the beech trees and the orchards, the little house with its soul of the home; he loved old Lorellard and his wife; he loved the children in the streets, the horses that went to drink at the big pond, the pigeons, the chestnut trees with their wax white flowers; and perhaps without realising the pain and the beauty of it he loved Claire.

She was Myonville; she was the spring, the greenness and perfume, the soul of all he desired. She began to fill his whole consciousness, this dainty shabby little woman with her grey eyes and shining hair, her white throat, her busy fingers and her wisdom. She roused in Tod all that passionate tenderness that memory connected with his mother. It was only when he realised how much he wanted her that he discovered the tragedy of it all.

Claire still puzzled him.

One evening he had tried to make her read an English book. Their heads were together, by the lamp on the table. Old Lorellard was smoking his pipe; madame dozing; Josephine watching Tod and her cousin. It was a moment of gaiety, Claire laughing, expostulating, hesitating, with a little finger pointing at some difficult word.

“But, monsieur, it is so absurd, your English endings. Puff and trough, and though and enough. There’s no system.”

“There never is a system, except in the army,” laughed Tod; “I’ll get the Army Council to get it all altered. Supposing you write me a letter?”

“Be serious,” said Claire, touching the crown on his sleeve for a moment with the tip of her little

finger.

"I am serious," said Tod, with a look of his blue eyes.

And suddenly she grew shy, strange. She drew the book away, and went to Josephine almost with the air of a child asking for protection. Tod was puzzled. Josephine began to talk to him in her gay and eager way, but Tod did not want to talk to Josephine. Old Lorellard, that kind old man of the world, refilled Tod's glass, and smiled at him from under his bushy eyebrows.

"To the end of the war, monsieur."

"With all my heart!" said Tod.

"And monsieur will go to his home."

Tod nearly choked over that glass of wine. He had glimpsed something that he had not glimpsed before. Claire was nothing to him, even though he had realised with a sudden anguish that she was everything. Perhaps these good people were trying to make him understand; their eyes had been open to his blindness? But, after all, he had spoken no single word! It was just his own silly fancy, the sensitive boy in him, nothing more, and for some days he tried to believe it was that.

He tried to pretend to a happy gaiety, to accept these weeks in Myonville as nothing more than a charming interlude, a drawing of the breath before more effort. His officers noticed that Tod was growing solitary and silent, not morosely so, but with the gentle and quiet look of a man who had worries. He was out much on his horse, and it was on one of these rides of his that Tod came nearer to a realisation of the truth.

He had ridden to Eu; and was trotting back in the evening from that very French and pleasant old town, enjoying the rolling country and the blue sky and the beech woods, when he came upon three little people resting by the road. A girl was sitting on the grass, holding a weeping child in her lap, and a small boy was standing beside her and looking with quaint melancholy at his dirty shoes. He seemed undecided as to whether he should laugh or weep. The girl was Claire, very pretty in her simple Sunday clothes.

Tod dismounted. Her grey eyes looked up at him gladly.

"What's this! Oh, mam'selle, why this grief?"

"I'm so tired, monsieur," said the child.

Claire explained.

"We have been to Le Treport. I promised to take them to the sea; we missed the last train. I think there are only two trains in the day, monsieur."

"So you started to walk?"

"And mam'selle has been carrying Marie," put in the boy; "and Marie is heavy."

Tod looked into Claire's tired eyes, and knew now how he loved her.

"Ma pauvre petite," he said, "did no one stop to give you a ride?"

"A car of the Croix Rouge passed us, but the driver shouted that it was forbidden."

"Punch knows how to disobey orders, don't you, old chap? Who wants a ride? Come along, Marie; up in the saddle; he's such a quiet old horse. Now then, Thomas, up you go too."

He lifted the children on to Punch's back, and then turned to Claire.

"You are tired," he said, and his eyes added: "Ma chérie, so tired."

His man's tenderness betrayed itself so utterly that she flushed and looked confused.

"I am no longer tired, monsieur."

"We have eight more kilometers."

"I'm very strong. It was carrying the child."

"I wish I could carry you," said Tod.

There was a welling up of light into her eyes, a light that is seen but rarely in the eyes of a woman. Then she laughed.

"Monsieur would soon be tired of it," she said. "I am little, but so solid!"

Tod's coming changed that weary pilgrimage into a triumphal return. Punch behaved like a gentleman, walking stolidly with his bridle on Tod's arm. The children, surmounting a brief awe of Tod, began to laugh and chatter.

"Who are they?" he asked.

Claire looked straight ahead down the avenue of beeches. "The mother is a widow, a widow of the war. And she could not afford——"

"So you stepped in?"

"Well, it is a pleasure."

"It would be to you," he said, "anything that is fine and good——"

"Monsieur!" she exclaimed softly, but with a touch of reproach.

Tod flushed.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, “I couldn’t help it. And you love children?”

“Is it not nature?”

“I have none,” he said, “but I was very happy when I was a child. I remember it all so well. My mother was the best woman in all the world, and I should like to be to my boy what my father was to me.”

“They are dead, then?” said Claire.

“Yes.”

“It is sad for monsieur. But you have a home.”

“No, not a home like the Lorellards’. If I get killed it won’t matter much.”

“You must not say that,” she said, “there are too few good men in the world.”

The two children demanded a large part of the conversation, and Claire and Tod drew apart to meet again in the chatter of the youngsters. Old Punch looked at Tod now and again with a question in those soft eyes of his. “Is this according to Army Orders, sir, and am I doing the job correctly?” Tod rubbed Punch’s nose, and then pretended to tickle Mademoiselle Marie’s leg.

“Naughty,” she said highly delighted. “Naughty man.”

And all the time Tod was conscious of Claire stepping along beside him as though they were mated and these two children on old Punch’s back ——! But Tod was dreaming dreams.

When they came to the outskirts of Myonville

Claire looked questioningly at Tod.

"Monsieur le Colonel would prefer to ride in alone?"

"I? Why should I?"

"The English are so correct."

He regarded her earnestly.

"I'm as happy as a king and as proud. But is it not allowed for you and these children?"

"I was not thinking of myself," she said, "but of the dignity of the English officer."

"Please God," said Tod, "may I be kicked into the nearest ditch if my dignity is so shabby a thing as that."

She gave him a flash of her eyes.

"You are a good man, Monsieur Tod."

And Tod went into Myonville with the happy face of a Sir Percival, past many of his own men who saluted him with hand and eyes, past the sacred doorway of his own orderly-room and the brisk face of the battalion sergeant-major. Somewhere near the church a man of the new draft that had just come to the battalion, a little literary gent or something jerked in for the last phase, chose to be facetious in the hearing of one of Tod's veterans.

"The C.O.'s found a hot billet. These officer chaps ——"

The back of a hard hand swung swiftly, struck him in the mouth.

"You b——y little blighter! He's worth a brigade of you scribbling rotters. Don't you try that sort of stuff on us."

The literary gent had a bloody lip, and he was frightened.

“Can’t a chap have a little joke——?”

“No, not you, when you want to put it on the colonel. He was out in ’14 while you were polishing the seat of a chair. You aren’t in the same class.”

It had been a happy evening for Tod, happy in its innocence and its simplicity and in his comradeship with Claire. She had talked to him more intimately and with a freedom that had brought him very near to her, yet perhaps because of the day’s happiness he was a little blind to what it meant to her. Tod had not realised the woman under that calm and courageous surface. He had not fathomed the depths of her, the possibilities of passion that a weaker woman might have betrayed to a weaker man. He had not divined what had happened to Claire any more than he quite realised all that had happened to himself.

The Lorellards were sitting in the big kitchen when Tod returned from the mess. There happened to be a Frenchman with them, an interpreter attached to an English Division, and an old friend. He lived in the next village and was home on leave.

Tod was introduced. He sat down and began to talk. The kitchen was in semi-darkness, for there were no lights; they had to be careful in Myonville because the German planes were searching each night for a big ammunition dump somewhere near the mouth of the Somme. And then Tod missed Claire from the pleasant friendliness of the family circle. She was in the kitchen. She had taken a chair over to the far corner of the door that opened into the shop, and she was sitting there alone in the dusk,

a little figure, almost invisible, save for her pale face.

Tod was puzzled.

She did not move, or join in the conversation, but sat there mutely, isolated, wholly apart.

“Mademoiselle Vignard is tired,” he said to Josephine. “Is not that so, Mademoiselle Claire?”

“Perhaps,” she answered him with an almost casual abruptness.

She did not speak again, but something emanated from her, a pathetic sense of resistance, an obstinate sadness that challenged Tod. He did not understand her silence and her isolation, and in groping for an explanation, wondered whether he was in the way.

The interpreter did not stay long. Tod stood there awkwardly after the Frenchman had gone. Claire was still detached and silent in her corner.

“Have I driven your friend away?” he asked them.

Josephine answered him.

“Oh, no, monsieur. He was just a friend of my brother’s. He is not very acceptable to us and to Claire.”

Tod thought he had found the explanation of Claire’s aloofness, but he was wrong.

When he said “Good-night” to the Lorellards she did not come out of her corner, and her good night was almost inaudible. “Bon soir, monsieur.”

Tod went upstairs to his room, troubled.

“Have I offended her?” he thought, “and how?”

Chapter Thirty-three

Two nights later Myonville was bombed. Some German airman, searching for that monstrous dump, and somewhat at sea in his reckoning, dropped his explosives on that great patch of blackness, Myonville and its trees. There was much noise; some tense terror; but not a house was touched: the German bombs fell in the gardens, and the orchards and the fields.

Tod was undressing when he heard the German plane overhead, and the excited voices of people in the street. He put on his tunic, leant out of the window and listened, seeing the orchard of the Lorellards all black under the full moon. A door banged in the house. He heard frightened footsteps on the stairs, and Josephine's voice high pitched and excited.

"Claire, Claire, come into the fields. Maman is waiting."

"I shall stay here," said a quiet voice.

Then a bomb crashed somewhere over by the church and Tod saw Josephine and her mother rush across the yard. The girl turned at the orchard gate.

"Claire, do not be so foolish!"

Tod returned.

"I will bring her, mam'selle," he called; "go on with madame."

He knew the door of Claire's room, and he crossed the landing and knocked.

"Are you dressed, mam'selle?"

"Yes," she answered him.

"Then you will come out into the fields?"

"I am not afraid."

"But—I—am afraid," he said; "you will come out with me into the fields?"

She seemed to hesitate; then she opened her door. Tod was standing there with the moonlight on his face, and no man could have looked less unafraid or more calm.

"Come," he said, "it is wiser."

She preceded him down the stairs, not hurrying, moving almost reluctantly. He had dominated her for the moment, and his domination was so sweet that it hurt.

They reached the orchard, with its mystery of moonlight and of shadows. The grass was heavy with dew, and the trunks of the old trees looked black as ebony.

"Why did you lie to me?" she said suddenly.

"I do not understand you."

"You said you were afraid. You are not afraid."

"I was not afraid for myself," said Tod.

She looked at him sharply in the moonlight.

"Sometimes one does not care."

And then she tried to smother the half-confessed cry of pain in those words.

"I mean—that it is just chance, monsieur."

But Tod's face had the tense, white listening look of the soldier, of a man grown cunning in the hell's music of the war. They were close to the orchard ditch, and Tod pulled the girl into it with a fierceness

that was too elemental to wait for words.

"Down, down on your face!"

It was like the plunge and crash of some meteorite. The ground shook; the whole orchard was a sudden yellow glare; fragments of metal, sods, shreds of splintered wood went seething through the apple bough and through the hedge behind them. One heavy bit of steel whined low over Tod's head, and fell with a "phut" into the bank behind him.

He found himself holding Claire's hand. She was trembling, and bending low upon her knees.

"Thank God," said Tod, lifting his face into the moonlight.

She drew her breath in deeply, and then suddenly withdrew her hand.

"I'm sorry if I was rough," Tod said to her.

"It was necessary, monsieur. I understand now."

"Perhaps you understand," he said, "why I was afraid? Rather than anything should happen to you ——"

She stood up and astonished him with a sudden outburst of gaiety. Tod had seen men laugh in a hysterical sort of way when they had escaped some great danger, but the girl's soft laughter was far more elusive and subtle. It sounded very strange to him in that solemn orchard with the German plane still droning overhead.

"And grandpère is still asleep. I am sure of it. We always say that he will not hear the trumpet of the Angel Gabriel. I wish to see the great hole in the ground."

She went forward lightly between the orchard

trees, a quick and graceful little figure, sometimes in the moonlight, sometimes in the shadow. To Tod she had become a tantalising and baffling creature, surprising him with her silence or her laughter, her flashes of frankness or an aloofness that left him puzzled and alone.

“Here, monsieur! Oh, the poor earth! the poor tree!”

He found her standing on the edge of a black pit, with all the wet grass about her covered with sods and dirt. An old pear tree, splintered at the base, had toppled sideways, and lay with its boughs trailing in the crater like a dead thing with spread arms and tumbled hair. Claire was standing like a child and looking down into the pit, a sudden solemnity upon her and pity in her eyes.

“It was such a good tree,” she said, “and bore such sweet fruit.”

Tod looked at her with a great longing.

“Better the tree than you.”

She did not seem to hear him.

“André was so fond of this tree. We used to have a swing on that big bough. And Uncle will be grieved. He loves all trees.”

Tod said nothing. He had seen so many dead men and so many dead trees.

They heard voices in the meadow beyond the orchard, the voices of women and children and old men. Josephine’s voice was audible above all the others.

“It fell in our orchard, I am sure. Oh, mon Dieu! supposing the house had been struck!”

Claire turned suddenly and went in the direction of the voices.

“Josephine, ici, ici. We are safe. The old yellow pear tree has been broken.”

They came pouring into the orchard with all the eagerness and the sangfroid of the French, those wonderful peasants whom Tod had learnt to respect from the bottom of his heart. Josephine ran and kissed Claire.

“Where is mon père?”

“Asleep, I believe.”

There was a chorus of laughter, exclamations. They gathered round the black hole and the broken tree, observing everything with the simplicity of children, immensely interested, sympathetic. A boy slid down into the crater and began grubbing with his hands for souvenirs.

Tod had placed himself close to Claire.

“It is good luck,” he said; “you will never be so near to a bomb again.”

She smiled queerly, her two hands folded below her throat, her eyes looking up at the moon. And then she slipped away, withdrawing herself with an unobtrusive gentleness, and going to Josephine, who was looking at the tree.

Something held Tod back. He did not follow her, for that little act of hers had affected him profoundly. It was so symbolical, so delicate, yet so strong.

Later they gathered in the kitchen, where old Lorellard had been found quietly smoking his pipe.

“It is all over, is it?” he said.

"Mon père, the yellow pear tree is broken."

"Well, it died for France," quoth old Lorellard with a wink and a cock of his chin.

Josephine, a flushed and tumultuous Josephine, had run to the cellar for a bottle of red wine.

"It is a celebration, a great deliverance," she said, "for the whole family and Monsieur le Colonel."

Tod bowed to her.

"France has taught me many things, mademoiselle, the great things that matter."

They drank the red wine, all save Claire, who refused to touch it, and the old people went to bed. Tod and the two girls sat talking for half an hour with the moonlight shining in upon the floor and glinting on the buckles of Claire's shoes. Her face was in the shadow, Josephine's in the light.

"Such danger is but child's play to monsieur," said the dark girl.

Tod seemed to be thinking.

"There are things that hurt one more than wounds," he said.

And he heard Claire sigh.

Josephine lit the candles.

"It is safe now."

She gave one to Tod and went up the stairs, Claire following her. Tod came last. Josephine's room was at the top of the stairs, but Claire and Tod had to cross the big landing that was larger than any of the rooms. Their two doors were opposite each other.

"Good night, Mademoiselle Claire," said Tod, looking back.

And for one moment she turned her head and gave him the most wonderful look in all the world, a shine of the eyes, a soft and splendid tenderness, a flash of exaltation touched with despair.

Tod went into his room, walked up and down for half a minute, and then knelt at the open window.

"God, bless her always and always," he said, "and make me strong."

Chapter Thirty-four

It was washing day, and Josephine and madame were hanging out the linen in the orchard. A pair of Papa Lorellard's blue linen trousers flaunted it in the sunlight between the two white sheets; and a red petticoat completed the tricolour. From the schoolhouse across the lane came a murmur of children's voices. Old Lorellard's geese gaggled in the meadow.

"The colonel is in love with Claire," said Josephine to her mother.

Madame Lorellard was pegging up a pair of lace-edged pillow slips.

"It is understandable," quoth the old lady; "I have seen it for days."

"It is a pity," said the daughter.

"Why a pity? I do not think that any harm will come of it."

