Pym had resumed his seat at the table and was once more toying with his pen. "Open the door," he commanded, "and let me see what you have brought with you."

Tommy obeyed gingerly, and then Pym gaped, for what the open door revealed to him was a tiny roped box with a girl of twelve sitting on it. She was dressed in some dull-coloured wincey, and looked cold and patient and lonely, and as she saw the big man staring at her she struggled in alarm to her feet, and could scarce stand on them. Tommy was looking apprehensively from her to Pym.

"Good God, boy!" roared Pym, "are you married?"

"No," cried Tommy, in agony, "she's my sister, and we're orphans, and did you think I could have the heart to leave Elspeth behind?" He took her stoutly by the hand.

"And he never will marry," said little Elspeth, almost fiercely; "will you, Tommy?"

"Never!" said Tommy, patting her and glaring at Pym.

But Pym would not have it. "Married!" he shouted. "Magnificent!" And he dipped exultantly, for he had got his idea at last. Forgetting even that he had an amanuensis, he wrote on and on and on.

"He smells o' drink," Elspeth whispered.

"All the better," replied Tommy, cheerily. "Make yourself at home, Elspeth; he's the kind I can manage. Was there ever a kind I couldna manage?" he whispered, top-heavy with conceit.

"There was Grizel," Elspeth said, rather thoughtlessly; and then Tommy frowned.

CHAPTER II - THE SEARCH FOR THE TREASURE

Six years afterwards Tommy was a famous man, as I hope you do not need to be told; but you may be wondering how it came about. The whole question, in Pym's words, resolves itself into how the solemn little devil

got to know so much about women. It made the world marvel when they learned his age, but no one was quite so staggered as Pym, who had seen him daily for all those years, and been damning him for his indifference to the sex during the greater part of them.

It began while he was still no more than an amanuensis, sitting with his feet in the waste-paper basket, Pym dictating from the sofa, and swearing when the words would not come unless he was perpendicular. Among the duties of this amanuensis was to remember the name of the heroine, her appearance, and other personal details; for Pym constantly forgot them in the night, and he had to go searching back through his pages for them, cursing her so horribly that Tommy signed to Elspeth to retire to her tiny bedroom at the top of the house. He was always most careful of Elspeth, and with the first pound he earned he insured his life, leaving all to her, but told her nothing about it, lest she should think it meant his early death. As she grew older he also got good dull books for her from a library, and gave her a piano on the hire system, and taught her many things about life, very carefully selected from his own discoveries.

Elspeth out of the way, he could give Pym all the information wanted. "Her name is Felicity," he would say at the right moment; "she has curly brown hair in which the sun strays, and a blushing neck, and her eyes are like blue lakes."

"Height!" roared Pym. "Have I mentioned it?"

"No; but she is about five feet six."

"How the ---- could you know that?"

"You tell Percy's height in his stocking-soles, and when she reached to his mouth and kissed him she had to stand on her tiptoes so to do."

Tommy said this in a most businesslike tone, but could not help smacking his lips. He smacked them again when he had to write: "Have no fear, little woman; I am by your side." Or, "What a sweet child you are!"

Pym had probably fallen into the way of making the Percys revel in such epithets because he could not remember the girl's name; but this delicious use of the diminutive, as addressed to full-grown ladies, went to Tommy's head. His solemn face kept his secret, but he had some narrow escapes; as once, when saying good-night to Elspeth, he kissed her on

mouth, eyes, nose, and ears, and said: "Shall I tuck you in, little woman?" He came to himself with a start.

"I forgot," he said hurriedly, and got out of the room without telling her what he had forgotten.

Pym's publishers knew their man, and their arrangement with him was that he was paid on completion of the tale. But always before he reached the middle he struck for what they called his honorarium; and this troubled them, for the tale was appearing week by week as it was written. If they were obdurate, he suddenly concluded his story in such words as these:

"Several years have passed since these events took place, and the scene changes to a lovely garden by the bank of old Father Thames. A young man sits by the soft-flowing stream, and he is calm as the scene itself; for the storm has passed away, and Percy (for it is no other) has found an anchorage. As he sits musing over the past, Felicity steals out by the French window and puts her soft arms around his neck. 'My little wife!' he murmurs. The End--unless you pay up by messenger."

This last line, which was not meant for the world (but little would Pym have cared though it had been printed), usually brought his employers to their knees; and then, as Tommy advanced in experience, came the pickings--for Pym, with money in his pockets, had important engagements round the corner, and risked intrusting his amanuensis with the writing of the next instalment, "all except the bang at the end."

