

Colonel TODHUNTER of Missouri

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PROLOGUE.

Ladies and gentlemen, permit us to present Colonel Todhunter of Missouri and his home folks. They're our kind of people—just the plain, homelike, everyday sort, you know, with whom you can summer and winter and whom you can get to know and to like and to feel for when they run into trouble. There's plenty of love and romance in this story, with politics of the sort that will never go out of date—or let's hope so, anyway. There's nothing of the problem story in this tale of the colonel and his friends and foes; just a plain, straight, all the way through story of the honest, old fashioned kind that's worth reading.

CHAPTER I.

Colonel Todhunter Campaigns Among the Confederate Daughters.

COLONEL THURSTON T. TODHUNTER was undeniably the distinct embodiment of that picturesque native American type, the Kentuckian born and Missourian bred, as he entered old Judge Bolling's law office in Nineveh and saluted his white haired occupant with a cordially impressive wave of the hand in friendly greeting.

It was the morning of the day preceding the return from St. Louis of the Hon. William J. Strickland, law partner of Judge Bolling and now an avowed candidate for the Democratic primary nomination for governor of Missouri, and Colonel Todhunter's buoyant aggressive bearing was due to his delight that his lifelong friend had at last yielded to popular pressure and made open announcement of his candidacy. The scent of political battle in the Strickland cause was hot in the colonel's nostrils, and he sniffed its savors with militant joy.

Tall and erect, Colonel Todhunter carried his spare but stalwart frame with an ease that somewhat belied the grizzled gray of his hair and the white of his soldierly mustache and old fashioned "imperial." One could not easily have failed to recognize him for just what he was—a lineal descendant of that colonial Virginian stock whose grandsons followed the pioneer trail that led from the Old Dominion, first to North Carolina, then to Kentucky and Tennessee and thence to Missouri, a stock that has remained distinctively American since the time of its first taking root in American soil.

Colonel Todhunter laid his cane on Judge Bolling's office table as he en-



gray-blue eyes twinkled significantly. "Judge," he said, "the Nineveh Daughters of the Confederacy are givin' a picnic down at Indian Springs today, and they're goin' to set a dinner at a dollar a head for the benefit of the Confederate Soldiers' home at Higginsville, sub. I reckon all that ain't no particular news to you, but I thought maybe you'd enjoy goin' down there with me, sub. I'd be tickled to death to have you."

Judge Bolling's lips twitched. "You old devil, you! You couldn't any more keep from campaigning among the daughters than a yearling colt can keep from kicking up its heels in the pasture and you know it. You can't fool me."

"What I can't do and what a yearlin' colt can't do are two mighty different things, judge," answered Colonel Todhunter. "But I ain't connected with old Bill Strickland's campaign in no official capacity that I'm aware of, and if I see fit to turn a trick on my own hook, that's nobody's blame business but mine, sub."

Then the colonel chuckled. "I'll tell you one thing and that ain't two: I'd ruther have a woman's promise to make her husband vote for me or my candidate than to have a man's own word on a stack o' Bibles a mile high, sub. It's only up to the man to keep his word. But it's up to the woman to prove that she can manage her husband. And she'll do that, sub or die in the attempt."

Old Judge Bolling laughed. "Well, Thurs," he said, "I've just been fooling with you anyway. Mrs. Todhunter herself stopped at our house this morning and took Mrs. Bolling along with her, and she made me promise to come later, so it's all right. They'll have no excuse for saying that we're there in Colonel Strickland's interest, so you and I can go down to Indian Springs with a perfectly easy conscience."

An hour later old Judge Bolling and Colonel Todhunter emerged upon the picnic grounds in company, having driven down in the colonel's buggy.

Mrs. Todhunter, a white haired old aristocrat of the antebellum type, advanced to meet her husband and his friend. If Mrs. Todhunter had a fault it was that she tacitly regarded all Nineveh as being vassal to her social suzerainty and bore herself something as might the ruling monarch of some little principality. But this manner was not apparent in her bearing toward old Judge Bolling, whom she knew as being of her own caste.