Josephine grimaced.

"No; they are both too strong, and monsieur is not like other officers. But it is a pity."

"Well?"

"That he is married. He would have married Claire."

"Ma chérie, what a romancer you are!"

"I am not, Maman. And Claire wants him."

Madame Lorellard's kind blue eyes grew sharp and questioning.

"Has she told you?"

"Would Claire tell me, or anybody? But she wants him as she has never wanted a man, and he—he is hers—body and soul. They are in heaven, and in hell, Maman."

"How do you know?"

"I have sharp eyes and a heart. My dear Maman, I am a woman, a vain one, a talkative one, but I love Claire. I am handsome, yes, and I have black eyes, and a mouth that troubles most men, but this man is different; he has fallen down at little Claire's feet. He could not help it, I think. These things just happen."

Madame Lorellard went on hanging up her linen. Her ruddy face looked impressive, untroubled, the face of an old woman who was not easily shaken. Her blue eyes were proud.

"Yes, it is a pity," she said, "and yet I clap him on the shoulder for it. A man of sense, a good man, so merry, and so courteous. He will not do her any harm."

"But she will suffer," said Josephine; "Claire is not like the vain, light-hearted ones."

“But it is a triumph,” said the old Frenchwoman; “such a man and an English colonel, a good soldier. Let her look at it in that way.”

“Claire cares nothing for triumphs. She wants the man—the one man, and his children.”

“Bless the girl,” said Madame Lorellard, “but if he had married her we might have lost her. Is not that something?”

“You are growing old, Maman,” said her daughter.

Even the children at the school were aware of a change in Mademoiselle Claire Vignard, or “la petite mère,” as they called her. She looked sad, so sad at times; the class noticed it when it should have been absorbed in its sums. There were moments when “la petite mère” was strangely inattentive, and she could be caught gazing out of the window at the white road and the beech trees and the great clouds and the blue sky. She was like a child whose heart was not in her lessons, and who wanted to be away somewhere; the class understood that quite well, but the reason of it was beyond the understanding of the class. Claire had always been so vital, so smiling, so shrewd, so calm, so full of interest in her teaching, a little mother who had persuaded the lazy ones to take trouble. Half the small boys were in love with her. She was so much prettier, so much more charming than Mademoiselles Epinard and Fleury, those two rather thin women who were so ready to scold.

And then came that morning when Mademoiselle Claire Vignard worked out a sum incorrectly on the blackboard, and did not notice it. But Monsieur Moreau, the schoolmaster, who happened to come

into the room, noticed it and was shocked.

Such a thing had never happened before in Claire's career.

"Mademoiselle Vignard! It is incorrect!"

"Which, monsieur?"

"The example on the blackboard."

The class maintained a grave silence. Claire, faintly flushed, had left her chair and was looking at the chalked figures on the board. Then she took a duster and a stick of chalk and made the proper corrections.

"I am sorry, monsieur."

M. Moreau happened to be worried, and in a bad temper.

"Please be more careful in future."

The class was indignant, scandalised. For any man to speak to "la petite mère" in such a fashion! Little Emile, the chanticleer of the class, protruded a contemptuous tongue behind M. Moreau's back.

"Cochon!" muttered the infant.

Claire smiled at them all when the schoolmaster had marched out. She had recovered herself.

"Did none of you see that I was saying my prayers on the blackboard?" she asked them.

Emile stood up and replied with great solemnity. He was destined to be an orator.

"The class would never confess that Mademoiselle Vignard could make a mistake," he said; "the error was in M. Moreau's manners."

Claire's laughing eyes thanked this sententious

little diplomat of seven.

“Perhaps I shall never make a mistake again, Emile. If I do, the class shall correct me.”

Tod, too, had touched a season of great sadness. The gods were warning him that this happy sojourn in Myonville was drawing to a close, for were not reinforcements arriving, and a temporarily depressed brigadier showing a new sparkle and a more critical alertness. Some day their marching orders would arrive with all the blind suddenness of a bolt from Olympus. And Tod’s heart was in Myonville. He could not help it; it had just happened so. This green and golden month had been a season of strange beauty and tenderness, the happiest and yet the saddest month in all Tod’s life.

He would never see Claire again. He had no right to see her again, and he knew that he loved as he had never thought to love any woman, as his father must have loved his mother. It was all so hopeless and so tragic, and yet there was no bitterness in Tod’s heart; the romance was too great for that. He was just a big man, profoundly touched, profoundly sad, not a little afraid of hurting the heart of the woman he loved, still more sad when he thought of that other woman.

Tod was tempted, but the Quixote in him kept its face in the sunlight.

“If you took the trouble to find out,” said the voice, “you might discover things that would set you free.”

And Tod refused.

“It can’t be done,” he answered. “I can’t play the spy and the cad to win her.”

But he wanted to pour out his heart to Claire, to express that love of his with all the passion and the tenderness that cried out in him like the joy of the spring. There was such an exultation in loving her as he did, and yet it was the thought of the afterwards that made him pause and remain silent. Tod knew that he would suffer most terribly when he left her, but he would have a man's work to do, other men to think of, while Claire—would just have this little village and her children. She had been contented before his coming, and Tod spent those last days in wondering whether she cared, whether she cared as he did. He did not want to suffer; his vanity was not concerned in it, and yet—— What a memory to carry in his heart, what a splendid tenderness for a man to die with after all the little meannesses of his marriage!

It was Tod's last evening but one in Myonville, though he did not know it then, and he walked over the fields to Gibas where another battalion was quartered, and had tea with the officers who were billeted in the château. The colonel was a ragged old ruffian of a Scot, lean, biting, merciless, but with a heart of gold. He had a peculiar affection for Tod; in a sense they were rivals. Both battalions swore by their colonels.

"You will be staying to dinner, Western?"

And Tod refused.

"Sorry, Colonel, but I must get back."

"Must—must! There's no must about it! Just a wee French lassie somewhere, my lad!"

Tod blushed.

"I'm nearly twenty years younger than you are,

sir."

"Ye soft-tongued young scamp, calling me sir! Well, get along with you."

And Tod went, old Melville walking as far as the red-brick gate-house with him, eager as some rough-haired terrier over the news that was coming in.

"We'll be at them again in ten days, my lad. They say we shall move north to St. Omer to pick up some more men and spend a week knocking them into shape."

"I'm ready," said Tod with a far-away smile as the old Scot turned back at the gate, "though I had almost forgotten the war back here."

"Yes, it has been a brave month, Western. I'm the better for a sight of the children and those big trees."

Tod walked back through the deep lanes of Gibas, with the elms and the beeches meeting above his head and a small stream that had grown tired of its proper bed winding as it pleased about the sandy road. The blue sky was almost invisible, so thick was the canopy of leaves, and the little white houses seemed lost and hidden in this world of green growth. The road climbed slowly out of these woodland deeps like a snake crawling out to bask in the sun. Tod had a sweep of fields before him, sheeted with red sainfoin and wheat full of scarlet poppies. The distant trees of Myonville cut the deep blue arch of the sky like the misty towers of a distant town. A great iron crucifix stood on a mound just where the road left the shadows of the trees.

Tod took a field-track that branched away to the left. It was a favourite walk of his, a sort of pilgrim's way that was in no hurry to get to any particular

place, turning aside and loitering when a tree or a piece of orchard or a row of old trees pleased it. At times it cut deep into the fields like the sunk bed of a stream. Tod knew that it would bring him into Myonville close to old Lorellard's poplar wood, where he could turn into the meadows and so through the orchard to the Lorellards' house. He felt that he wanted to be alone and to escape the salutes of his men.

Half-way across the fields the track skirted a little grove of aspens, and sitting on the grass bank under one of these trees Tod saw Claire Vignard. She was all alone there like some Joan of Arc under the trees of Domrémy, and so absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not see Tod or hear his footsteps, so that he came on her like a figure that steps down out of a dream.

Tod had faltered for a moment, swept by a rush of great tenderness. She looked so much alone with her dear self, a little lost, so unconsciously sad that his heart misgave him. He wanted to go to her, reach out his hands and meet the soft light of her grey eyes and utter those words that haunted him day and night:

"Ma chérie, I love you."

Yet when he saw her sitting there alone, gazing towards the far horizon of her dreams, his own tenderness smote him in the mouth. There was nothing that he might say to her, nothing that he had the right to say.

He moved on again, and suddenly she saw him, the very man of her thoughts, the mate of her dear desires, but she remained still, still as a bird whose startled heart beats rapidly. Deep in her eyes shone a

soft inward glow. She felt Tod loved her, and would never speak.

"No school to-day?"

"It is a holiday, monsieur."

Tod stood looking down at her, the little woman with the sunlight on her face and hair, her bosom moving with a suggestion of slight breathlessness under the plain white blouse, her grey eyes shining—yet faintly clouded, each hand clasping a tuft of grass. Tod trembled on the edge of that tragic tenderness of his. He wanted her, and she, in her dreams, had felt herself embraced by him.

"It is so beautiful and peaceful here," he said.

"Not a leaf moves," she answered, looking upwards.

"Still as an empty church."

She closed her eyes for a moment and dreamed. Tod was so near, yet she knew that he would come no nearer.

"You have been very happy in Myonville?" she asked him suddenly.

"Very happy."

And then he added:

"I know that I shall never be so happy again."

Those were the only words he could utter, but in the stillness of the fields she took them into her heart.

"I am going back now, monsieur," she said.

"May I walk with you?"

"If you wish it."

And silence walked with them nearly all the way.

Chapter Thirty-five

Tod knew next morning that the battalion was to leave Myonville within twenty-four hours. A dispatch-rider brought him an early morning order from brigade headquarters, and Tod's orderly-room in Widow Dubois' house near the church began to function with great vigour. Tod was there before breakfast, with both hands deep in a basketful of official detail. A lorry arrived for the quartermaster and thundered off to Abbeville to draw ordnance stores. The transport officer had horses to collect. The battalion was to parade at nine, in battle order, for the C.O.'s inspection.

Tod rushed his breakfast and was back in the orderly-room. He was grim, brisk, a little feverish, conscious of a little woman with grey eyes waiting for him beyond all that mass of mechanical detail, the one thing in life that mattered. The war mattered, but it had become a habit, and Myonville had broken the habit. The work irritated him, though it had to be gone through with, and Tod pushed his way through as though he were forcing his way through a wood.

Tod inspected the battalion, went round all the billets, spent another hour in the orderly-room with his adjutant and felt himself nearer Claire.

"We move at nine, James. It's all quite simple. We are due at the starting-point at nine-fifteen. Seymour can ride on for billets at St. Riquier. We have an hour's break on the road."

"I'll see to everything, sir."

"I think I'll go round and get some of my things together," said Tod.

Then the office orderly rushed in.

"The general, sir, the Divisional general."

"Damn him!" said Tod under his breath.

It took another hour to get rid of the Divisional general. Tod had a reputation, and the great man was critical and inquisitive. He told Tod that his horses were dirty, and then asked him to dinner.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Tod, "but I have arranged to spend my last evening with some friends here."

The general was sportive and no fool.

"That's all right, Western; I quite understand."

Tod saluted him with great affection and watched him ride round the corner, and then started for his billet. The orderly-room sergeant pursued Tod.

"Will you sign these letters, sir?"

"Get Captain James to do it, Murray. I don't want to see any more of these damned things to-day."

Claire Vignard had just come in from the school. She was sitting sewing by the kitchen window, with the familiar work-basket on the window-sill beside her. She happened to be alone, for Josephine was busy in the shop, and the old Lorellards were down in the fields.

She heard the door of the café open, and a man's footsteps crossing the outer room. It was Tod; she knew that quick step of his so well, and the quiet way he had of closing the door.

“Back from school, mademoiselle.”

He came into the kitchen, and put his cap and stick on the table. She could see that he was much moved, and pretending to be casual; but he was flushed, and his eyes were restless. He walked to the window and stood looking at the orchard, a tense figure, head drawn back, eyes at gaze.

Suddenly he turned to her.

“Always working,” he said.

She did not raise her head.

“Yes, it is good to work.”

“I shall always think of you like that,” he said, “sitting by the window sewing. We go to-morrow.”

“To another village, Monsieur Tod?”

Her voice was very steady.

“No, to the front. I’m glad it’s the front.”

He turned again to the window, heart-sick, but very determined.

Claire had gone white, and her eyes seemed blind for the moment. She kept her head bowed and went on with her work.

“Ssst!”

Tod turned sharply.

“What is it?”

“Nothing, monsieur.”

He saw a drop of blood, very red in the sunlight, showing on the tip of one of her fingers, but her hands moved steadily at their work, and presently a red stain showed on the white linen.

Tod never forgot that little drop of blood on Claire's finger. It remained a vivid memory through the coming months.

"I am sorry it is the trenches," she said, after that short silence.

"Where else could a soldier go?" he answered. "I am not afraid of the trenches."

"I cannot think of you as being afraid, monsieur. I can only wish you bon chance."

Tod was looking at the orchard trees, and in their greenness he saw Myonville, the spring, all the beauty of that quiet month, and perhaps—the heart of Claire Vignard.

"I have been very happy here," he said slowly, almost like a man praying; "it has taught me so much. I don't know whether I shall ever come back again; I should like to come back, some day. You have all been so good to me."

Claire's head had dropped a little lower.

"It has been a pleasure to—us, monsieur."

And Tod smiled, a far-away, wondering smile.

"Life is queer, isn't it? Well, one does not forget. It's for France and you, anyway, if anything happens, I shan't regret it."

She gave him a brave flash of her grey eyes.

"I shall not forget, monsieur. It will be a good memory."

"God bless you, ma petite," said Tod, and went blundering up the steep stairs to his room with the excuse that he had to look through his kit. But he sat on the bed and stared at the wall.

"It's all over," he said to himself; "she's—she's ____"

He could not say what Claire was, for his thoughts were a mere fumbling tenderness; but Claire was staring at the little red mark on the white linen, and wondering whether he knew.

Lieut.-Colonel Western spent his last evening with the Lorellards. They took their chairs and a little table into the orchard, also five glasses and a bottle of red wine. It was a sad evening, dying away into the soft June dusk, and Tod and Josephine were the talkers. Old Lorellard puffed at his pipe and appeared depressed; madame had been working in the sun and was tired; Claire's eyes were watching Tod as though she wished to burn the memory of him into her mind. Tod was calm, very gay, smiling in the face of his own sadness.

"I shall be fighting for all of you," he said; "for madame and monsieur and the little farm, for Mademoiselle Josephine and the shop, for Mademoiselle Claire and the children."

"I am not a religious man, monsieur," said old Lorellard, "but I shall think of you when I use my scythe and my hoe."

"That's as good as a prayer, my friend."

"Good men do not need praying for," said Claire Vignard suddenly; "it is enough for us to remember them."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," said Tod.

The battalion was to move at nine, and Tod's servant had orders to call him at six, but Tod needed no calling. He could not sleep. He was thinking of Claire, thinking of her all the night, and how absurd

it seemed that he might never see her again. He could not bring himself to realise it, though the man in him knew that it was true. Old memories of Spaniards Row came back to Tod. All that he suffered that night, the silence and the helpless yearning of it made him think of the night when his mother died. She had slipped away from him into the darkness, never to return—but Tod's mother had died; Claire was a living Claire.

And so wonderfully alive, so wholesome, so comely and desirable, such a soft sweet thing to be embraced, that Tod could hardly believe that he was losing her. It seemed so wrong, so damnably and ridiculously wrong, almost as monstrous as the death of his mother had seemed to Tod—the child.

When the dawn came he left that most comfortable of French beds in which he had been unable to sleep, washed himself, put on his best tunic and riding-breeches and his new field-boots, and went softly on to the broad, white-floored landing. The house seemed silent and asleep, and Tod slipped silently down the stairs, yet not so silently that he passed unheard by someone else who had been unable to sleep. Claire, standing at her window in her nightdress, saw Tod walk out towards the orchard. He paused by the gate to light his pipe.

"Mon pauvre," she said to herself, "for you too the dawn is a sad one after a night of sadness. Will you call your pipe by my name, I wonder, as French boys do? Why did you come to us—ah!—why did you come?"

She watched Tod disappear into the orchard, and then slipped back into bed.

"I will not see him again," she said. "I do not

think that I could bear it. I shall stay here till he has gone."

Tod walked up and down the orchard for an hour. Perhaps—lover-like—he had hopes of seeing Claire again and of speaking a few last words to her, words that would remain after he had left, but it was not Claire who came to him, but Josephine on her way to the woodstack to bring in an armful of dry wood.

"Bonjour, monsieur. You are very early."

Her dark eyes looked straight at Tod.

"I could not sleep," he said, with brotherly frankness.

