

The Sacrifice of Enid

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"If anything went wrong, and she called out, I could hear her in this still air," he said to himself, though what interval must elapse between his descending Sharp Tor and ascending Three Barrows, he did not trouble himself to think about.

But nothing did go wrong, and he spent the hours in musing what life might mean to him if he had a wife who would fulfil his fancies and dreams.

"I am aware people would think me mad, but I would marry her to-morrow. I should not be mad. Intuition isn't given us for nothing."

He watched her until she was completely out of sight, turning towards Willowbridge with a heavy heart, for he knew she was in grave peril. At breakfast Miss Ormonde remarked upon his pre-occupation.

"And now give an account of yourself," she said looking archly at him. "You left me at the door of this house with the scantest civility, and I had expected you to play tennis with me after dinner."

"It would have been too dark. I was obliged to leave you on business connected with one of the mill hands. In a large concern like this there is a great deal to see to. I wish all the people to look on me as their friend."

But he felt guilty as he made this speech, for he knew that if any other young woman connected with the factory had chosen to spend the night on the Moor he would not have watched over her, and would, after ineffectually remonstrating with her on her folly in no mild terms, have discharged her.

"Never mind, my dear," said Mr. Westlake, "don't waste your time on a busy man. We are going to have up some young men from Plymouth for fishing, in a day or two, Army and Navy men, and they will make Mr. Ronald look sharp."

His son smiled, he was very glad to be relieved from attendance on Miss Ormonde, since yesterday he had found this irksome, or, to be more correct, positively distasteful.

"I am very glad they are coming," he said, "they will probably play tennis much better than I do."

"But they won't ride or fish better," replied his mother jealously.

"My dear mother," said Ronald, "why not state once for all that I am an Admirable Crichton, that everything I do is perfection, and then the company needn't be bored by hearing any more about it."

"And everything you do that I know about is perfection," returned his mother undaunted.

"I hate perfect men," said Miss Ormonde.

Seeing that a retort was on his wife's lips Mr. Westlake said: "And I know what those fellows are. They will come into my house and ride my horses, and fish in my river, and make themselves confoundedly agreeable, and then they will go away and think they have done me a great favour."

"They won't get nicer meals anywhere than here," said Mrs. Westlake, looking on her well-spread breakfast table with its handsome china and silver, with pride.

"My dear, don't you know that in the present day all young men think the best of everything only their right. When I was young I was thankful for a beefsteak I can tell you. You have never known any hardships, Ronald."

"No, indeed. I must be off now." "How you do grind at that factory!" said Miss Ormonde. "I call that a great hardship."

"There are worse things for a man than hard work," he replied, and went out.

He knew that it was hopeless to expect a letter yet from Mary Williams, but all day, in spite of scrupulous attention to business, the subject was in his mind. He was certain she would keep her promise if she crossed the moor in safety, but the if was terrible to contemplate. "Perhaps

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MARY WILLIAMS comes to the office of Ronald Westlake, paper manufacturer, to ask for work. He hesitates to employ her, because she looks too genteel for mill work. There is a special mysterious reason for her wanting employment for herself, and also for her lover. Westlake really falls in love with her. Mary Williams starts a long journey on foot back across Dartmoor — to Plymouth. Riding out, Westlake meets her and tries to induce her not to sleep on the moor. Failing in that, he keeps watch over her, without her knowledge.

she would have let me transact her business for her and carry that heavy parcel," he perpetually worried himself by thinking, although in his heart he knew that any offer of this kind would have been refused.

Meanwhile she was proceeding steadily on her way. She studied her compass attentively, and walked by the Erme until she reached the source. It was then that her real difficulty began. It was as Ronald had said. There was not a path, nor a track, nor a house, not a human being, only these far-stretching wild tors around her. At first the solitude was restful, and then it became awful, she longed for the sight of a friendly human being, although, secrecy being her object, had she seen anyone advancing she would certainly have concealed herself.

It was a very warm day, and she felt her strength sadly overtaxed before the day was over. But although her feet were swollen and her limbs aching she pursued her way sternly, and by wonderful good fortune did not once deviate from the right route. She arrived in the neighbourhood of Two Bridges towards nightfall, breathing a prayer to God of devout thankfulness that the worst part of her journey had now been accomplished, that no mist had come on, that no man, whether friend or foe, had met her. She had been entirely unobserved.

