

The Sacrifice of Enid

CHAPTER VIII.

The Chief Butler.

DONALD returned after some quarter of an hour, looking grave but serene. Daylight was fast departing, but a huge red moon had risen and shed her light over the moorland; the scene was beautiful.

"Look," he said, and stood beside her in silence, adding after some minutes, "I am afraid we must be going back soon. Let us cross the rivulet and take the other track home."

There were stepping stones, but they were rough and slippery.

"The stones are unsafe," he said. "May I?" and without waiting for a reply he lifted her in his arms and walked through the water. His feet of course were very wet, though he was not conscious of anything save her presence; his voice was grave and quiet, but she had felt his heart beating as he set her down.

"I want to say something to you," he said. "You will not visit my words on me by refusing to continue in my office."

"I suppose that is what I ought to do, but I do not wish to if you want me to remain. I trust you not to repeat them."

"I thank you warmly. I wish you to remain, I wish it fervently. And I will do the best I can for your lover, should he come."

He unconsciously laid some slight emphasis on the word "Should."

"I think he may come soon. You will not set him to pick rags?" she said, looking dangerously fair in the moonlight.

"I will not. If he is worth it I may perhaps advance him to some position of trust."

Her face became pale. "I thank you from my heart, but—but you must not do that. He will be content with a low position. He would prefer it at first."

"I thought perhaps he might do clerk's work, and sit in your office."

The positive grandeur of this concession was not lost on her, but it was not fully appreciated at once, for to him it meant the loss of almost all he held dear, her society, and not only that but the presence of a hated, because successful, rival.

"You are very good," she replied, "but it will not do. You would not let him read your confidential letters?"

"Certainly not. But is he not educated? Can he not do accounts?"

"He is highly educated, still—it will be best to give him manual labour."

Human nature will out after unnatural restraint. "I am very glad to hear it," Ronald replied heartily; "he shall have manual labour."

His spirits rose suddenly, he laughed as he pointed out the gambols of some ponies. "I shall always remember this evening," he said, "for I don't suppose I shall ever come here again with you. Look how solemn the lights are now that both moon and stars are shining, although daylight has barely faded."

"Some scenes are too beautiful, I think."

Both minds were in complete accord, she turned to him, and continued speaking from her heart. "I never used to realize as I do now how in spite of all outward circumstances our life is given us to work out each for himself."

"I am not sure that I understand you."

"I mean that each trivial action and thought makes up the sum of character, so character works itself again into action and thought indefinitely. In another life, no doubt, the same circle is continued, infinitely widened. It is this that causes the perplexities of all theories on the subject. To get away from ourselves is impossible whether in this world or any other, the only thing to do is, I suppose, to strive after good—which is God."

"I suppose so," he assented reverently.

"Mr. Westlake, in offering to do your utmost to-night, both for myself and my lover, you have striven after

By MRS. HARCOURT-ROE

Author of "A Man of Mystery," "The Silent Room," Etc.

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. Mary Williams goes on her way. Along the road she leaves a parcel with a cottager which she pays him to keep till it is called for by a man; afterwards a bicycle which she buys on the road. At Princetown she visited the gaol—and watched the convicts on the plantation; afterwards returned to Willowbridge and the paper mill. Her duties at the mill are much enlivened by the peculiar attentions of her employer who becomes very unpopular with his fiancée, Miss Ormonde, in consequence. He offers Mary a position as typist. Two people find themselves each between two fires. Mary accepts the offer. A great case of sentiment works up between Westlake and his employee. He proposes marriage. She refuses—concealing the reason.

that good. I am more than touched. I feel humble before you."

"No, no, no," he replied. "No, no," and there was silence between them until he wrung her hand and parted from her before entering the village street.

CHAPTER IX.

Alarm.

FOR some little time after this Ronald was very grave and silent.

He spent as little time as possible with Mary, giving her her work briefly and, quite unconsciously, speaking in a cold, business tone. In truth, he was afraid of himself, and determined that she should have no cause to complain of him after his declaration.