She paused by him, a woman who understood all that had happened to these two people, but whose thoughts were with Claire.

"You have been too happy in Myonville, Monsieur Tod."

"Happy!"

He felt that Josephine understood.

"But not now."

"Mon ami," she said, "you will go to your home when the war is over, and you will forget."

"I shall have no home," he answered, "and I shall never forget. Some day—perhaps——"

She looked at him pityingly with her dark eyes.

"It is serious with you; I know. It is very hard."

Tod thought a moment.

"Josephine—I wonder if I might write to her?"

She answered him at once and very firmly.

"No, monsieur. It would not be fair."

"Not even once?"

"If wounds are kept open——"

Tod looked her straight in the face.

"You are right, absolutely right," he said, "it would not be fair."

And Josephine kissed him.

"Claire will understand," she said.

Chapter Thirty-six

The battalion bugles were blowing and the men were falling in on the square by the church. The transports had hooked in and were waiting in the little Rue des Fermes. Half Myonville was there by the church, crowded against the fronts of the little white houses and under the pollarded limes, laughing and exchanging banter with the soldiers and wishing them good luck.

"Where's the C.O.?"

The adjutant, glancing at his watch and rather worried, threw this question at Haines the doctor, who came up jamming a packet of sandwiches into his haversack.

"He left me at the mess. Said he had forgotten something at his billet."

"It's three minutes to nine. Sergeant-Major!"

"Sir?"

"Send the colonel's horse along to his billet, the

café down by the school."

"Never known him late," said James to the doctor, "not by ten seconds."

Tod had gone back to his billet, for an overmastering impulse had taken him there. Claire had hidden herself and he had not seen her to say "good-bye" when he had left the house at half-past seven. And suddenly the thought had shocked him, the thought of "I shall never see her again," and his heart had answered—"I must."

The café door was locked. Tod went round to the gate that led into the yard, and came face to face with Josephine.

"Mademoiselle."

Josephine understood.

"She is in her room."

"I have a minute, no more. Josephine, you can trust me."

"I trust you," she said, and walked away towards the orchard.

Tod stood in the little brick-paved yard, looking up at the house all green with the leaves of the great pear tree. A little smoke rose from one of the chimneys. Claire's window, with its white lace curtains, was half closed.

"Claire," he called softly, "Mademoiselle Claire."

Then he saw her at the window. She was dressed, and he had a glimpse of her white blouse and the top of her black apron with the blue pansies.

"Monsieur——!"

She had gone pale at the sound of his voice, and

she was trembling.

"It is au revoir, I had not seen you."

"Je ne descende pas," she said; "I cannot, monsieur."

She looked down at him for a moment with a sudden tragic radiance that was near to tears. And then her hand dropped something, a little book bound with a slip of blue ribbon. It was a little Testament that had belonged to her mother. Tod picked it up.

"God bless you for ever and ever," he said.

And then he turned and ran.

He was buttoning that little brown book into the breast pocket of his tunic, when an orderly met him with his horse.

"All right, Smith. Thanks. Now then, Punch, old boy."

He swung into the saddle and rode down the street to the church. The church clock struck nine as he reached the battalion, those brown men in their fighting kit standing steady, eyes to the front.

And Tod smiled. It was a brave smile. He was the soldier again.

"Nearly late, James."

"It never happens, sir."

"All ready?"

"All ready, sir."

"Then we'll move off."

So Tod rode out of Myonville at the head of his men, and Claire went to the school and sat calmly

through the morning under the eyes of the children.

"Is it all true?" her heart kept saying. "Why did he ever come to me?"

And yet she knew that she would not have had it otherwise.

Chapter Thirty-seven

Tod fought all through the summer months; in the autumn he fought at Le Cateau and Landrecies, and even before he had reached that October phase he was made to realise that he was not going to be killed. At Wallincourt he had a house knocked down about his head, and beyond being buried and smothered with plaster, he was not hurt. James, his adjutant, was shot dead beside him in a street in Le Cateau. Somewhere near Landrecies Tod missed the exploding of a "delayed action mine," and missed it with a margin of forty seconds. "The C.O.'s luck." It was proverbial, and the men agreed that he deserved it, but they warned Cane, his servant, to look out. "You be very careful, Whacker, or some bloomin' shell that 'asn't the cheek to touch him will blow you to b——y blazes."

Cane "looked out" until the Armistice intervened, and he found himself tacking oiled linen over the broken windows of a villa in Landrecies, and arranging old pails to catch the drip from the ceiling. Cane believed in the colonel; he believed too in that little old French Testament which he knew Tod always carried in the breast pocket of his tunic. Cane was a religious boy, though the battalion had given him the irreverent name of "Whacker."

Tod felt lost, most strangely lost. The amazing business was over, the high spirited tension of it relaxed after those years of inward discipline. It was as though the world had struck work of a sudden, and stood waiting at the street corners for God and the millennium to arrive on earth. Tod did not quite know whether he was glad or sorry. He was glad for these poor French folk, but he had a feeling that something fine and heroic and simple had gone out of life, and that the great adventure was at an end.

They had reached the top of the hill, and the dull misty November sky was like a grey curtain showing the world nothing but a huge question mark. What next? Whither? How?

Were they going back down the hill again, back to the old life, or would they push on to other hills vaguely imagined in the grey distance?

To Tod it was a day of interrogation.

He remembered standing in the garden of the little rococo French villa that had been hit by a couple of German shells. Through one big hole in the brickwork the staircase leading to the attics was visible, hanging derelict in mid-air, its banisters splintered and twisted. A broken lime tree lay half across the iron gate, resting on one of the brick pillars. The grass plot was covered with broken tiles and bricks, the flower beds pulped and trampled. The front door hung by one hinge, a pathetic and drunken door. But the villa was not dead. An old Frenchman in carpet slippers was patiently raking up the rubbish and taking it off in a basket to a far corner of the garden. Madame and her two daughters had carried out some chairs and a settee and were dusting them with affectionate care.

Tod was touched.

“They don’t understand these things in England,” he said to himself; “they never will.”

He went across and spoke to the old Frenchman, who was his host.

“To-morrow, monsieur, I will get some of my men to help you. It was bad luck, those two shells, after all these years.”

“Ah, Monsieur le Colonel, we are quite happy. Are we not free?”

“I admire your courage, monsieur,” said Tod, “and the courage of madame and her daughter.”

The Frenchman pointed with his rake at the hole in the wall.

“Bricks, monsieur, only bricks; not the blood of my children. That can be remedied. We shall get to work in France; we shall clean up all the rubbish.”

“I wish England had had some of this,” said Tod thoughtfully; “the few bombs we got were nothing. I suppose that is why you French are so much finer than our people.”

“But your army, monsieur, is it not superb?”

“There was nothing wrong with our army; I’m thinking of some of those people at home.”

Tod wandered out alone one afternoon, and passing through a battered and slimy-streeted old town, broke away into the country that was strangely still and quiet under the grey November sky. It was a land of little farms and green meadows shut in by high hedges, and Tod followed the track of a tank that had cut square gaps in the hedgerows, the bushes lying flattened like crushed faggots in the

ditches. There were shell holes everywhere, turf and scattered earth where the barrage of the English guns had advanced across the fields. The farmhouses still seemed to be deserted, and a great silence reigned over those little secret meadows.

But Tod was not concerned with the war and its last dramatic phases. He had come to the edge of the "Afterwards," an afterwards that was as sudden and strange as the sea to a man who has marched for months through a forest. Tod wanted to think. He had been thinking in jerks and spasms during the war, disconnectedly, rather vaguely, though certain stark and fundamental facts had emerged from the chaos. He had learnt to know men. He had learnt that they were utterly unequal. He loved them, even though he knew that most of them were good-hearted sluggards, born to be led and managed. He had discovered the bad man, who was often clever and dangerous, and who responded to nothing but fear and the voice of a master. Tod had been a master. No man less of a bully than he, but he had learnt the great lesson of mastery. Character; that was the one thing that counted. And because of his ideals, his love of men and his passionate vision of what life should be for them in the future, he was torn within himself, puzzled, challenged. He had had dreams of a new leader and a new earth. Socialism—perhaps? But what of the master-men, the leaders? Was not good staff-work as important in a State as in an army? Was not civil discipline as necessary as military discipline? Could a committee of battalion cooks have schemed and carried through a big offensive? Were not the best talkers often the worst fighters, and the least dependable of men? Tod had been living with realities. He had learnt the great lesson, that the very nature of man has a way of

upsetting the most elaborate and beautiful theories. You can use workmen to build a cathedral, but you cannot use the workmen's backs in place of stones. You can set a hundred men running a race, but the whole hundred will not breast the tape together. Life was still a race. Penalise the speedy men, and the thing would become a farce, a disgraceful strolling match for loafers. Nature would put up her starting pistol, and go in search of a better strain, of new men. Civilisation's business was to see that there was a fair start for all, and no fouling.

In wandering over those wet fields Tod came upon a little orchard close to a long rambling red-roofed house whose eyes still seemed to be staring in a blind and frightened way at certain horrors that had been enacted close to it. The orchard had been a German howitzer position. A scattering of poplars and willows in the surrounding hedgerows had screened it well, but chance or some English airmen had spotted those squat black cannon, and death had come out of the grey sky.

The orchard was all brown with shell holes and scattered earth. Half the trees had been smashed. One big howitzer lay wallowing in a crater like some huge black beast dead and swollen. A second had been caught in the act of making off towards the road, and stood where it had been left, its snout cocked in the air as though it had been squealing in terror. The ground round about was littered with wicker cases, fuse boxes, shells, German helmets, overcoats, gas-masks, a torn and bloody tunic. Two or three dead Germans still sprawled under the hedge. Tod could picture the fierce intensity of that battle scene. The sudden plunging shells, the crash of the explosives, the spurts of dirt and smoke, the

shrinking desperate men drifting away from their smothered guns, the dead left lying. What a glimpse of the last judgment on the men who had conceived and created the war!

Tod sat down on a wooden case. He was used to such scenes. This smashed German battery was a thing of the past, and Tod's thoughts were in the future.

He had a packet of Mr. Burgetrode's letters in his pocket, and he wanted to read them again at his leisure. Some of them were in answer to the scrawls he had sent to this big friend, the curt, frank outpourings of a soldier to a man who understood.

There were many passages in Julian Burgetrode's letters that spoke as an answering voice to Tod's thoughts.

"Am I an idealist? Of course I am an idealist, but I prefer good concrete for my foundations, to building in a bog of sentimental and Utopian slush."

"If you think you are coming back to a new heaven and a new earth, my son, get rid of that idea at once. We are going forward, but I think that we shall go forward in a way very different from what most people imagine. Read French history as it concerns a period like our own. And don't think that England has been chastened, as the best of you have been chastened out there. It hasn't. The grocer is still stronger than God."

"Keep away from the people who are always calling on the State to do this and to do that. Don't be befogged by that word 'State.' Be ready to take your coat off and fell your own trees."

"After all, what is the 'State' to which these good

people are always appealing? Such a State is nothing but officialdom. And who is your official? Just old Mr. Peasgood Nonsuch, a rather dull and phlegmatic old gentleman who goes back to Surbiton or Ealing each evening, and grumbles over the paper, with his feet in the fireplace. Mr. Peasgood Nonsuch, and whole cohorts of Nonsuches are not going to do your business for you."

"The country that sits down and waits for someone to hand it its spade, bring it its dinner, and wipe its unsweated forehead, is going to the devil."

"Tod, my boy, you must know that men have to be managed and to be moved. Most of them are just marionettes. Necessity is the great wire. Cut it and you will stop the vital current to the whole complex scheme. And an intoxicated mob of fools will be fighting like starving dogs."

"We are still creatures of necessity, not democratic demigods. We have created our scheme of civilisation, and we have got to live with it; it's our Sphinx, our Master. Nature is not going to be cheated."

"For the average man needs fear, the fear of hunger and no fire. The truth is as old as Adam. Have we suddenly become automatic angels?"

"Tod, my man, don't sink yourself to the level of the pap-mongers and visionary journalists. Don't be quixotically unselfish. Not one man in ten thousand really cares about the big dream. He's thinking of his coal-cellar and the income tax. The grocer will beam you his blessing and do you behind your back. It's in the blood."

"Nature is not going to let us all wallow in a social elysium just yet. We have got to be up and

doing, every man of us. Those who sit under the apple tree and smoke and wait for Mr. Peasgood Nonsuch to climb up and throw down the apples won't get 'em. They don't deserve to get 'em."

"Get power. Be big. Keep away from the clever little people. Character and courage are worth more than cleverness. As you say—the war has taught us that."

"Get power. Use it benignantly, wisely, but get power. Why should a man be afraid to be big? What sort of world would it be if we were all like a field of cabbages. Refuse to be lopped and dragged down by the people who haven't the heart to be big."

"Is it wrong to say that all the great work of the world has been done by adventurers, pioneers, students, individuals? The mob of little men comes trailing along through the gaps cut by the pioneers, and you will hear the little men shouting: 'How well we are doing this job!' "

"I'm not talking 'superman stuff.' It is that other damned creed that I'm attacking, the cry of 'all in the trough together,' the mob spirit that lusts to pull down because it has not the grit to climb up."

"You seem to write at times, Tod, as though you wondered whether I ever felt afraid of the power I happen to hold. I don't. I created what I have created; no other man has a grip of the great machine as I have. I'm not modest about it, because it is a fact."

"Why should one be so absurdly sensitive? I'm fair to the men who work for me; I try to do all I can for them; I try to push up the keen and the good ones."

"I can almost imagine the day when the Proletariat will say to God: 'Look here, you come down out of that. We're fed up with your swank. We can run the bally show ourselves.' "

"And supposing God agreed?"

"Take it another way. Supposing a general of a division was seized with a hypersensitive false modesty. 'I must really apologise to you men for having the impertinence to be in authority over some fifteen thousand of you. I suggest you elect a committee and fight the division. Of course, if I might tender a little innocent advice—now and again, but believe me I shall not intrude upon your authority!' "

"No, I'm not going to abdicate. I'm not senile just yet. The man who knows that he can lead is a coward if he abdicates."

"I often think there is too much open-mindedness about our young men of brains. A little more backbone and a little more battle-axe would be better."

Tod smiled over these letters of Mr. Burgetrode's. They were so fresh, so pungent, so vigorous, and they echoed many of the grim facts that Tod has discovered during the war. He had learnt how to father a battalion, that little world of men in miniature.

And then he re-read Julian Burgetrode's last letter.

"So the Bloody Business is nearly over. It has been the most religious thing in all history. The German organisation should have won. It was beaten by something higher and finer than mere

organisation. Character, the good heart of the plain man.

"I want you back with me, and I shall agitate when the time comes. I am getting a little old. I want you to help me to manage men."

Tod put those letters away, and began to think of other things. In this battered orchard under the grey of the November sky, his thoughts went back to Myonville and Claire—sturdy, grey-eyed, deep-bosomed Claire. He had carried the little book she had given him, still tied about with a bit of blue ribbon, a warm memory next to his heart. He unbuttoned the flap of his breast pocket, drew out the worn, brown Testament, and, looking at it, thought of her with a tenderness that was as sacred as the memory of his mother.

That other life was claiming him again. He saw himself going back to England, to the woman who inspired in him nothing but a profound distrust. He had no letter from Millie in his pocket. It was three weeks since he had received one from her, and perhaps the silence between her letters had been a relief to him. He did not want to remember his wife.

Walking home towards the pale winter sunset, Tod tried to hold fast to some of Julian Burgetrode's words.

"Be big. Work is more lasting and more satisfying than love."

And in Landrecies Tod happened to see a French soldier, home on leave in Landrecies after more than four years of its occupation, being embraced by his weeping wife.

"Oh, Jean, mon mari!"

"Damn!" said Tod; "Burgetrode's wrong."

Chapter Thirty-eight

The Armistice was not more than three weeks old when Tod walked into Mr. Burgetrode's private room in the Hotel Europa. Mr. Julian Burgetrode had been the Controller of Something during the latter part of the war, and his department inhabited the whole of the hotel. A certain notorious daily paper had said ferocious things about Mr. Burgetrode, referring to him as the "Autocrat with the Red Tie," yet nothing had happened. Many people had discovered that it was impossible to hurt Mr. Burgetrode; he walked over them with a grim and humorous smile, and his reply was his silence.

"Hallo, Tod! I didn't know you were on leave."

He got up briskly out of his leather chair, his blue eyes a-shine, that strong, long-fingered hand of his out to be grasped. Julian Burgetrode's eyes became quite different when he looked at Tod, for Tod had given him the great thing that he had lacked.

"I'm just off the train, sir."

