

The gentleman was a clergyman, small, thin, round-shouldered, with a long neck; weak-eyed and dryly polite. The lady was middle-aged, though still young-looking; very pretty, with gray hair; very well dressed; very small, full of nervous energy, with tiny hands and feet. It was Little Billee's mother; and the clergyman, the Rev. Thomas Bagot, was her brother-in-law.

Their faces were full of trouble—so much so that the two painters did not even apologize for the carelessness of their attire, or for the odor of tobacco that filled the room. Little Billee's mother recognized the two painters at a glance, from the sketches and descriptions of which her son's letters were always full.

They all sat down.

After a moment's embarrassed silence, Mrs. Bagot exclaimed, addressing Taffy: "Mr. Wynne, we are in terrible distress of mind. I don't know if my son has told you, but on Christmas Day he engaged himself to be married!"

"To—be—*married!*" exclaimed Taffy and the Laird, for whom this was news indeed.

"Yes—to be married to a Miss Trilby O'Ferrall, who, from what he implies, is in quite a different position in life to himself. Do you know the lady, Mr. Wynne?"

"Oh yes! I know her very well indeed; we *all* know her."

"Is she English?"

"She's an English subject, I believe."

"Is she a Protestant or a Roman Catholic?" inquired the clergyman.

"A—a—upon my word, I really don't know!"

"You know her very well indeed, and you *don't—know—that*, Mr. Wynne!" exclaimed Mr. Bagot.

"Is she a *lady*, Mr. Wynne?" asked Mrs. Bagot, somewhat impatiently, as if that were a much more important matter.

By this time the Laird had managed to basely desert his friend; had got himself into his bedroom, and from thence, by another door, into the street and away.

"A lady?" said Taffy; "a—it so much depends upon what that word exactly means, you know; things are so—a—so different here. Her father was a gentleman, I believe—a fellow of Trinity, Cambridge—and a clergyman, if *that* means anything!... he was unfortunate and all that—a—intemperate, I fear, and not successful in life. He has been dead six or seven years."

"And her mother?"

"I really know very little about her mother, except that she was very handsome, I believe, and of inferior social rank to her husband. She's also dead; she died soon after him."

"What is the young lady, then? An English governess, or something of that sort?"

"Oh, no, no—a—nothing of *that* sort," said Taffy (and inwardly, "You coward—you cad of a Scotch thief of a sneak of a Laird—to leave all this to me!").

"What? Has she independent means of her own, then?"

"A—not that I know of; I should even say, decidedly not!"

"What *is* she, then? She's at least respectable, I hope!"

"At present she's a—a blanchisseuse de fin—that is considered respectable here."

"Why, that's a washer-woman, isn't it?"

"Well—rather better than that, perhaps—*de fin*, you know!—things are so different in Paris! I don't think you'd say she was very much like a washer-woman—to look at!"

"Is she so good-looking, then?"

"Oh yes; extremely so. You may well say that—very beautiful, indeed—about that, at least, there is no doubt whatever!"

"And of unblemished character?"

Taffy, red and perspiring as if he were going through his Indian-club exercise, was silent—and his face expressed a miserable perplexity. But nothing could equal the anxious misery of those two maternal eyes, so wistfully fixed on his.

After some seconds of a most painful stillness, the lady said, "Can't you—oh, *can't* you give me an answer, Mr. Wynne?"

"Oh, Mrs. Bagot, you have placed me in a terrible position! I—I love your son just as if he were my own brother! This engagement is a complete surprise to me—a most painful surprise! I'd thought of many possible things, but never of *that*! I cannot—I really *must* not conceal from you that it would be an unfortunate marriage for your son—from a—a worldly point of view, you know—although both I and McAllister have a very deep and warm regard for poor Trilby O'Ferrall—indeed, a

great admiration and affection and respect! She was once a model."

"A *model*, Mr. Wynne? What *sort* of a model—there are models and models, of course."



"IS SHE A *LADY*, MR. WYNNE?"

"Well, a model of every sort, in every possible sense of the word—head, hands, feet, everything!"

"A model for the *figure*?"

"Well—yes!"