"I'm very glad you've come, judge," she said laughingly. "And especially right now. It may take you and Colonel Todhunter both to make our Mary and young Tom Strickland behave themselves, sir. Tom has already kidnapped Mary away somewhere after I put them to work spreading tablecloths, and I've been vowing all sorts of vengeance on both of them. I don't approve of Tom's behavior at all, judge."

"It pains me to disagree with a lady, madam," replied the white haired old judge gallantly, "but I must say I approve of Tom's conduct in getting Miss Mary Todhunter off to himself at every chance, ma'am!"

"That's all very fine, judge," said Mrs. Todhunter, laughing and shaking her head, "but Mary has no business permitting Tom Strickland to monopolize her. She came out here with Stamford Tucker. I wouldn't blame Stam in the least if he got ugly about it."

Then Mrs. Todhunter laughed and pointed an accusing finger. "There they are now, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. Won't you go over there for me, judge, and tell Tom Strickland to behave himself and send Mary to me right away? There's no earthly use in Colonel Todhunter going, because neither one of them would mind a word he says!" Old Judge Bolling, laughing, moved off toward the young couple.

Mrs. Todhunter turned to the colonel. "You see, I know you like a book, Colonel Todhunter!" she said, her eyes twinkling. "You think everything young Tom Strickland does is just right, and you'd stand up for him quicker than his own father. And as for Mary, she can twist you around her finger any time. Don't think I place any dependence upon you where they are concerned, sir!"

Colonel Todhunter smiled calmly. "It ain't askin' you to, Mary," he retorted. "In the first place, I approve of Tom's fallin' as deep in love with Mary as he knows how. In the second place, interferin' in these here sentimental affairs is a mighty ticklish business, and I'm here at this picnic to have a good time. I'm a-goin' to have it, too!" Saying which, he beat a hasty retreat. But he had hardly succeeded in placing a section of the picnic crowd between himself and Mrs. Todhunter when a young girl came running along his trail, breathless, and with mischievous eyes.

"Mrs. Todhunter wants you to come right back to her, colonel," she announced. "She's short on men to help her, and she's awful busy. Wants you to come right away, sir."

Colonel Todhunter glanced whimsically at the messenger. "Ain't that just like a man's wife? She didn't want Judge Bolling when she saw him. Oh, no! It's me she wants. And I'll bet she's got the hardest job on the grounds picked out for me right now."

Then he turned to the amused girl. "Thank you, Miss Louise," he said ruefully. "Please tell Mrs. Todhunter I'll be there in two or three minutes."

Suddenly, but a little distance ahead, he saw Tom Strickland parting from Mary. They were a handsome couple, the colonel's daughter an exquisite type of the well born southern girl, her hair and eyes a rarely pure brown, her skin of almost baby fairness, a proud little mouth, a joyous bearing; the youth a tall and well built young country bred gentleman, his eyes a clear blue, his hair a sunburned yellow, his mouth and chin clean cut and firm. Colonel Todhunter approved heartily of both.

As Mary left her companion and went to join her mother, a second girl, with obvious intent, crossed Tom Strickland's path. She was of a different type, a plebeian beauty, black haired, with passionate eyes, full red lips, a suggestion of rich animal life in her movements.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Tom Strickland!" she said in a low tone, a little break in her voice. "You let me drop like I was something you despised just the minute you caught sight of Mary Todhunter. I wouldn't treat a dog that way, Tom."

There was something pitiful in the utter frankness of surrender with which the speaker's eyes confessed her liking for Tom Strickland. Colonel Todhunter knew her well. She was the granddaughter of old Rafe Doggett, who had been a private soldier in a Confederate regiment during the civil war. The family belonged to the class once known as "poor whites," but old Doggett had been a good soldier, and Lottie-May, his granddaughter, owed her membership in the Daughters of the Confederacy to the esteem in which he was held.

This was even more than a concession to inferior caste. The darkly beautiful country girl whom old Rafe Doggett's son had married in another state had gone away from home one day, leaving her baby daughter behind, and never returned. A picturesquely handsome "Indian herb doctor," who had been peddling his wares in Nineveh for some days and was known to have paid bold attentions to her, disappeared at the same time. Lottie-May Doggett, inheriting the same vital beauty of soft roundness, red lips and sensuous black eyes, had grown up in Nineveh, defiant, under the shadow of her mother's shame.

