

THE LANDLADY'S DAUGHTER.

He had not even the distinction of being ugly. He was one of those drab-coloured featureless people whom one would never credit with being clever, interesting, or even wicked; and there are very few of us who do not judge the book by the cover. He was rather beneath the medium height, he was fat, and his clothes were not of a cut to display his figure to advantage. And the worst of it was that he possessed a keen critical faculty, and was a good deal ashamed of that common-place exterior of his. Moreover, he had expensive tastes, for he came of a good, though impecunious, family, he liked cultivated society, fine surroundings, well-cooked dinners, and he possessed sixty pounds a year, and an uncle from whom he had expectations; but he had had the expectations so long that he had come to take them as a matter of course, and would have been surprised to see them change into realities.

If his uncle had not had rheumatism he might have died sooner, but the rheumatism made him so careful that it seemed to have given him the gift of immortality. There were times when Tom felt tempted to lure the old gentleman out on a showery day, and leave him for an hour or two on a damp seat in the park; but he did not yield to this evil suggestion, nor to that other more subtle one, to provoke him to wrath after a heavy dinner and bring on the apoplexy which, to judge by the small space there was between his head and shoulders, would easily attack him. No, he let the old man live his selfish life in his bachelor apartments in Piccadilly, while he lived his unsatisfying one in the dull room in a low part of the Edgware Road neighbourhood, for which he paid the weekly rent of seven and sixpence.

He was very unhappy, poor Tom; he was oppressed by his sordid surroundings, depressed by his own lack of social qualifications, impressed by the stern realities of existence. Moreover, he was in love; so much in love that when of an evening he leaned out of his window and smoked the pipe which was his one and only luxury, he looked away from the busy, ragged, noisy crowds, which quarrelled and fought, and made their purchases, and did their rough courting, up to the still heavens, and felt at peace; so much so that he heard not the oaths or the laughter, or the loud talking beneath him, but only the low tones of Helen Power speaking to him kindly in the dimly-lit conservatory; so much so, too, that as she was his world, and all the other world but as a shadow across his path, he felt it would be better that death should come to him than that he should have to live without her.

For he would have to live without her. He knew that well enough. Even if he already possessed the money which one day might be his, he would have no chance, and certainly he had none as it was. Talented, wealthy, beautiful and good, there were great and clever and distinguished men who would be proud to have her for a wife, and he would never have dared even to let her know that he loved her, for though he was but too well aware of the fact, he did not wish her to tell him that it was impossible she should care for him. Out of a mistaken kindness, a City friend had asked Tom Chendale to go and stay with him and have a little shooting, and Tom, who was weak in some respects, could not refuse the chance of two weeks' ease and comfort and pleasure, though he knew from bitter experience that he would feel out of place, and balance his enjoyment by suffering, for to a sensitive poor man there are many little things that go to make up a social martyrdom, and which would never occur to one uninitiated into the positive pain of not being able to give a servant a decent tip, and of having to keep his underclothing under lock and key, lest a curious eye should perceive its lamentable deficiencies.

It was while on this visit that Tom met Miss Power, and lost at once his heart, and his peace of mind. He was so altogether beneath her notice that he thought it kind of her to pay as much attention to him as she did. It was a mistaken kindness, arising out of her pity for the small, ordinary man who ate so much at meal-times, and said so little. There were two other gentlemen staying in the house, both society men, one of them brilliantly

clever, and they were willing to do more than flirt with her; perhaps it was to escape their attentions that she asked Tom Chendale so many questions about himself, and proved how sympathetic a listener she could be.

The holiday came to an end. He had shaken hands with her, and walked the length of the great drawing room with tears in his eyes, due to the consciousness that he would in all probability never see her again, and a miserable feeling that he must be cutting but a sorry figure before her in that old short coat of his, which had seen so much service. The pathos of daily life often arises from details which may seem ludicrous to lookers on.

He had gone back to his seat in the office and to his dingy lodgings, to his insufficient meals and his monotonous evenings, with a weight of pain which yet was mingled with joy, and which he would not have been without; he had gone back to dream idle day dreams, to wish for the impossible, to taste the bitter sweet of hopeless love, to lie wide-eyed and sleepless on his bed, and to greet the dawn with tears, to awaken to the depths of hitherto unimagined passion in his nature, and to be for ever transformed and to see a transformed world, all for love of a woman.

He had no friend in whom to confide, he had very little to distract his thoughts; he had no taste for low pleasures, and he could not afford expensive ones; he had liked books once, but now he could not fix his attention on them; and there was no vent for the restlessness which possessed him, no mode of changing the current of his thoughts or of drowning thought altogether. One evening he went to see the same friend who had invited him into the country; they played cards and there was much whiskey; at first poor Tom was incapable of taking much interest in the game, but by and by he grew lively, even noisy. He felt gay and light-hearted as he had not done for weeks, and that though he lost—but they played so low, the loss was inconsiderable. He went home humming a song. The next day his friend gave him a small parcel; he was as good-hearted a fellow as ever lived. "Tom," he said, blushing, "you praised my whiskey last night, and—and you seem to like it, old chap. I wish you would accept a bottle. It comes in useful sometimes."

Tom accepted it gratefully. He knew it was the whiskey which had put so much spirit in him last night, in more senses than one; he took it home with him, and he opened it that evening.

He had been poor before, but now he seemed to be harder up than ever, and shabbier, and less respectable, and by and by his possessions began to diminish; the silver-mounted pipe, which his uncle had given him in a fit of unwonted generosity, found its way to an "Uncle," who was the brother of neither his father nor his mother, and the little teapot of Worcester China, which had been a valued memento of the latter, performed the gymnastic feat of going "up the spout," while one or two odds and ends of some slight value, which had been wont to lie about on his mantel-piece, were now, as he informed the landlady's daughter, "put away."

The landlady's daughter was sorry. She took a tender interest in Tom, did Polly Winter. She knew he was a gentleman, and she pitied him because he was lonely, and because, from experience she knew what it was to be out of harmony with one's surroundings, and the mere fact that beyond the greetings of ordinary courtesy he never was familiar with herself, was, according to Polly's standard, a point in his favour. And so it was a real grief to her when one evening he met her on the stairs and muttered some indistinct remark to her, smiling idiotically. She looked at him with astonishment, and then she ran into her room and threw herself on her bed, and cried. And from that day she regarded Tom anxiously when she saw him, and still more anxiously did she regard the bottle which he kept in his cupboard, and which was renewed more often than she cared to see. He never attempted to hide the bottle, and there was no need to keep it under lock and key, because the Winters had proved themselves so honest in the matter of butter and bacon, to say nothing of matches, that they were above suspicion.

One day Tom heard at the office that Miss Power was engaged to be married to a Member of Parliament.