"Oh, my God! my God! my God!" cried Mrs. Bagot—and she got up and walked up and down the

studio in a most terrible state of agitation, her brother-in-law following her and begging her to control herself. Her exclamations seemed to shock him, and she didn't seem to care.

"Oh, Mr. Wynne! Mr. Wynne! If you only *knew* what my son is to me—to all of us—always has been! He has been with us all his life, till he came to this wicked, accursed city! My poor husband would never hear of his going to any school, for fear of all the harm he might learn there. My son was as innocent and pure-minded as any girl, Mr. Wynne—I could have trusted him anywhere—and that's why I gave way and allowed him to come *here*, of all places in the world—all alone. Oh! I should have come with him! Fool—fool—fool that I was! . . .

"Oh, Mr. Wynne, he won't see either his mother or his uncle! I found a letter from him at the hotel, saying he'd left Paris—and I don't even know where he's gone! . . . Can't *you*, can't Mr. McAllister, do *anything* to avert this miserable disaster? You don't know how he loves you both—you should see his letters to me and to his sister! they are always full of you!"

"Indeed, Mrs. Bagot—you can count on McAllister and me for doing everything in our power! But it is of no use our trying to influence your son—I feel quite sure of *that*! It is to *her* we must make our appeal."

"Oh, Mr. Wynne! to a washer-woman—a figure model—and Heaven knows what besides! and with such a chance as this!"

"Mrs. Bagot, you don't know her! She may have

been all that. But strange as it may seem to you—and seems to me, for that matter—she's a—she's—upon my word of honor, I really think she's about the best woman I ever met—the most unselfish—the most—"

"Ah! She's a *beautiful* woman—I can well see *that*!"

"She has a beautiful nature, Mrs. Bagot—you may believe me or not, as you like—and it is to that I shall make my appeal, as your son's friend, who has his interests at heart. And let me tell you that deeply as I grieve for you in your present distress, my grief and concern for her are far greater!"

"What! grief for her if she marries my son!"

"No, indeed—but if she refuses to marry him. She may not do so, of course—but my instinct tells me she will!"

"Oh! Mr. Wynne, is that likely?"

"I will do my best to make it so—with such an utter trust in her unselfish goodness of heart and her passionate affection for your son as—"

"How do you know she has all this passionate affection for him?"

"Oh, McAllister and I have long guessed it—though we never thought this particular thing would come of it. I think, perhaps, that first of all you ought to see her yourself—you would get quite a new idea of what she really is—you would be surprised, I assure you."

Mrs. Bagot shrugged her shoulders impatiently, and there was silence for a minute or two.

And then, just as in a play, Trilby's "Milk below!" was sounded at the door, and Trilby came into the

little antechamber, and seeing strangers, was about to turn back. She was dressed as a grisette, in her Sunday gown and pretty white cap (for it was New-year's Day), and looking her very best.

Taffy called out, "Come in, Trilby!"

And Trilby came into the studio.

As soon as she saw Mrs. Bagot's face she stopped short—erect, her shoulders a little high, her mouth a little open, her eyes wide with fright—and pale to the lips—a pathetic, yet commanding, magnificent, and most distinguished apparition, in spite of her humble attire.

The little lady got up and walked straight to her, and looked up into her face, that seemed to tower so. Trilby breathed hard.

At length Mrs. Bagot said, in her high accents, "You are Miss Trilby O'Ferrall?"

"Oh yes—yes—I am Trilby O'Ferrall, and you are Mrs. Bagot; I can see that!"

A new tone had come into her large, deep, soft voice, so tragic, so touching, so strangely in accord with the whole aspect just then—so strangely in accord with the whole situation—that Taffy felt his cheeks and lips turn cold, and his big spine thrill and tickle all down his back.

"Oh yes; you are very, very beautiful—there's no doubt about *that!* You wish to marry my son?"

"I've refused to marry him nineteen times—for his own sake; he will tell you so himself. I am not the right person for him to marry. I know that. On Christmas night he asked me for the twentieth time; he swore he would leave Paris next day forever if I

refused him. I hadn't the courage. I was weak, you see! It was a dreadful mistake."

"Are you so fond of him?"

"*Fond* of him? Aren't *you*?"

"I'm his mother, my good girl!"