Mr. Burgetrode's eyes absorbed Tod in a keen stare. This was not the normal Tod, but a strong man inwardly excited, burning from some blow or shock of shame, a man whose mouth had been shut tight over words that could only be uttered once or twice in a lifetime.

"Sit down."

Mr. Burgetrode turned to his private secretary, but that discreet man, a student of the Burgetrode

climatology, an observer of cyclonic pressures and weather-cocks, was slipping out of the room.

"I see no one for half an hour, Mr. Jukes."

"Quite so, sir."

Tod had not sat down, nor had Mr. Burgetrode. They stood facing each other.

"Special leave, Tod?"

"Special leave."

"What's happened?"

Tod pulled a letter out of his pocket-book.

"Read that."

Mr. Burgetrode sat down in his chair, but Tod walked up and down, looking at the books, the maps and diagrams on the walls, restless, excited, one great emotion locked up within him. Mr. Burgetrode seemed to take a very long time reading that letter, and Tod kept giving him quick and impatient glances.

But he had read it at last, and laid it down on his desk.

"Well?"

His blue eyes betrayed nothing.

"Why didn't she tell me before?" said Tod, with sudden passion. "Good God, why didn't she tell me before!"

Mr. Burgetrode's eyes gave a faint gleam. There was a very human cry in Tod's voice, an emotion that was deeper than a disillusioned man's anger and humiliation.

"Well, she has told you," said Mr. Burgetrode

quite gently.

Tod faced about.

“Yes, but this has been going on for months. She says so, she admits it. If only she had been honest with me—months ago.”

“What does it matter, man, if you are free now?”

“It may have made all the difference in the world to me,” said Tod. “I wanted to be free then, but I couldn’t behave like a cad.”

And then Mr. Burgetrode understood. His face seemed to grow a little older, a little thinner, the face of a man who found it difficult to adjust his patience to youth’s sudden passionate surprises.

“So that is what has happened,” he said quietly; “sit down and tell me.”

But Tod remained standing with his hands in his pockets, staring at the fire. The war had broadened his sympathies and quickened his understanding. Years ago he would not have thought it possible for this fierce old man to be hurt, but now he knew that it was otherwise. And Tod was touched.

“I have never told anyone else.”

“Is that so?”

“I wanted to come straight to you. It’s not because I feel that I owe you debts that I can never repay—it’s because——”

He hesitated, and gave Mr. Burgetrode a queer, shy, human look, a look that made something cry out in the older man’s heart.

“Because of what, Tod?”

“Because you matter. Because you have been the

only friend in England that mattered. You have been such a big man to me. It's like coming to a father."

Mr. Burgetrode seemed to sink more deeply into his chair.

"Is that how you feel, Tod?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it. Who is she?"

Tod pulled out a pipe, filled it with quick and jerky movements of the fingers, and looked again at the fire.

"She is French."

"A Parisienne?"

"Oh, no; I met her in a village—last spring. She teaches in the village school. Her people are peasants, well-to-do peasants, gentlefolk in all that counts."

"How old?"

"Claire—Claire must be twenty-four. The most exquisitely wise thing in petticoats I ever met, and clean as a bit of white light."

"So she teaches in the school, Tod."

"Yes, she loves children," said Tod; "she's so much of a child herself. And she can run a house, and cook, and mend things, and she has read books that I never heard of. I don't suppose she had had any new clothes since 1914, and it suited her. She was a bit of France, a France that our people don't understand."

Tod was looking at the fire, and Mr. Burgetrode was looking at Tod.

"And so it just happened?"

"Yes, it just happened."

"And you went away and never told her?"

"I never told her, but I think she knew."

Then Tod sat down by the fire with his back half turned to Mr. Burgetrode. He was talking out of the deeps of his heart, and the old man knew it.

"I couldn't tell her, and yet it was hard, most damnably hard. But then I had never had what other men have had, some woman to think of, and perhaps —children. You don't know how I wanted it at times. I only had the men, the battalion. I suppose this was bound to happen to me, sooner or later. It's rather hard that it may have happened too late."

"You haven't written?"

"Never. It wouldn't have been fair. Don't you know how there are some people you can't trifle with; it would be like cheating a child."

"I know," said Mr. Burgetrode; "it would be like me cheating you."

He got up and came and stood by Tod.

"So you will go back to this village?"

"I must, even if it's to find that she's no longer free."

"And supposing she is free?"

"I shall ask her to marry me. I want her. You don't know how I want her."

Mr. Burgetrode smiled at the fire.

"Tod," he said; "I'm going to be honest with you. When you first told me this I was angry. I was ready

to say all sorts of clever and cynical things, but somehow you always kill the cynic in me. Now that first marriage of yours——"

"I know; it was just sex."

"And now——?"

"I suppose it is sex; but it is something so different. She's so natural, so simple, and yet so clever. There is nothing smart about her in the modern sense. She's as natural as the peasant life they live out there; she'd be natural anywhere, just like a flower or an unspoilt child. You might call me the biggest fool on earth, but I know that I am not a fool. To me it's obvious; instinct—I suppose."

"You are not a fool, Tod. The worst woman to manage is the greedy woman, the superficially smart woman. The picture of your little schoolmistress touches me. But supposing she refused to leave France?"

Tod glanced up sharply.

"I hadn't thought of that. Besides, it's all a dream as yet. I'm not going near her till I'm free."

"That may mean months."

"I don't care. I'm not going there with any excuses. She has eyes that make any sort of excuse look mean."

"I'm with you utterly. But to return to that question. Supposing she refused to leave France? She's a Frenchwoman."

"I don't think she would refuse," said Tod; "if she cared for me enough to marry me."

"Would you turn Frenchman if she did refuse?"

Tod had to face that question, the question that mattered to Mr. Burgetrode.

"I would," he admitted, "but I don't think the need would arise. A man has to work where his farm lies, and my farm lies over here. Claire would see that at once, she always looks straight at the heart of things. But I'm dreaming again."

He relit his pipe and stood up.

"I have had more than that half-hour, sir; I'm wasting your time."

"This is my time, Tod. The things that concern you will always concern me."

He made a movement towards his desk chair, but a sudden little lift of Tod's head, a look of the eyes, half shy, half proud, but wholly affectionate, held him where he was.

"Do you think I don't appreciate all this? I'm not just a wild boy who has got lost in his great romance."

"I like the way you have come to me, Tod."

"Of course I came to you. You have been my one friend at home through all the war. Those letters of yours used to help me, give me a sort of trumpet call when I was down. You are always telling me to be big. I have tried to be big, and you have been big to me to-day."

Mr. Burgetrode gave a queer and quiet laugh.

"Have I? Perhaps because you have taught me to swallow my own medicine."

"I want to come back and work for you," said Tod; "I have been thinking of that—for years. And if Claire came into my life, she would not spoil your

work and mine. She's big in her simple, wise way. I think you would get rather fond of Claire. She's like my mother—behind her man all the time, not meddling or fussing, but helping with all her heart. There we are, dreams again!"

"I accept the dream," said Mr. Burgetrode, with strange softness, "and I thank you for letting me share it."

He turned sharply and went to his desk. His emotion translated itself into action, and found self-expression there. He began to write a letter. Tod remained by the fire.

Mr. Burgetrode finished his letter.

"Tod."

Tod turned to him.

"This other affair had better be settled at once. Now—about the man?"

"Goldstein? Oh, he has plenty of money. He's the sort of beast who would have made a million during the war. I wish I could be sure that he could never treat her like a cad. She—was—my wife, after all."

"Tod," said the big man, "don't try and make yourself responsible for anybody else's bed. You cannot insure happiness for others. Now, I have written this letter."

"Yes."

"It is to my own firm of solicitors. I have told them that this divorce must be pushed through at the earliest possible moment. You had better go to them, because what I have asked them to do will be done. There should be no difficulty. She has gone off with the man and there will be no defence."

He handed Tod the letter.

“Now, one thing more—money.”

“I don’t want any money,” said Tod; “I have saved a little, and there will be my gratuity. Besides ——”

“You couldn’t take it? That’s true; not now, and for such a purpose.”

And then he smiled at Tod.

“Has Claire a dot?”

“I haven’t asked her. And we are still dreaming.”

“Perhaps not. I shall give Claire her dot. Now, what about to-morrow, Tod? Where are you staying?”

“Nowhere—yet.”

“Go to the Melton. It is close to my club; and take my card. And to-morrow—what about a long tramp in the country? I want to talk, and I want you to talk.”

“What about?” asked Tod, with a smile.

“Well, if you can forget Claire for a moment, about what the war has taught you.”

“You will have to include yourself in that, sir,” said Tod.

Chapter Thirty-nine

For one day at least Mr. Julian Burgetrode ceased to control anything. He put on the oldest clothes he could find, a shabby brown Norfolk jacket, and a pair

of old grey knickers and grey stockings. The athlete in him showed when he put on such clothes, and he looked the long, gaunt, iron-muscled Viking that he was, a man of many adventures and of many victories. And yesterday he had won a victory over himself.

Tod came in from his hotel to breakfast with him, fresh-faced, clean-eyed, carrying himself with a quiet yet boyish dignity. He did not appear to notice Mr. Burgetrode's clothes, for with Mr. Burgetrode clothes did not matter. He would have dominated and effaced a collection of rags, for the older his clothes were, the better he looked in them.

But he noticed Tod's.

"Hallo, a new tunic and nice pink breeches!"

"They were waiting for me in town."

Mr. Burgetrode's eyes approved of Tod, and approved of him with fierce affection. He was the finest type that England has produced, big-hearted, shrewd, yet simple; very grim when thwarted, yet smiling even when grim; big in the chest, with a fairish and well-squared head; not too bulky like some of the Germans and Americans; a powerful, quick, alert figure, never jerky or self-conscious in speech or movement. And utterly frank; a man who could take blows and keep his temper.

"Porridge?" said Mr. Burgetrode.

"I feel like porridge. What a gorgeous day we've got!"

Mr. Burgetrode glanced at the ribbons on Tod's tunic, the ribbons of the Military Cross, the M.M. and the Croix de Guerre. He glanced too, at Tod's stiff left arm, and the crown and star on his sleeve. And Mr.

Burgetrode was proud, quite absurdly proud, prouder than Tod ever guessed.

"And I daresay the clever little people in London would think him a very ordinary sort of man," he reflected, "so long as there was nothing but talk. But let a mob get loose, and they would be chattering like frightened apes behind this big boy's back. Character—character's everything."

"Where are we going to-day?"

Tod had left it to Mr. Burgetrode.

"What about your boots, Tod? I shall walk you twenty miles."

"And we attack at the end of it?"

"My idea it to capture Leith Hill. The car drops us at a little place called East Horsley. We find our way over the downs into Shere, strike across to Abinger Hatch, lunch there, go on to Leith Hill, on to Ockley, and then somewhere along the line of the old Staine Street back to Dorking. The car picks us up there."

"You won't be jumping fences to-day, sir?" Tod asked.

"I believe I could beat you at it, my son. Those nice cord riding-breeches would be something of a handicap!"

December had produced its jewel of a day, a softly clouded amethyst, with rents of blue sky and splashes of sunlight. The hills were a grey blue, the valleys full of violet shadow. The day had the soft eyes of a woman, very gentle and very calm.

Here and there the bracken still had a touch of gold in its brownness, and so had the fallen leaves. They were crisp to the feet under the beech trees.

The red-throated old Scots firs had a blue bloom on their tops like the bloom on a grape. Nothing could have been more solemn than the massed blackness of the spruces.

Old Burgetrode walked with his head up, keen as a boy, smelling the smell of the woods and finding it good. The fall of the leaf always stimulated him; there was nothing melancholy about it to a man who was destined to die in harness.

Tod had been telling him about the last battles, and how he had been thrilled and touched by all that he had seen in those redeemed French towns and villages.

"It was worth all those years of slogging, to win back the poor, shabby old places—with the poor, shabby, plucky people. It made me feel good. It's a thing I shall never forget."

"The most epic thing that ever happened on earth," said Mr. Burgetrode—"that and the return of the Serbs. But I'm going to catechise you, Tod."

"Right. What in?"

"How did you run your battalion?"

Tod gave a short laugh.

"Towards the end it seemed to run itself. I never had any bother."

"A complete and self-regulating organism, every cell functioning automatically? Not quite that, I think! I'm a vitalist, and I always look for the vitaliser. You were the central stimulus, what?"

"I got things done," said Tod.

"Exactly. That's a very simple definition of a vitaliser. And the men?"

"They were good chaps."

"How did you manage them?"

"If I found a man running crooked I had him up alone and talked to him absolutely frankly as man to man. I tried to be the father to him; I gave him that chance."

"And if he remained bad after that heart to heart talk?"

"I broke him," said Tod simply; "that was the only thing to do."

Mr. Burgetrode walked on, head in air, smiling in the deeps of his eyes.

"That is what you are going to do with me—manage men."

"It's one of the most interesting games in the world," said Tod. "I'm fond of men."

"You won't find is so easy in civil life."

"I don't suppose I shall."

"You'll have no machine behind you save the machine that some of our visionaries want to smash. All the discipline will have to come out of yourself. There will be days when you will be tempted to use ferocious blasphemy, when you feel you could smite some fool on the mouth. If you try to discipline some blackguard you may find a thousand men on strike. The solidarity of labour, which may be just organised stupidity."

"There is a lot of common sense in the average man," said Tod.

"Yes, when he uses it and doesn't let himself be tricked by being tempted with a carrot. Socialism is

the carrot just at present—not the ordered and scientific Socialism that you and I might try to evolve—but a sort of beautiful dream in which you do half the work you used to do and get twice the money, and you begin the dream by confiscating other people's superfluous possessions. For Socialism, extreme Socialism, to work effectually, ordinary men would have to be either angels or slaves. Can't you see the discipline that would be needed? An army might have arrived at that state of discipline, a mass of civilians—well, I'll say never."

"You are an individualist?" said Tod.

Mr. Burgetrode laughed.

"Haven't you glimpsed the real solution—what has happened and will happen every time? Supposing I accept Socialism, the scheme is not complete. Individualism will ride on the patient Socialist ass. The socialised many will be led and managed by the individualised few, enlightened and sympathetic individuals, no doubt. It is the most obvious thing that ever there was."

"I suppose it is. But have the workers ever had their fair share?"

"They haven't. And in a very short time they will be wanting more than their fair share. I'm not thinking in money, but in products, the sweat we give and the sweat we live on—other men's sweat. We live on other men's sweat, mental or manual; that ought to be obvious—even to your common-sense man, but sometimes it isn't. John Brown is not going to sweat for you. Charge him more for his sweat and he'll retaliate. In the end the thing becomes ridiculous; there is a row in the tap-room, and some big person has to restore order. Besides, all

this is deep down in the bowels of Nature. Some people say that we have superseded Nature, taken over her job. Bosh! Don't you believe it."

They were climbing through the woods to Leith Hill, and the brown-coloured tower showed against a patch of soft grey-cloud.

"Get up high, get a view," said Julian Burgetrode; "leave your heart down below to learn, but push your head up to the stars to think."

They sat down on the great grassy mound and looked south over the trough of the Weald. The Downs showed in the far south, and even Chanctonbury Ring was visible, like a patch of smoke from some giant smithy.

"It makes me think of Cassel," said Tod when he had gazed a long while in silence.

"Why did they make you a lieutenant-colonel, Tod?" Burgetrode asked him suddenly.

"Don't know, I'm sure," said Tod; "I suppose they knew I was keen."

"Exactly. Do you know what your trouble is going to be?"

"What?"

"Managing a unit in which half the men think they ought to be lieutenant-colonels, and want to know why they're not. The answer's so simple, but we seem to be afraid of hurting the working man's feelings. He's so sensitive, so susceptible, and if you offend his dignity he throws down his tools."

"I prefer the working man to the rich Jew," Tod said.

"Tod, my friend, have I ever said that I loved the

Jew type? I should think the Assyrians were the most beastly people who ever lived. I have a sort of silly fondness for the plain Englishman; but are you going to play the game by him if you are afraid to stand up and tell him the truth? People don't like being told the truth, and the plain man is in a very nasty temper."

"What particular truth?"

"That the plain man has got to work damned hard, and that then some of his dream may come true."

"Yes," said Tod.

"That all men are not equal; that all men can't be colonels, not only because they are not fit to be colonels, but because a world of colonels wouldn't work."

"But do they want to be colonels?" Tod laughed.

"Ask the women what they want. What has the great cry been? 'We want a bigger share in running things.' Ambition! Quite right. And there you have Nature's old primitive cry. These fierce and discontented young men in Glasgow and Manchester and Sheffield and London—what do they want? Get to the heart of it. Power! They want to run their own people. Let them. But when they start the poor ignorant mass like a lot of Gadarene swine straight for the precipice—what then?"

