

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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George Du Maurier, *Trilby* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

It was a bright April day in Paris. The sun came and went behind fast-moving clouds, and a cool wind came in through the high studio window. The room was almost ready now. The large piano had finally come from England, and it stood against the wall, clean and newly tuned. On another wall hung fencing masks, gloves, and foils. Ropes and rings came down from a beam in the ceiling, and all around the room were casts, sketches, and copies of famous pictures.

The studio was large, irregular, and full of promise. There were little corners that would one day hold books, pipes, coats, cups, and all the small objects that turn a workroom into a home. Near the stove were simple cooking tools. In a cupboard were plates, knives, forks, glasses, oil, vinegar, and mustard. A great low couch stood under the north window, wide enough for three English friends to lie side by side and smoke in peace. The floor had rugs and skins on one side, and rough matting on the other, so a man could fence, box, jump, or fall without breaking his bones.

One of the three friends was Taffy, a huge fair young man from Yorkshire. He stood with bare arms and swung a pair of Indian clubs round his head in strong, smooth circles. His shirt clung to him with sweat, and his face was red from exercise, but there was nothing ugly in him. He looked fierce at first, yet his blue eyes were kind. His great arms were powerful, and every movement showed long practice and confidence. He had once been an officer in the army, and he still carried himself like a soldier.

That part of his life was behind him now, but not forgotten. He had gone through war without a wound, yet a foolish hurt had kept him away from the one famous battle that could have made his name. He had never quite forgiven fate for that joke. At last he left the army, sold out, and came to Paris because he believed art was his true work. So there he was in the studio, exercising like a fighter,

though he now called himself a painter. His big yellow-brown whiskers and heavy mustache made him look older and more serious than he was.

The second friend was Sandy, whom they called the Laird. He sat at his easel in an easy, careless way, working at a small picture. He was painting a Spanish man singing to a fine lady, though he himself had never been to Spain. That did not trouble him at all. He had found a toreador costume cheaply in Paris, had borrowed a guitar, and was perfectly ready to believe in his own subject while he painted it. His pipe had gone out, the ashes had fallen on his clothes, and he seemed not to care.

Sandy had a cheerful face that did people good. He liked words, jokes, poems, and funny songs. In the middle of his painting he would suddenly recite something in his Scottish voice, laugh at his own pleasure, and go on with his brush. His family in Dundee had wanted him to become a lawyer, just as his father and grandfather had been before him. But here he was in Paris instead, far from home, painting, joking, and living exactly as he liked. He was light-hearted by nature, and his good humor filled the room almost as much as the spring light.

The third friend was much younger than the other two. This was Little Billee. He was kneeling on the couch, leaning on the window, with a piece of bread and sausage in his hands. He had been drawing from a live model all morning and was very hungry, so he ate with real joy. Yet even while he ate, he kept looking out over the roofs of Paris. He was small and graceful, with dark hair, fine features, and large blue eyes. He dressed more carefully than the others, though he lived among them happily and loved them dearly.

Paris entered him through the eyes before it ever entered him through thought. He looked down into the square, at old houses with worn walls and dark windows, at broken places between buildings, at distant roofs, towers, and bits of sky. Through one opening he could see the river and the old city. Farther away rose the towers of Notre-Dame. He could not have explained all he felt, but he knew that the sight of Paris moved him deeply. The very name of the city had always sounded magical to him, and now he was really there, young, free, and full of hope.

When he finished eating, he lit his pipe, lay back on the great couch, and let his happiness spread through him. He had lived a gentle life in England with his mother and sister. He had not gone to school. He had been protected, loved, and kept rather innocent. He knew little of the world, and even less of Paris. But now he lived among artists, in the Latin Quarter, with two older friends whom he admired almost without limit, and he felt that life had opened before him at last.

To Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird seemed almost perfect. Whatever they said sounded wise. Whatever they did looked right. They were stronger, older, louder, and much more experienced than he was, and he gave them all the trust of a young heart. They were amused by this, but also touched by it. They loved his affectionate nature, his quick smile, and his gentle, open way with them. They also saw something in him that he himself did not fully understand yet: a real gift.

He was not the kind of young artist who made speeches about pictures. In fact, he often said nothing at all about the paintings around him, even when his friends wanted praise or blame. He could look at one of Sandy's pictures in silence. He could stand before one of Taffy's serious studies and offer no opinion. This could be hard on friendship. But his silence did not come from coldness. It came because his eye went somewhere else. He noticed people, gestures, faces, movements, and little odd truths of life before he noticed theories or schools of art.

Even in the Louvre he would often look less at the great masters than at the visitors and copyists, especially the young women painting there, or the Paris seen through the windows. Yet when talk began at dinner, he listened with complete respect while Taffy and the Laird praised one painter and attacked another. Then later he would make little drawings of them speaking, arguing, waving their hands, and looking important. These drawings were lively, exact, and funny. The others knew, even if Little Billee did not, that such work came from a rare hand.

They had taken the studio together, but each lived a little differently. Sandy slept in a small room off the studio. Taffy had a room at a hotel nearby. Little Billee stayed in another hotel across the quarter. Still, the studio was their true center. They worked there, ate there, fenced there, talked there, and dreamed there. For Little Billee, it was more than a room. It was the beginning of the life he

wanted most. It held work, freedom, beauty, and friendship all in one place.

As he lay on the couch and looked from one friend to the other, he felt a warm and grateful pride. Taffy was still swinging the clubs with a soldier's force. Sandy was still at his easel, smiling to himself at his own thoughts. Outside, Paris spread in every direction, full of streets, roofs, bridges, and unknown adventures. Little Billee joined softly in Sandy's song, then stopped and thought of the years ahead. He wondered what the three of them would be like at forty, and whether life could ever be better than it was on that bright Paris afternoon.

Part 2

A loud knock at the door broke Little Billee's happy thoughts. Two men came in together. The first was tall, thin, dark, and rather dirty, with long black hair, a black beard, and bright black eyes that seemed to shine under heavy lids. He wore a red cap and a large old cloak, and there was something both powerful and unpleasant about him. This was Svengali.

The other was much smaller and quieter. He was dark too, with a marked face and very soft brown eyes. He carried a violin under his arm as if he had just come in from the street, and he looked shy and gentle beside his friend. Svengali greeted the three Englishmen in his strange French, full of rough sounds and comic turns, and at once pointed to the piano. Little Billee, who loved all musicians at sight, welcomed the two visitors as warmly as he could.

Svengali threw his cap on the piano, pushed back his cloak, and sat down as if the room already belonged to him. He ran his hands over the keys in a quick, easy way, and in a moment the three friends understood that he was no ordinary player. Then he began a piece by Chopin. Little Billee had never heard anything like it before. The music seemed to open a new world in him and fill him with a feeling too strong for speech.

Until that day he had known only the simple music of home. He knew songs that mothers and sisters played in drawing rooms, songs that were pretty, kind, and safe. But this was different. It was deeper, sadder, richer, and far more

beautiful. He listened with all his heart, and he remembered it from that day on.

After that, Svengali and the little violinist, Gecko, played together. They did not play long grand pieces. They played short dances, little sad songs, and sharp, sweet bits of melody that seemed to begin in one feeling and end in another. Sometimes the music was wild, sometimes tender, sometimes almost painful in its beauty. Even Taffy and the Laird, who were not easy men to silence, could only sit and listen.

When the two musicians stopped, nobody spoke at once. The room felt full of something unseen, as if the sounds were still moving in the air. Then another loud knock came, sharper than the first. Before anyone could answer, the door opened, and a very strange young woman stepped in. She stood there framed by the darker space behind her, tall, strong, and quite at ease.

She wore a gray soldier's coat over a short skirt. Under the skirt, her white ankles and bare feet could be seen inside a large pair of old men's slippers. Her hair was short and thick, and her face was brown with freckles. At first glance she did not seem beautiful in the usual way, for her mouth was large and her face was broad, but she had fine bones, a strong brow, and a look of health, humor, and fearless kindness that made everyone notice her at once.

She smiled at them with large white teeth and said, in English, "You are all English, aren't you? I heard the music and thought I would come in and say hello. You don't mind, do you? My name is Trilby. Trilby O'Ferrall." Her voice was deep and rich, almost like a man's singing voice, and she spoke with a mixed accent that was part Scotch and part French. Little Billee got up at once and offered her a chair, but she refused it and sat cross-legged on the model throne near the piano.

Then she took out a paper parcel of food from her coat pocket and began to eat without the least shame or fear. "I'm a model," she said. "It is noon, so this is my rest time. I'm posing downstairs for the sculptor Durien. I pose for everything." Little Billee looked puzzled, so she laughed and said, "Everything. Head, hands, feet, all of it. Especially feet."

With that she pushed off one great slipper and stretched out her foot. Then she

pushed off the other. "There," she said. "That is the best foot in Paris. And this one is the only one that can match it." She laughed in a free, bright way, but Little Billee did not laugh. He stared.

He had an artist's eye, and he saw at once that her feet were astonishingly beautiful. Their shape was clear, fine, and perfectly natural, like something from an old statue, but alive and warm and young. They did not look weak or soft. They looked strong, clean, and graceful. All at once this half-funny, half-rough young woman seemed to stand on a kind of beauty that changed her whole figure in his eyes.

Gecko stared too, quite openly. Trilby did not care. She finished her bread and cheese, licked the tips of her fingers clean, took out some tobacco, and made herself a cigarette. She smoked it with slow pleasure, filling her lungs deeply and letting the smoke go back out through her nose. There was no coquetry in her, only health, habit, and complete ease.

Svengali, who had been watching her closely, began to play again. He chose a serious piece, hoping perhaps to move her. But Trilby only said that it was good music, though too sad for her taste. Then he banged out a foolish, comic tune, and she said at once that she liked that better because it was gayer. The laugh went against Svengali, because she was perfectly honest and did not see that he was trying to make fun of her.

Little Billee asked, "Do you love music?" She answered, "I do, very much. My father used to sing. He was a gentleman and a scholar. He sang 'Ben Bolt.' Do you know it?" Little Billee said that he did. Then she asked, as simply as a child, "Shall I sing it for you?"

She sat upright on the throne, placed her hands on her knees, lifted her face, and began. What came out was so strange that no one quite knew what to think. She followed the rise and fall of the song, but not the true notes. The sound was big, full, and powerful, but the tune itself seemed broken and wandering, as if it could not find its way home.

Nobody laughed. It was too odd for easy laughter, and too sincere for cruelty. When she finished, there was a silence. Little Billee thanked her kindly and said

it was a fine song. Trilby explained, with complete seriousness, that some people said she could not sing, but others had told her she had a wonderful voice and only needed training. She repeated all this to Svengali in French, innocent of the sharp amusement in his eyes.

Svengali answered that her voice was indeed remarkable. The others thought him cruel for mocking her, and yet there was also truth in what he said. Trilby blushed with pleasure, rose, brushed the crumbs from her coat, and prepared to go back to work. On her way to the door, she stopped in front of one of Taffy's pictures and coolly told him that the rag-picker in it was carrying his basket and lantern in the wrong way. Taffy turned red, and Trilby laughed softly and said, "Ah, now you are angry."

At the door she looked back at all three of them with open friendliness. She thanked them, told them where she lived, and left the room as suddenly as she had entered it. The moment she was gone, Little Billee said, "I think she is wonderful. And what beautiful feet!" Then, while the impression was still burning in him, he scratched the outline of her left foot on the red wall with the point of an old compass. It was quick, sure, and alive, and even then it showed the hand of a true artist.

But the day did not end there. Gecko asked what "Ben Bolt" was, and Little Billee sat at the piano and sang it gently in his clear English voice. Svengali pushed him aside, took the tune, and turned it into something far greater than it had seemed before. Then Gecko joined in, and together they changed that simple little song until it grew deep, sad, noble, and almost grand. The poor old melody became so full of feeling that the three English friends could hardly bear the beauty of it.