To this Trilby seemed to have nothing to say.

"You have just said yourself you are not a fit wife for him. If you are so *fond* of him, will you ruin him by marrying him; drag him down; prevent him from getting on in life; separate him from his sister, his family, his friends?"



"'FOND OF HIM? AREN'T YOU?'"

Trilby turned her miserable eyes to Taffy's miserable face, and said, "Will it really be all that, Taffy?"

"Oh, Trilby, things have got all wrong, and can't be righted! I'm afraid it might be so. Dear Trilby—I can't tell you what I feel—but I can't tell you lies, you know!"

"Oh no—Taffy—you don't tell lies!"

Then Trilby began to tremble very much, and Taffy tried to make her sit down, but she wouldn't. Mrs. Bagot looked up into her face, herself breathless with keen suspense and cruel anxiety—almost imploring.

Trilby looked down at Mrs. Bagot very kindly, put out her shaking hand, and said: "Good-bye, Mrs. Bagot. I will not marry your son. I *promise* you. I will never see him again."

Mrs. Bagot caught and clasped her hand and tried to kiss it, and said: "Don't go yet, my dear good girl. I want to talk to you. I want to tell you how deeply I—"

"Good-bye, Mrs. Bagot," said Trilby, once more; and disengaging her hand, she walked swiftly out of the room.

Mrs. Bagot seemed stupefied, and only half content with her quick triumph.

"She will not marry your son, Mrs. Bagot. I only wish to God she'd marry *me*!"

"Oh, Mr. Wynne!" said Mrs. Bagot, and burst into tears.

"Ah!" exclaimed the clergyman, with a feebly satirical smile and a little cough and sniff that were not sympathetic, "now if *that* could be arranged—and I've no doubt there wouldn't be much opposition on

the part of the lady" (here he made a little complimentary bow), "it would be a very desirable thing all round!"

"It's tremendously good of you, I'm sure—to interest yourself in *my* humble affairs," said Taffy. "Look here, sir—I'm not a great genius like your nephew—and it doesn't much matter to any one but myself what I make of my life—but I can assure you that if Trilby's heart were set on me as it is on him, I would gladly cast in my lot with hers for life. She's one in a thousand. She's the one sinner that repenteth, you know!"

"Ah, yes—to be sure!—to be sure! I know all about that; still, facts are facts, and the world is the world, and we've got to live in it," said Mr. Bagot, whose satirical smile had died away under the gleam of Taffy's choleric blue eye.

Then said the good Taffy, frowning down on the parson (who looked mean and foolish, as people can sometimes do even with right on their side): "And now, Mr. Bagot—I can't tell you how very keenly I have suffered during this—a—this most painful interview—on account of my very deep regard for Trilby O'Ferrall. I congratulate you and your sister-in-law on its complete success. I also feel very deeply for your nephew. I'm not sure that he has not lost more than he will gain by—a—by the—a—the success of this—a—this interview, in short!"

Taffy's eloquence was exhausted, and his quick temper was getting the better of him.

Then Mrs. Bagot, drying her eyes, came and took his hand in a very charming and simple manner, and

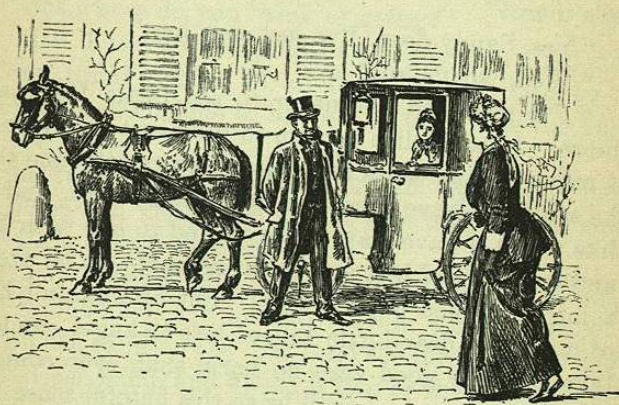
said: "Mr. Wynne, I think I know what you are feeling just now. You must try and make some allowance for us. You will, I am sure, when we are gone, and you have had time to think a little. As for that noble and beautiful girl, I only wish that she were such that my son *could* marry her—in her past life, I mean. It is not her humble rank that would frighten me; *pray* believe that I am quite sincere in this—and don't think too hardly of your friend's mother. Think of all I shall have to go through with my poor son—who is deeply in love—and no wonder! and who has won the love of such a woman as that! and who cannot see at present how fatal to him such a marriage would be. I can see all the charm and believe in all the goodness, in spite of all. And, oh, how beautiful she is, and what a voice! All that counts for so much, doesn't it? I cannot tell you how I grieve for her. I can make no amends—who could, for such a thing? There are no amends, and I shall not even try. I will only write and tell her all I think and feel. You will forgive us, won't you?"

