

CHAPTER XLVI

JOHN peered at a notice outside the door of Study No. 7 and smiled.

‘ AT HOME THIS WEDNESDAY.

TEA 4 PROMPT.

ALL ARE WELCOME.

BRING YOUR OWN CHAIRS!

MUSIC AND ELEGANT CONVERSATION.

P.S.—Anyone offering to recite “Gunga Din” will be thrown into the passage.

Underneath was pinned another large card :

HOUSE FULL.

Judging by the clatter within, the latter notice probably spoke the truth.

“I think we must chance it,” said John. He tapped at the door and immediately several feminine voices within invited him to go away. He pushed it open.

“Don’t you see, ass, that we are full up—why, grandpa, old thing, I’m ever so sorry. Never thought it might be you.” Poppy came forward delightedly. “Squeeze up there, you girls.”

“You don’t seem to have much room, Poppy.”

“Oh, there’s lots,” said Poppy, and indeed the study began to be less congested as several of her friends, bashful in the presence of Poppy’s visitors, had begun to leave. “Come in; you are just in time for tea.”

“Let me introduce your American aunt,” said John, waving towards Delilah, “and your cousin.” He noticed with some disapproval that that young gentleman had

already commenced ogling the prettier of the schoolgirls. He came to himself with a start on hearing his name.

Poppy shook hands gravely. She was really a very beautiful little girl, more and more like Angeline as she grew older.

"We have a splendid tea, grandpa; we have been 'blucing' the fiver you sent me on Monday. There are three kinds of jam and two kinds of cake——"

"Excellent."

"Chocolate éclairs, cherry tart, veal and lam patties, and a *beautiful* pork pie."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"With lots of jelly round the edges. Pink blancmange and sausages—I think that's all. No, I forgot the chicken-paste. There was some custard, but that got upset when we threw Maisie into the passage."

"Did she offer to recite 'Gunga Din'?"

"No, much worse. 'The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God.' Of course, I love Kipling, but there is a limit to human endurance."

John looked at his great-granddaughter admiringly. She was not yet fourteen, but her self-possession, her sweetness and the promise she gave of great capability delighted him. Child she was yet, but he saw in her the promise of a wonderful woman. All that he had approved in Billy, his long-dead son, in young Tim who fell at Magersfontein, in Antony her father—all that was there and more.

"If only she had been a boy," he thought, and yet again he would have her no other than she was.

"I shall expect you to make a wonderful tea," said Poppy. "If you are thirsty there's ginger-beer and cream-soda, and grandpa, you must have some of my coffee—everyone says I make the *wonderfullest* coffee."

There was a glorious little trill in her voice which reminded him of Angeline.

"I'll do my best, Poppy, and after all, at my age, it doesn't really matter if I do ruin my digestion."

"Oh, gran'pa, I *like* you when you are facetious. . . . Of course, you're going to live to be a hundred. Maisie's grandpa is only seventy, and he goes round in a bath chair, and feeds on horrid slops. I am ever so proud of you."

John drew up his armchair. There was quite a quantity left of the feast; evidently Poppy had not meant her guests to run short. One by one they had all gone now.

Harry Tcdhunter was gazing at Poppy, rather impressed. In these days he was reflecting, what with bobbed hair and short skirts, it was impossible to tell how old a girl was. In another four years—yes, his mother's advice was good. Not a bad catch to marry a countess and a millionairess, especially when she gave promise of such beauty as Poppy.

"Are you staying in England long, Harry?"

"Yes, mommer and I are thinking of settling down here."

John frowned. It occurred to him that probably they had an idea of settling down at Woden, in which case it would be necessary to disillusion them. As a girl and a puritan, Delilah had annoyed him; as a middle-aged woman of the world she still annoyed him. He had not yet made out the intent and purpose of her new *rôle*, but she was of the sort to get on his nerves had he ever indulged in that luxury.

He had no objection to her living on his bounty, but he objected to her doing so in his presence continually.

"Are you going to do something here then—going into some sort of business?" asked Poppy, sweetly. She was not particularly impressed with Harry, who even to her youthful eyes, appeared to be in the "cub" stage, and unlicked at that.

"There's no need for that," interposed Delilah.

"Oh, yes, there is," said John. "It isn't good for a young man to run round idle. He ought to do some sort of work." Harry's face fell, "unless he intends to study."

"Wouldn't mind going to your Oxford or Cambridge," replied Harry, smitten by a bright idea. After all, if he intended to follow the Astor plan and become British, he might as well make a start. His sole knowledge of English universities was derived from that admirable work dealing with the adventures of Mr. Verdant Green.

John nodded. It seemed as satisfactory a way of disposing of Harry as any other. Delilah looked dubious, but before making protests, remembered in time that her father held the purse-strings.

"I am sure you will like it, Harry."

He beamed at her ingratiatingly.

John looked at him, and then at Delilah. Something about her complacency reminded him of a fat cat contemplating a saucer of cream. He thought he had a very fair idea of the reason for this sudden visit.

"Delilah doesn't want the money to get out of her clutches," he thought. "Very well, Delilah, we shall see. You may have cropped your own hair, but you will not crop mine. I am no Samson in his dotage."