After that, Svengali took out a small wind instrument of his own and played the same tune again. The sound was thin only in size, not in feeling. In his hands it became full of pain, sweetness, and passion. Little Billee listened as if some inner door had opened in him. For a moment he felt he could see more deeply into sadness, beauty, and the passing nature of all things, and when the music ended, he was left with a strong new wish: that one day, through his own art, he might

express something of what he had just heard.

Part 3

That first day did not end in silence or in work alone. When the afternoon was over and the light began to soften, the three friends often went out to eat together somewhere cheap and lively. There was a little restaurant where the food was plain, heavy, and good enough for hungry young men. They ate soup, eggs, beans, bread, cheese, and whatever meat was put before them, and they drank rough wine from plain wooden cups. Around them sat models, students, workers, and girls from the quarter, all talking fast, laughing hard, and filling the room with noise and life.

After dinner, the evening could go in many directions. Sometimes they played games in a café. Sometimes they went to a cheap theater and laughed at broad comic acting. Sometimes they watched the wild dancing at a student garden and tried a little of it themselves. Sometimes they chose something more serious and went to the Odéon to hear a play. Paris seemed endless to them, and every street promised something worth seeing.

On fine Saturdays they had a favorite walk. The Laird would dress himself a little more carefully than usual, and Little Billee, who always looked neat, would join him. Then the two would collect Taffy, and the three would go arm in arm through the city, with Taffy's huge body between the others like a moving wall of strength. They walked without hurry because they believed the whole city belonged to youth, friendship, and a free afternoon.

They crossed bridges, looked into shop windows, handled old books and strange objects, and stared at all the odd treasures that Paris seemed to pour into the streets. They liked picture shops, second-hand stalls, bits of old furniture, prints, frames, and forgotten things. They often bought objects they did not need and would never use. That did not matter. The pleasure was in choosing, touching, and imagining.

When they reached the Pont des Arts, they would stop in the middle and look

both ways along the river. One side gave them the old city and the church towers. The other gave them the long shining water, the bridges, the evening sky, and all the westward glow of Paris. There they tried to say what they felt, and of course they failed. But they failed happily, because at their age it was enough to feel that life was splendid.

After that came more walking, more talking, and often a meal of English food in an English house. Then they spoke even more than before, with the confidence of men who had not yet been corrected by life. They judged painters, poets, novels, schools of art, nations, governments, and the whole world. They praised each other with warmth and attacked the famous with courage. Youth gave them this freedom, and friendship made it sweet rather than foolish.

At last they came home through darker streets, crossing back into their own quarter. There the city changed its face. The bright evening became quiet stone, old walls, narrow ways, and the deep watch of old buildings that had seen many generations of the hopeful and the lost. Even then they did not stop talking. They would take one friend to his door, then continue the argument and walk with another to his, and then start all over again as if no good-night could ever be final.

Rainy days had their own pleasures. When the city looked gray through the studio window and the wind moved over the roofs, they often stayed at home. Little Billee went out to buy bread, meat, onions, potatoes, butter, lettuce, herbs, cheese, and wine. Taffy laid the table and made the salad with the serious care of a man who thought his own way the best. The Laird bent over the stove and cooked everything together into a hot strong meal that smelled better than it looked and tasted better than either of them expected.

Then came coffee, pipes, and talk under the shaded lamps while the rain beat on the great window and the fire made little sounds in the stove. Those evenings were among the happiest of all. They spoke of books, painters, old stories, new poems, English writers, French writers, Greece, Rome, and everything noble they had partly understood and fully loved. Much of it was youthful talk, not always wise, not always exact, yet it came from clean excitement and from a true hunger of the mind.

So the days passed in work, exercise, food, art, jokes, long walks, and the warm confidence of shared youth. They were not rich, but they were strong, curious, and free. The quarter around them was noisy, rough, and full of strange people, yet to them it felt like a kingdom. The studio was their center, Paris their playground, and the future an open road. Up to that point, there was still no real trouble among them, and no serious shadow of love.

A day or two later, when boxing and fencing had begun again in the studio and men were moving about with masks, foils, and loud voices, a call came from the door that they already knew well: "Milk below!" In another moment Trilby came in. This time she looked very different. She wore a neat black dress, a white apron, a clean cap, and well-darned brown stockings, and though her slippers were old and plain, her feet gave them a grace no shoemaker could have made.

Little Billee saw all this in a moment. He noticed not only her dress but the expression in her face. Her smile was open and brave, and her eyes were kind, but he felt there was something hidden deep under that light. It was not just humor, not just ease, and not even just goodness. He had the sudden painful sense that behind her sweetness there was some old sorrow or shame that she carried alone.

She was greeted at once by the men in the room, who all seemed to know her well. They spoke to her quickly in easy French, laughing and calling out to her from different corners. She answered just as quickly, with the same fearless warmth, and the room brightened around her as if she had brought in more than her own body. She seemed at home anywhere, and she gave other people permission to be at ease.

Yet this easy talk had a different effect on Little Billee. He could not follow much of the fast French, and what he did understand made him uneasy. Trilby seemed very familiar with these people, and they were familiar with her. He knew too little of Paris to judge properly, but he knew enough to feel a small sharp jealousy. The others laughed, while he stood aside and watched.

He was troubled by two opposite feelings at once. One was pity, because he thought he had seen sadness in her. The other was something warmer and more selfish, because he did not want her to belong so easily to everybody in the room.

He had barely met her, yet already her coming and going had begun to matter to him more than he wished. That alone was enough to disturb his peace.

So the happy life in the studio continued, but not quite in the old way. Paris was still bright, the friendships were still strong, and the days were still full of work and pleasure. Yet Trilby had now entered that circle for a second time, more deeply than before, and Little Billee no longer saw her only as a curious and charming visitor. Without saying so even to himself, he had begun to wait for her.

Part 4

That afternoon, Trilby had not come empty-handed. She had brought Taffy a rag-picker's basket, hook, and lantern so that he could paint the figure more truly next time. She explained all this with cheerful seriousness, as if there were nothing strange in knowing such things so well. Taffy, who had first been offended by her criticism, soon saw that she was right and began to laugh at himself. Trilby laughed too, not to hurt him, but to make peace.

She also spoke of the people from whom she had borrowed these things. They were a rag-picker named Père Martin and his wife, who sold old objects and cheap pictures in a poor street. Trilby described them with such warmth that even Taffy, who had first sounded shocked, gave in at once. She said they were rough people, but kind, clean in their way, and good friends to artists, especially English ones who paid ready money. Then she added, almost carelessly, that there was a little child there, and that she was very fond of him.

This child, whom she sometimes called her godson, was in truth her little brother. His name was Jeannot. Their father had been Patrick O'Ferrall, an educated Irishman who had fallen through drink, and their mother had died after hard years in Paris. Trilby, still very young, had gone to work, and after her own fall into a poor and dangerous life, she had supported the child as best she could. Père Martin and his wife gave him a home, and Trilby loved him with all her heart.

Little Billee did not know all this at once, but he saw enough to feel that Trilby's life had depths he had not guessed before. He had first noticed her feet,

then her voice, then her face. Now he began to notice her kindness. There was nothing soft or weak in her, yet everything in her turned quickly toward care, help, and laughter. It was this, more than beauty, that began to draw him.

Sometimes she brought little Jeannot to the studio. He came in his best clothes, with his hair carefully curled and his face shining from hard washing. He was a lovely little boy, fair and bright, with quick ways and great delight in everything. The Laird filled his pockets with sweets and made pictures of him. Taffy lifted him, swung him, and played rough games with him so gently that the child screamed with pleasure.

Even Taffy, who liked to look hard and manly, could not hide how much he loved the little fellow. Jeannot's laughter touched them all. Little Billee painted a beautiful small picture of him and gave it to Trilby. She gave it to Père Martin, and from there it passed into unknown hands, like many small treasures that vanish from poor homes and careless lives.

These were happy days for Trilby. She was proud of Jeannot, proud when he looked neat, proud when he laughed, proud when he pleased her English friends. And they were happy days for the three men as well, because the child brought a new sweetness into the studio. He made the place seem less like a bachelor's room and more like a home. Even Little Billee, who was often shy with strong feelings, gave way freely to this quiet family joy.

Best of all was a Sunday they spent together at Meudon. The three Englishmen took Trilby and Jeannot into the woods for the day. They rode little donkeys, looked at peep-shows, shot at targets, won sweets, wandered among the trees, and played foolish games with complete seriousness. It was the kind of day that seems too simple to matter and yet stays in the heart for years.

Trilby came dressed differently that day, in a small bonnet and a gray jacket she had made herself. Seen from a little distance, she might almost have looked like a respectable English girl. But respectability sat on her lightly, and before long she was teaching the Laird some favorite dance steps in the garden after dinner. Then all likeness to English order ended at once.

Little Billee, Taffy, and Jeannot made the music as best they could while Trilby

danced. She moved with unusual grace, but there was nothing low in it. She was funny, free, and full of life, yet still somehow innocent in spirit. The Laird tried to follow her and was so absurd that everyone near them laughed and clapped, and he bowed as if he were the greatest dancer in France.

For Little Billee, such days had a dangerous sweetness. He was no longer simply amused by Trilby. He watched her with increasing tenderness and with growing confusion. When she laughed with others, he felt left out. When she turned kindly to him, a warm peace came over him that he could not control. He had not yet named this feeling, but it was already changing the whole color of his life.

The others began to see that Trilby was becoming part of their little world. She mended things, helped without being asked, turned up when needed, and somehow belonged to the place without forcing her way into it. Yet she also remained separate from them. She came from poorer streets, knew rougher people, and carried a past that no one had fully heard. That difference gave her a kind of mystery in Little Billee's eyes.

Then one day the Laird fell seriously ill. The doctor was called, and he said a nurse was needed at once. But Trilby would not leave the matter to strangers. She took charge herself, stayed by his bed, and for three days and nights hardly slept at all. She watched, carried, cooled, lifted, listened, and obeyed every order with tireless care.

On the third day the danger passed. The fever broke, and the Laird began to speak clearly again. When the doctor came, he found Trilby fast asleep by the bedside at last, worn out by love and duty. The old man was deeply touched by what she had done, and praised her warmly when she woke. She almost cried with happiness at his kind words.

After that, no one who had seen her closely could think of Trilby only as a bold studio model or a strange girl from the streets. She had shown herself brave, faithful, and full of natural goodness. The others loved her more for it. As for Little Billee, the feeling in him had gone beyond interest or pity now. Without saying so even to himself, he had begun to love her.

Part 5

When the Laird was safe again, everyone felt the change at once. The fear went out of the room, and gratitude took its place. Even the old doctor, who was not a sentimental man, praised Trilby warmly for her care and patience. She had worked until her strength was gone, and when kind words were given to her at last, she cried with simple happiness.

After that, the three English friends could not think of her in any light way. She was no longer only the bold, funny, pleasant girl who came and went through the studio. She had become dear to them in a deeper sense. Each of them, in his own manner, had begun to feel that life would be poorer when the little group must one day break apart and go its separate ways.

They even made small plans for her future, though they did not always speak them aloud. They wished she could somehow be kept from danger when they were gone. They knew enough of Paris to fear what might happen to a poor woman left alone in that hard quarter. Trilby herself never troubled about the future in that way. She lived from day to day, laughed when she could, and kept tomorrow at a distance.

Yet there was one dark figure moving through her bright little world, and that was Svengali. He came often to the studio now, usually with Gecko, and his music still gave him the right to enter where his manners alone would never have allowed it. But the three friends soon saw that music was not the only reason for his visits. He came to see Trilby, and Gecko came for the same cause, though in a very different spirit.

Gecko loved her with complete humility. He looked at her as if she were far above him, and as if a kind word from her were already more than he deserved. His devotion was like that of a faithful dog. He did not press himself forward, and he never seemed to hope for anything. He only wanted to be near her and to serve.

Svengali's feeling was not like that at all. He could be soft in voice, but there was always mockery under it. He could bend and flatter, but even his humility

seemed to hide a threat. When he joked, it was with the ugly pleasure of something that enjoys causing fear. He was not playful in a human way. He was like some black, nervous creature from a bad dream.