A sudden grimness came over Tod's face.

"We had something like that once or twice over there."

"And you had to stop it."

"Yes. I was only a second lieutenant then."

“And what did you do?”

“Used my revolver. It was beastly—the most damnable thing I have ever had to do. But it stopped it.”

“Quite so. And if the big men fail at a crisis, Nature steps in. Adam, who has been drunk with words, is scourged back to work. And Nature shows no mercy. She sets the slave to clean up the mess he has made.”

Mr. Burgetrode paused suddenly and looked at Tod. And then he laughed.

“Beyond the Downs lies the sea, and across the sea is a bit of old Picardy, where the peasants are at work in the fields and children are sitting in the school.”

“Sorry, Sir,” said Tod, “I couldn’t help it.”

Chapter Forty

Tod spent a week of his leave with Julian Burgetrode and then went to Shaston. The town had a few pleasant memories for him, memories of Tom Lavender, the Mossups, and of poor Kitty who was dead. He put up at the Brunswick, a quiet hotel on the front, and spent his first evening with Tom Lavender.

Old Lavender was the same tranquil soul, but he had aged, and his clothes looked shabby, and the cuffs of his shirt were frayed. Tod noticed these rather pathetic details, also a certain waxy whiteness of his old friend's face. Tod had seen that look in France—on the faces of old Frenchmen who had not enough to eat.

"I can't walk as I did," Tom told him; "if I can get to Ashurst Wood I'm satisfied. After all, you haven't to go far to find beauty and a few birds."

"The beauty is inside you," Tod said to himself, "and you ought to have birds singing round your deathbed."

But he contrived to sneak a secret interview with Mrs. Jelf, a Mrs. Jelf who looked thinner and sharper about the face.

"Mr. Lavender isn't well," said Tod.

The old woman gave him an almost fierce look.

"If I could help it I would," she said; "I can manage on potatoes and porridge and tea, and a little bread and margarine. He's proud—terribly proud."

Tod was shocked.

"Do you mean to say——"

Mrs. Jelf held his sleeve between a sharp forefinger and thumb. She was on the verge of senility, but loyal to the last.

"He thinks I have meat," she said with a cunning air, putting her face close to Tod's; "he thinks I have meat every day! Poor dear! I tell him lies; I pretend."

"So—he—has all the meat, Mrs. Jelf?"

"It isn't much."

Tod sat down and pulled out his pocket-book.

"He's never got to know of this. You'll promise?"

"He'll never know," said Mrs. Jelf; "I pretend I'm such a manager. He's just like one of his birds, you know."

Tod handed her two five-pound notes.

"Money's for use. I'll send you something every now and again. Doesn't the shop pay?"

"It never did pay very much," said Mrs. Jelf, "but then money never did matter to him; he's above money."

And then she grew fierce again.

"And to see those sluts all dressed up and showing off their clothes on the seafront! And the money some of the greedy beasts have been making! It near drives me mad sometimes, and him—not enough to eat. I could go out and pull the clothes off their backs, I could."

"He shan't go hungry in the future," said Tod.

"You always was a sort of son to him," said Mrs. Jelf, beginning to weep.

It amused Tod to stroll round Shaston and look into the shops he had known and register a second impression of some of the people who had had the handling of his youth. He walked into Mr. Snape's shop and bought a dozen new razor blades. "Mr.-Any-think-Else" had disappeared, but Snape was there more pink and polite than ever.

He did not recognise Tod.

"Be-ootiful weather for the time of year, sir."

"Splendid," said Tod, and he could not resist pulling Snape's leg. "Do you happen to keep Bartrup's Consumption Cure?"

The chemist looked a little puzzled.

"We do stock it. Three-and-ninepence the bottle, sir."

"Is it any good?"

Snape pursed up his lips. He did not think it wise to advertise the stuff to an educated customer.

"Well, sir, of course, as you know, phthisis is a bacterial infection. Bartrups contend that their mixture contains a specific remedy, some particular drug——"

"It used to be just ipecac, and sugar," said Tod, "and was dear at half a crown. Three-and-nine, now, is it?"

Mr. Snape stared at him.

"Yes, three-and-nine. War price, sir."

"The war has been very useful to a lot of people," said Tod; "no, I don't want that rubbish. Good morning."

He left Mr. Snape still staring, and raking his

mental kitchen-midden for some lost memory.

"Seem to have seen him before—somewhere. Fancy his asking for Bartrup's. Sidey sort of man. I don't like these army chaps."

Tod walked down Ponsonby Place and rediscovered the establishment of Flowerdew & Rook. It had been enlarged, and had refined itself into a very superior concern, showing you in one window a room furnished in the Jacobean style, and another in which Sheraton was reproduced with meticulous accuracy in all its details. The place was full of antiques, beautiful old pieces of furniture, china, glass, Sheffield plate, and some big trays full of exquisite enamels. A grey four-seater touring car was standing outside the shop, and just as Tod strolled by, Rook came out and entered the car.

Rook happened to glance at Tod, and recognised him. The two men stared back at each other for a moment, but it was Rook whose eyes flinched and shrank away.

"The Majestic," he said to the chauffeur, "and hurry up, I'm late."

Tod walked on.

"Rook has made money," was Tod's reflection, "and poor old Tom Lavender hasn't enough to eat."

Tod was in search of the Mossup family, and the family proved elusive. The old white cottage with its green porch and green front door had passed into other hands. "We've bin here two years," the old woman who opened the door told him; "yes, Mossup was the name. A delikit chap that kept a shop and was bankrupt. You might try Friday Street down by the gas works."

Tod tried Friday Street, appealing to a good-natured looking soul who was scrubbing her steps.

“Mossup? The Mossups live in Love Lane. First on the right. It’s number six, I think.”

Tod turned into Love Lane, a little black backwater of a street with the great red gasometers towering over it, and a high wall blinding the lower windows. No. 6 was one of about thirty tightly compressed houses with a door and a window on the ground floor and two windows above. The door of No. 6 was grained in imitation of some imaginary wood, probably oak. The doorstep was clean, and the black door-knocker had just been repainted.

Tod knocked.

A little girl of five opened the door. She had pale eyes, a white face, and a scar on her neck where glands had been removed.

“Does Mr. Arthur Mossup live here?”

The child looked at Tod with solemn wonder.

“Yes, that’s Father. Father’s in the yard, sawing wood.”

“May I come in? I’m a friend of your father’s.”

“Yes, come in,” said the child.

Tod stepped straight into the front parlour, and Miss Mossup closed the door. Tod heard sounds of activity coming from the back of the house, the rasping of a saw, and then the sound of a man coughing.

“Supposing I go through?” he said to the child.

He was smiling, and when Tod smiled at children they smiled back at him.

"Yes, you may. I'll take you to Daddy."

She took hold of Tod's hand, and her little fingers felt cold.

The yard at the back of the house was about twelve feet long and eight feet broad—a respectable tank. Someone had built a small shed in one corner, using old egg-boxes, and squares of tin cut from biscuit tins for the roof. In the other corner lay a pile of old wood, bits of old fence poles and posts. In the centre of the yard a man in shabby black trousers and an old white sweater was sawing at a length of wood, using a packing case with notches cut in it as a sawing-tool. The back of the man's neck looked thin and yellow. He was wearing carpet slippers, and he had not shaved.

"Hallo, old man!" said Tod.

Mossup turned on him, an aged, shrewish, thin-haired Mossup, with the eyes of a man who slept badly.

"Bless my soul!"

He flushed up in his old shy way, and reached for Tod's hand.

"Heard you were some sort of big pot, now. How did you find out——?"

"By asking. And Miss Mossup——"

The child was watching Tod.

"Run away, Nan," said her father, with sudden irritability, "we're busy."

The child went slowly into the house, and Tod felt uncomfortable, cooped up in this tank with a man who was so obviously sick in soul and in body.

"Mind if I go on working, old man?" said Mossup.

"Not a bit. I'll light a pipe. Do you smoke, Arthur? You didn't use to."

"Can't afford it."

Mossup turned to his sawing-stool. The saw was working badly; it wanted sharpening and setting, but the man in the dirty white sweater struggled with it with a sort of evil and angry patience. He got out of breath, and the veins grew big on his forehead.

Tod felt still more uncomfortable.

"Good exercise, that," he said.

"Saves a little money," panted the sawyer. "I got this lot cheap, and it's cheaper than coal."

He paused to rest.

"Drat this saw!"

"You've been ill, old man," said Tod abruptly, forcing his way to close quarters.

"Ill? I'm always ill. When the business broke——"

He resumed his sawing.

"I went back to Horrox's. No good for the army. Then I tried munitioning. Got bronchitis. Now I've always got bronchitis or something. No good for work. Oh, damn this saw!"

His chest was heaving, his lower lip thrust out. Then he began to cough.

"Let me have a go," said Tod.

He almost pushed Mossup aside. The man in the sweater stood and coughed and panted.

"Must do something. Olive manages the millinery in a new shop in King William Street. She works like

a horse. Food's so dear; it's damnable."

He caught hold of Tod.

"Ninepence for a loaf, Western, ninepence! And if I want a new pair of boots——"

He began coughing again, and the cough smothered his anger. Tod went on sawing, bending his head over it, the man in him shocked and hurt. Poor, kindly, simple old Mossup! He had been such a good chap, and in his place Tod saw this querulous, sick, soured failure, this pathetic thing that could not bear to be watched by its own child.

"You want a holiday, old man," he said softly.

"Holiday!"

There was a snarl in Mossup's voice.

"This is a holiday. This rotten body of mine isn't fit for anything else. What holiday does Olive get? I'm just a household drudge, an old woman; that's all I'm fit for."

"She doesn't think so," said Tod.

Mossup gulped something like a sob, and his voice became more human even in its querulousness.

"It's so humiliating, old man. If you only knew how I——"

He sat down suddenly on an old sugar box.

"She's an angel, an absolute angel. And I'm—I'm a cantankerous, snarling beast. I always feel sore in the head; I make her miserable. It's sordid; it's horrible. I see it all, and yet—somehow—I can't help it."

Tod could not bear it any longer. He left the saw standing in the notch and turned to his old friend.

"Look here, old chap——"

"I never paid you that ten pounds, you know," said Mossup quickly; "I meant to."

Tod's eyes were almost angry.

"I gave it you," he said. "Now, look here, old chap, are you seeing a doctor?"

"What good's a doctor to me? It's my self-respect that's ill. He can't physic that, can he?"

"But I know somebody who can."

And then Mossup showed the hysterical and cantankerous temper of a weak man whom life had humiliated.

"Yourself, I suppose?"

"Perhaps."

"That's it, that's just it. You've been a success, Western. Your people didn't fit you out with a rotten body, and now you come swanking around here making me look like a miserable fool before my wife. I won't have it! I tell you——"

"Old man, shut up."

It was the soldier who spoke in Tod, the man who had the instinct of authority.

"You are not going to talk like that, Arthur. Do you understand?"

Mossup looked at him vacantly. He thought that Tod was angry, and anger—other people's anger—frightened him.

"I didn't mean——"

"You're ill, old man; that's what's the matter. You want your strength back, and then you want work."

"No one wants me," began the derelict.

"Shut up! I can get you a job in half an hour, directly you are fit for it, and a good job. I happen to have been lucky. Now, I want you and Olive and Nan to have dinner with me to-night—"

"But I haven't got any——"

"Go in and shave," said Tod, "or by George, old man, I'll do it for you."

And Mossup went. A clean chin was the beginning of his recovery.

Tod hired a horse one morning and rode over to Pentworth. He stabled the horse at The George and walked by way of Spaniards Row to the little cemetery beyond the railway station. No. 13 was the same queer old lovable lunatic of a house, but the shop had become a saddler's, and someone had cut down all the sooty laurels and aucubas where Tod's great snake had lived. Pentworth smelt vividly of his childhood. The northern end of Spaniards Row was littered with the leaves of the great chestnuts and elms, and it had the same damp perfume. Tod could picture the lights beginning to blink out in the little town when the dusk came down like fog from the sea.

Tod found the grass and weeds long and rank over the grave of William and Nancy Western. He had written to a local florist and gardener about the grave and paid the man a yearly fee for the keeping of it. Tod was hurt and angry, and he called at the florist's shop on his way back to The George.

The proprietor was a surly, off-hand, take-it-or-leave-it sort of person.

"Can't get the labour," he said. "We've had

something better to do than bother about graves."

"Is that so?" said Tod. "We've been rather busy, too, out there. But you took the money, didn't you?"

The man blustered.

"What money?"

"I paid you by cheques," said Tod, "and I happened to notice that the cheques went through the bank. That grave hasn't been touched."

"You can have the money and you can get out of my shop," said the man. "Because you're a colonel or something you needn't think——"

Tod looked at him very steadily.

"I'm not going to make a row with you about that grave, but I shall call on the rector and tell him to expect a cheque from you and that he can use it as he pleases. Will you have it that way, or shall I put the matter into the hands of my lawyers? I call it fraud."

And quite suddenly the man became polite.

"You needn't be so rough about it, sir. I've been worried to death what with labour and prices. I'll look up the amount."

"Right," said Tod; "don't forget. And I think you will send a man down to cut that grass."

"To-morrow if possible."

"To-morrow? I think I may be in Pentworth again to-morrow. Good morning."

Tod had an early lunch at The George and rode back to Shaston, touching at Burnt Farm on the way. He found Uncle Remus in bed—the old man had been hemiplegic for a year—and the carter's wife

looked after the house for him, her husband managing the farm. The woman, a very decent and quiet little body, was glad of a talk to Tod.

"He's that trying and cantankerous," she said, "that me and my man wouldn't stay here if we hadn't worked for him all these years. He's always thinking we are after his money."

Uncle Remus had his iron bedstead by the window where he could look out on the farm. There was no fire in the room and no carpet on the floor, and the old man's grey head and bluish face contrasted with the red coverlet on the bed.

Uncle Remus was senile, and yet the one great inspiration of his life still dominated him. He was pleased to see Tod, and he crowed at him like a baby.

"What's them things on your sleeve, Nephew?"

Tod had drawn a chair beside the bed. Uncle Remus had withdrawn one claw of a hand from under the clothes, and was fingering Tod's sleeve.

"That means I'm a colonel, Uncle."

"A colonel!" And Uncle Remus opened his pale eyes very wide. "Ain't we grown? And you killed plenty of Germans?"

"A few."

"What's them bits of ribbons?"

He passed a wavering forefinger across Tod's chest, showing a child's desire to touch and finger things.

"Medals I have won, Uncle."

"My!" said Uncle Remus. "You must have killed

lots of Germans! Little Tod Western grown up to be a colonel! I'm proud of the boy."

And then he grew cunning and sly, leaning over and leering at Tod and taking him by the sleeve.

"I've left you all my money, every bit of it."

"It's very good of you, Uncle Remus."

"Come here; I don't want to speak loud. I've saved four thousand pounds. You'll get it."

He swung back in the bed and sat looking at Tod with an air of sly exultation.

"What d'you think o' that?"

"I think I'd like you to have a fire in your room, Uncle."

"Fire! What do I want with a fire? Four thousand pounds! Worth more than a row of ribbons, my boy, though I won't say I ain't proud of 'em. I'm a warm man; I don't want no fire."

He bent forward again, tapped Tod on the knee, and pointed to the floor.

"She thinks she's going to get some of it," he said, with an attempt at a wink.

"Who? Mrs. Dodds?"

"She comes purring round me like a cat. I let her think I've left her a hundred pounds."

"And haven't you?"

"Not a farthing!"

And Uncle Remus crowed and rocked in the bed as though he had perpetrated the great jest of his life.

"Not a farthing! I'll be even with her for trying to

fool me. Uncle Remus wasn't easy to fool, was he, my boy?"

"No," said Tod, thinking that if the old man's money came to him, Mrs. Dodds should have her hundred pounds, and that Tom Lavender and poor old Mossup would not be the poorer.

He said good-bye to Uncle Remus, promising to come over and see him again, and made westwards into the red glow of a winter sunset. From the high ground above Redling he could see the sea, the sea that lay between him and France. Tod's thoughts were in old Picardy, in that village not far from St. Valery at the mouth of the Somme, that village where Claire Vignard taught in the school.

A great restlessness came upon him, a sense of something precious slipping out of his life while he remained silent, waiting. Matters were going forward; Julian Burgetrode's lawyers asserted that the case was beautifully simple—a mere bit of legal machinery. And yet——

"I wonder if I might write to her?" said Tod.

A voice within him answered, "No."

Perhaps some Frenchman had returned to Myonville, and Claire was happy and forgetting? Tod set his horse at a canter, his blue eyes staring straight into the sunset.