Tom Strickland stared at the girl, plainly surprised. "Why, Lottie-May," he exclaimed; "I won't let you think such a thing! I only hurried to say 'Howdy' to Miss Mary because she had just got here. Anyway—and here he smiled teasingly—"I could see with one eye that Stam Tucker was just wild to have a talk with you."

Lottie-May's eyes flashed. "Stam Tucker—shucks!" she cried scornfully. "I wouldn't wipe my feet on him, Tom, when you're around, and you know it. But I can tell you one thing—and here a note of proud vanity sounded in her voice—"tryin' hard as he is to git Miss Mary Todhunter to marry him, just like you are, Stam Tucker loves me more in one minute than he will love her in his whole lifetime."

"Lottie-May," ejaculated Tom angrily, "you mustn't talk like that. You ought to be ashamed. You've got no right to couple Miss Mary Todhunter's name."

"No, no, that's it!" interrupted the girl hotly. "I mustn't mention Mary Todhunter's name in the same breath with mine. It ain't right, you think? Well, I will—and I hate her! I hate her!"

"I didn't mean that, Lottie-May," protested Tom. "You know I didn't mean that!"

But the girl was gone. Hagar-like, she moved with a sort of outcast pride, her pretty head held high, her eyes flashing. In a moment she had disappeared in the crowd.

"Tom," said Colonel Todhunter, advancing, "you'd better be hurryin' to where Mrs. Todhunter is and make your peace for stealin' Mary away. You're in hot water, young man."

Tom Strickland flushed consciously. "Colonel, I reckon you heard what Lottie-May Doggett was saying to me?"

"I couldn't very well help it, Tom."

"Well, sir, you mustn't draw any wrong conclusions from what she said, Colonel Todhunter. Lottie-May's a good girl, so far as I know, and I've always felt sorry for her. But she's been brought up under a cloud, and it's made her sorter reckless and full of the devil. I don't believe she cares how black she paints herself, and I think too much of her to take her at her word about knowing that Stam Tucker loves her and makes love to her without thinking of marrying her. That's just her wild talk, sir."

"She's certainly grown up to be a mighty pretty girl, Tom," said Colonel

Todhunter. "And now that you've broached the subject and I've heard what I have, will you let me give you a word of advice?"

"Certainly, colonel," replied Tom. "Well, Tom, speakin' plainly, it's this. You better fight mighty shy of Lottie-May hereafter, sub. I don't mean anything against the girl. But she thinks a lot of you, and she don't mind lettin' you know it, and that makes a mighty dangerous situation."

Then, seeing that the young man was ill at ease and maybe inwardly resentful, Colonel Todhunter left him, to his obvious relief.

But the colonel himself shook his head doubtfully. "There ain't no bigger fool on earth, sub," he commended with himself, "than a healthy young chap in his twenties, with a head fuller of women than a squash is of seeds—and just about as soft as that there squash, too, sub. I don't like to think of Tom Strickland, with Mary on one side of him, and him lovin' the very ground she walks on, and Lottie-May Doggett on the other side of him and her lovin' him the way she does love him."

Even as he thus mused an approaching figure brought a humorous grin to Colonel Todhunter's lips. It was the martial figure of Captain Sim Birdsong of the Nineveh light infantry, but without the aggressive support of his regimentals and with dejection in every line. Sim's face was the tragic mask itself.

"Great name above, cap'n!" vociferated the colonel, mock apprehension in his tone. "what in thunderation is the matter, sub? You look like you'd lost your last friend on earth!"

"Colonel Todhunter," said Sim solemnly, "you're the very man I wanted to see, sub. I'm in a peck of trouble, and I'm a-goin' to ask you to tell me the best way out of it, if you'll be so kind, sub—you havin' more experience in the world than me."

"Sim," replied Colonel Todhunter. "I don't know whether I can or not, but I'll do my level best, sub. Specify your trouble."

"Colonel," responded Sim wearily. "It's Miss Angelica Exall's ma; that's what it is. I can't shake her off, sub. That old woman's worse'n the seven year itch. I can't get rid of her for a minute, Colonel Todhunter."

"What do you want me to do, Sim?"