He had once helped Trilby when her eyes were hurting, and he never forgot that small power over her. Now he tried another kind of power. He would move close, fix his strange eyes on her, and make small motions with his hands as if he wished to force sleep or obedience upon her. Trilby hated this. She would begin to tremble, feel sick with fear, and then break away from him with a great effort, as if waking from a nightmare.

When Taffy was there, he never allowed such things to go on for long. He would step in with rough good humor, speak sharply, and sometimes strike Svengali on the back with a heavy friendly blow that was far from gentle. This ended the scene at once. Svengali feared Taffy's strength too much to push matters openly when he stood near. So Trilby's peace, when she had it, often depended on Taffy being in the room.

Then fortune suddenly turned in Svengali's favor. He played at several important concerts and was a success. He gave a concert of his own and caused a great stir, and after that he dressed like a man determined to be looked at in the street. He bought rich clothes in strange colors and shapes, spent freely, and enjoyed every eye that turned toward him. Fame had come just enough to excite him and not enough to make him generous or wise.

He paid none of his old debts, but he carried newspaper notices in his pockets and read them aloud to anybody who would listen. Trilby had to hear them more than anyone else. While she sat in the studio mending socks or quietly watching the others fence and box, he would begin another speech about his future greatness. He told her of London, of applause, of noble ladies, of high payment, of grand houses, and of the triumph that would be his. Then he would lay all this splendor at her feet and ask her to share his life.

He did all this in a wild, ugly, half-laughing way that made his boasting even worse. He mocked Little Billee's painting, mocked the Laird's art, mocked Taffy's body and manners, mocked French artists, mocked everyone except himself. He

would cry out that the world was speaking of Svengali and no one else. He would read praise of himself from the newspapers as if every word were holy truth. And if Trilby failed to give him full attention, his vanity turned at once to cruelty.

Then his talk became hateful. He would tell her horrible stories of sickness, death, loneliness, and the cold public places where unclaimed bodies lay. He spoke of her beauty turning poor and forgotten, of strangers looking at her through glass, and of himself passing by in wealth while she lay lost and alone because she had not listened to him. These speeches frightened her badly. Even when she tried to laugh them away, the fear remained in her face.

Again Taffy would break in and save her, usually by forcing Svengali toward the piano or making open fun of him. Then Svengali would change his tone and call for music. He would ask Trilby to sing "Ben Bolt," praising her voice in a way that was clearly false to everyone but her. Poor Trilby, who loved to be asked, needed very little urging. She would sing her strange wild version of the song, and Little Billee would suffer through it in silence.

Svengali would accompany her in the most dreadful way, making the song more painful instead of less. When she finished, he would test her ear by striking notes on the piano and asking which was higher. She could not tell, except when the notes were very far apart. It was plain that she had no true ear for music, yet Svengali praised her extravagantly and called her gifted. This was part of his pleasure. He liked to laugh at people while seeming to honor them.

He tormented the others as well whenever he could. He pinched, pushed, held, mocked, and bullied them in jest, though only where he felt safe. He seized Little Billee's thin arms and legs and laughed at their slightness. Little Billee sometimes kicked back in real anger. Then, just as things were about to go too far, Taffy would catch Svengali in turn and force him to sing or cry out for mercy. Svengali never dared answer Taffy with the same freedom he used toward weaker people.

So the studio life went on, still rich in friendship and laughter, but with this bad note always sounding through it when Svengali came. His music was beautiful, but the man himself brought ugliness, fear, and strain. Little Billee felt it more and more deeply, because everything that troubled Trilby now troubled

him too. The happy days were not over yet, but the first true shadow had fallen across them.

Part 6

One lovely Monday morning in late September, Taffy and the Laird sat in the studio and did not work. They had come back late the night before from a happy week in Barbizon and the forest, and Monday felt heavier than usual after such freedom. At last Taffy said that painting was impossible and that a walk and a good lunch would be wiser. The Laird agreed at once, and the two set out together to fetch Little Billee away from his work and make him share their laziness.

They had not gone far when they met him in the street. He was carrying his things, but he looked nothing like himself. His face was pale, his hair was wild, and there was something almost desperate in the way he moved. Taffy stopped him at once and asked what had happened.

Little Billee answered with shocking force. Trilby was sitting at Carrel's studio, he said, sitting for the figure before all those men, and the sight of her had struck him like a blow. He had run out at once and would never go back there. He meant to leave immediately for Barbizon and be alone.

Taffy seized him by the collar and tried to stop him. Little Billee was beside himself and begged to be let go, promising only that he would write every day. Taffy forced that promise from him and then released him, and in a moment he was gone. The two friends stood in the street, greatly troubled, and both understood that something serious had begun.

As they walked on, each said the thought he had long half hidden from himself. Taffy said that Little Billee must be in love with Trilby. The Laird answered that he had feared the opposite as well, that Trilby was in love with Little Billee. The two ideas together made a miserable picture, and though they went to lunch as planned, they had little peace in them that day.

Trilby, meanwhile, had gone to Carrel's studio only because Carrel himself had asked her. He wanted to paint before his pupils and had chosen her, as a favor,

for the figure of a woman carrying a pitcher. She was proud that so great a painter wanted her help, and she had gone there with no suspicion of harm. The work had barely begun when Little Billee came in, saw her, and fled.

At first she could not understand his behavior. She wondered whether he was ill, or had forgotten something, or had been suddenly called away. Then another thought came, sharp and terrible. Could it be that he had been shocked by the sight of her there, standing as a naked model before strangers? That thought changed everything in a moment.

She remembered then that neither Little Billee nor Taffy nor the Laird had ever asked her to sit for them in that way. She remembered how grave Little Billee had always looked when she spoke lightly of posing for the whole figure. What had seemed simple and ordinary to her all her life now appeared in another light. A deep new shame was born in her, and it hurt more than anything she had ever known.

Carrel saw that something was wrong and asked whether she was ill. She tried to go on, but the feeling grew too strong. Soon she dropped the pitcher, covered her face, and burst into tears in front of the whole studio. Carrel at once helped her dress, sent for a cab, and took her home like a father, while she wept and tried to explain what had happened.

For the next days she lay on her bed in her little room and thought of her past life with unbearable pain. Her old troubles with her eyes returned, but even that physical pain seemed lighter than what was happening inside her mind. For the first time, she saw her old life not only as hard or poor, but as something that had wounded her own soul. At last she felt she could not remain alone with such thoughts and decided to write to the Laird.

She chose him because she had always been most free and natural with him. He was easy to speak to, easy to trust, and she had nursed him through illness with the open affection of a child for an older brother. So she wrote everything. She told him that Little Billee's face had shown shock and disgust, that she now felt ashamed of having sat for the figure, and that she meant never to do it again. She also confessed more than that, naming the wrongs of her past with painful honesty,

and begged him not to let the three friends cast her off.

The Laird came almost at once. She cried over him, kissed him, and held him as if he were her last safe friend in the world. He did not answer with grand speeches. He laughed kindly, spoke simply, and comforted her in the most natural way possible, which helped her more than solemn pity would have done.

He told her she had been foolish to suffer alone when she could have sent for them immediately. He said they would all be glad that she meant to leave that old life behind her. He did not pretend that nothing mattered, but he made her feel that friendship still stood firm, and that the future did not have to be like the past. Then he asked her to come that very evening and dine with him and Taffy and cook the meal as she used to do.

When he left, he left behind the happiest woman in the Latin Quarter. She had confessed and been forgiven. With that forgiveness came something almost new in her life: self-respect. Before, cleanliness had meant only the washing and care of the body. Now it meant another kind of cleanliness, inward and moral, and she held to it with all the force of her nature.

The dinner that evening became unforgettable for her. After the meal she washed and put away the plates and knives, then sat sewing quietly. She would not even smoke a cigarette, because the habit now reminded her of scenes and moods she wanted to leave behind. The others talked of Little Billee, of his upbringing, of his mother and sister, of the fine people among whom he had always lived, and of the great future they believed waited for him.

As Trilby listened, her heart rose for him and sank for herself. She heard once more how rare his talent was and how bright his path might become. Fame and fortune seemed likely to come to him, unless something should ruin his promise or draw him away from his true work. And while she rejoiced at the thought of his success, she also felt the distance between them more sharply than ever.

She did not dream now of being loved by him. The very boldness of such a hope seemed impossible to her in her new humility. She only asked herself whether she might still remain his friend, or, if that were too much, whether she might at least serve him in some small faithful way. In that question there was

both pain and devotion, and from that evening onward her love, though still mostly silent, grew deeper and more serious than before.

Part 7

Little Billee stayed away in Barbizon for a full month. When he came back to Paris, the sun and open air had darkened his face so much that his two friends almost laughed with surprise when they first saw him. But they stopped laughing as soon as they looked at the studies he brought with him. These were not merely good. They were so fresh, so sure, and so alive that both Taffy and the Laird felt the old shock again, the same one they had felt before, when they first understood that their quiet young friend had a gift beyond their own. They forgot envy in admiration and love.

To them he seemed at once stronger and more delicate than before. His body was still slight, his hands still fine, his face still young, but everything in him now looked clearer, more certain, more inwardly fixed. He had gone away in pain, and he came back with the look of a man who had passed through something difficult alone. Yet he was gentle as ever in manner. He did not speak much, but his silence no longer seemed only shyness. It seemed full of work and purpose.

When Trilby came in from her day's labor at six o'clock and found him there, she stopped as if the ground had moved under her feet. He shook hands with her and said, in the easiest voice, "Hello, Trilby!" That was all. But her face lost its color, her lower lip trembled, and she looked down at him with such open, hungry, humble love that both Taffy and the Laird were deeply troubled. Little Billee looked back with a warmth that troubled them no less.

Still, nothing was said. The four of them went together to dine, and after dinner Trilby returned to her work. On the next day Little Billee showed his Barbizon studies to Carrel, and the master was so pleased that he invited him to come to his own private studio and finish the picture of the girl with the water pitcher there. This was a very great honor, and Little Billee accepted it with grateful seriousness. His days became fuller than ever.

For some time after that, very little was seen of him in the old studio, and very little of Trilby either. A fine laundress, who works with irons and linen all day, does not have many free hours. Yet they often met at dinner, and Sunday still remained a happy day. On Sunday mornings Trilby came, as before, to mend the Laird's linen, darn his socks, and look after all the little household matters that she now half ruled by custom and kindness. On Sunday afternoons the old life returned with fencing, boxing, music, and laughter, and for a few hours it almost seemed that nothing had changed.

But things had changed. Week after week Taffy and the Laird noticed a quiet, gradual change in Trilby herself. She was losing the careless roughness that had once made everyone laugh. Her French was no longer so full of street slang, except now and then by habit. She was less noisy, less wild, less quick to turn everything into a joke. Yet she did not seem sadder. On the contrary, she seemed happier than before, but happy in a quieter and deeper way.

Her face changed too. She grew thinner, especially in the cheeks and jaw, and the lines of her head began to show more clearly. These lines were very fine. What had once seemed merely strong now looked beautiful. Her freckles faded as summer ended and she spent less time out of doors. She let her hair grow and drew it back in a small knot, which showed the shape of her head and ears and neck more plainly, and all these were graceful in a way Little Billee would have noticed at once even if he had tried not to notice them.

Her mouth, which had once seemed too large, now took on a firmer and sweeter line. Her teeth, large and white and even, gave brightness to every smile. Most striking of all, a new softness came into her eyes. They were still clear and strong, but they now held a steady light that had not been there before. It was the light of love, though no one named it so aloud. Taffy and the Laird saw it, and because they saw it, they worried.

Little Billee saw it too, though perhaps not with the same fear. He had once looked at Trilby first as an artist, then as a friend, then as a sufferer who had suddenly become precious to him. Now he looked at her with a feeling that was becoming impossible to mistake. Yet he still kept silence. His breeding, his

delicacy, and his uncertainty held him back. He had never been a man to rush toward feeling with rough confidence. He let it grow in him quietly, almost painfully, as if he feared to injure it by touching it too soon.

