

"I say, Nan, w'at's the reason you won't let me pay for his milk?" asked Tode, after a little.

Then it was Nan's turn to look uncomfortable, and the color rose in her cheeks as she answered, "I can pay now for all he needs. You know Mrs. Hunt gets a double quantity of bags and I work on them every day."

But this answer did not satisfy Tode. "That don't make no difference," he growled. "Don't see why you won't let me do nothin' for him, and he cast a gloomy glance at the baby, but Little Brother laughed up at him and the gloom speedily melted away. After a moment's silence he added, slowly, "It's comin' cold weather. He'll want a jacket or somethin', won't he?"

"He'll have to have some warm clothes," replied Nan, thoughtfully, "but I can get them—I guess."

Tode turned upon her fiercely. "I s'pose you'd let him freeze to death 'fore you'd let me buy him any clothes," he burst out, angrily. "I sh'd like ter know w'at's the matter with ye, anyhow. Has that measly Dick Hunt ben stuffin' ye 'bout me?"

Nan coloured again and dropped her eyes.

"Say—has he? I'll give it ter him next time I catch him out!" and Tode ground his heel suggestively into the gravel walk.

"Oh, Tode, don't! Please don't fight Dick," pleaded Nan. "How can you when his mother's so good to Little Brother?"

"Don't care 'f she is. He ain't," was Tode's surly reply. "He don't want you'n him to stay there."

Nan's eyes were full of uneasiness. "Did he say so?" she questioned, for she had noticed Dick's coldness and been vaguely disturbed by it.

The boy nodded. "Yes," he said, "he tol' me so. Said there's 'nough fer his father ter feed 'thout you'n him," and he pointed to the baby.

"But I work," pleaded Nan. "I pay for all we eat."

"But ye don't pay for the rent an' the fire, an'—an' everything," Tode replied with a note of triumph in his voice, "so now, ye better let me pay fer Little Brother an' then you c'n pay the rest."

Nan hesitated and her face was troubled. Finally she lifted her dark eyes to his and said bravely, "Tode, I guess I ought to tell you just why I couldn't anyway let you do for Little Brother as you want to. It's because—because you don't get your money the right way."

"Who says I don't? Did that Dick Hunt say so? I'll"—began Tode, fiercely, but Nan laid her hand on his arm and looked steadily into his face.

"Tode," she said, earnestly, "if you will look straight into Little Brother's eyes and tell me that you never steal—I'll believe you."

"I never"—began the boy, boldly; then he met a grave, sweet glance from the baby's big blue eyes, and he hesitated. The lying words died on his tongue, and turning his eyes away from the little face that he loved, he said gloomily, "What's that got to do with it anyhow? S'posin' I do hook a han'ful of peanuts sometimes. That ain't nothin'."

"Tode, do you want Little Brother to hook a handful of peanuts sometimes when he gets big?" asked Nan, quietly.

The boy turned his eyes again to the baby face and the hot blood burned in his own as he answered, quickly, "Course I don't. He won't be that sort."

"No, he won't, if I can help it," replied Nan, gravely.

Tode dug his toe into the dirt in silence. Nan added, "Tode, by and by, when he gets bigger, would you want him to know that you were a thief?"

When Tode looked up there was a strange gravity in his eyes, and his lips were set in an expression of stern resolve.

"I've got ter quit it," he said, solemnly, "an' I will. Say, Nan," he

added, wistfully, "if I quit now, ye wont ever let him know I used ter be—what you said, will ye?"

"No, Tode, never," answered Nan, quickly and earnestly. "And Tode, if you'll stick to it, and not steal or lie or swear, I shan't mind your helpin' me get things for Little Brother."

The boy's face brightened, and he drew himself up proudly. "It's a bargain, then," he said.

Nan looked at him thoughtfully. "I don't believe you know how hard it will be, Tode. I find it's awful hard to break myself of bad habits, and I don't s'pose you've ever tried to before, have you?"