"I wonder?" he said to himself.

And then:

"Why shouldn't I write to Josephine? I'll tell her not to breathe a word of it to Claire."

He wrote to Josephine Lorellard that very night.

Four days later he was back with his division in

Belgium, schooling himself to face the months ahead of him and the coming of his liberty.

In March Tod was demobilised. Julian Burgetrode met him on Folkestone pier.

"You will be free in two months or so," he said to Tod.

Tod said nothing.

Chapter Forty-one

One June morning Tod walked out of his hotel in Abbeville and took the train for Eu. He had reached Abbeville the evening before, and had spent an hour wandering round the familiar old town that had been so savagely bombed during his month at Myonville. He was very much the young English civilian, brown lounge suit, brown boots, fawn-coloured velour hat, wash-leather gloves. His old military cane was the only soldierly thing left to him, save, of course, all that soldierliness that he carried in his heart and head. It was not the Tod Western of Shaston thrown back into civilian clothes, but a man who had the *bel air* and the eyes of a master.

Tod sat in the train and watched the country go by. He was excited, a little afraid, the boy lover utterly absorbed in the life of the moment. No one expected him in Myonville, nor did he know what he would find there, how they would welcome him, whether the day of days would not end in some tragic anticlimax.

"Claire—why Claire married Jules Loubet six months ago."

Tod tried to keep such words as these constantly in his ears.

He tested his French by chatting to an old farmer opposite him.

“Monsieur was in the war.”

Yes, Tod was in the war. He found his French flowing freely, but he kept an eye on the landscape, and watched for the green valley and the cliff of trees that meant Myonville and romance.

The great flat fields, the poplars, the straight roads, the little white-walled houses stirred him most profoundly. He was back in France, France that was so unforgettable, so full of poignant memories; and then he sighted that old sugar factory among the beeches on the road to Abbeville. Myonville was less than a mile away, and Tod began to fidget.

The train ran into Myonville through fields of wheat, beetroot and crimson clover. There was the familiar level-crossing, with the red brick Café de la Gare, and its skittle alley in the garden. The church spire seemed to hold up a beckoning finger above the elms and beeches.

The train stopped. Tod raised his hat to the old Frenchman and got out. Myonville had always been a quiet station, and it was so quiet on that June morning that Tod felt the one notorious person on earth, a stranger to be stared at. The station-master took the tickets, and Tod wished him good morning. He had once had a slight altercation with the station-master.

“Bonjour, monsieur.”

He gave Tod a surprised look and then re-examined Tod’s ticket.

"You don't remember me," said Tod.

"No, monsieur. The English are so much alike."

It was an unpromising prelude.

Tod walked up the dusty road from the station to the little Place de l'Eglise. Myonville looked exactly the same, only there were no English soldiers in it. Women were chatting under the shade of the limes. Tod saw the old curé toddling across the cobbles to the church, the identical, rather snuffy and grey-chinned old gentleman. The same brown dog was lying in the same doorway. The fat woman at the baker's shop had her hair in curling pins, and was arguing as usual, her hands on her hips. From the doorway of the Papillon d'Or the young demoiselle who used much "Fleur de Trèfle" and was Parisian in her atmosphere, looked out questioningly at Tod with eyes that were black and big and alluring. She had troubled the hearts of one or two of Tod's subalterns. Tod raised his hat to her and blushed.

"Tiens, it is Monsieur le Colonel!"

He passed on and found himself in that quiet and familiar street running softly westwards in the sunlight towards the high shade of an avenue of beeches. And suddenly Tod was afraid, for so much hung on the happenings of the next few minutes. All the dreams of a year were walking with him down that sunlit village street, and for a moment Tod's courage turned to water. Supposing she had left the place, or was married, or his coming should prove of no meaning to Claire Vignard?

The street curved slightly, so that the Café de la Paix and the schoolhouse next to it were hidden from Tod until he reached the big pond where the peasants watered their horses. He noticed that there

were no children to be seen. It was the hour for them to be at school. Walking very fast Tod rounded the curve, and saw the schoolhouse with its iron railings and queer little belfry, and next to it the house of the Lorellards all brown in the sunshine, just as he had seen it when he had walked for the first time to his billet.

Both the sidewalk and the roadway were deserted, save for a figure in light blue standing at its ease outside the Café de la Paix. This French soldier seemed to belong there. Bareheaded, a pipe in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets, he had the air of a man in possession, a man standing on his own doorstep and surveying the world.

"Damn that chap!" said Tod.

He was absurdly interested in the figure of the Frenchman, absurdly afraid of it. Did the man belong to that particular house, or was he a mere chance loafer? He was standing squarely in front of the café doorway, and he stared hard at Tod as the Englishman came up, nor did he offer to move.

It was obvious that the Frenchman did belong to the house of the Lorellards, and his thick-set blue figure closed the doorway.

"Bonjour, monsieur."

Tod came to a standstill. The Frenchman looked surprised. He was young and rather sallow, the laconic and inexpansive type of peasant.

He took his pipe out of his mouth, but he did not move from the doorstep.

Tod tried a sniper's venture.

"It is Monsieur André Lorellard—perhaps?"

The Frenchman looked still more surprised.

“That is so, monsieur.”

And Tod laughed.

“We never met, Monsieur André. Your mother and your father were so very kind to me a year ago. You may have heard them speak of me, Colonel Tod Western.”

The French boy’s impassive face changed instantly. He stood aside; he put out a hand, and his rather hard blue eyes became laughing and friendly.

“Monsieur—but what a surprise! I have heard of you so often.”

Tod gave André’s hand an almost savage grip.

“We were friends before we met. You are on leave?”

“I am home to be married, monsieur.”

“Felicitations,” said Tod, seriously scared.

“Perhaps you may have met my fiancée, monsieur?”

“It is possible.”

“Mademoiselle Yvonne Frangonard, of the Petite Folie Farm.”

Tod could have kissed Master André. That gentleman’s figure had become one of cloudless blue.

“Yes, I think I remember Mademoiselle Frangonard. Are your parents at home, André? I have come to see them.”

André smiled queerly at Tod. Then he went into the café and shouted excitedly.

“Josephine! Josephine! Un ami!”

He turned again and laughed in a brotherly way at Tod.

“Wait, monsieur. Such a surprise for them all! They will be so delighted!”

Josephine came into the long room, polishing a glass with a cloth. She looked at André and then at Tod, seemed lost for a moment, and then exclaimed as only a Frenchwoman can exclaim:

“Monsieur Tod!”

She came forward and kissed him. André had disappeared.

Tod sat on one of the deal tables, left foot swinging, smiling shyly at Josephine.

“Yes, I have come back. I said I might come back, you know. And how are Monsieur and Madame?”

“Very well, monsieur,” said Josephine, sitting on the table opposite him.

“And you?”

She laughed.

“It is for monsieur to say.”

“Always charming—and my friend?”

“Perhaps.”

Josephine was waiting the question that mattered, the question that was burning there in Tod’s eyes.

“And Claire?”

Josephine picked up her apron and examined a frayed edge.

“She is—at the school, monsieur.”

"And well?"

"And well."

"And?"

"She is still Claire Vignard," said Josephine, dropping her apron and smoothing it with her hands.

Tod got off the table with a flushed and intense face.

"Josephine, I'm free; I'm free. Do you understand?"

She raised her dark eyes to his.

"Monsieur has——?"

"It was not my fault," he said quickly. "I waited till it was all over before coming here. I have all the necessary papers to prove——"

"Do you think I do not believe you?" she asked, almost sharply; "of course I believe you. Monsieur does not tell lies."

She glanced over his shoulder at the clock.

"Claire will be here in ten minutes."

Tod was also looking at the clock.

"Do you think that I have anything of a chance, Josephine?"

The French girl smiled.

"It is a good thing, monsieur, that Claire is not religieuse. It will not matter."

Tod pondered those words, and Josephine slipped from off her table.

"I will go to the schoolhouse and meet Claire," she said, "if monsieur will wait in the kitchen."

"Could I see her——?"

"No one will come into the kitchen for an hour. I will tell her there is a friend—just a friend."

Tod went and kissed Josephine.

"I can hardly believe it all," he said.

He sat in the Lorellards' kitchen, in the place that had always been his, between the stove and the window. Claire's wooden workbox stood as usual on the window-sill, and Tod lifted the lid and looked at all its neatness with the eyes of a lover. He remembered the way she had pricked her finger on the morning when he told her that the battalion was leaving Myonville. Through the window he could see the neat red bricks of the yard, a washing tub tilted to dry against the wall of the wash-house, the green tops of the orchard trees.

Suddenly Tod stood up. She had come in by the orchard gate and was crossing the yard, the Claire of a year ago, in her daintily shabby black dress, and her hair like a pale brown wreath touched with sunlight. It was the same calm, frank-faced Claire, with her mouth and her grey eyes, more serious, perhaps a little sad. She looked quite innocent and unsuspecting, just a woman who had her work to do, a woman who had come to speak with some casual friend.

A pair of clean shoes were standing against the wall. Claire picked them up, entered the kitchen, and saw Tod.

She dropped the shoes on a chair, and stood looking at him with round grey eyes.

"Monsieur—you!"

And Tod, the man, did not move, for he saw something that his dream had never shown him. Claire was afraid.

Chapter Forty-two

She sat down suddenly at the table, her elbows resting upon it, her little fists clenched under her chin. Her eyes looked straight at Tod.

“Why have you come back?”

There was a fierceness in her voice, an attack in the abrupt words she threw at him.

Tod took his chair and sat down opposite her, his elbows also on the table.

“Because I have a right to come back.”

“Why?”

“I am free. I am no longer married.”

The eyes opposite him gave a kind of flicker, like a light blown by the wind. She did not say anything, but sat there, waiting.

Tod felt in his coat pocket, brought out the little brown Testament and laid it on the table between them.

“You remember?” he asked.

She bowed her head slightly.

“I remember, monsieur.”

“I have carried it—always. I thought I should never come back, that I should never see you again. I was very unhappy then; I knew things that I could

not tell you. It would not have been fair. Was I wrong?"

"You were never wrong."

The words were almost inaudible. Her fists had unclenched themselves, and her hands were curved against her cheeks. She was looking at the table now, and not at Tod, and her eyes were heavy with something deeper than fear.

"I thought I should never come back," he went on. "Then life changed for me. And yet—I had to wait. The woman I had married had given herself to another man. It had happened before I met you, but I had only guessed it then."

She stretched out a hand and fingered the little brown book.

"You did not—not love her, monsieur?"

"I did not love her."

"Never?"

"Once, when I was a boy and did not know."

She bent her head a little lower, to hide the wondering and melting tenderness of her face.

"It was very hard for you, monsieur."

One of Tod's brown hands reached out and covered her hand that was lying on the brown book.

"Claire, I am free."

He felt a little trembling in the hand beneath his. And the love in Tod blazed out and over her. He half rose, and leant across the table.

"Oh, beloved! is it possible that you care a little? All these months I have been thinking and waiting

for this day and for you. It's just a year ago."

"A year ago——"

She hung her head, a woman trembling on the edge of her exultation, the exultation of surrender.

"I rushed back. I couldn't help it. You wouldn't come down."

"I couldn't," she said.

"But you gave me this. Oh, ma chérie, I love you —I love you."

She raised her head suddenly and looked right into his eyes.

"I went to the school—after you had gone. I do not know what I taught the children. I did not care."

"Claire!"

"Yes, it is true. I knew you would never come back to me again, that you could never come back—unless—and I am a woman, Tod!"

Tod bent over the table and took her face between his hands. There was something sacramental in the great tenderness with which he touched her. And thus they remained for a moment, Claire's hands folded over his wrists, her face dreaming up to his, her grey eyes the eyes of a woman who gives herself utterly and without fear.

"God bless you for ever and ever," said Tod.

And then he drew back a little.

"Claire!"

Her eyes waited.

"Will you marry me? Listen. I am English, you are French; my work is in England. Would you go with

me?”

She smiled up at him.

“I can speak a little English, mon chéri.”

Tod kissed her.

Chapter Forty-three

There were voices in the orchard, the voices of Josephine and her parents. Madame Lorellard had the look of a woman who had lost something and knew that she would never find it again. Old Lorellard was laughing. He loved young people and the exciting and romantic things that happen when a man is young. André, slouching along with his hands in his pockets, regarded the family with eyes of amusement. André had seen the world.

“Listen!” said Claire. “They are coming!”

And then the Lorellard family descended upon Tod. Claire had drawn aside and was standing with her back to the window, her hands resting on the sill —a softly radiant Claire, with shy eyes that looked at everything but Tod. Tod stood squarely in the middle of the kitchen, showing something of the air of a man ready to receive a deputation, half-smiling, half-solemn, but wholly proud.

The Lorellards had no thought of being formal. They were warm-hearted French folk, and they enveloped Tod with the vivacity of the French who can be gay and intimate without touching a note that is familiarly vulgar.

“Ah, Monsieur le Colonel!”

"What a charming compliment you pay us!"

"Welcome back to Myonville!"

Tod kissed madame just as he would have kissed his mother; it seemed the natural and properly human thing to do. Old Lorellard shook hands with joyous enthusiasm. Josephine was laughing and talking for all of them. André had looked at Claire, made a grimace, and then gone to shake hands a second time with Tod.

"But what a surprise, monsieur!"

"And you have come all the way from England?"

"Oh, la la! These soldiers are wonderful men!"

"Where are you staying, monsieur? At Abbeville? But Monsieur's old room is at his service."

"And Claire—Claire——"

But Claire had slipped away, and no one had noticed it save André, who was sufficiently uninvolved to notice everything. The Lorellard family looked wisely and humorously puzzled.

"But she was here a moment ago!"

"You were all talking so hard," said André, "and Claire seems to think it is quieter in the orchard."

The family looked at Tod, and Tod found himself faced with a public declaration.

"My dear friends," he said, "I must ask your pardon for being an Englishman. I'm afraid that I have behaved in a rather English way. I have asked Claire to marry me."

The family had accepted the position of an audience, and Tod had to go on.

"I came back to Myonville because, by the English law, I am to-day a free man. I should have asked Claire to marry me a year ago if I had been free then. Monsieur Lorellard, as is only right and fair, I have brought all the necessary documents and proofs with me."

Old Lorellard nodded, smiled and grunted something that was indistinguishable.

"I wish for the attendance to-morrow of Monsieur le Maire, a notary and an interpreter, so that everything can be examined properly."

Then old Lorellard interrupted him.

"Monsieur, let the formalities wait. We trust you with all our hearts. Josephine, a bottle of wine."

Josephine went to the cellar for the wine while madame collected the proper number of glasses. The three men were fraternising round the table, the two Frenchmen smoking Tod's cigarettes, when Josephine returned with the wine.

Old Lorellard looked round the room.

"But what has happened to Claire?" he asked.

"I will go and find her," said his daughter.

Josephine was away quite a long time, and the Lorellards and Tod talked about the war. The Frenchmen still seemed fascinated by it, and by the epic of justice of those last hundred days. They could not understand it when Tod tried to explain to them that in England people did not wish to speak about the war.

"But, monsieur, how is it possible?"

"It is very strange," said Tod. "I could go on talking about it for ever and ever. It has taught me so

much. But the people at home are bored. It is said that no magazine will publish a tale that mentions the war. The people wish to forget."

Old Lorellard was frowning.

"In France, monsieur, we cannot forget. Perhaps it is that your people in England have not suffered sufficiently."

"It may be that," said Tod, "but I do not understand it. I feel like a Frenchman. I think that you are much greater than we are, monsieur."

"A nation that forgets so easily," said Père Lorellard, "is easily fooled."

Tod's thoughts had followed Claire into the orchard, and he was beginning to wonder why the two girls were so long in returning, when he heard footsteps crossing the yard. Josephine reappeared in the doorway. She ignored the family and made a sign to Tod. Tod followed Josephine into the yard.

"Claire needs you, monsieur," she said. "Be very gentle with her."

"Is she unhappy?"

"It is the reaction, monsieur, the panic that sometimes attacks a woman when she has felt too happy. You will find her in the orchard."

Tod went in search of Claire, so manfully sure of his own happiness and of hers that he wondered what was troubling her. He found her sitting on the wooden seat under one of the apple trees, quite calm, so calm that no sign of suffering or of struggle betrayed themselves to Tod. She looked up at him with her frank, grey eyes, a little pathetically perhaps, but with a frankness that refused to let her

love cloud his future with the emotions of the moment.

“I asked Josephine to send you to me. I wish to talk to you, Tod.”

He sat down beside her on the seat.

“What is troubling you, ma chérie?” he asked.