Trilby, for her part, had become humbler instead of bolder. The new self-respect born from her shame had changed the whole tone of her life. She worked hard, kept herself carefully, and seemed to wish, without saying so, to deserve the company she loved. If she was quieter now, it was not because joy had left her. It was because joy had gone deeper into her nature and become mixed with reverence. She no longer wished merely to amuse or charm Little Billee. She wished to be worthy even of his friendship.

The old studio still received many visitors. Men came and went, boxed, fenced, played the piano, scraped at the fiddle, and filled the room with talk and smoke. But for Taffy and the Laird, two living figures had become its true center: Little Billee and Trilby. The whole place seemed to brighten or darken according to their presence. A look between them could change the feeling of the room more than a dozen loud voices. The others might laugh, but the two older friends watched in silence and understood that the matter was becoming serious.

Yet there was sweetness in this seriousness. Nothing false had entered between the two. There were no tricks, no hidden games, no selfish plans. Trilby's love made her simpler, gentler, and better. Little Billee's feeling made him more earnest, more inward, and more alive. They did not say much, but in their very restraint there was something moving and pure. Their affection grew not through bold scenes, but through small meetings, shared meals, Sunday hours, quiet looks, and the comfort of being near.

So the autumn passed in this tender half-light. Work went on. Meals were taken as usual. The old friendships held firm. The studio still echoed with laughter and movement. Yet under all this there ran another current, silent and strong. Love had come, and though it had not yet openly spoken its name, it was there now in Trilby's softened face, in Little Billee's attentive quiet, and in the troubled hearts of Taffy and the Laird, who loved them both and feared what the future might demand.

Part 8

As Christmas came near, the studio filled with plans. The three English friends meant to give a great feast on Christmas Day and invite all their favorite companions from the quarter. Trilby was to help with the cooking and serving, together with Angèle Boisse and the Vinard family. Cards of invitation were drawn with much pride and foolish art, and money was spent on food and drink with a freedom that did not match their usual habits. They ordered meats, sweets, pies, wine, beer, and every rich thing they could afford, and looked forward to the day with the hunger and joy of boys.

Christmas Eve came first. The great dishes from England had not yet arrived, but there still seemed time, and no one wished to be troubled too soon. The three friends dined as usual and then went to hear the midnight service at the Madeleine, where a famous singer was to sing the Christmas music. The night was clear and cold, and the streets were alive with people going to late suppers, churches, and bright gatherings. Paris seemed wide awake and full of expectation.

Inside the church, among the crowd, Little Billee was deeply moved. The service, the great voice, the organ, and the hour itself broke over him like a wave. He felt love for life, for death, for sorrow, for beauty, and for all human weakness at once. And in the midst of that feeling, one image came before him more clearly than all the rest. It was not some holy picture from the church, but Trilby herself.

He saw her in his mind as a poor, lost, tender soul who needed pardon and love. In that moment he did not think of her as a model, a bold girl of the quarter, or a creature of rough laughter and easy ways. He thought of her as someone to be protected, chosen, and held close forever. The feeling took hold of him completely. By the time he left the church, his mind was fixed. He would ask Trilby to marry him again, and this time he would not let the matter rest.

Yet even such high feeling could not save the whole night from foolishness. Back at his hotel, Little Billee was kept awake by the disgusting noise of a drunken man in the room below. The holy music, the spiritual glow, and all the great

thoughts of the church were driven away by coarse singing, stumbling, and fear of fire. He lay there angry and miserable, thinking what a beast a drunken man could become. So his Christmas morning began with moral pride rather than peace.

At midday on Christmas Day, the studio was in confusion. The expected food from England still had not arrived. Trilby and Angèle stood ready with their sleeves turned up, and the others could do little except wait, watch the street, and grow more and more anxious. They ate a worried lunch and kept looking out toward the road, imagining failure, delay, and disgrace. Then at last the missing hamper came, almost at the very hour when the guests themselves began to arrive, and the whole room changed at once from dark disappointment to noise, motion, and cheerful disorder.

Soon the studio was bright with lamps and crowded with friends. There were painters, students, soldiers, and odd companions of many kinds. People talked, drank, laughed, greeted one another loudly, and praised the food before it was even on the table. Trilby moved through all this activity with full authority, arranging places, correcting mistakes, giving orders, and somehow making everyone accept her rule. No one resisted her for long. That was part of her power.

The meal itself was a great success. Hunger, youth, friendship, and the freedom of the quarter gave everything a special taste. One dish followed another. Wine and beer flowed steadily. Talk rose and spread through the room in waves. The guests became warmer, louder, kinder, and more foolish as the evening went on, and the studio, already dear to its owners, seemed to become for one night the happiest place in Paris.

After dinner there were more arrivals and still more noise. Games began. Music returned. Even the police, called in because of the loud laughter and uproar, were drawn into the fun, given drink, and made as ridiculous as the others. It was not a noble scene, but it was full of life, and Little Billee moved through it all in an excited joy that made him more active, stronger, and bolder than anyone had ever seen before. He spoke warmly to people he barely knew, embraced new friends, and gave himself up completely to the pleasure of the hour.

Late at night the women began to leave. One by one they said good-night and

went down the stairs. Trilby was the last. Little Billee followed her to the top of the staircase, where they were suddenly alone. There, without soft preparation and without any careful speech, he spoke at last from the center of his heart. He told her that he had already asked her many times, and asked her once more, more seriously than ever, to marry him. If she refused him now, he said, he would leave Paris the next morning and never return.

Trilby turned pale and leaned back against the wall. She covered her face with her hands, as if the words had struck her physically. Little Billee pulled her hands away and begged for an answer. What he saw in her face then was not coldness, nor shame alone, nor fear alone, but all these together, mixed with love too strong to hide. At last she said yes. Then she fled down the stairs in tears.

When Little Billee went back into the room, he was no longer himself. His happiness had gone beyond ordinary joy and become a kind of bright madness. He sparred with Svengali and made his nose bleed. He showed unexpected strength in his body and warmth in his speech. He filled the glasses of Dodor and Zouzou again and again, called them dear friends, and drank with them as if the whole world had suddenly become lovable.

At last, in the cold early morning, he found himself in the street between those two companions, all three of them too full of drink and feeling to walk properly. They laughed, embraced, lost balance, chased a flying hat, and sat in the gutter like children. Little Billee wept from gratitude and joy and told them that no man had ever been so happy. However foolish the scene may have looked from outside, one thing was true: on that Christmas night, he believed his whole life had opened before him at last.

Part 9

The days after Christmas were full of a new secret joy. Little Billee had what he wanted at last. Trilby had said yes, and that one word changed the whole world for him. He went about like a man walking in bright air after a long illness. Even when he was quiet, happiness seemed to move in him like hidden music.

Yet such happiness could not stay hidden for long. He wrote home, and the news traveled quickly. His mother, Mrs. Bagot, was deeply alarmed when she learned that her son had engaged himself to marry a woman in Paris whom she did not know and could not place in his world. She came at once with her clergyman brother-in-law and his sister, and they went straight to the studio to ask questions.

Little Billee was not there when they arrived. Whether from shame, confusion, or stubborn feeling, he had kept away. So Taffy had to receive them and answer in his place. The Laird, less brave at that kind of struggle, escaped as soon as he could, leaving Taffy alone with the mother and uncle. Taffy would have faced a regiment more gladly than those two anxious English relatives asking careful questions in a quiet room.

At first the questions seemed simple enough. Was Miss O’Ferrall English? Was she Protestant or Catholic? Was she a lady? What had her father been? What had her mother been? Had she any money? Was she respectable? Taffy tried as well as he could to answer honestly without wounding either side. But the more he spoke, the worse the matter looked from Mrs. Bagot’s point of view.

When he said that Trilby earned her living as a fine laundress, the mother was troubled. When he had to admit that Trilby had once sat as a model, she grew frightened. When she understood at last that Trilby had sat for the whole figure, her distress became open and painful. To her, this was not merely a difference of class or manner. It seemed a complete ruin of all the hopes she had held for her son.

Taffy, though hot, awkward, and miserable under such questioning, would not betray Trilby. He admitted what had to be admitted, but he also spoke of her goodness with all the force he had. He said she was one of the best women he had ever known, the most unselfish, the most generous, the most faithful. Mrs. Bagot could hardly believe him, yet his conviction shook her more than any argument would have done. She began to see that the matter was not simple even for those who loved her son best.

At last Taffy said what he really believed. He did not think Little Billee could

be turned by argument. If any appeal would work, it must be made to Trilby herself. He trusted her heart. He trusted her love for Little Billee. And he feared more for her than for anyone, because he felt that if she gave him up, she would do it in full pain and silence.

Mrs. Bagot did not like to hear this. She still thought first as a mother whose child was being taken from her. Yet she could not ignore the strange respect with which Taffy spoke of the woman she had come to condemn. There was a pause in the room, full of strain. Then, at that exact moment, a familiar cry came from the outer door: "Milk below!"

Trilby had come in her Sunday dress because it was New Year's Day. She wore her pretty white cap and looked at her very best. When she saw strangers, she was about to turn back, but Taffy called her in. She entered, and the moment her eyes fell on Mrs. Bagot, she understood that something grave had come upon her life.

Mrs. Bagot, for her part, was struck at once. Whatever she had expected, it was not this. Trilby stood before her tall, fresh, simple, and full of natural grace. She was not proud, not bold, not vulgar, and not in the least like the dangerous woman of the mother's fears. There was beauty in her face, but more than that, there was sweetness, openness, and something childlike that disarmed anger.

The two women spoke apart. Trilby did not defend herself in any hard or angry way. She knew very well what separated her from Little Billee's family, and she had already thought of it before this hour came. She admitted that she had promised to marry him, and admitted also that she had refused him many times before giving way. But now that his mother stood before her in pain, all her own hopes fell back at once.

Mrs. Bagot pleaded for her son, for his future, for his family, and for the life that would be broken if he went against them all. Trilby listened and understood. She needed no long lesson in sacrifice. She loved Little Billee too deeply to tie him to herself against the whole force of his home, his mother, his sister, and the world in which he had been raised. So she gave the promise that Taffy had half expected and half dreaded: she would give him up.

When she came out into the courtyard afterward, she saw a young girl in the

carriage window. The face was pale, sweet, and wonderfully like Little Billee's own. Trilby knew at once that this must be his sister. The sight went through her like pain. It made the choice she had just made feel final, and it also made it feel right.

A little farther on she met the Laird, who had been waiting in fear and shame. She told him at once what had happened. She said she had promised never to see Little Billee again, and that she would not let harm come to him through her. She even began, with that same brave sadness, to think of where she might go and how she might live. Thus the first great happiness of their love came almost at once to its first great end, not through lack of feeling, but because Trilby loved him enough to renounce him.

Part 10

After Trilby left the courtyard, the Laird stood watching the empty street for a long time. He had seen her brave face, her tears, and her final effort to smile, and he knew that she meant what she had said. She would go away at once. She would take Jeannot if she could, vanish from Paris, and cut herself out of Little Billee's life before anyone could stop her.

She had told him plainly that everything had changed for her now. The sky itself, she said, seemed different. She said that she had lived only to belong to their little circle, but that this could not be any more. Then she kissed him, waved once from the bend in the street, and disappeared. The Laird felt as if something living had been torn out of the old life they all shared.

The next morning Taffy received two letters. One was from Mrs. Bagot. It was warm, intelligent, and painful to read, because it gave full praise to Trilby's goodness while still insisting that such a marriage would end in regret, shame, and unhappiness for both sides. Taffy could not easily answer her arguments, however much his heart still leaned toward pity for Trilby.

The other letter was from Trilby herself. She wrote that she was going away to end the misery, and that from the first moment after saying yes she had known she

had acted like a fool. She said she loved Little Billee too much to marry him and then live to see him sorry for it, or ashamed of her, even if he never showed such feelings. She added that she was going away with Jeannot and begged Taffy not to try to discover where she had gone.