"I want you to see if you can't toll Miss Angelica's ma away from her for a little while, colonel; that's what I want. The old lady hates me worse'n poison, so I don't come right out and face her, sub. I can see right now, plain as the nose on my face, that I've got to leave this picnic without sayin' a blessed word to Miss Angelica 'less'n somebody helps me out o' the fix I'm in. Couldn't you figure out some way of doin' it, sub? Miss Angelica's ma thinks a heap o' you."

Colonel Todhunter smiled grimly. "Sim, there ain't but one way, and that's by draggin' Mrs. Todhunter into it—I ain't got no business doin' that, but I'll try if I can make the rifle. I'll see if I can't fool Mrs. Todhunter into sendin' her to help with the dinner. But you got to hide out when that word is delivered, sub. From what you say Miss Angelica'll have to go right along with her ma if there's any sign o' you bein' in the neighborhood, Sim."

"Colonel Todhunter, that's a mighty fine idea, and I believe it'll work like a charm, sub. If I get any kind of a talk with Miss Angelica, colonel, I'll be grateful to you all the rest of my born days."

Colonel Todhunter chuckled, but made no reply. The next moment he was headed for the spot where his wife reclined the dinner arrangements.

"Well, well, Colonel Todhunter!" that lady cried. "I'm certainly surprised to see you, honey. But I reckon you must have heard that all the work's done and dinner's about ready, and you're too hungry to wait any longer."

Colonel Todhunter laughed into Mrs. Todhunter's bantering eyes. "Mary," he said, "I want you to do a good turn for poor Sim Birdsong."

"Why, what in the world's the matter with Sim? That boy hasn't gone and hurt himself, has he?"

"Mary," said Colonel Todhunter, "Sim's havin' the very old scratch of a time. He's tryin' to get just a minute's chance to court Miss Angelica Exall, and her ma won't let him have it. We got to help him. Don't you need old Mrs. Exall over here for a minute?"

Mrs. Todhunter contemplated her husband sternly.

"Well, I do declare, Colonel Todhunter," she ejaculated. "If I was such a dymed in the wool matchmaker as you'd be afraid to go out among young folks at all. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

But Colonel Todhunter held his ground manfully. He knew Mrs. Todhunter. Her bosom yearned even now to succor Sim Birdsong in his sentimental plight.

"You go and tell Mrs. Exall to hurry over here," she said. "It so happens that I do need her to help dish up the dinner. If I didn't I wouldn't send for her to save Sim Birdsong's life." But Colonel Todhunter knew better.

Half an hour later Sim layaid him in a grateful ambuscade. "Colonel Todhunter," he said, "it worked. And I've said some words to Miss Angelica Exall that I've been trying to say for a month, sub. I'll never forget you and Mrs. Todhunter the longest day I live, colonel."

Later in the afternoon Colonel Todhunter laughed to himself. "I'll tell you, sub," he concluded, "if old Bill Strickland ain't solid with the Daughters of the Confederacy here in Nineveh it ain't my fault. I ain't never worked so hard with the women since I courted Mrs. Todhunter—and she shore did make me work overtime and no mistake, sub!"

CHAPTER II. Mary Todhunter Entertains the Green Eyed Monster.

COLONEL TODHUNTER was seated in his favorite cane bot-tomed armchair at the far end of the wide "gallery" extending across the entire front of his home, an old fashioned colonial house of hospitable aspect. With Mrs. Todhunter he had just returned from the Daughters of the Confederacy picnic, and they were awaiting the arrival of Mary and her escort, Stam Tucker, before having supper.

The Todhunter residence stood on the crest of a gentle slope overlooking the pleasing sweep of Missouri countryside that intervened between the town of Nineveh and the colonel's own peaceful fields of growing corn. Mrs. Todhunter sat close to her husband, her hands folded in her lap, her happiness sweetened eyes contemplating the pastoral picture that had come to seem a vital part of her own life.

"They'd better be almighty quick about gettin' here if they know what's good for 'em," grumbled Colonel Todhunter wistfully. "I'm as hungry as a young hound dog this very minute. I'll be shot full of holes if my stomach don't feel like my throat's cut, Mary. I could eat a grindstone right now if somebody'd bust it up and pass it to me on a plate for real vittles!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Colonel Todhunter," smiled Mrs. Todhunter, "after that dinner you ate at the Daughters' picnic. I declare to goodness I was afraid they'd all think you never got anything fit to eat at home."