She made a little gesture with her right hand, a gesture that was meant to repulse, to hold the man in him aloof.

“Will you listen to me, please? A little while ago I let myself be overcome without thinking. It was like a dream, a dream that one has dreamt so often, suddenly coming true. Here—in the orchard—I awoke; I began to ask myself questions. Do you understand all I say?”

“Every word,” Tod answered her.

“Let me be quite honest,” and she looked at him for a moment, and then at the house beyond the trees. “I am a peasant girl, Tod, a schoolmistress; I am very ignorant of many things. You—you were a colonel, what in England you call a gentleman; your friends will be gentlemen, men of affairs. It may be that I shall not be suited to such a life—your life; that I could not help you as I should wish to help you. Do you understand?”

Tod’s face was shadowed with an almost sacred tenderness.

“I understand everything,” he said. “I have thought about everything all these months. And I will answer you, Claire, as it is right that you should be answered, not by throwing my love at you, dear, but with the truth, the truth that can be so

convincing."

She drew a deep breath.

"I am listening."

He leant forward slightly with his elbows on his knees.

"I will tell you some of the things about my life. I am a child of the people. My father kept a little shop, a shop where he made photographs. My mother worked, just as you and Josephine work. I loved her very dearly, Claire; she was the best woman in the world. I, too, have worked in a shop; I have sold furniture and drugs, and I have helped to let houses. I was just a boy behind the counter. Then I had a business of my own, and it failed. Afterwards—the war came. I began the war as a common soldier; I ended it as a colonel. Now, in England, I have a big friend who wishes me to work for him; he employs many men; he wishes me to help him with these men. I have accepted. He knows I am here, and why I am here, and he has wished me good luck. To me he is like a father."

Tod paused for a moment, and glanced at Claire. She was still the calm, courageous little woman, holding aloof for his sake, but Tod saw that her eyes had softened.

"So you were not a rich man?" she said.

"I have no thought of being rich," he went on; "there are so many better things in life than money. I shall get money, because it is necessary, and because I do not want the woman I love to be worried. I have ambitions. I want to be big, as a man, like my big friend. I am quite a simple soul, Claire; the war has made me simple. I want a comrade, a little comrade,

a little woman whom I can take in my arms, a little woman with clever hands and a warm heart. I want her and a home, dear; I have never had a real home since I was a child. I do not want my wife to be a great lady, a woman of fashion, a gad-about, an intellectual. I want her to be my wife, just that."

Claire gave a little shiver, a shiver of inward exultation.

"You would let her work for you, Tod, and perhaps—perhaps you would let her have a child?"

"I should want a child—her child," said Tod.

She sat looking at the sky, and then she spoke again.

"But your friends?"

"My friends will be friends who work. Life is so much more real with people who work, people who are interested. You know far more than most English girls."

"How?"

"You went to a good school at Tourcoing, did you not? Then you studied at Lille. You have read more than I have read; you know things that I do not know. You can cook, sew, make clothes, manage a house."

And then he laughed.

"But do you not know how charming you are, how all men would love you, men who are weary of feverish women, women who rush about and think of nothing but excitement and clothes? You are so quick, so witty, so full of understanding; so wise, so ——"

She, too, was laughing now, laughing tenderly

with the lover in him. She laid a protesting hand on his sleeve.

“I am not such a marvel, Tod; I am a little girl who has taught children, and I love you—greatly.”

“Ma chérie,” he said, and drew her head on to his shoulder.

They sat there for a while, not speaking, like two children in a wood, heads touching, hands clasped, breathing in the beauty and the mystery of it all, the green leaves, the blue sky, the shadows, the patches of sunlight, each other. It was simplicity, the simplicity of deep and happy emotion, two lovers in the spring of the year, a man and a woman without guile.

“My Tod,” she said presently, “I hope you will never be ashamed of me. I am clever—in my way—and I shall try so hard.”

He turned and kissed her hair.

“You must not talk like that. Doesn’t God know what he has given me? Ma chérie, I’m so happy.”

She looked at him with eyes that were all light.

“Do you know why I, too, am so happy?”

“Tell me.”

“Because I can trust you, it’s so much to me, this love.”

“And to me,” he answered.

And then a sudden playfulness seized him.

“Mon Dieu—there is the family, those dear people sitting solemnly round a bottle of wine, and waiting!”

"For us?"

"Of course."

"Let us go," she said, jumping up, but still holding his hand, "let us go and begin life, mon mari."

Chapter Forty-four

On the following day Tod transferred himself from Abbeville, taking a room at the Hôtel Papillon d'Or, since etiquette and his own sense of delicacy would have it so. André was in Tod's old room overlooking the orchard, and though Josephine had talked of putting André in the attic, Tod had refused to have her brother evicted. Besides, André was to be married on the Sunday. He was the most important man in Myonville for the moment, though André's romantic pre-eminence was soon usurped by Tod.

"The English colonel had come back to marry little Claire Vignard."

The mayor knew the secret and talked about it, and the whole village imitated the mayor. It was a great sensation, a sort of fairy tale in real life, a romance that delighted the women and turned Tod into the Prince. Everybody watched him go in and come out. The children ran after him in the street. The girls said that he was very handsome. Being English, he was supposed to be immensely rich. There is no socialism about a love affair, none of your cabbage philosophy in the eternal "Once upon a time."

Tod was very busy. He made old Lorellard put on his Sunday clothes and go with him to interview

Monsieur le Maire. He persuaded the mayor to produce a lawyer and an interpreter. He arranged that there should be a formal meeting at the house of the Lorellards while Claire was at the school, for it was a whim of hers that she should continue to teach the children until her marriage.

Tod was frank with Monsieur le Maire.

"You see, monsieur, I divorced my wife; the decree of the divorce was made absolute, as we call it, a few weeks ago. My English lawyers have given me all the necessary documents, and I want them examined for the benefit of Monsieur Lorellard."

The mayor patted Tod on the shoulder.

"Monsieur is a man of honour, a man of good sense."

"I do not wish to see the documents," grumbled old Lorellard.

"Monsieur, it is necessary," said Tod; "I like things done properly, honestly."

"Monsieur is quite right," said the mayor.

Old Lorellard was looking uncomfortable.

"Has Claire told you, Monsieur Tod?"

"What?"

"She has no dot worth speaking of."

"I knew that long ago," laughed Tod. "My foster-father in England is presenting her with a dot."

"Tiens!" said the mayor, "what generosity, what delicacy! Permit me to say, Monsieur Western, that I am at your service in all ways and at all times."

The mayor seemed to be on the edge of an

oration, and Père Lorellard dragged Tod away.

"He is a good fellow, but a windbag. I have a field to hoe."

They were walking down the street when the mayor rushed after them.

"Monsieur—Monsieur le Colonel Western!"

Tod turned back to meet him.

"Monsieur, pardon me, but the marriage—it will have to be a civil marriage. Does monsieur understand?"

"Quite. You will do me the honour of performing it. Is not that so?"

The mayor bowed.

"Mademoiselle Vignard is not a bigot. It is a very great mistake to be bigoted. Now in England, Monsieur Western——"

He held Tod fast for five minutes, and when Tod was released he found that Père Lorellard had disappeared. The hoeing of his weeds was of more importance than the eloquence and the information of Monsieur le Maire.

Jan van Eyck would have made a picture of that "family conference" had he seen it as Claire Vignard saw it when she returned unexpectedly from the school. Monsieur le Maire sat at the head of the table, a florid man with his yellow hair standing up like the mane of a lion, very attentive, very solemn. Old Lorellard was in his blue breeches and blue and white striped shirt, and his grey, close-cropped head was the head of one of Napoleon's grenadiers. He looked tolerant and amused, but his eyes brightened whenever he looked at Tod. The *avoué*, pince-nez

half-way down his nose, was busy with papers. The interpreter, who fidgeted on his chair like a bird on a perch, was always trying to explain things that did not need explaining, and getting himself snubbed by the lawyer. André smoked a cigarette and looked bored. Madame Lorellard sat with her knitting in her lap, clicked her pins and listened. Tod, with his old leather dispatch-box open on the table in front of him, seemed always to be insisting on certain documents or certain figures being explained to Père Lorellard, and Père Lorellard would scratch his head, smile tolerantly at Tod, and allow himself to be convinced twice over.

For the moment no one saw Claire. Tod was making a little speech, and no one interrupted him, but the impressionable and bored André began to smile. Claire was standing behind Tod's chair, with a mother-look in her eyes, quite unembarrassed by all these functionaires.

"So the dot will be fifty thousand francs," Tod was saying.

Then someone touched him on the shoulder. He turned and saw Claire.

"What is this?" she asked with an air of severity.

André began to laugh. Tod had jumped up, a little flushed. He was trying to smile at Claire.

She looked at Père Lorellard.

"Have you not told him?" she asked. "There is no dot, no fifty thousand francs? It is absurd!"

She was angry, a little humiliated. Père Lorellard scratched his head and appeared embarrassed, but the mayor was ready to make a speech.

"Mademoiselle——" he began.

She ignored him and turned to Tod.

"I have no dot," she said. "I thought——"

Tod got hold of her hand; she made a little struggle, but Tod would not let her go.

"Messieurs," he said, "supposing I leave you to conclude these formalities. You have all the documents. I wish to speak to my fiancée."

The mayor bowed in his chair.

"Certainly, monsieur. A few words of explanation."

Tod drew Claire out of the room.

"Come into the orchard, ma petite."

He put his arm round her.

"I knew you had no dot, ma chérie. For myself I did not desire it. In England we do not worry."

"Oh, my Tod!" she said. "I bring you nothing—a few hundred francs!"

They were in the orchard now where no one could see them, for the high hedges were thick with leaf. Tod took Claire's face between his hands and kissed her.

"Look at me, ma petite, right into my eyes. Have you not given me your love, and is not that all that I desire? But you overheard a little secret, a secret that was to have been kept till after our marriage."

"I do not like secrets," she said.

"It is no longer a secret. My big friend for whom I work, is like a father to me. He is very rich. It was his wish that he should give you a dot. I consented,

because it will be such a pleasure to him, and because he has no children and is lonely."

"But fifty thousand francs! What shall I do with such a sum?"

"It can be invested. You will have a little income of your own, for your clothes and all that a woman wants. And you will be able to send little presents to Josephine and Madame."

Her face brightened.

"How good you are. And all those papers, and the mayor, what do they mean?"

Tod smoothed her hair back with his hands and kissed her forehead.

"Claire, I know that these good people trust me, but I wanted to show them everything, so that they could be sure. Remember, I am taking you away to England; I want them to have no shadow left behind; it is only right that I should leave them with no whisper of a doubt. Each year we will come to France and visit them; we can take our holiday here, and Josephine and your aunt can come to us."

"Oh, how good you are," she said, "my Tod, mon mari!"

He held her very close.

"To-morrow you will not go to school?"

"But why?"

"I have hired an auto for to-morrow. We go to Abbeville or Eu, whichever you please. Josephine can come with us. We are going shopping."

"But, Tod!"

"Listen," he said. "I haven't spent any money for

such a long time, and I am going to enjoy myself. We will go to the jeweller's and the costumier's, and visit the ladies who sell chapeaux. Yes, I am going to enjoy myself very much."

"I have a little dress," she began, "that will do for the marriage."

"Of course you have," he said, "but is that any reason why I should not enjoy myself? Besides, I want you to choose presents for all my good friends."

She looked at him with sudden, mischievous eyes.

"So you realise that I want nothing?"

"Of course I realise it," he said, "but it is I who want a very great number of things. And what is more, I am going to get them."

Chapter Forty-five

The car was waiting at Monsieur Lorellard's door; not a very brilliant car to be sure, but what did that matter? It needed painting; the upholstering had felt the war, and the chauffeur wore a cloth cap and an old blue military overcoat. Tod looked at the tyres, and half Myonville looked at Tod.

"They are going shopping."

"To Paris?"

"Paris! Listen to Nanette! The child's head is always in Paris. No; Abbeville, ma chérie."

"He is going to buy her a ring, perhaps?"

"Of course."

"Look, they are going alone! Mademoiselle

Josephine is not dressed."

"Well, it is the English custom, and monsieur is English."

"I wish I could go to Abbeville and buy pretty clothes," said Nanette.

Tod was handing Claire into the car. She wore a plain little black hat and a black coat and skirt, and her shoes were not new, nor were her gloves very much newer than her shoes. A white lace collar and a quaint little tartan tie showed at her throat. Yet everything was dainty, distinctive, sleek, indefinably French and charming.

"How pretty you look!" said Tod.

"These clothes? I bought them in Lille six years ago. Josephine, you traitress!"

Josephine, in apron and slippers, laughed at them from the doorway.

"No, no, I never meant to come. I should have been so unnecessary."

André gave a push to the old car as it smoked off.

"Au revoir. Remember me to all the charming girls at Printemps."

They did not go to Abbeville; they went to Eu; for Claire had a greater love for that more mysterious, more steeply-streeted, and more shadowy old town. There were scars of the war too in Abbeville, raw places that had not healed, memories of death and of terror. And Claire was happy, happy with the beautiful completeness of a child who rushes out to gather flowers on a morning in June. The woman in her took the joy of a child and held it against her heart. It was her day of days, her first adventure with

her lover.

The old car creaked and panted along the upland road, threading the shadows of the long avenues, and thrusting its unpolished snout into the sunlight and the broad blueness of that June day. Tod was holding Claire's hand. The Frenchman in the front seat kept his eyes on the road.

"It was just here," said Tod, pointing to the grass bank under the beeches.

"Yes, I remember."

"And Punch came to the rescue. Poor old Punch! I wanted to buy him, but he got lost at the Base."

They dreamed awhile.

"Ma chérie," said Tod suddenly, "what sort of house would you like to live in?"

She was lost in a new languor, the delicious sense of her new intimacy with this dearest of men, but she came out of her dreams and smiled at him.

"A little house, just a little house."

"You shall have it."

"And a woman, a sensible woman to help me."

"Will one be enough?"

"What should I do with more? I want the little house to be my house."

"You are not always going to be in the house," said Tod. "I shall want you to come out with me. I shall want people to see my charming little wife."

"So you would like me to wear pretty dresses, sometimes?"

"It will be a weakness of mine, I'm afraid."

The car sailed quite jauntily down the long hill into the valley below Eu. Tod was feeling in the breast pocket of his coat; he brought out a rather bulky pocketcase and looked half shyly and half tenderly at Claire.

"Now you are going to let me enjoy myself?"

"What do you mean?"

"I am going to buy things, all sorts of things."

She resisted, because a part of the subtle and exquisite joy of the day was in resisting, and in the ultimate surrender. A Frenchwoman loves interplay; it is born and bred in her, and she weaves it into all the tender activities of her life. Her exclamation, her smiles, her retaliations are more subtilised and less obvious than those of the Englishwoman. She has not the mental nudity of the average woman across the water. "She is always dressed," says the critical islander, but when that dress is charming and a little unexpected, why quarrel with it? All civilisation hangs in the grace of a petticoat and the set of a hat.

Tod bent forward and spoke to the driver.

"We shall stay in Eu most of the day. Take us to the best hotel and put up the car there."

"Bien, monsieur."

"And make yourself comfortable, monsieur; I wish it."

The Frenchman smiled.

There was no haste in the mood of the morning. They left the car at the hotel and set out to wander through the streets of Eu. Claire knew all the shops, but she remained dispassionate, tenderly reticent, leaving the spirit of the adventure to Tod. He should

discover all the wonderful things that he desired. If necessary she could guide him without appearing to guide, resist by choosing. But she went with him as no cold creature, no prig, no careful woman seizing an opportunity. She was just as excited, just as passionately happy as Tod, but she would keep her head because this dear man had lost his heart.

"We will go in here," said Tod, after a glance at the rings in the *bijoutier's* window.

It was a great affair, the buying of that ring, but a most subtle victory for Claire.

"Look, it is exquisite, this little one. I love it."

The simple little hoop with its single ruby, like a soft flower with drops of brilliant dew hanging about its petals, might not have satisfied Tod. Nor did a difference of two hundred francs satisfy the *bijoutier*.

"This other is a very beautiful ring, monsieur."

"It is," said Tod.

"Look, then!"

She put it on, closed her fist, and made a quick revelation of the thing's hardness, its artificiality. Then she pulled it off, and let her hand lie softly on Tod's sleeve.

"It suits me," she said; "it is so simple."

She was right. There was a spirituality in her choice.

"Your taste is better than mine," he said.

Her eyes lifted to his.

"But does it not please you better, on the hand of this little woman who loves you so?"

"You most exquisite soul," he said.

They ignored the *bijoutier*; nothing mattered that day. But the *bijoutier* still had ambitions.

"One moment, mademoiselle; here!"

