

He had an insane love of rum, but did not love the landlord. In other years Peter Tindar and himself had loved and wooed the sweet maiden—Ellen Goss—and he won her, leaving Peter to take up with the vinegary spinster who had brought him the tavern, and he knew that lately the tapster had gloated over the misery of the woman who had once discarded him.

"Why don't you send him home?" demanded Mrs. Tindar, with an impatient stamp of her foot.

"Hush, Betsy! He's got money. Let him be, and he'll be sure to spend it before he goes home. I'll have the kernel of that nut, and his wife may have the husk!"

With a snuff and a snap Betsy turned away, and shortly afterward Tom Darcy lifted himself up on his elbow.

"Ah, Tom, are you awake?"

"Yes."

"Then rouse up and have a warm glass."

Tom got upon his feet and steadied himself.

"No; I won't drink any more to-night."

"It won't hurt you, Tom—just one glass."

"I know it won't!" said Tom, buttoning up his coat by the solitary button left. "I know it won't."

And with this he went out into the chill air of midnight. When he got away from the shadow of the tavern, he stopped and looked up at the stars, and then he looked down upon the earth.

"Ay," he muttered, grinding his heel in the gravel, "Peter Tindar is taking the kernel, and leaving poor Ellen the worthless husk—a husk more than worthless! and I am helping him to do it. I am robbing my wife of joy, robbing my dear children of honor and comfort, and robbing myself of love and life—just that Peter Tindar may have the kernel and Ellen the husk. We'll see!"

It was a revelation to the man. The tavern-keeper's speech, meant not for his ears, had come on his senses as fell the voice of the Risen One upon Saul of Tarsus.

"We'll see!" he said, setting his foot firmly upon the ground; and then he wended his way homeward.

On the following morning he said to his wife: "Ellen, have you any coffee in the house?"

"Yes, Tom." She did not tell him that her sister had given it to her. She was glad to hear him ask for coffee, instead of the old, old cider.

"I wish you would make me a cup, good and strong."

There was really music in Tom's voice, and the wife set about her work with a strange flutter at her heart.

Tom drank two cups of the strong, fragrant coffee, and then went out—went out with a resolute step, and walked straight to the great manufactory, where he found Mr. Scott in his office.

"Mr. Scott, I want to learn my trade over again."

"Eh, Tom, what do you mean?"

"I mean that it's Tom Darcy come back to the old place, asking forgiveness for the past and hoping to do better in the future."

"Tom," cried the manufacturer, starting forward and grasping his hand, "are you in earnest? Is it really the old Tom?"

"It's what's left of him, sir, and we'll have him whole and strong very soon, if you'll only set him at work."

"Work! Ay, Tom, and bless you, too. There is an engine to be set up and tested today. Come with me."

Tom's hands were weak and unsteady, but his brain was clear, and under his skillful supervision the engine was set up and tested; but it was not perfect. There were mistakes which he had to correct, and it was late in the evening when the work was complete.

"How is it now, Tom?" asked Mr. Scott, as he came into the testing-house and found the workmen ready to depart.

"She's all right, sir. You may give your warrant without fear."

"God bless you, Tom! You don't know how like sweet music the old voice sounds. Will you take your place again?"

"Wait till Monday morning, sir. If you will offer it to me then, I will take it."

At the little cottage Ellen Darcy's fluttering heart was sinking. That morning, after Tom had gone, she had found a dollar bill in the coffee cup. She knew that he left it for her. She had been out and bought tea and sugar, and flour and butter, and a bit of tender steak; and all day long a ray of light had been dancing and shimmering before her—a ray from the blessed light of other days. With prayer and hope she had set out the tea-table, and waited; but the sun went down and no Tom came. Eight o'clock—and almost nine.

Hark! The old step! quick, strong, eager for home. Yes, it was Tom, with the old grime upon his hands, and the odour of oil upon his garments.

"I have kept you waiting, Nellie."

"Tom!"

"I didn't mean to, but the work hung on."

"Tom! Tom! you have been to the old shop?"

"Yes, and I'm bound to have the old place, and ——"

"Oh, Tom!"