Smaller people, in Tommy's state of mind, would have hurried straight to the love-passages; but he saw the danger, and forced his Pegasus away from them. "Do your day's toil first," he may be conceived saying to that animal, "and at evenfall I shall let you out to browse." So, with this reward in front, he devoted many pages to the dreary adventures of pretentious males, and even found a certain pleasure in keeping the lady waiting. But as soon as he reached her he lost his head again.

"Oh, you beauty! oh, you small pet!" he said to himself, with solemn transport.

As the artist in him was stirred, great problems presented themselves; for instance, in certain circumstances was "darling" or "little one" the better phrase? "Darling" in solitary grandeur is more pregnant of meaning than

"little one," but "little" has a flavour of the patronizing which "darling" perhaps lacks. He wasted many sheets over such questions; but they were in his pocket when Pym or Elspeth opened the door. It is wonderful how much you can conceal between the touch on the handle and the opening of the door, if your heart is in it.

Despite this fine practice, however, he was the shyest of mankind in the presence of women, and this shyness grew upon him with the years. Was it because he never tried to uncork himself? Oh, no! It was about this time that he, one day, put his arm round Clara, the servant--not passionately, but with deliberation, as if he were making an experiment with machinery. He then listened, as if to hear Clara ticking. He wrote an admirable love-letter--warm, dignified, sincere--to nobody in particular, and carried it about in his pocket in readiness. But in love-making, as in the other arts, those do it best who cannot tell how it is done; and he was always stricken with a palsy when about to present that letter. It seemed that he was only able to speak to ladies when they were not there. Well, if he could not speak, he thought the more; he thought so profoundly that in time the heroines of Pym ceased to thrill him.

This was because he had found out that they were not flesh and blood. But he did not delight in his discovery: it horrified him; for what he wanted was the old thrill. To make them human so that they could be his little friends again--nothing less was called for. This meant slaughter here and there of the great Pym's brain-work, and Tommy tried to keep his hands off; but his heart was in it. In Pym's pages the ladies were the most virtuous and proper of their sex (though dreadfully persecuted), but he merely told you so at the beginning, and now and again afterwards to fill up, and then allowed them to act with what may be called rashness, so that the story did not really suffer. Before Tommy was nineteen he changed all that. Out went this because she would not have done it, and that because she could not have done it. Fathers might now have taken a lesson from T. Sandys in the upbringing of their daughters. He even sternly struck out the diminutives. With a pen in his hand and woman in his head, he had such noble thoughts that his tears of exaltation damped the pages as he wrote, and the ladies must have been astounded as well as proud to see what they were turning into.

That was Tommy with a pen in his hand and a handkerchief hard by; but it was another Tommy who, when the finest bursts were over, sat back in his chair and mused. The lady was consistent now, and he would think

about her, and think and think, until concentration, which is a pair of blazing eyes, seemed to draw her out of the pages to his side, and then he and she sported in a way forbidden in the tale. While he sat there with eyes riveted, he had her to dinner at a restaurant, and took her up the river, and called her "little woman"; and when she held up her mouth he said tantalizingly that she must wait until he had finished his cigar. This queer delight enjoyed, back he popped her into the story, where she was again the vehicle for such glorious sentiments that Elspeth, to whom he read the best of them, feared he was becoming too good to live.

In the meantime the great penny public were slowly growing restive, and at last the two little round men called on Pym to complain that he was falling off; and Pym turned them out of doors, and then sat down heroically to do what he had not done for two decades--to read his latest work.

"Elspeth, go upstairs to your room," whispered Tommy, and then he folded his arms proudly. He should have been in a tremble, but latterly he had often felt that he must burst if he did not soon read some of his bits to Pym, more especially the passages about the hereafter; also the opening of Chapter Seventeen.

At first Pym's only comment was, "It is the same old drivel as before; what more can they want?"

But presently he looked up, puzzled. "Is this chapter yours or mine?" he demanded.

"It is about half and half," said Tommy.

"Is mine the first half? Where does yours begin?" "That is not exactly what I mean," explained Tommy, in a glow, but backing a little; "you wrote that chapter first, and then I--I--"

"You rewrote it!" roared Pym. "You dared to meddle with--" He was speechless with fury.

"I tried to keep my hand off," Tommy said, with dignity, "but the thing had to be done, and they are human now."