"When I'm ashamed of having a good appetite, Mary," replied Colonel Todhunter, "and 'specially if I ever come to that day when I ain't got it, I'll ask the Old Marster up above to call me to my heavenly home. Th' ain't no man got a right to turn away from wholesome vittles when the good Lord's been bountiful enough to provide 'em for that man's eatin'. Nature don't never give a man such a right. If he gets so he can't relish his food it's one of her punishments for his playin' tom fool with himself, sinnin' and skylarkin' around. And I ain't never seen no trifter at meal times that was fit to do a man's work."

Mrs. Todhunter laughed outright. "If you're eating to get ready for hard work, Colonel Todhunter, I'm certainly glad to see you eat hearty, because you're likely to be kept mighty busy nominatin' Colonel Strickland for governor of Missouri. You could nominate yourself a heap easier."

"Maybe I could, honey," replied Colonel Todhunter. "but Bill Strickland's a mighty popular man, all the same, and he deserves to be. I reckon I could be elected easler'n him, too, knowin' blame nigh every Democrat in Mizzoarah, but I'd make a mighty poor governor. You got to handle some all fired measly customers in politics, and I ain't got patience enough to handle 'em right. That's exactly where old Bill Strickland's got me beat. He can use all sorts o' men, crooked and straight, to gain honest ends—he proved it when he was chairman of the state committee—and that's what a governor's got to do to accomplish anything worth while. That's why I'm workin' for Bill Strickland. He ain't only my friend—he's far and away the best man for governor of Mizzoarah visible to the naked eye at the present writin'."

Mrs. Todhunter's comprehending eyes rested softly on the colonel's grizzled visage. "Thurston," she said, "I know better than that. I know better than you do why you'd rather have Colonel Strickland run for governor than to run yourself. It's because they couldn't pull you away from Nineveh and this old home of ours with a yoke of oxen."

Something of incredulous surprise flashed into Colonel Todhunter's face. Then his eyes swept lovingly across the familiar Missouri landscape spread out before him. He looked at Mrs. Todhunter and smiled.

"I reckon you've guessed it, honey," he spoke at last, almost wonderingly. "But I'll be tarred and feathered if I ever realized it until you told me. The good Lord above us, Mary, if I was elected governor and knew I had to live up yonder in Jeff City for four years I'd die of homesickness the first dash out o' the box. Th' ain't no money and no fame could pay me for doin' it, sub!"

Mrs. Todhunter's eyes gleamed with laughter. "That's you all over, Thurston, and I wouldn't have you changed a speck, not for anything in the world. No, not even if the dear Lord himself told me he was willin' to do it!"

Colonel Todhunter contemplated his wife gravely. "That's a mighty lucky thing, Mary," he replied then, his eyes twinkling just a trifle. "Lucky for you and a blamed sight luckier for me, 'cause I reckon I got to stay just like I am to the end of the chapter, honey."

At that moment the sound of young voices was heard from the twilight shadowed avenue leading up to the house. Then a buggy drawn by a high stepping bay mare came into view.

"That's Mary and Stam Tucker now," said Mrs. Todhunter. "And I'm glad Mary's home. I don't like that skittish horse Stam Tucker drives."

"That there mare o' Stam's ain't a bit more skittish than Mary Todhunter herself," Colonel Todhunter responded, chuckling. "And they're both a-goin' to give Stam the surprise of his life one o' these days. Just look at Mary honey! You'd think she was a kitten set right down by a saucer o' cream. She's so tickled. She's havin' as good a time with Stam Tucker as if they wan't no such young man as Tom Strickland in all the world. And right this minute she wouldn't give Tom Strickland's little finger for Stam Tucker's whole body and soul and all old

Eph Tucker's money throw in to boot!"

Mrs. Todhunter laughed lightly. "Mary's just beginning to receive company, Colonel Todhunter," she expounded. "And, like all girls, she wants to have a good time with her beaux. If it don't happen to be Tom Strickland that's handy it'll be Stam Tucker. And if it isn't Stam it'll be somebody else."