And in the quick, impulsive warmth and grace and sincerity of her manner as she said all this, Mrs. Bagot was so absurdly like Little Billee that it touched big Taffy's heart, and he would have forgiven anything, and there was nothing to forgive.

"Oh, Mrs. Bagot, there's no question of forgiveness. Good heavens! it is all so unfortunate, you know! Nobody's to blame, that I can see. Good-bye, Mrs. Bagot; good-bye, sir," and so saying, he saw them down to their "remise," in which sat a singularly pretty young lady of seventeen or so, pale and anxious,

and so like Little Billee that it was quite funny, and touched big Taffy's heart again.

When Trilby went out into the court-yard in the Place St. Anatole des Arts, she saw Miss Bagot looking out of the carriage window, and in the young lady's face, as she caught her eye, an expression of sweet surprise and sympathetic admiration, with lifted



"SO LIKE LITTLE BILLEE"

eyebrows and parted lips—just such a look as she had often got from Little Billee! She knew her for his sister at once. It was a sharp pang.

She turned away, saying to herself: "Oh no; I will not separate him from his sister, his family, his friends! That would *never* do! *That's* settled, anyhow!"

Feeling a little dazed, and wishing to think, she turned up the Rue Vieille des Mauvais Ladres, which was always deserted at this hour. It was empty, but

for a solitary figure sitting on a post, with its legs dangling, its hands in its trousers-pockets, an inverted pipe in its mouth, a tattered straw hat on the back of its head, and a long gray coat down to its heels. It was the Laird.

As soon as he saw her he jumped off his post and came to her, saying: "Oh, Trilby—what's it all about? I couldn't stand it! I ran away! Little Billee's mother's there!"

"Yes, Sandy dear, I've just seen her."

"Well, what's up?"

"I've promised her never to see Little Billee any more. I was foolish enough to promise to marry him. I refused many times these last three months, and then he said he'd leave Paris and never come back, and so, like a fool, I gave way. I've offered to live with him and take care of him and be his servant—to be everything he wished but his wife! But he wouldn't hear of it. Dear, dear Little Billee! he's an angel—and I'll take precious good care no harm shall ever come to him through me! I shall leave this hateful place and go and live in the country: I suppose I must manage to get through life somehow. I know of some poor people who were once very fond of me, and I could live with them and help them and keep myself. The difficulty is about Jeannot. I thought it all out before it came to this. I was well prepared, you see."

She smiled in a forlorn sort of way, with her upper lip drawn tight against her teeth, as if some one were pulling her back by the lobes of her ears.

"Oh! but Trilby—what shall we do without you? Taffy and I, you know! You've become one of us!"

"Now how good and kind of you to say that!" exclaimed poor Trilby, her eyes filling. "Why, that's just all I lived for, till all this happened. But it can't be any more now, can it? Everything is changed for me—the very sky seems different. Ah! Durien's little song—'*Plaisir d'amour—chagrin d'amour!*' it's all quite true, isn't it? I shall start immediately, and take Jeannot with me, I think."

"But where do you think of going?"

"Ah! I mayn't tell you that, Sandy dear—not for a long time! Think of all the trouble there'd be—Well, there's no time to be lost. I must take the bull by the horns."

She tried to laugh, and took him by his big side whiskers and kissed him on the eyes and mouth, and her tears fell on his face.

Then, feeling unable to speak, she nodded farewell, and walked quickly up the narrow winding street. When she came to the first bend she turned round and waved her hand, and kissed it two or three times, and then disappeared.