SHE determined once more to sleep out of doors: to go to an hotel would excite remark and defeat her object. She found a sheltered spot on a tor, and again established herself for the night.

But this time she could not sleep. She had no mossy bed, and the ground was very hard, she was greatly overtired, and she was very nervous. Every distant noise made her tremble, stories of ruffians who had overpowered and murdered helpless women crowded on her recollection. The support which Ronald's presence had given her was now wanting, while physical fatigue caused her determination to waver. The night seemed terribly long, although there were only five hours of darkness, and she was thankful when morning dawned. She ate her sandwiches, now grown very dry, and drank some water from a rushing stream, then looked cautiously round before continuing her journey. It was very early, and no one was in sight.

After a time, keeping in the shadow of the stone wall which skirts the high road, she arrived at a poor cottage hidden from the road by a hollow. She sat down and watched it steadily.

At the expiration of an hour a man came out of the door, a dirty, unkempt Devonshire labourer of middle age. When he was close beside her, she addressed him.

"I want to speak to you, and I don't want anyone to see or hear us. I will make it worth your while."

"I wonder at anyone making anything worth my while," said the man gloomily. "Good luck don't come my way. No one can see or hear us here," he added, moving behind the shelter of some rocks.

"You are very poor?" she asked, an expression of positive joy on her face, which the man thought heartless.

"Poor? I should say so. I have a wife and seven children to keep on ten shillings a week, and my wife always ailing. We don't see a bit of meat from one week's end to another. It's nothing but work, work, work, and then I can't make two ends meet."

"Can you hold your tongue?" The man was shrewd, he partly understood.

"You mean if it's made worth my while?"

"I do. It is nothing wrong that I wish you to do, but you must swear to secrecy."

"I will swear to anything. Swearing don't trouble me."

She turned away for a moment, feeling greatly humiliated. Were these the agents she was forced to employ, men who stood at nothing? Could such a course be right? But she battled down her scruples mentally: "I thought it all out long ago; I must go on."

"I want you," she said to the man, "to take care of this parcel and hide it away in your house so that not a soul will know it is there."

"There ain't many hiding places in my house."

"Then you refuse?" said Mary, her heart sinking.

"No, I don't. But I won't guarantee as no one will find it. I will put it in the roof, and do the best I can."

She was now nervously agitated. "Listen to me attentively. I will give you ten pounds now for keeping it. One of these days a man may call for it. It may be a week hence, it may be a year, it may be never. But if you deliver it up to the right man with the seals unbroken, you will receive one hundred pounds as soon as he is able to reach a large town."

"ONE hundred pounds for keeping a parcel! What sort of a man?" he asked suspiciously.

She hesitated. "A man in uniform—who will come here and ask you for it and mention the name on it."

"Ah, I understand," replied the man, whose wits were keen, "and mayhap there would be a reward offered for that man, and those that sheltered him would find themselves in trouble. A hundred pounds ain't none too much."

"There would be little risk," she said pleadingly: "he would go away almost as soon as he came."

"I'll do it. Don't distress yourself, my dear," for tears were in her eyes. "I've got girls of my own. The money will be a godsend to me. But suppose I am out when he comes?"

"Oh," she exclaimed in alarm, "I never thought of that," and tears now fell on her face.

"Don't cry, my dear," said the man with genuine kindness, "it will be all right. I must tell my wife. She is never out and she won't talk."

"Are you certain?" "I am quite certain she don't want to lose a hundred pound. If we talk there'll be an end to it."

"There will. I am grateful to you besides for your kindness. If—if things turn out well I shall not forget you."

"As to not doing wrong I'm not so sure about that. I believe I am doing wrong, and putting myself within the reach of the law. But I'll risk it."

She gave him ten pounds, and then handed him the parcel, saying earnestly: "You swear to be true?"

"I swear it," and he laid his rough toil-stained hand on hers and she knew that he would keep his word.

"I believe you. I trust you," she replied. "If you never see me again you will know that I shall remember both you and your family."

She saw him re-enter his cottage with the parcel, and then she took the road towards Princetown, a mile distant.

It was still early, there was no traffic, the townspeople were not up. But a young tourist about twenty years of age in a grey suit, came riding along on a bicycle. An idea struck her sud-

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