"I have chosen," was all she said, with an air of extraordinary yet gentle finality.

The man said no more. He had studied women.

They wandered out again, Claire glancing at her ring.

"It is so sweet," she said, "but there is yet another sweetness in it."

He smiled down at her, with a question in his eyes.

"Well?"

"You let me choose it, you let the woman in me choose."

"I could not help it," said Tod.

Twenty yards farther on he wheeled and drew up outside a costumier's. It was one of those particularly French shops, small, piquant, restrained, showing a few exquisite things in the window, a dress, two hats, a rose-coloured sash, two little grey slippers standing demurely apart. Claire knew this little shop. It was a fragment of Paris, very fashionable, charming, but expensive.

"I think this should do," said the man.

She admired Tod for choosing that shop.

"My dear, it is very expensive."

"A few good things are better than a lot of cheap ones."

She had no answer to that.

They entered the shop, and it was Tod who spoke to a swarthy little Frenchwoman with bright eyes and a merry smile. He stood in the middle of the square of green carpet, his hat in his hand, his blue eyes vaguely amused.

“Madame, have you any Paris models?”

“Everything is from Paris, monsieur.”

“Good,” said Tod. “May we see everything? My fiancée wishes to choose.”

The two women looked at each other. Claire smiled.

“A simple costume, madame, that I can wear at my marriage, and afterwards.”

There was some subtle interchange of sympathy between the two women. Tod, the man, was put gently on to a chair in a corner and persuaded to be a spectator. Madame and Claire began to chatter like old friends.

“Yvonne!”

A pretty girl, like a dark pansy, appeared from behind a glass door. Madame spoke to her with an air of mystery; and the dark girl disappeared, to return with an armful of Parisian creations.

They were displayed, commented on, discussed as though Claire were a daughter.

“What about that pink thing?” said Tod from his corner, the blatant and enthusiastic male.

Madame was very emphatic.

“Oh, no, monsieur—never! Yvonne should not have brought it.”

Tod lapsed and became again the devoted spectator. And yet he was enjoying himself intensely, watching Claire and the two women fingering these beautiful things, Yvonne spreading the costumes over her own figure for Claire to judge them like an impressionist. He beheld a new Claire, vivacious, critical, yet ever charming, smiling at him from time to time, quite capable of holding her own with these experts, betraying an instant and instinctive knowledge of what suited her and what did not.

“That pleases me.”

She appealed to Tod.

“But it is black,” he objected.

Madame suppressed him with motherly impressiveness.

“Black, monsieur, is the most refined, the most restrained, the most cunning of colours. A charming woman never looks better than in black.”

“Supposing you try it on?” said Tod meekly.

The two women, the costumes, and Claire disappeared into a room behind the shop, and Tod waited for the completion of the mystery. Half an hour passed, and then Yvonne came hurrying out.

“Mademoiselle wishes to know if monsieur is ennuyé?”

“I am quite happy, mademoiselle.”

She smiled at him archly and hurried out into the street. Something seemed to be lacking, some little refinement, a detail that was necessary for the completion of a picture. Yvonne returned with an armful of cardboard boxes, but she did not tell Tod what they contained.

Tod heard much pretty chattering in French, the blending of three women's voices, exclamations of delight and of admiration. Tod felt thrilled, just as excited as the women, for was there not something of a sacramental mystery about all this feminine ritual, this dressing of his most dear lady? And then she appeared to him; vaguely shy, smiling in a way that was new to her, a little, subtle, tender smile, her soft lips ready to ask a question.

"Dear heart!" said Tod.

He stood up and gazed, and his eyes saw nothing but this little woman in a black chiffon velvet gown cut low in the front, threaded about the wrists and neck with twisted threads of cerise and silver, and held at the waist by a belt of silver. On her head was a close-fitting black velvet hat, carrying a little halo of silver filigree work, and underlined with cerise. Grey silk stockings and little black shoes with silver grey uppers showed below the hem of the black dress.

"Well?" her eyes asked him with a little tremble of light.

"Dear heart," said Tod again, "it's—it's perfect."

She gave him a strange melting look.

"What beauty there may be in me—is yours," it said.

Madame clapped her hands softly, and Yvonne smiled.

"Monsieur is convinced! Mademoiselle has the beauty of simplicity."

"It's—it's perfect," said Tod once more, looking into Claire's eyes.

And he refused to let her change that costume. It was so simple and so charming that he felt that she could have met both Myonville and Paris in those dainty and gentle clothes.

“The other dress can be packed, madame, and we can call for it.”

“Certainly, monsieur.”

“And now,” said Tod, “what about the other things? I’m going out for a short walk.”

He handed his pocket-book to Claire.

“Tod—I——”

“I won’t be long,” he said, escaping out of the shop.

Claire looked at Tod’s pocket-book and then at Madame.

“I do not require anything more,” she said softly, “but a pair of gloves, a petticoat or two, and a simple blouse.”

“But if monsieur——?”

Claire smiled with her grey eyes at the other woman.

“It is sufficient—if I am happy.”

Madame smiled back at her.

“I understand. It is an admirable feeling. Yet, mademoiselle, if you drive in an auto——”

“Yes,” said Claire with a sigh, “I shall need a cloak. A very simple one, one that I could wear too in the winter.”

“We have a black velour, and quite inexpensive. It will harmonise with that costume.”

"It must be quite inexpensive," said Claire with that softly final air of hers.

Tod returned in half an hour, and wanted to know what she had bought.

"All that I need," she told him, handing him back his pocket-book. "I have paid madame."

Tod did not examine his pocket-book until the evening, and then to see whether he needed another cheque cashing at Abbeville. He found that he had more money left than he expected. Claire had refused to seize an opportunity.

From the costumier's Tod carried her off to lunch at the hotel, a happily proud Tod who looked all Eu in the face with eyes that said "See what an exquisite little woman I have here. And she is going to marry me! Wonderful, isn't it?" They had a bottle of Pommard for lunch, Claire drinking just one glass of it and looking as though she had been born in that charming frock. She was rather quiet with Tod, perhaps because she was so happy, and thought of the future without a moment of dismay.

"We have more shopping to do yet," he told her.

"For whom?"

"For you. And there are the presents for the family."

She resisted gently.

"Ma chérie, you have bought me so much. For the others—yes, if it pleases you."

"Have you a travelling trunk?" asked the practical Tod.

"A little one."

"You will want something bigger. Let us run through the list. Answer correctly like a good child."

She pretended to be extremely solemn.

"Have you an umbrella?"

"Yes."

"A raincoat?"

"No."

Tod made a note of it.

"House shoes—pretty ones, I mean?"

She shook her head.

Tod made another note.

"Gloves?"

"Yes."

"A little handbag for the vanities of women?"

"No."

"That is essential."

She held up a hand.

"Please, Tod, no more."

There was something in her eyes that touched and restrained him.

"Ma petite," he said, "you have let me enjoy myself. It has been the happiest day of my life. I thank you, with all my heart."

The day drew to a close, and the shabby old blue auto improvised a finale when they were within half a mile of Myonville by blowing a big burst in one of its back tyres. There was no spare wheel, only a spare tube and tyre. The chauffeur, who had lunched

very well, smiled at Tod and asked them if they would remove themselves from the back seat as the tools and the jack were under it.

Tod got out.

“Why shouldn’t we walk? The car can bring on the parcels.”

They decided to walk.

The sunset was behind them, and they came into Myonville with a yellow sky at their backs and the long shadows of the trees falling across the village. One of the high avenues of beeches led them to the end of the village, and from the darkness of this avenue they seemed to step at once into the evening brightness of the wide and open street. The French folk were sitting at their doors, and the passing of Claire and Tod was the passing of a romance.

Myonville behaved like the warm-hearted and simple little place it was. Claire had nothing to fear from these good people. She went past the doorways with shining eyes, the little lady of Tod’s life, so frankly happy that she looked for no evil in the heart of this little world, nor would she have found it had she looked.

“Bon soir, Mademoiselle Vignard; bon soir, monsieur.”

There were smiles, whisperings, a bobbing out of heads when they were past, but not a grudging word, not a sneer, no English gawking, no English giggles. These people were civilised, and Claire Vignard had taught their children.

“Tiens! but what pretty clothes!”

“The Englishman has been spending his money.”

"Is she not looking charming?"

"Yes, Claire Vignard deserves it. It will not spoil her."

"Ah, what a romance! Did you notice how he looked at her? They say the English make good husbands."

"No man could help being good to her."

And then a child ran out and into Claire's arms.

"Oh, mam'selle! Pretty, pretty!"

Claire kissed her.

"Am I pretty, ma petite, or is it the dress?"

"It is you," said the child.

Tod bent down in turn and kissed Nanette.

"We think the same, Nanette; we are very wise people, you and I."

The Lorellards were sitting in the doorway of the café, and it was Josephine who first caught sight of Claire, and Josephine's good heart betrayed itself.

"They are coming. The auto must have broken down. Ma foi! she is lovely! He has turned her into a little Parisian angel!"

Even the bored André leant forward over his sister's shoulder.

"It is Printemps," he said; "Monsieur Tod has discovered Printemps."

Claire was embraced, exclaimed over, kissed, while Tod stood and watched the pleasure and the playful tenderness of these dear people, a Tod who could not be disconcerted by André's mischievous smile. Claire had to show her costume, her *chapeau*,

her little shoes, even her silk stockings. They were like children, very lovable, grown-up children, and Tod knew that he was one of them.

"Ah, Monsieur Tod, but you are très, très gentil, très généreux."

"Am I?" said Tod. "But why? I have never enjoyed myself like this before."

He was looking at Claire with eyes of wonder and of tenderness.

"You will spoil her, monsieur," said André roguishly.

Madame snubbed him.

"Love never spoilt a good woman, my son. Take that to heart."

Then Claire escaped.

"Tod is hungry," she asserted.

"I'm not," said her man.

"But you must be, because I am," and she laughed back at them from the doorway. "I shall be back in one moment, and I will help to get some supper."

"It is ready," Josephine called after her: "we waited for you."

Tod wandered out into the orchard, because the sunset was there and a blackbird was singing, and all his happiness seemed part of the sunset and the green leaves and the blackbird's song. Tod had never thought that life could be so good. He idled to and fro under the apple trees, filled to the lips with a precious and innocent tenderness, a simple man whose very simplicity was his strength.

Presently he heard Claire calling him.

"Tod! Tod!"

He turned and met her where a red rose bush grew by the garden gate, and Tod stood still. She had changed her new frock and put on her simple black working skirt, a white blouse and the little apron with the blue pansies. It was the Claire of all his memories, the Claire of the schoolhouse, the Claire who had won him in her daintily shabby clothes.

"Dear God!" said Tod, "nothing will ever be better than that. It's the woman, not the clothes."

Chapter Forty-six

One summer afternoon Mr. Julian Burgetrode met the Channel boat at Folkestone.

Standing behind a crane, a friend unseen, he watched the crowd on the boat's deck and their sheep's progress towards the gangway. Mr. Burgetrode had to look elsewhere for Tod and for Tod's wife, for they were not among the people who pushed and struggled to extricate handbags and suitcases.

"Silly fools," he said, "and to think we had an army!"

Then he caught sight of Tod, Tod standing a little apart and absorbed in an affectionate argument with a little woman in black, a charmingly sturdy little woman who looked up into Tod's face and maintained a grip of her handbag.

"I *will* carry it," Claire was saying; "I am not so helpless."

It was Tod who gave in, and like a big, amused, and a devoted boy, but Mr. Burgetrode was not interested in Tod; his attention was absorbed by Tod's French wife. The Colossus had very keen sight, and he watched this little woman in black while she was wholly unconscious of being observed. He had an impression of a full round face, pale, but not with the pallor of Paris, a wreath of soft brown hair, two big grey eyes, a mouth that was both generous and shrewd, and a very firm little chin. She was dressed quite simply in that costume that had been bought at Lille before the war, and the black velour cloak, and the hat that had come from Eu. She was one of those women who combine animation and repose, who look both fragile and strong. Mr. Burgetrode had a full view of her face as she talked to Tod, and it made him think of soft white light, pure and yet sensitively passionate.

"French," said Mr. Burgetrode to himself, "but yet not the France of Paris. A little fair girl with a white throat and a passion for one man in those grey eyes of hers. A very great passion perhaps. And she understands."

The crowd poured off the boat, and Tod was shepherding Claire towards the gangway, making a sort of sacred space about her. Mr. Burgetrode saw him glance over his shoulder, and then set his back squarely and forcibly against the energetic person of a bullet-headed Englishman who was thinking of nothing but a seat in the luncheon-car. Tod held the man back till Claire was on the gangway. Mr. Burgetrode liked the squareness and the determination of Tod's back.

He went forward hat in hand to meet them.

"Hallo, sir! I hadn't seen you. It's very good of

you to come and meet us."

Mr. Burgetrode was smiling.

"So here you are. And this is my adopted daughter? I am very charmed to welcome you, madame."

Mr. Burgetrode spoke excellent French, and for the moment he had something of the manner of a Frenchman. Standing there bareheaded, he held out a hand to Claire.

"It is Mr. Burgetrode," said Tod.

She gave him a little smile, and then looked straight at Julian Burgetrode. Their hands met. Claire's eyes and face were as open as the light to him; he was Tod's big friend, and hers, a cleverer man than Tod, she knew that at once; but great with the same greatness, so she thought. She showed no fear of Julian Burgetrode, no knowledge of the necessity in an attitude that should please him. It was possible that he might be jealous of her. She smiled that aside.

"I have wished so much to see you, monsieur."

Mr. Burgetrode still held her hand. He liked her simplicity, her unaffectedness, her dignity that was like the dignity of a child. She had come to a strange land, bravely, without tears, trusting a man. And he, too, was trusted. The bigness of him offered its homage.

"Well, now you see me, Madame Claire. Is it a surprise for both of us? I think I have the right to the greater pleasure."

The woman in her answered the more subtle man in him.

“You will have no cause to be afraid of me, monsieur.”

“My dear child!” said Mr. Burgetrode with unusual emotion; “Tod, you scoundrel, why didn’t you tell me?”

Tod looked puzzled.

“What, sir?”

A sudden smile passed between Claire and Mr. Burgetrode.

“Of course you told me! I beg your pardon. I didn’t visualise it, that’s all.”

They followed the porter and the luggage along the pier, Claire walking between the two men, and looking with eyes of amazement at all those people who seemed in so savage and helpless a hurry.

“How droll,” she said with a glance at Mr. Burgetrode, “I expected England to be so calm.”

“Calm!” echoed the great man; “no, we are not calm. We are much too discontented.”

Tod walked on to speak to the porter.

“My husband is not discontented,” said Claire.

Mr. Burgetrode’s fierce blue eyes softened when he looked at this little woman.

“He is a very unusual man.”

“He is the best and most generous man in the world,” she said, and then with a passionately serious light in her grey eyes, “it is my affair that he shall always be happy.”

Tod came back to them.

“There’s a big crowd in the Customs.”

"No hurry," said Mr. Burgetrode. "I booked three seats on the luncheon-car."

"Will they want to open my box and disarrange all my pretty things?"

"Smile at them, madame," said Mr. Burgetrode with an air of mischief. "Tod, you had better leave it to your wife."

Julian Burgetrode had yet another opportunity of watching these two children of his while they were dealing with a bored and rather irritable official. Tod chose to act as spokesman. Claire stood at his side, looking up at him with eyes of adoration, motherliness, pride.

"I'm asking you if you have anything to declare, sir. It's no use——"

"I haven't anything; but my wife——"

"Open the lady's trunk," said the man brusquely.

Claire looked at Tod.

"What does he say?"

"He wishes to see your trunk?"

"Quelle horreur!" said Claire.

She took a little bunch of keys out of her vanity-bag and turned to the official.

"Monsieur," she began, using for the first time her quaint academic English, "I am married, one week. I have one Paris costume, three silk petticoats, my lingerie——"

The man stared at her. She was preparing to unlock her trunk.

"You will not disarrange all my pretty things,

monsieur, please?”

Mr. Burgetrode saw that something had happened to the official. His bored face broadened to a smile. He looked at Tod and chalked the luggage.

“That’s all right, sir. I won’t bother the lady.”

“You can put your keys back, ma chérie,” said Tod.

Claire thanked the official.

“It is very agreeable of you, monsieur. I have told you the truth; it is just my little trousseau.”

“Don’t mention it, madam,” said the man.

Mr. Burgetrode swept them away. He was laughing somewhere in the depths of those fierce eyes of his.

“I was wrong,” he said to himself, “quite wrong. I shall never be jealous of this child.”

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[The end of *The Prophetic Marriage* by Warwick Deeping]

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