Tode considered the question. "Guess not," he said, slowly, after a pause.

"Then I'm afraid you'll find you can't stop doing those bad things all at once. But you'll keep on trying, Tode. You won't give up 'cause it's hard work," Nan pleaded, anxiously.

"Nope," answered the boy, briefly, with a glance at the soft little fingers that were clasped about one of his.

When Nan went home he went with her to the door, loth to lose sight of the only creature in the world for whom he cared. As the door closed behind the two, he walked on thinking over what Nan had said. Much of it seemed to him "girls' stuff an' nonsense." As if a feller couldn't stop swipin' things if he wanted to! he said to himself.

As he went on he passed a fruit stand where a man was buying some bananas. In putting his change into his pocket he dropped a nickel, which rolled toward Tode who promptly set his foot on it, and then pretending to pull a rag off his torn trousers, he picked up the coin and went on chuckling over his "luck." But suddenly he stopped short and the hot color rose in his cheeks as he exclaimed with an oath,

"Done it again!" He looked around for the man, but he had disappeared, and with an angry grunt Tode flung the nickel into the gutter and went on, beginning so soon to realize that evil habits are not overcome by simply resolving to conquer them. Tode never had made any such attempt before, and the discovery had rather a depressing effect on him. It made him cross, too, but to his credit be it said, the thought of giving up the struggle never once occurred to him.

He found old Mr. Carey asleep in his chair, and he awoke him roughly. "See here!" he exclaimed, sharply. "Is this the way you 'tend to business when I'm gone? Some cove might a stole every book an' paper on the stand, and cleaned out the cash, too." He pulled open the drawer as he spoke. "No thanks to you that 'tain't empty," he grumbled.

He had never spoken so sharply before, and the old man was vaguely disturbed by it. He got up and walked feebly across the room, rubbing his trembling fingers through his grey hair in a troubled fashion, as he answered slowly,

"Yes, yes, bishop—you're right. It was very careless of me to go to sleep so. I don't see how I came to do it. I'm afraid I'm breaking down, my boy—breaking down," he added, sadly.

As Tode looked at the old man's dim eyes and shaking hands a feeling of sympathy and compassion stole into his heart, and his voice softened as he said, "Oh, well, it's all right this time. Reckon I'll have to run the business altogether till you get better."

"I'm afraid you will, bishop. I'm not much good anyhow, nowadays," and the old man dropped again into his chair with a heavy sigh.

The weeks that followed were the most miserable weeks of Tode Bryan's short life. He found out some things about himself that he had never before suspected. It was wholesome knowledge, but it was not

pleasant to find that in spite of his strongest resolutions, those nimble fingers of his would pick up nuts and apples from street stands and his quick tongue would rattle off lies and evil words before he could remember to stop it. The other boys found him a most unpleasant companion in these days, for his continual failures made him cross and moody. He would speedily have given up the struggle but for Little Brother. Several times he did give it up for a week or two, but then he staid away from the Hunts' rooms until he grew so hungry for a sight of the baby face that he could stay away no longer. Nan came to understand what these absences meant, and always when he reappeared she would speak a word of encouragement and faith in his final victory. Tode had not cared at all for Nan at first, but in these days of struggle and failure he began to value her steadfast faith in him, and again and again he renewed his vow to make himself "fit to help bring up Little Brother," as he expressed it.

It was one day toward the close of winter that Tode noticed that Mr. Carey seemed more than usually dull and listless, dropping into a doze even while the boy was speaking to him, and he went to bed directly after supper. When the boy awoke the next morning the old man lay just as he had fallen asleep. He did not answer when Tode spoke to him, and his hands were cold as ice to the boy's touch.