"Mrs. Todhunter," returned the colonel, "you're wastin' your breath tellin' me things like that. I know Mary Todhunter, and I know you when you was Mary Todhunter's age. If she ain't the livin' likeness of what you was then I'll eat my hat, so what can you tell me that I don't know already? Tom Strickland will have his hands full bringin' her to a standstill, I tell you!"

By this time Mary and her escort had reached the house and Stam Tucker was assisting her from the buggy. Mrs. Todhunter and the colonel advanced to meet them.

"You've got to stay to supper, Stam," said Mrs. Todhunter. "I know you must be good and hungry, and Colonel Todhunter will have old Jupiter take your horse around to the stable. You and Mary come right in now."

Stam Tucker gladly accepted the invitation, the colonel calling to old Uncle Jupiter, the faithful family retainer, to take charge of the bay mare, and then the Todhunters and their guest went in to supper.

But, hungry though he had declared himself and grateful as was the Missouri supper of fried chicken, egg



"You've got to stay to supper, Stam," said Mrs. Todhunter.

bread, butter beans and corn on the ear, with coffee made under Mrs. Todhunter's own supervision, Colonel Todhunter found time to divert himself vastly with the two young people.

"You boys and girls these days are a mighty low spirited lot," he announced gravely. "I was a-studyin' all of you at the Daughters' picnic, and I never in all my born days saw young folks miss so many chances for havin' fun."

"Why, father!" indignantly cried Mary. "I think we had the nicest kind of a time. I know I did, anyway. Didn't you, Mr. Tucker?"

"Indeed, I did, Miss Mary," promptly replied Stam Tucker, but with a discomforting recollection of Tom Strickland in his mind. "And it certainly was a big success for the Daughters, too. They must have made a lot for the Soldiers' home, I should think."

"They'd ha' made a lot more," said Colonel Todhunter, "if you young people had been more'n half alive. What the Daughters ought to ha' done was to have a good old fashioned fiddler out there and got up a big barn dance chargin' everybody extra for dancin'."

"A barn dance—oh!" mocked Mary her pretty nose uptilted. "I'd like to see myself takin' part in a barn dance just like we were living in the backwoods."

"You'd see yourself enjoyin' a mighty fine frolic if you did, young lady," declared the colonel valiantly. "Good old Virginia reels and cotillions and a mazurka and schottische or two sandwiched in between 'em ain't to be sneezed at, let me tell you."

The speaker glared at the scornful young couple. Then he chuckled. "And you ought to ha' played kissin' games, too," he resumed—"Spin the plate and 'Pleased or displeased' and 'Heavy, heavy, hangs over your head.' Great name above, th' ain't nothin' like them there old games for makin' young people real sociable."

Mary tossed her head disdainfully. "Kissing games, indeed!" she cried. "If that ain't old fashioned, I'd like to know!"

"'Course it's old fashioned," agreed Colonel Todhunter, the light of relishful teasing in his eyes. "So is kissin' itself, for that matter. But I won't trust none of you Nineveh girls behind the door when there's any kissin' goin' on, old fashioned or no old fashioned, Miss Mary Todhunter!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, father!" cried Mary, mightily indignant. "What in the world will Mr. Tucker think?"

"I don't care what Stam thinks, it's true all the same," returned Colonel Todhunter gravely. "And what's in it to be ashamed of? The trouble with you young folks nowadays is that you are skeered to death o' bein' natural. You know you've got to play the old game, but you think you're smart enough to play it in a new way and you ain't. All you do is to spoil the



"You can't fool me!"

tered and executed his gesture of courteous salutation.

"Well, judge," he said jubilantly, "the fight's begun, and we've got to rally around old Bill Strickland to a fare you well, sub! I-gad, sub, I ain't a-goin' to be content with nothin' less'n whippin' that there Stephen K. Yancey outfit to a frazzle, sub!"

Old Judge Bolling smiled at the colonel's zestful hailing of the imminent combat. "You're right, Colonel Todhunter," he agreed. "And the sooner we get plump into the middle of the fight the better, sir. It can't begin too soon to please me."

Colonel Todhunter nodded. Then he