Her letter was full of pain, but it was also steady and clear. She blamed no one except herself. She said she ought to have been a lady and could never become one now, and that too much had gone wrong in her life to be set right. Yet even there she did not sink into self-pity. Her mind had already turned toward duty, toward Jeannot, and toward the hard future she meant to bear without complaint.

Taffy understood then that there was no hope of mending matters quietly. Little Billee must be told something, and quickly. He could not be allowed to go on dreaming that Trilby would return at the usual hour or that the trouble with his mother might yet be argued away. So Taffy made up his mind to face the matter directly, though nothing was harder for him than painful speech of that kind.

When Little Billee learned that Trilby had gone, his grief turned at once into wild revolt. He cried out against the whole idea of rank, position, and the cruel rules by which one fault ruined a woman forever while men passed free. He would not hear reason. He would not listen when Taffy and the Laird tried to explain that it was not only a question of class, but of all the trouble that would follow such a marriage. To him, these arguments sounded like cowardice dressed up as morality.

He spoke now not as the shy, delicate boy they knew, but like a person burning from head to foot. He cried that poor women were always hunted, ruined, and then judged, while men who had helped to destroy them still walked proudly through the world. He said it was a shame, a hideous shame, that there should be one law for women and another for men. The words broke out of him in sobs, cries, and half-finished sentences, for he was too excited even to speak clearly.

At last the strain became too much for his weak body. His speech broke into gasping sounds, and then he fell in a fit on the floor. The doctor was called at once. Taffy hurried in a cab to fetch Mrs. Bagot and her daughter, and the Laird, with help from others in the house, undressed Little Billee and put him into bed. Thus the day that should have been his wedding day ended in terror and collapse.

The illness that followed was long and serious. What began like a fit turned into brain fever and other complications, and for many weeks he was in real danger. His mother and sister stayed near him in the studio, where beds were made for them, and the whole place changed from a home of youth and laughter into a place of nursing, worry, and exhausted waiting. Everybody suffered in one way or another.

When at last the worst danger had passed, it was clear that something in Little Billee had been altered. He lay quiet and weak, with little wish to speak. He almost never mentioned Trilby. Only once did he ask whether she had come back, whether anyone knew where she was, and whether anyone had written to her. The answer was no. Mrs. Bagot had thought it better that no letter should be sent, and Taffy and the Laird had agreed.

This decision did not bring peace. Mrs. Bagot felt bitterly toward Trilby because she was tied in her mind to all this trouble, yet she also felt bitterly toward herself because she knew Trilby had acted with generosity in giving him up. Taffy and the Laird were unhappy too, for they had lost both of the two people who had made the studio most alive. The room, the days, and the old habits all seemed empty now.

So the new year opened in sickness, silence, and separation. Trilby was gone to some unknown place with Jeannot. Little Billee lay weak, changed, and far from the bright joy that had filled him on Christmas night. The old merry life of Paris had not ended all at once, but it had been broken, and everyone around him felt that the break was deep.

Part 11

Little Billee did not die, but the long illness left something broken in him all the same. His strength came back slowly, his mind became clear again, and little by little he could speak, listen, and work. Yet those who loved him most felt that the old quick warmth of his nature had somehow been dimmed. He himself knew it before anyone else did.

This was the strangest part of his recovery. He thought often of Trilby, but without the old pain, tenderness, or joy. He thought of Taffy and the Laird, of his mother, of his sister, and even of himself in the same altered way. It was as if the place in him where affection had once lived had gone numb while the rest of his mind remained active and sharp.

That frightened him more than open sorrow would have done. A man can understand grief, anger, or longing, but this inward coldness seemed unnatural. He wondered whether he should speak of it, whether it meant his illness had touched his brain in some dangerous way, and whether it might pass if he waited. In the end he said nothing, because he could not bear to trouble the people who were already doing everything for him.

So he tried another method. If feeling would not come naturally, he would act as if it had never left. He became more tender than ever in his manners. He clung to his mother and sister, kissed them often, thanked them for small things, and took pains not to trouble anyone even for a moment.

This was not falsehood in him. He truly wished to love as he had loved before, and he hoped that by practicing gentleness and care he might draw the missing warmth back into his heart. He was thoughtful to every person around him, not only to those nearest him. There was no small service he would not gladly perform, no little sacrifice he would refuse, if it made life easier for another human being. But all the while he felt that he was doing these kind things from will rather than from joy.

Another change troubled him almost as much. His old vanity had nearly disappeared. He had once taken a natural delight in his own gift, in his success, in the quickness of his hand and eye, and even in the praise that followed him. That pride had not made him cruel, but it had been part of his life and energy, and now it seemed gone. He missed it as one misses a habit of light or movement that had once seemed foolish to value.

Yet he did not doubt his talent. He still told himself that he was a real artist and that he must work harder than ever to become a greater one. Only now he thought of this less as a triumph and more as a fact. He felt almost like a figure in an

equation, a result produced by causes outside himself, something made rather than something glorious by merit alone.

This way of thinking stripped success of some of its sweetness. He meant to use his powers fully, and to discipline them with all the force he had. But he no longer felt the easy self-pleasure that had once gone with ambition. Under all his careful manners and clear plans there lay a constant unrest, a gray uneasiness that never quite left him. It was not sharp enough to be called misery, yet it seemed likely to last forever.

That was the worst of it. He began to fear that this pale inward discomfort was all he would ever feel strongly again. He imagined a life of permanent twilight, not open despair, but a long flat dimness without the bright mornings of the soul. This thought hurt him deeply, though even that hurt seemed less vivid than it should have been. He had come back from danger, but he did not feel fully alive.

Time still moved on, however, as time always does. The months passed, and his body steadily grew stronger. The first violent pain of Paris faded into distance. The practical world began once more to make its claims on him: work, reputation, opportunity, and the life waiting for him beyond sickness and the closed room of recovery.

At last he left Devonshire and went on to London. The city was ready for him now in a way it had not been before. He was no longer merely a promising young painter from abroad. He was already known, already admired, and already expected. Doors opened to William Bagot as they had once opened only to the boy called Little Billee in a much smaller world.

But though London welcomed him, it did not cure him. He brought into his new life the same divided state: outward grace, inward blankness; steady purpose, uncertain feeling. He was older in fame, older in suffering, and outwardly more complete than before, yet the best and simplest part of himself still seemed to stand at a distance. For the moment, all he could do was work.

Thus began the next stage of his life. Paris, with its studio, its laughter, and its lost happiness, had fallen behind him. Trilby was gone from sight, and the old life had closed. In its place stood London, success, society, and the quiet unresolved

emptiness he carried with him wherever he went.

Part 12

London gave Little Billee work, praise, and a growing name, but it did not give him peace. So from time to time he went back to Devonshire, where his mother and sister still lived. There the air was softer, the days were slower, and old habits came back more easily. Yet even there he carried the same hidden trouble inside him. He wanted healing, but did not know where it might come from.

On one of these returns, his mother and sister were waiting for him with a little pony carriage, and with them was Alice. The sight of her moved him at once. For one brief instant he saw in her eyes a look of quiet love, so sudden and so gentle that it almost reached the cold place in his heart. He felt, for a second, that one more moment of such kindness might have cured him.

Alice was not like Trilby. She was fair, calm, well brought up, and exactly what an English home would call good and proper. To Little Billee, who was tired of inward confusion, such goodness had its own beauty. It seemed safe, clear, and healing. He did not yet love her, but he wanted very much to believe that he might.

That evening he sat with his mother in the garden while the moon sank slowly beyond the sea. He told her how pretty Alice had grown, and how nice she had always been. His mother at once answered with a hope she had long been hiding. She said how happy it would make her if he could grow fond of Alice.

Little Billee answered half seriously and half in self-mockery. He said that Alice was too good for the likes of him, and meant for some strong young country gentleman, tall, rich, and full of health. His mother would not hear of this. She told him that he was deeply loved and admired, and that Alice believed in him almost as much as she did herself. Her words stayed with him long after the talk was over.

That night he dreamed of Alice. In the dream he loved her in the right and peaceful way a good woman should be loved, and she kissed him and healed him

completely. It was such a happy dream that he tried not to wake. But when morning came, the old trouble was still there. He understood then that a dream could not save him.

Still, he rose thinking of Alice, dressed thinking of Alice, and ate breakfast thinking of Alice. He told himself that she was exactly the kind of wife a man should want: pure, kind, well trained, and steady. Then came the old weakness of doubt. He could not easily believe that a woman like her might truly care for a man as slight and fragile as himself.

He judged himself harshly in these matters. He admired strength so much that he thought all women must admire it too. In his own mind, a man ought to be broad, tall, and powerful, and he knew he was none of these things. Even when a woman loved him, he found it hard to trust what she felt. So hope in Alice rose and fell inside him almost at the same moment.

The memory of Trilby made this worse. He still thought of how quickly she had given him up when his mother spoke, and in his unhappier moods he twisted that sacrifice into something else. He told himself that a stronger man, a more masterful man, would not have been surrendered so easily. It was not a fair thought, but pain does not always think fairly.

Wanting to think more quietly, he went out alone in the morning sunlight with his pipe and a book. He walked up the green lane past the pretty church that belonged to Alice's father, and there he met Alice's dog waiting at the gate. Even this simple little meeting pleased him. All the small signs around Alice seemed full of comfort, order, and home.

Yet comfort was not cure. Alice could touch him, stir him, and almost awaken what had gone numb in him, but "almost" was not enough. The kingdom of love did not fully open again. His mother hoped, and no doubt Alice hoped too, but the deep change left by illness and grief was not so easily undone. Little Billee could admire, wish, dream, and even long, but he could not give himself wholly.

So nothing lasting came of Alice. Time moved on, and later she married another man, a churchman older than herself, and lived the kind of respectable life that gives neither great joy nor great disaster. Thus that quiet possible future

passed away like the dream it had always been. And so, for Little Billee, there was no healing there either, and no more of sweet Alice.

Part 13

There was still more unhappiness to come before that broken chapter truly closed. One day in February, when the weather was cold and the light in Paris seemed gray and tired, Angèle Boisse came to see Taffy and the Laird in the temporary studio where they were working. She was in deep distress and could hardly speak at first. When at last she managed to tell her news, it seemed almost too cruel to believe. Little Jeannot had died of scarlet fever.

Trilby and the child had been living in hiding at a little village called Vibraye, in the Sarthe. She had earned their bread by washing and sewing, doing whatever work she could find. When Jeannot fell ill, she had never left him, not for an hour. Day and night she stayed beside his bed, watching him, holding him, and trying to save him by love where medicine could do little. But love was not enough. The child died, and Trilby's grief was terrible to see.

Angèle said that everyone feared for Trilby's mind after the funeral. She seemed so broken, so empty, and so wild with sorrow that people thought she might destroy herself. Then, on the day after Jeannot was buried, she vanished. She took nothing with her, not even her proper clothes. She left no note, no word, and no sign of any kind. One moment she was there in the poor room where she had suffered, and the next she was gone.

The people of the village searched everywhere they could think of. They searched the ponds, the wells, the small stream that ran through the place, and even the edge of the old forest. They called to her and asked questions, but there was no answer. It was as if the earth had taken her in silence. Angèle told all this with tears, crossing herself again and again, and begging Taffy and the Laird to do something, though she hardly knew what could still be done.

Taffy did not waste time in words. He went at once to Vibraye, spoke to everyone he could find, questioned them sharply, and tried to trace the smallest

clue. He also communicated with the Paris police and did everything a practical, faithful friend could do. But no trace of Trilby appeared. Day after day, when he came back to Paris, he went with a beating heart to the Morgue and looked. He hated the place, yet he forced himself there because friendship demanded it.

The Laird suffered in a quieter way. He was less made for searching and official business, but his heart was as sore as Taffy's. He thought of Trilby alone somewhere in the winter world, with no child left to hold and no friend near enough to save her. He thought of her quick laughter, her brave ways, her great voice, her beautiful feet, and the warm life she had brought into their old studio. To imagine all that life swallowed in darkness was more than he could easily bear.