"Human! who wants them to be human? The fiends seize you, boy! you have even been tinkering with my heroine's personal appearance; what is this you have been doing to her nose?"

"I turned it up slightly, that's all," said Tommy.

"I like them down," roared Pym.

"I prefer them up," said Tommy, stiffly.

"Where," cried Pym, turning over the leaves in a panic, "where is the scene in the burning house?"

"It's out," Tommy explained, "but there is a chapter in its place about--it's mostly about the beauty of the soul being everything, and mere physical beauty nothing. Oh, Mr. Pym, sit down and let me read it to you."

But Pym read it, and a great deal more, for himself. No wonder he stormed, for the impossible had been made not only consistent, but unreadable. The plot was lost for chapters. The characters no longer did anything, and then went and did something else: you were told instead how they did it. You were not allowed to make up your own mind about them: you had to listen to the mind of T. Sandys; he described and he analyzed; the road he had tried to clear through the thicket was impassable for chips.

"A few more weeks of this," said Pym, "and we should all three be turned out into the streets."

Tommy went to bed in an agony of mortification, but presently to his side came Pym.

"Where did you copy this from?" he asked. "'It is when we are thinking of those we love that our noblest thoughts come to us, and the more worthy they are of our love the nobler the thought; hence it is that no one has done the greatest work who did not love God.'"

"I copied it from nowhere," replied Tommy, fiercely; "it's my own."

"Well, it has nothing to do with the story, and so is only a blot on it, and I have no doubt the thing has been said much better before. Still, I suppose it is true."

"It's true," said Tommy; "and yet--"

"Go on. I want to know all about it."

"And yet," Tommy said, puzzled, "I've known noble thoughts come to me when I was listening to a brass band."

Pym chuckled. "Funny things, noble thoughts," he agreed. He read another passage: "'It was the last half-hour of day when I was admitted, with several others, to look upon my friend's dead face. A handkerchief had been laid over it. I raised the handkerchief. I know not what the others were thinking, but the last time we met he had told me something, it was not much--only that no woman had ever kissed him. It seemed to me that, as I gazed, the wistfulness came back to his face. I whispered to a woman who was present, and stooping over him, she was about to--but her eyes were dry, and I stopped her. The handkerchief was replaced, and all left the room save myself. Again I raised the handkerchief. I cannot tell you how innocent he looked.'"

"Who was he?" asked Pym.

"Nobody," said Tommy, with some awe; "it just came to me. Do you notice how simple the wording is? It took me some time to make it so simple."

"You are just nineteen, I think?"

"Yes."

Pym looked at him wonderingly.

"Thomas," he said, "you are a very queer little devil."

He also said: "And it is possible you may find the treasure you are always talking about. Don't jump to the ceiling, my friend, because I say that. I was once after the treasure, myself; and you can see whether I found it."

From about that time, on the chances that this mysterious treasure might spring up in the form of a new kind of flower, Pym zealously cultivated the ground, and Tommy had an industrious time of it. He was taken off his stories, which at once regained their elasticity, and put on to exercises.

"If you have nothing to say on the subject, say nothing," was one of the new rules, which few would have expected from Pym. Another was: "As soon as you can say what you think, and not what some other person has thought for you, you are on the way to being a remarkable man."

"Without concentration, Thomas, you are lost; concentrate, though your coat-tails be on fire.

"Try your hand at description, and when you have done chortling over the result, reduce the whole by half without missing anything out.

"Analyze your characters and their motives at the prodigious length in which you revel, and then, my sonny, cut your analysis out. It is for your own guidance, not the reader's.

"'I have often noticed,' you are always saying. The story has nothing to do with you. Obliterate yourself. I see that will be your stiffest job.

"Stop preaching. It seems to me the pulpit is where you should look for the treasure. Nineteen, and you are already as didactic as seventy."

And so on. Over his exercises Tommy was now engrossed for so long a period that, as he sits there, you may observe his legs slowly lengthening and the coming of his beard. No, his legs lengthened as he sat with his feet in the basket; but I feel sure that his beard burst through prematurely some night when he was thinking too hard about the ladies.

There were no ladies in the exercises, for, despite their altercation about noses, Pym knew that on this subject Tommy's mind was a blank. But he recognized the sex's importance, and becoming possessed once more of a black coat, marched his pupil into the somewhat shoddy drawing-rooms that were still open to him, and there ordered Tommy to be fascinated for his future good. But it was as it had always been. Tommy sat white and speechless and apparently bored; could not even say, "You sing with so much expression!" when the lady at the pianoforte had finished.