Tode did not know what to do, but he finally hunted up the policeman, who knew him, and the two went back together and found the old man dead. As no relatives appeared, the city authorities took charge of the funeral, the books and the few pieces of furniture were sold to pay the expenses, and Tode found himself once more a homeless waif. He had not minded it before, but his brief experience of even this poor home had unfitted him for living and sleeping in the streets. He found it unpleasant too, to have no money except the little he could earn selling papers. He set himself to face his future in earnest, and came to the conclusion that it was time for him to get into some better paying business. After thinking over the matter for several days he went to Nan.

"You know them doughnuts you made th' other day?" he began.

"Yes," replied Nan, wonderingly. Mrs. Hunt had taught her to make various simple dishes, and as Tode had happened in the day she made her first doughnuts, she had given him a couple, which he had pronounced "prime!"

Now he went on, "I don't want to sleep 'round the streets any more. I'm sick of it, but I can't make money 'nough off papers to do anything else. I'm thinkin' of settin' up a stand."

"A bookstand, Tode?" questioned Nan, interestedly.

"No—a eatin' stand—fer the fellers ye know—newsboys an' such. 'F you'll make doughnuts an' gingerbread an' san'wiches fer me, I bet all the fellers'll come fer 'em."

"Now that ain't a bad idea, Tode," said Mrs. Hunt, looking up from her work. "Of course the boys would buy good homemade food instead of the trash they get from the cheap eatin' houses, an' Nan, I shouldn't wonder if you could earn more that way than by workin' at these bags."

Nan considered the matter thoughtfully, and finally agreed to give it a trial, and Tode went off highly pleased.

It took him two weeks to save enough to start his stand even in the simplest fashion, but when he did open it, he at first did a flourishing business. In the beginning the boys patronised him partly from curiosity and partly from good fellowship, but Nan's cookery found favour with them at once, and "Tode's Corner" soon became the favorite lunch



counter for the city newsboys, and Tode's pockets were better filled than they had been since Mr. Carey's death.

For several weeks all went well, and the boy began to consider himself on the high road to fortune, but then came a set back.

One day his stand was surrounded by a crowd of boys all clamoring to be served at once, when a big fellow who had taken possession of Tode's newspaper route, months before, came along. He had never forgotten or forgiven the boy for getting the better of him on that occasion, and now he thought he saw a chance for revenge.

Creeping up behind the group of hungry boys, he suddenly hit one of them a stinging blow on the face, and as this one turned and struck back angrily at him, the big fellow flung him back with all his strength against Tode's stand. The stand was an old one and rickety—Tode had brought it secondhand—and it went down with a crash, carrying cookies, doughnuts, gingerbread, coffee, sandwiches, cups, plates and boys in one promiscuous mixture. Before the boys could struggle to their feet, Carrots, with his hands full of gingerbread, had disappeared around the nearest corner. There was a wild rush and a scramble, and when two minutes later, Tode stood gazing mournfully at the wreck, not an eatable bit remained. The boys had considered the wreckage as their lawful spoils, and every one of them had snatched as much as he could.

Later, however, their sense of justice led some of them to express, after their rough fashion, sympathy for Tode, and disapproval of his enemy's revengeful act. Besides, a few of them had enough conscience to acknowledge to themselves that they had not been entirely blameless. The result was that half a dozen of them went to Tode the next day and offered to "chip in" and set him up again.

Tode appreciated the spirit that prompted the offer, but he was also shrewd enough to foresee that should he accept it, these boys would expect favours in the way of prices and quantities when they dealt with him in the future, and so he declined.

"Reckin I can stan' on my own feet, boys," he answered. "I've been a-tinkerin' up the ol' stand, an' I'm a-goin' to start in again to-morrow. You fellers come here an' get yer breakfast, an' that's all the help I'll ask, 'cept that ev'ry last one o' ye'll give that Carrots a kick fer me."

"We will that!" shouted the boys. "We'll make him sorry fer himself!" And the next day their sympathy took the practical form that Tode had suggested, for every one of them that had any money to spend, spent it at "Tode's Corner," so that his stand was cleared again, but in a very satisfactory fashion—a fashion that filled his pockets with dimes and nickels.

(To be continued.)