The news was kept from Little Billee. That was not difficult to do, because he spoke so little and asked almost nothing. He was still weak from his long illness, and those around him feared any fresh shock. His mother thought silence was mercy. Taffy and the Laird, though miserable at the secrecy, agreed with her. None of them could see what good would come from telling a man so newly risen from the edge of death that the lost woman he had loved had now lost even her little brother and had disappeared into the world.

When at last he was able to get up and sit in the studio again, one of the first things he asked to see was his picture of Trilby carrying the pitcher. They brought it to him and stood by in silence while he looked. He gazed at it for some time without speaking. Then he gave a small shrug and laughed.

It was a dreadful laugh to hear. It did not belong to a young man at all. It was dry, cold, and old, the laugh of someone who has forgotten how to weep and must make some sound in its place. Those who heard it felt more pain from that thin laugh than they might have felt from open sobbing, because it seemed to show how far inwardly damaged he had become. His body was recovering, but something gentler and more precious had not recovered with it.

The picture itself must have cut him deeply, even if he did not say so. It was not just paint on canvas. It held the shape of a lost happiness and the image of a woman whose life had crossed his own only to be broken apart from it. Yet he would not speak of Trilby, of Jeannot, of Paris, or of blame. He looked, laughed

once, and turned away. The silence after that was heavier than any speech.

Thus the last ties to the old Paris days were not cut cleanly, but frayed one by one through illness, death, disappearance, and secrecy. Jeannot was gone into the earth. Trilby had vanished into uncertainty. The bright little world of the Latin Quarter, with its studio jokes and Sunday outings and cheap dinners, no longer existed except in memory. Even before Little Billee left for the next stage of his life, that earlier life had already become something buried.

And so the shadow lay complete over all of them. Taffy searched and found nothing. The Laird remembered and could not forget. Little Billee sat upright again among his things, but with that strange inward winter still upon him. The old story had not yet ended, but its first great part was truly over now, and what remained ahead would come out of loss, not innocence.

Part 14

In late autumn Little Billee left at last for London, and London was ready for him. He was no longer merely a gifted young student from Paris. He had already become William Bagot, a painter with a real name, a man whose work was wanted, watched, and praised. Doors opened more easily than before, and people who had once only encouraged him now spoke of him as if success were already certain.

He took rooms and a studio suited to his growing place in the world. Everything there was chosen with taste and care. The furniture was good, the rugs and draperies rich without being heavy, and the whole place had the finished look of someone who knew beauty and could afford it. On his easel stood an important new picture already promised to a well-known dealer before it was complete. This was the visible proof that his talent had become marketable, and that the public had begun to claim him.

He worked hard, very hard indeed. No man in his circle gave himself more steadily to labor when work was before him. He painted with the full force of his concentration, as if effort itself might solve what feeling could not. When the hour for rest came, he rested with equal discipline. Even his pleasures were carefully

managed. Nothing in his outward life suggested collapse or confusion now. He had become orderly, successful, and admirably controlled.

Invitations gathered on his mantelpiece in growing numbers. Cards came from people of position, from hostesses, patrons, and fine ladies whose names mattered in the social world. There were notes written on scented paper, little signs of welcome, little claims upon his time, little openings into circles once far above him. He accepted more of these calls than he would once have thought possible, and he found that he could move among such people without discomfort.

There was danger in this, though not the danger foolish people imagine first. He was too delicate in taste and too inwardly shy to become openly vain or coarse with success. But he might easily become something else: the agreeable young artist of society, the refined favorite of intelligent women, the harmless trusted companion whose talent, manners, and slight melancholy made him peculiarly attractive. That kind of life flatters a man while quietly drawing him away from his deepest work.

It suited one part of him very well. He was gentle, attentive, quick to understand, and naturally graceful with women. He could listen without boredom, speak without noise, and show admiration without common boldness. Such gifts are dangerous in drawing rooms. They make a man welcome in places where stronger and simpler natures are often kept outside. In those rooms he could charm without trying, and because he seemed safe, he was often trusted too easily.

Yet this worldly ease did not mean he was healed. The same inward blankness still moved under everything. He could work, visit, dine, talk, and even seem warmly interested, while all the time feeling that the true center of himself was absent. He had become more polished, not more whole. The old loss still lived in him, though it no longer cried out. It had hardened into a condition.

That was why success gave him less pleasure than it should have done. He knew he was rising. He knew his pictures were stronger, finer, and more original than many others shown around him. He knew people admired him, and that he deserved a great part of their admiration. But he could not take full joy in this knowledge. Praise reached his mind more easily than his heart. Even triumph

came to him slightly chilled.

Still, he did not waste what had been given to him. If feeling failed, will remained. He continued to train his hand, discipline his eye, and force his gift into fuller expression. He knew enough of art to understand that talent without labor becomes manner, and manner soon becomes decay. So he worked on, not with the easy happiness of youth, but with the set purpose of someone who has discovered that work may be the only honest answer to private emptiness.

He also remained, outwardly at least, more affectionate than ever with those nearest him. He wrote dutiful letters. He visited his mother and sister when he could. He accepted their tenderness and returned it in every visible way. People around him, seeing this increased gentleness, may well have thought that suffering had deepened and softened him. In one sense that was true. In another sense it hid the more troubling truth that he was often performing love rather than feeling it fully, and doing so because he wished to bring it back by faithful practice.

Thus his London life began under two opposite signs. On the outside there was growth, fame, good taste, welcome, and promising work. On the inside there remained that gray inward weather left by illness, loss, and the violent breaking of his first great love. Because he was brave and well-bred, he carried both conditions at once and let few people see the full cost of it. His life looked like success. Much of it was success. But the best part of him had not yet found peace.

So the interlude of Little Billee opened not in failure, but in a kind of divided victory. The world was beginning to reward him richly, and he had earned the reward. Yet every reward came to a man whose heart had been struck in a place no public honor could touch. He went forward all the same, painting, visiting, rising, and being admired; and because he could still do all these things so well, most people would never guess how incomplete the triumph felt to the one who won it.

Part 15

In Devonshire, Alice remained for a while the one possible answer to Little

Billee's trouble. She was everything calm, pure, and well-ordered that his mind had begun to long for. Around her there was no roughness, no confusion, and no painful memory of Paris. Her father's church, the lane, the garden, the quiet house, and even the old dog at the gate all seemed to belong to a world where a man might be healed simply by entering it.

He tried very honestly to give himself over to that hope. He thought of Alice from morning to night. He admired her beauty, her goodness, her careful upbringing, and the gentle trust she seemed to place in him. Because he wanted peace so much, he persuaded himself that perhaps love of this kind, quiet and English and safe, was better than the violent happiness he had once known.

But wanting to love is not the same as loving. Again and again he found that his mind could move toward Alice more easily than his heart could. He could imagine a future with her. He could even dream it at night and wake with the sweet pain of having lost it. Yet when he tested the dream against the truth of his inward state, it would not hold.

The old weakness in him rose at once and spoiled it. He still could not believe fully that a woman like Alice might choose a man like himself. He was too conscious of his slight body, his delicate appearance, and the want of strong physical force in him. He had always honored beauty and strength in form almost like a religion, and now that very habit turned against him.

Because of this, he judged women by the same false standard. He believed that all women, especially English women, must prefer strength first and everything else afterward. Talent, refinement, tenderness, and intelligence seemed to him poor rivals beside broad shoulders and an easy command of life. So even when Alice's manner gave him hope, he found ways to destroy that hope himself.

Trilby's memory made it worse. In his sadder moods he still thought of the speed with which she had let him go when his mother spoke. He did not do her justice in such moments. He forgot that she had given him up from love and not from coldness, and instead let himself imagine that a stronger man would have been held more fiercely.

This was unfair to Trilby, unfair to Alice, and unfair to himself. But sick hearts

are not always just. A wound that has gone deep will often twist memory until it hurts in the most useful place. So even in the quiet Devonshire sunshine, with Alice near and his mother hopeful, he carried within him an argument that never truly ended.

Still, the possibility remained for a time, and others around him certainly believed in it. His mother cherished the hope with all the force of a loving woman who wants both happiness and safety for her son. No doubt Alice, in her own quiet way, hoped as well. Everything outward favored such an ending. It would have satisfied affection, family, custom, and common sense.

Yet life does not always follow the road that looks most reasonable. Little Billee could not give Alice what she deserved. He could admire her, be grateful to her, and almost take shelter in the thought of her, but he could not offer the full warmth of a restored heart. The illness of the past had left too much emptiness behind it, and no amount of good intention could fill that emptiness by force.

So the hope slowly died, not in quarrel or scandal, but in weakness and delay. Nothing was openly broken because nothing had ever been strongly formed. Alice passed out of the center of his life as gently as she had entered it. Later she married an older churchman and settled into the kind of respectable life that offends no one and astonishes no one.

For Little Billee, this meant that another door had quietly closed. He had looked toward Alice as toward a cure, and found instead only another proof that the deepest hurt in him remained. Devonshire could soothe him for a little while. Alice could awaken longing, tenderness, and regret. But neither place nor person could bring him back to what he had been before Paris and before Trilby.

Thus the Interlude ended as it had begun: with outward promise and inward want. Little Billee was rising in the world, admired in London, loved at home, and still rich in gift and opportunity. Yet one possible future after another slipped from his hands, and he went on toward fame carrying within him that same unresolved blankness, quieter now, but no less real.

Five years passed. In those years the old three friends had not lived as they once had in the studio, side by side, full of talk and youth and careless hope. Life had taken each of them in a different direction. Little Billee had become famous as a painter. Taffy and the Laird had gone on with their own work and their own lives. Yet the old bond between them had never really died, and now Paris drew them together again.

The city was full of one name. Everywhere people spoke of a singer called la Svengali. Her success had been sudden, violent, and almost unbelievable. The newspapers were crowded with praise, and rumor moved faster than print. Some called her the greatest singer in Europe. Some spoke as much of her beauty as of her voice. Little by little another thought forced itself on the three friends, one they hardly wished to admit: could this marvelous singer possibly be Trilby?

The idea seemed impossible. They all remembered too clearly the tall girl from the Latin Quarter who could not sing even a simple song in tune. They remembered "Ben Bolt," her brave face, her deep speaking voice, and her total want of ear. And yet there were details in the reports that troubled them. There was mention of unusual beauty, of English birth, of a strange personal charm, and at last of feet whose casts were becoming famous in Paris. Such things were enough to shake even disbelief.

So the three friends went together to hear her. They entered not as light-hearted young men in search of pleasure, but as people going toward something they feared to know and could not refuse. The hall was crowded, excited, and full of expectation. The name of la Svengali was in every mouth, and all around them moved that restless public hunger which gathers before a new wonder. Yet in the middle of all that noise, Taffy, the Laird, and Little Billee felt strangely alone.

Then she appeared. Whatever doubt had remained was struck down at once in Little Billee's heart, though the others still fought against belief. It was Trilby and yet not Trilby. The face, the smile, the figure, the hair, the remembered grace of the body were there. But they were lifted now into another order of being, made grander by dress, fame, and the fixed spell of the stage. She seemed both their old

lost friend and some public creature made out of her by genius, force, and mystery.

And then she sang. No one who heard her could have forgotten it. The voice had everything: sweetness, strength, flight, tenderness, fire, and a strange piercing purity that seemed more than human. It moved from laughter to longing, from play to deep feeling, from lightness to solemn beauty, with a power that conquered the whole audience. Even those who knew nothing of music were carried away. Tears came to eyes that had not expected them. The great crowd rose at the end as one body and shouted for her again and again.

For Little Billee, the effect was greater still. Something that had long been silent in him suddenly woke. As he listened, it seemed to him that the numb winter in his heart broke open at last. Love, grief, memory, joy, and pain all returned together. He felt once more the old warmth of life itself, the same full inward movement he had not known since the happy Paris days before the great break. He was himself again, and he knew it. He owed that terrible gift to Trilby.