"Shyness I could pardon," the exasperated Pym would roar; "but want of interest is almost immoral. At your age the blood would have been coursing through my veins. Love! You are incapable of it. There is not a drop of sentiment in your frozen carcass."

"Can I help that?" growled Tommy. It was an agony to him even to speak about women.

"If you can't," said Pym, "all is over with you. An artist without sentiment is a painter without colours. Young man, I fear you are doomed."

And Tommy believed him, and quaked. He had the most gallant struggles with himself. He even set his teeth and joined a dancing-class; though neither Pym nor Elspeth knew of it, and it never showed afterwards in his legs. In appearance he was now beginning to be the Sandys of the photographs: a little over the middle height and rather heavily built; nothing to make you uncomfortable until you saw his face. That solemn countenance never responded when he laughed, and stood coldly by when he was on fire; he might have winked for an eternity, and still the onlooker must have thought himself mistaken. In his boyhood the mask had descended scarce below his mouth, for there was a dimple in the chin to put you at ease; but now the short brown beard had come, and he was for ever hidden from the world.

He had the dandy's tastes for superb neckties, velvet jackets, and he got the ties instead of dining; he panted for the jacket, knew all the shop-windows it was in, but for years denied himself, with a moan, so that he might buy pretty things for Elspeth. When eventually he got it, Pym's friends ridiculed him. When he saw how ill his face matched it he ridiculed himself. Often when Tommy was feeling that now at last the ladies must come to heel, he saw his face suddenly in a mirror, and all the spirit went out of him. But still he clung to his velvet jacket.

I see him in it, stalking through the terrible dances, a heroic figure at last. He shuddered every time he found himself on one leg; he got sternly into everybody's way; he was the butt of the little noodle of an instructor. All the social tortures he endured grimly, in the hope that at last the cork would come out. Then, though there were all kinds of girls in the class, merry, sentimental, practical, coquettish, prudes, there was no kind, he felt, whose heart he could not touch. In love-making, as in the favourite Thrums game of the dambrod, there are sixty-one openings, and he knew them all. Yet at the last dance, as at the first, the universal opinion of his partners (shop-girls, mostly, from the large millinery establishments, who had to fly like Cinderellas when the clock struck a certain hour) was that he kept himself to himself, and they were too much the lady to make up to a gentleman who so obviously did not want them.

Pym encouraged his friends to jeer at Tommy's want of interest in the sex, thinking it a way of goading him to action. One evening, the bottles circulating, they mentioned one Dolly, goddess at some bar, as a fit instructress for him. Coarse pleasantries passed, but for a time he writhed in silence, then burst upon them indignantly for their unmanly

smirching of a woman's character, and swept out, leaving them a little ashamed. That was very like Tommy.

But presently a desire came over him to see this girl, and it came because they had hinted such dark things about her. That was like him also.

There was probably no harm in Dolly, though it is man's proud right to question it in exchange for his bitters. She was tall and willowy, and stretched her neck like a swan, and returned you your change with disdainful languor; to call such a haughty beauty Dolly was one of the minor triumphs for man, and Dolly they all called her, except the only one who could have given an artistic justification for it.

This one was a bearded stranger who, when he knew that Pym and his friends were elsewhere, would enter the bar with a cigar in his mouth, and ask for a whisky-and-water, which was heroism again, for smoking was ever detestable to him, and whisky more offensive than quinine. But these things are expected of you, and by asking for the whisky you get into talk with Dolly; that is to say, you tell her several times what you want, and when she has served every other body you get it. The commercial must be served first; in the barroom he blocks the way like royalty in the street. There is a crown for us all somewhere.

Dolly seldom heard the bearded one's "good-evening"; she could not possibly have heard the "dear," for though it was there, it remained behind his teeth. She knew him only as the stiff man who got separated from his glass without complaining, and at first she put this down to forgetfulness, and did nothing, so that he could go away without drinking; but by and by, wherever he left his tumbler, cunningly concealed behind a water-bottle, or temptingly in front of a commercial, she restored it to him, and there was a twinkle in her eye.

"You little rogue, so you see through me!" Surely it was an easy thing to say; but what he did say was "Thank you." Then to himself he said, "Ass, ass, ass!"