The Laird stared for several minutes up the empty thoroughfare—wretched, full of sorrow and compassion. Then he filled himself another pipe and lit it, and hitched himself on to another post, and sat there dangling his legs and kicking his heels, and waited for the Bagots' cab to depart, that he might go up and face the righteous wrath of Taffy like a man, and bear up against his bitter reproaches for cowardice and desertion before the foe.

Next morning Taffy received two letters: one, a

very long one, was from Mrs. Bagot. He read it twice over, and was forced to acknowledge that it was a very good letter—the letter of a clever, warm-hearted woman, but a woman also whose son was to her as the very apple of her eye. One felt she was ready to flay her dearest friend alive in order to make Little Billee a pair of gloves out of the skin, if he wanted a pair; but one also felt she would be genuinely sorry for the friend. Taffy's own mother had been a little like that, and he missed her every day of his life.

Full justice was done by Mrs. Bagot to all Trilby's qualities of head and heart and person; but at the same time she pointed out, with all the cunning and ingeniously casuistic logic of her sex, when it takes to special pleading (even when it has right on its side), what the consequences of such a marriage must inevitably be in a few years—even sooner! The quick disenchantment, the life-long regret, on both sides!

He could not have found a word to controvert her arguments, save perhaps in his own private belief that Trilby and Little Billee were both exceptional people; and how could he hope to know Little Billee's nature better than the boy's own mother!

And if he had been the boy's elder brother in blood, as he already was in art and affection, would he, should he, could he have given his fraternal sanction to such a match?

Both as his friend and his brother he felt it was out of the question.

The other letter was from Trilby, in her bold, careless handwriting, that sprawled all over the page, and her occasionally imperfect spelling. It ran thus:



“I MUST TAKE THE BULL BY THE HORNS”



"MY DEAR, DEAR TAFFY,—This is to say good-bye. I'm going away, to put an end to all this misery, for which nobody's to blame but myself.

"The very moment after I'd said *yes* to Little Billee I knew perfectly well what a stupid fool I was, and I've been ashamed of myself ever since. I had a miserable week, I can tell you. I knew how it would all turn out.

"I am dreadfully unhappy, but not half so unhappy as if I married him and he were ever to regret it and be ashamed of me; and of course he would, really, even if he didn't show it—good and kind as he is—an angel!

"Besides—of course I could never be a lady—how could I?—though I ought to have been one, I suppose. But everything seems to have gone wrong with me, though I never found it out before—and it can't be righted!

"Poor papa!

"I am going away with Jeannot. I've been neglecting him shamefully. I mean to make up for it all now.

"You mustn't try and find out where I am going; I know you won't if I beg you, nor any one else. It would make everything so much harder for me.

"Angèle knows; she has promised me not to tell. I should like to have a line from you very much. If you send it to her she will send it on to me.

"Dear Taffy, next to Little Billee, I love you and the Laird better than any one else in the whole world. I've never known real happiness till I met you. You have changed me into another person—you and Sandy and Little Billee.

"Oh, it *has* been a jolly time, though it didn't last long. It will have to do for me for life. So good-bye. I shall never, never forget; and remain, with dearest love,

"Your ever faithful and most affectionate friend,

"TRILBY O'FERRALL.

"P.S.—When it has all blown over and settled again, if it ever does, I shall come back to Paris, perhaps, and see you again some day."

The good Taffy pondered deeply over this letter—read it half a dozen times at least; and then he kissed it, and put it back into its envelope and locked it up.

He knew what very deep anguish underlay this somewhat trivial expression of her sorrow.

He guessed how Trilby, so childishly impulsive and demonstrative in the ordinary intercourse of friendship, would be more reticent than most women in such a case as this.

He wrote to her warmly, affectionately, at great length, and sent the letter as she had told him.

The Laird also wrote a long letter full of tenderly worded friendship and sincere regard. Both expressed their hope and belief that they would soon see her again, when the first bitterness of her grief would be over, and that the old pleasant relations would be renewed.

And then, feeling wretched, they went and silently lunched together at the Café de l'Odéon, where the omelets were good and the wine wasn't blue.

Late that evening they sat together in the studio, reading. They found they could not talk to each