When the performance ended and the crowd poured out, the three friends went together through the warm Paris night in complete silence. They walked arm in arm, as they had done in former days, but now Little Billee was in the middle. He wished to feel the physical nearness of the two men who had shared his youth, as if the touch of them on either side might steady the great shaking return of his own heart. He was too full of feeling to speak. Taffy and the Laird were silent too, because Trilby's voice still lived in their ears and her transformed image still stood before their eyes.

At last they sat outside a café on the boulevard, with beer before them and all Paris still talking of la Svengali around them. The Laird broke the silence first. He said he could hardly believe it had truly been Trilby after all. Taffy answered at once that no other answer was possible. Little Billee said quietly that it was indeed Trilby, and that he had no doubt of it. For him the question was already settled in the deepest part of himself.

Yet certainty did not bring peace. If that singer was really Trilby, then what had happened in the five missing years? How had the poor girl from the studio, who once laughed at serious music and sang "Ben Bolt" like a wild joke, become

this queen of song? What power had lifted her? What had been done to her, or taught to her, or taken from her, to produce such beauty? The friends could not answer these questions, and the mystery of them pressed almost as heavily as the beauty of what they had heard.

Little Billee felt all this more sharply than the others. His joy at having his heart restored was mixed at once with sorrow, regret, and fear. He did not yet even know what he now felt for Trilby, because the feeling was too great and too complicated to be measured in a single hour. He only knew that hearing her had given him back himself. That was blessing enough for the moment. He did not yet force himself to think beyond it, because he felt that bad news was already waiting somewhere close ahead.

So that night ended not in explanation, but in wonder. The lost woman had returned before them as a public miracle. The old three friends, separated by five long years, had for one evening become three again. Yet beneath the joy of recognition there moved another truth, darker and still hidden. Trilby had reappeared, yes, but she had not returned simply as the Trilby they had known. Something immense and troubling stood behind la Svengali, and before long they would have to face it.

Part 17

During the next few days Paris did exactly what Paris always does with a new wonder. It talked too much, guessed too much, invented too much, and enjoyed all of it. The newspapers were suddenly full of stories about la Svengali. They gave her noble fathers, wild Irish childhoods, mysterious adventures, and impossible beauties. They spoke of her white skin, her strange charm, her feet, and her past life among artists, and they mixed truth and nonsense so freely that even the truth began to look like fiction.

Taffy, the Laird, and Little Billee read all this with uneasy minds. They did not deny among themselves that la Svengali was indeed Trilby. That was already past doubt. But they had no wish to help the public turn her into a cheap legend. So

they kept silence and let Paris chatter on as it pleased. It was enough for them to know that the lost friend of their youth had returned in a shape more wonderful and more troubling than any gossip could explain.

Even the Laird, who had once loved Paris as one loves a clever and amusing companion, had now had enough of it. The city seemed over-bright, over-noisy, and too full of staring faces. He wanted to get back to his work again. Taffy felt much the same. As for Little Billee, he had recovered his heart only to find it suddenly exposed once more to shock, memory, longing, and uncertainty, and that was almost harder to bear than the old numbness had been.

So on the next morning they prepared to leave Paris. They breakfasted together at their hotel and sat afterward in the crowded courtyard, waiting for the hour of departure. Little Billee went into the hotel post office to send a note to his mother. There, of all people in the world, sat Svengali alone at a small table, reading letters. The sight of him at such close distance, after the miracle and horror of the night before, shook Little Billee badly.

He half put out his hand as if some old instinct of politeness still worked in him, but drew it back at once. He had seen the look on Svengali's face. It was not merely dislike. It was hatred, open and cold. Svengali rose, gathered his letters, and as he passed Little Billee on the way to the door, he called him a filthy name and deliberately spat in his face.

For one second Little Billee was too stunned even to move. Then he rushed after him, caught him at the top of the marble stairs, kicked him, struck at him, and knocked off his hat. Svengali turned and hit him hard across the mouth so that the blood came. Little Billee fought back with all the desperate fury of a slight man driven beyond endurance, but he could not reach high enough or strongly enough to do much harm. In another moment a crowd had gathered around them.

Taffy saw what was happening and came through the crowd like a man called to his natural work. Little Billee, shaking, bleeding, and half choking with rage, cried out that Svengali had spat in his face without a word of provocation. At that, Taffy acted instantly. He seized Svengali by the nose with two fingers, twisted and dragged his head to and fro, then let him go and gave him a great open-handed

blow on the cheek, a blow so swift and complete that it seemed less like anger than judgment.

Svengali turned pale with shock. He gasped, called Taffy a coward, and declared that he would send his seconds. Taffy answered with perfect calm, gave him his card in proper form, and said that he would remain available until noon and afterward could be found at his London address. There was something almost elegant in the way he handled the whole disgraceful matter. The old military gentleman standing near approved of him warmly, and several bystanders seemed far more entertained than scandalized.

By the time the police officer arrived, the worst of the business was over. Svengali had left in a cab, and Taffy stayed to explain what had happened. Witnesses were ready enough, for there had been clerks and others in the room when the first insult was given. In the end the facts were simple. Svengali had committed the outrage, Little Billee had answered like an angry boy, and Taffy had finished the matter in his own direct way. The friends were free to continue their journey, though none of them now felt any ordinary ease about it.

What troubled them most was not the fight itself. That, in its rough male fashion, was clear enough. What troubled them was the reason for Svengali's hate. It was plain that Little Billee had become in his eyes not merely an old acquaintance, but an enemy. Why? Was it jealousy? Was it fear? Was it some old score carried silently for years? And behind all these questions stood the greater one, darker than the rest: what, exactly, was Trilby's life with Svengali now?

Little Billee felt the insult less physically than inwardly. The blood on his mouth, the shame of being spat upon, the helpless rage of the moment all burned in him; but under that burned something deeper. Svengali had touched not only his face, but his relation to Trilby. The act seemed to say that he had no right even to stand near that lost part of his own past. And because his heart had only just awakened again, every such wound now went in full depth.

So they left Paris with no comfort from the city's applause and no sweetness in the memory of la Svengali's triumph. The miracle of her voice still lived in them, but now it was joined to open violence and to a hatred that could no longer

be ignored. The mystery had not grown less after hearing her sing. It had grown larger. And as the train carried them away, all three friends knew that the story of Trilby and Svengali was moving toward something more dangerous than mere wonder.

Part 18

After the fight at the hotel, life did not at once bring the three friends face to face with Trilby again. Time moved on, and the center of attention shifted from Paris to London, where la Svengali was to appear before an even larger public. Her fame crossed the Channel ahead of her. The English newspapers repeated the French wonder, and London prepared itself with that heavy, eager seriousness it brings to a famous success from abroad. For Taffy, the Laird, and Little Billee, the coming performance was no mere social event. It was another approach to a mystery that had already given them beauty, shame, rage, and fear.

They went to Drury Lane and took their places among a great and excited crowd. The house was brilliant with light, jewels, opera glasses, eager faces, and all the restless movement of people determined to see something rare. Everyone seemed to know la Svengali by name, though few knew anything true about her. For the three friends, that vast public excitement only deepened their private tension. Trilby, once the poor girl of the Latin Quarter, had become a public possession, and they could do nothing but sit among strangers and wait.

At first all seemed as before. She came out before them splendidly dressed and radiant with that strange mixture of simplicity and magnificence that belonged only to her. The audience welcomed her with enthusiasm, and for a moment it looked as if another triumph were certain. Yet under the surface something was wrong. There was a slight uncertainty in the atmosphere, a pressure in the room that no one could have explained clearly, but that the three old friends all felt.

Then the disaster came. Trilby did not sing as la Svengali had sung in Paris. She tried to answer the call made upon her, but what came from her lips was not the miraculous art that had conquered Europe. It was the old wild, helpless,

grotesque voice from the studio years before, the same impossible “Ben Bolt” voice, large in sound and utterly astray in tune. The audience could hardly believe its own ears. Astonishment turned at once to noise, anger, ridicule, and confused shouting.

Poor Trilby herself seemed far more surprised than anyone else. She protested openly, like a hurt and bewildered child, saying that she did not want to sing at all, that she had sung only because she had been asked, and that she would sing no more. The manager cried out across the theater toward Svengali’s box, demanding to know what had happened to his wife. Trilby stood looking at the people, the lights, the manager, and the whole uproar with a vague bright smile, as if she only half understood where she was. It was plain to everyone now that something dreadful had broken apart before their eyes.

All at once attention shifted from her to Svengali. He was sitting in his box, motionless, watching the ruin of the performance with a fixed and terrible smile on his face. It was a smile of hatred, mockery, and some kind of revenge, as if he had turned the whole theater into a stage for one last cruel joke. The house took up his name and shouted it back at him, first in confusion and then in open derision. Trilby was led away, passive and bewildered, while all eyes fastened on the man in the box.

Then the truth came out in a still more shocking form. Officials entered the box, drew the curtains, and after a short delay an announcement was made from the stage. Svengali, it was said, had suddenly died there in his seat, perhaps from apoplexy or disease of the heart. His wife had seen this from the stage, and the shock had apparently driven her out of her senses. The audience was told that the money would be returned and that everyone should leave quietly.

Taffy did not leave quietly. With the Laird and Little Billee behind him, he pushed his way to a stage door he knew and demanded to be admitted at once. His size, his manner, and the authority in his voice overcame the resistance offered him, and the three were finally let through. As they passed one open room, they saw a half-undressed body on a table with men bending over it. That, without doubt, was the last they ever saw of Svengali.

They were taken to another room, where Trilby sat in a chair by the fire while musicians and attendants stood around her in confusion. Gecko was there on his knees, rubbing her hands and feet. She looked dazed, not violent, not truly mad in any common sense, but emptied out, as if the force that had animated la Svengali had suddenly been withdrawn and left only the familiar human creature beneath. The sight cut all three friends deeply. The great singer was gone, and their old Trilby, somehow, was before them again.

The first person she clearly recognized was Taffy. At the sight of him she sprang up, ran to him, and spoke not like a famous public artist, but like the Trilby of the old studio days, warm, direct, and bewildered. She kissed the Laird when she saw him, then turned to Little Billee and looked at him for a long time in surprise. He had changed, and she felt the change without understanding its history. She asked why they were dressed as they were, where she was, and what it all meant.

Most striking of all, she asked where Svengali was and said she wished to go home. There was no sign in her manner that she understood what had just happened on stage, or what sort of singer the world believed her to be. Her words, her tone, and her whole dazed innocence suggested not deceit, but ignorance. The three friends could only stare, because they felt that an even stranger truth than madness was beginning to show itself. The mystery had not ended with Svengali's death. It had only changed shape.

So that dreadful night closed with applause turned to uproar, triumph turned to disgrace, and Svengali himself turned from tyrant and master into a corpse behind a curtain. But Trilby still lived, and what remained in her after his death was now the question that mattered most. The old friends had recovered her in one sense, yet they did not understand what had been returned to them. She had fallen out of her public greatness in a single moment, and they were left standing beside her at the fire, knowing only that the next stage of the story would be sadder, stranger, and more intimate than anything that had gone before.

That same night, after the ruin at Drury Lane, the three friends took Trilby away from the theater and brought her to Little Billee's house in Fitzroy Square. She was quiet, confused, and easy to guide, like someone waking in the wrong room after a feverish sleep. She knew Taffy, the Laird, and Little Billee at once, and greeted them with the old warm friendliness, but she had no clear idea where she was or what had happened. She kept asking for Svengali and saying she wished to go home, and when they told her he was ill, she accepted that answer with simple concern. Little Billee gave up his own bed for her, a nurse was found, and the three men spent most of the night trying to set everything in order around her.

The strangest thing of all was not her weakness, but her innocence. She did not speak like a woman who had just stood before London as the greatest singer in Europe. She spoke like the old Trilby of the studio days, affectionate, direct, half playful, and wholly natural. There was no vanity in her, no memory of triumph, and no sign that she understood the power the world had lately worshipped in her. The public singer had fallen away in a single night, and what remained was the friend they had known before all the miracles and all the fame.