Sitting on the padded seat that ran the length of the room, and surreptitiously breaking his cigar against the cushions to help it on its way to an end, he brought his intellect to bear on Dolly at a distance, and soon had a better knowledge of her than could be claimed by those who had Dollied her for years. He also wove romances about her, some of

them of too lively a character, and others so noble and sad and beautiful that the tears came to his eyes, and Dolly thought he had been drinking. He could not have said whether he would prefer her to be good or bad.

These were but his leisure moments, for during the long working hours he was still at the exercises, toiling fondly, and right willing to tear himself asunder to get at the trick of writing. So he passed from exercises to the grand experiment.

It was to be a tale, for there, they had taken for granted, lay the treasure. Pym was most considerate at this time, and mentioned woman with an apology.

"I have kept away from them in the exercises," he said in effect, "because it would have been useless (as well as cruel) to force you to labour on a subject so uncongenial to you; and for the same reason I have decided that it is to be a tale of adventure, in which the heroine need be little more than a beautiful sack of coals which your cavalier carries about with him on his left shoulder. I am afraid we must have her to that extent, Thomas, but I am not asking much of you; dump her down as often as you like."

And Thomas did his dogged best, the red light in his eye; though he had not, and never could have had, the smallest instinct for story-writing, he knew to the finger-tips how it is done; but for ever he would have gone on breaking all the rules of the game. How he wrestled with himself! Sublime thoughts came to him (nearly all about that girl), and he drove them away, for he knew they beat only against the march of his story, and, whatever befall, the story must march. Relentlessly he followed in the track of his men, pushing the dreary dogs on to deeds of valour. He tried making the lady human, and then she would not march; she sat still, and he talked about her; he dumped her down, and soon he was yawning. This weariness was what alarmed him most, for well he understood that there could be no treasure where the work was not engrossing play, and he doubted no more than Pym that for him the treasure was in the tale or nowhere. Had he not been sharpening his tools in this belief for years? Strange to reflect now that all the time he was hacking and sweating at that novel (the last he ever attempted) it was only marching towards the waste-paper basket!

He had a fine capacity, as has been hinted, for self-deception, and in time, of course, he found a way of dodging the disquieting truth. This,

equally of course, was by yielding to his impulses. He allowed himself an hour a day, when Pym was absent, in which he wrote the story as it seemed to want to write itself, and then he cut this piece out, which could be done quite easily, as it consisted only of moralizings. Thus was his day brightened, and with this relaxation to look forward to be plodded on at his proper work, delving so hard that he could avoid asking himself why he was still delving. What shall we say? He was digging for the treasure in an orchard, and every now and again he came out of his hole to pluck an apple; but though the apple was so sweet to the mouth, it never struck him that the treasure might be growing overhead. At first he destroyed the fruit of his stolen hour, and even after he took to carrying it about fondly in his pocket, and to rewriting it in a splendid new form that had come to him just as he was stepping into bed, he continued to conceal it from his overseer's eyes. And still he thought all was over with him when Pym said the story did not march.

"It is a dead thing," Pym would roar, flinging down the manuscript,--"a dead thing because the stakes your man is playing for, a woman's love, is less than a wooden counter to you. You are a fine piece of mechanism, my solemn-faced don, but you are a watch that won't go because you are not wound up. Nobody can wind the artist up except a chit of a girl; and how you are ever to get one to take pity on you, only the gods who look after men with a want can tell.

"It becomes more impenetrable every day," he said. "No use your sitting there tearing yourself to bits. Out into the street with you! I suspend these sittings until you can tell me you have kissed a girl."

He was still saying this sort of thing when the famous "Letters" were published--T. Sandys, author. "Letters to a Young Man About to be Married" was the full title, and another almost as applicable would have been "Bits Cut Out of a Story because They Prevented its Marching." If you have any memory you do not need to be told how that splendid study, so ennobling, so penetrating, of woman at her best, took the town. Tommy woke a famous man, and, except Elspeth, no one was more pleased than big-hearted, hopeless, bleary Pym.

"But how the ---- has it all come about!" he kept roaring.

"A woman can be anything that the man who loves her would have her be," says the "Letters"; and "Oh," said woman everywhere, "if all men had the same idea of us as Mr. Sandys!"

"To meet Mr. T. Sandys." Leaders of society wrote it on their invitation cards. Their daughters, athirst for a new sensation, thrilled at the thought, "Will he talk to us as nobly as he writes?" And oh, how willing he was to do it, especially if their noses were slightly tilted!