Svengali's affairs had to be dealt with after his death, and this took time and caused fresh confusion. No real wife appeared to claim him, though old relatives came from Germany, and one by one his inventions were exposed as inventions. The money he left had in truth been earned by la Svengali, yet none of it came to Trilby. What remained to her were clothes, jewels, and gifts she hardly understood, and even these she believed belonged mainly to Marta. Through all this, Marta stayed beside her with complete devotion, loving her like an old mother loves a dying child.

It soon became plain that Trilby had not long to live. She grew too weak even for short outings and stayed almost always in her large sitting room with Marta near her. There, every afternoon, her three old English friends came to sit with her, drink coffee, smoke, and talk of Paris and the old studio days. They tried to make the hours bright for her, and she, with the instinctive grace that never left her,

helped them do it. These afternoons became a small court of affection and memory, a last kingdom built out of kindness and shared recollection.

Day by day she changed before their eyes, yet to them she seemed more beautiful than ever. Her face grew whiter and thinner, and the clear lines of bone beneath her delicate skin showed more finely as illness wasted her body. But the old brightness returned to her eyes when they came in, and the look she gave them was so tender, so eager, so full of clinging love for life and for them, that they felt already the future pain of remembering it. Even her smallest motions, now weak and light, brought back the strong lively girl she had once been.

Her speaking voice, too, had all its old magic. As she chatted and laughed in English, those rich tones and easy changes bewitched them almost as much as the singing voice that had conquered Europe. Sometimes other old companions came as well, and the room filled for a while with something like the lost spirit of Bohemia. Lorrimer came, and Antony, and the Greek, and the artists made chalk and pencil studies of her head that later became famous. But no sketch, however fine, could hold the whole sad sweetness of that living presence in decay.

These afternoons were perhaps the happiest she had ever known. She was among people who loved her without demanding anything from her, and she could live for a few hours in the language and the memories she cared for most. She liked to speak of old Paris, of Jeannot, of little things in the studio, of poor jokes and cheap meals and the old easy companionship of the quarter. In those hours she did not think much of tomorrow. But the nights were different.

In the small hours, when the house was still and Marta slept beside her, Trilby would wake from happy dreams and suddenly remember that death was close. Then fear would come, not the common fear of pain, but the dreadful bitterness of parting forever from all that she still loved. She longed sometimes to cry out, to rise, to walk, to wring her hands like any frightened creature caught and helpless. But she lay still and silent, unwilling to wake the tired old woman near her. At last the terror would pass, and resignation would come back over her like calm water after a storm.

In the morning courage returned. She would wake again to coffee, light, and

another day still granted to her, and life would once more seem sweet. There was something heroic in the simple way she accepted this daily rising and falling of the soul. She did not make speeches about suffering. She did not ask for pity. She took the day as it came, and if there was joy in it, she welcomed it with gratitude.

One day Mrs. Bagot came from Devonshire to see her, at Little Billee's urgent wish. The meeting was one of the most moving in the whole sad story. Trilby rose and timidly held out her hand, trying even then to apologize that she had not quite kept her old promise never to see Little Billee again, though things had turned out so differently. But the moment Mrs. Bagot heard that broken gentle voice and saw the terribly altered face of the girl she had once feared, all pride and all old hardness gave way. She rushed forward, caught Trilby in her arms, kissed her, called her "my poor girl," and wept over her as if over a lost child.

After that, Mrs. Bagot's whole feeling changed. She confessed her remorse and begged Trilby's forgiveness more than once, and Trilby, who had never truly hated her, answered with touching humility. She said again that she had always known she was not fit to marry Little Billee and that it had been foolish of her to yield at last. Mrs. Bagot would not hear a word against her. She stayed on instead of returning home at once, and before long she had come to love Trilby with a kind of late, astonished devotion, half maternal and half reverent. The woman once denounced as dangerous became to her a fast-fading lily, fragile, fragrant, and pitiful beyond resistance.

Their conversations sometimes turned toward the years Trilby had spent with Svengali, and these talks made the mystery even stranger. Trilby spoke of him not as a master who had made her famous, but as a man who had kept close to her, watched her health anxiously, and made her sleep whenever she felt pain or uneasiness. She remembered Marta's dresses and jewels better than her own public triumphs. She could recall trying on rich clothes, Svengali kneeling and praising her beauty, and then his familiar words, "Sleep, my darling," after which she would sink into long heavy sleep and wake tired. She remembered kindness, fatigue, illness, and dependence, but not the great artistic life the world believed she had lived.

She also spoke of death with a courage that startled Mrs. Bagot. She said she was not afraid of dying, for she had seen poor people die often and had nursed many of them herself. To her, death seemed part of the day's work, something not to be loved but not to be feared either. Yet even in this brave speech there was no hardness. She thought often of God and trusted that there would be mercy for everyone at the end. So her last days moved between fear and calm, tenderness and humor, suffering and submission, all held together by that peculiar sweetness which had always made people love her wherever she went.

Thus the weeks passed around her in Fitzroy Square, each day bringing the old friends closer and bringing the end nearer. Little Billee sat by her often, quieter than ever, loving her now without illusion and without hope. Taffy and the Laird, who had once shared with her cheap dinners and wild Paris laughter, now watched over her decline with a brotherly faithfulness that never failed. And Trilby, though fast slipping away, gave back to them in those final afternoons something more precious than any success or miracle of song: she gave them herself, at last undivided, poor, tender, humorous, mortal, and true.

Part 20

When the box came from the East, nobody in the room guessed what it would bring with it. It was large and heavy, and on the wood there were marks from a long journey over land and sea. The servant carried it in, and everyone looked at it with curiosity. Trilby, lying among her pillows, asked in a weak but cheerful voice what it could be.

They opened it before her. Inside was a great photograph of Svengali in the uniform of his Hungarian band. He stood there in the picture, dark and proud, with his baton in his hand and his eyes looking straight out. For a moment Trilby only stared, as if she had not understood what she was seeing. Then a faint smile came over her face, and she said softly that it was very like him.

After that she said nothing more. She kept her eyes fixed on the photograph, and slowly the expression in her face began to change. The smile stayed, but it no

longer seemed to belong to the room or to the people around her. Her eyes grew wider and brighter, and little by little she looked as though she were listening to something very far away.

Mrs. Bagot came near and offered her coffee, but Trilby did not seem to see either the cup or the hand that held it. Marta grew frightened and crossed herself. Taffy rose from his chair. Little Billee, who had been watching every movement in Trilby's face, felt his heart begin to beat so hard that he could hardly breathe.

Then, without warning, Trilby began to sing.

It was not her old speaking voice. It was not the broken, wandering voice that had once made the three friends stare in the studio when she sang "Ben Bolt." It was the great voice again, the wonderful voice that had filled theaters and made crowds tremble. It rose in the quiet room pure and rich and sweet beyond belief, and every person there stood still as if turned to stone.

The song seemed to come out of another world. There was sorrow in it, and tenderness, and command, and something strange and piercing that made the blood run cold. Little Billee fell on his knees beside her bed and looked up at her face, which had grown beautiful in a new and terrible way. It seemed to him that she was no longer singing for them at all, but for someone who stood unseen beyond them all.

When the song ended, the room remained silent. Trilby still looked toward the photograph. Then her face softened, and she seemed suddenly very tired. She moved her lips and spoke to Svengali as though he were present, as though he had been listening and was now pleased with her.

Little Billee caught her hand. It was already growing cold. He called her name once, then again, but she did not answer him as she had answered him so many times in the old days. Her head sank a little deeper into the pillow, and with her last failing breath she whispered, "Svengali ... Svengali ... Svengali."

After that there was one little sigh, and she lay still.

The doctor came quickly, but he could do nothing. He looked at her, touched her hand, listened a moment, and then stood up with tears in his eyes. Nobody in the room needed him to speak, for they already knew. Trilby was dead.

Mrs. Bagot broke into sobs and covered Trilby's poor wasted hands with kisses. Marta threw herself beside the bed and cried out like an old mother who has lost her child. The Laird turned away and hid his face. Taffy stood near the foot of the bed, pale and rigid, with both hands tightly closed. But Little Billee still knelt there and did not move.

They buried her with all honor. Many people came, for by then the whole world seemed to know her name. There were artists, musicians, great ladies, curious strangers, and the old friends who had loved her long before the world had heard her sing. The day was solemn and grand, but to Taffy and the Laird it all seemed strange and far away. They could only remember the tall girl in the studio coat, the laugh, the deep voice, the beautiful feet, and the cheap happy days in Paris.

That night Little Billee could bear his sorrow no longer. In darkness and confusion he made his way to Taffy's room, half dressed and trembling, and cried that he was going mad. He said he could not sleep, could not rest, and could not drive from his mind the thought that Trilby had died with another man's name on her lips. Taffy got out of bed at once, lit a candle, and did what he could to calm him. But there are griefs for which even friendship can do very little.

Time passed, as it always does. Out of that sorrowful time another life slowly began. Little Billee went again to Devonshire, ill in body and mind, and it was there, beside his bed, that Taffy and Blanche Bagot came closer to each other than ever before. Their love grew quietly, and before long they were married. It proved a happy marriage. Children were born to them, and years softened what years could soften.

Long afterward Taffy and Blanche came to Paris together. They were no longer young, though they were still strong and affectionate, and the sight of Paris brought back many things they had not spoken of for years. The Laird was not with them, for he was in Scotland, busy with a marriage of his own. One evening, after dinner, Taffy and Blanche went out into the city, and by chance they met Gecko.

He had changed terribly. He was small and bent and worn, and sickness and

poverty had done their worst with him. Yet when he saw Taffy and Blanche, a light came into his face. They took him in, gave him food and wine, and sat with him late into the night. At first they spoke of little things, but before long the old names rose between them, and Trilby's name could not be kept back.

Then Gecko told them at last what he had never fully told before. He said Trilby had not been mad on that dreadful night in London. She had not been pretending, and she had not turned false. She had simply forgotten. There had been, he said, two Trilbys.

There was the old Trilby they had known in the studio, the brave and kind and funny Trilby who could not sing in tune and who had no true ear for music at all. And there was the other Trilby, the great singer whom the world worshipped, who existed only when Svengali's will was over her and used the wonderful natural voice hidden in her body. Gecko spoke with tears running down his cheeks, and Blanche sat listening with both hands clasped tightly in her lap.

He told them how Svengali had found that marvelous voice in her and had worked on it for years, morning, noon, and night. He told them of the endless teaching, the journeys, the concerts, the triumphs, and the cruel hard labor. He told them also that all this had broken her health and worn her life away. Svengali had loved her in his own dark way, but he had driven her too far, and jealousy had made him harder and harder as time went on.

And why jealousy? Because, Gecko said, Trilby had never truly loved Svengali. In the deepest place of her heart she had loved Little Billee always. Paris had brought that old love back to life, and Svengali had felt it. That was why his temper had blackened, why his mastery had become cruelty, and why the end had been so terrible.

Taffy and Blanche sat in silence after this. Now at last the knot of the whole sad story was cut. Trilby had not willingly become cold, false, or proud. She had not forgotten those she loved from choice. What had happened to her had happened through another will, another power, and another life forced over her own. The truth came too late to save her, but not too late to clear her.

At last Gecko could speak no more. He was exhausted, and the candle on the

table had burned low. Taffy paid the bill, helped the poor little man downstairs, and put him into a cab. Then he and Blanche stood for a moment together in the cool Paris night and watched the cab disappear.

They walked back slowly to their hotel. Paris was still Paris, but it was no longer the Paris of their youth. Svengali was gone. Trilby was gone. Gecko too was passing out of the world. The old studio, the old laughter, the cheap dinners, the walks by the river, and the talk that never seemed to end had all gone back into the past.

Yet memory remained. Taffy and Blanche went on side by side through the sleeping city, and the remembrance of all those lost people and vanished days seemed to walk beside them, hand in hand. That was what remained in the end, not fame, not wonder, not terror, but tenderness, sorrow, and memory.