He attended to her comforts as scrupulously as before, she was never without some mark of his care, but he had given up indulging in the long talks which were a delight to both. It had been his custom to place the amount of her salary every week in an envelope and put it on her table, he did not like the idea of giving her money direct, but one day when it was due he forgot it.

He came into her office the next morning. "I am so sorry I forgot this, Miss Williams," he said gravely, depositing a sealed envelope in its usual place by the typewriter. "I cannot imagine how I could have been so careless. Perhaps I have been a little worried of late."

"I assure you that one day makes no difference to me. Mrs. Mason would trust me," she replied, although the fact that he had forgotten anything concerning her gave her a curious feeling of pain. He had spoken coldly, and she raised her eyes to his with a troubled look in them.

"You are not looking well," he said, with a return to his usual voice and manner. "Have you also been worried about anything?"

"I have been greatly worried. I am living now in perpetual anxiety."

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Unfortunately no."

After this he resumed his conversation with her; both had given up the light tone they had formerly indulged in at times, but they seemed drawn together, not as lovers, but as old tried friends, whom no trifling disagreement or untoward circumstance could really part.

On leaving the mill one afternoon, she met Simpson, the foreman. That good man's large face became very red, he looked at her with reproach.

"Do you happen to read your Bible, my dear?" he asked to her surprise.

"Certainly I do."

"And did you ever read about Joseph, and how he helped the chief butler to get out of prison?"

"Oh, yes, I have read that," replied

Mary smiling, though puzzled.

"Ah, you have read it. Then you remember 'yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.' Now, that's exactly like you."

"Indeed, Mr. Simpson, I cannot see how I resemble the chief butler in any way. I do not think I have forgotten anyone."

"You have forgotten me. Wasn't it me as got you that situation, where you work half time, and, for anything I know, get double pay, and are treated as a lady should be, and yet I dare say you never once say to yourself: 'It's Simpson as has got me this; it's Simpson I owe it to! No, you never speak to me now.'"

"My dear Mr. Simpson," said Mary laughing, "how can I speak to you when I never see you except in the distance? Let me assure you that I retain a most kindly recollection of your goodness to me when I was in the mill, and—" she hesitated, then added boldly, still with a smile in her eyes, "and of your getting me a very comfortable appointment. Let me prove to you that I am not like the chief butler. Will you come and have tea with me to-morrow?"

"Have tea with you, my dear?" asked Simpson, greatly astonished, for it was known that she received no visitors whatever.

"Yes; do. Tea at six, or any time you like."

"I will come."

HE was delighted. As soon as he could frame some reason for seeing the master he told him of the invitation.

"You are a fortunate man, Simpson," said Ronald laughing. "I am quite sure she would not invite me to tea under any circumstances whatever."

"No, sir, because you are the master."

"Ah, no doubt."

He knew that society etiquette would have been ridiculous in the foreman's eyes, and that, save for the fact of Ronald being the master, there appeared no reason to Simpson why any young woman should not invite any young man to a friendly meal.

"I hope she does her work well and is a good girl, sir, because you see I feel responsible like for recommending her."

"Yes, the appointment rests on your shoulders," Ronald replied with assumed gravity. "She is a good girl enough," he added carelessly, "and works hard. Altogether I find her very useful."

He retailed the conversation to Mary, who laughed heartily.

"I asked him because I saw his feelings were hurt. No, I shall not invite you to meet him. I must give him something very nice," and she told Ronald the anecdote of the chief butler.

"There is not anything special to be got in the village. Why don't you take in a few of these things?" he asked, pointing to the boxes of crystallized fruit and other delicacies.

"So I will. Thank you for suggesting it."

The tea-party involved some amount of preparation, for it was not a case of a cup of tea and a wafer of thin bread and butter. Mary had previously indulged in the extravagance of an afternoon tea-cloth and a small set of china, for these things added vastly to her everyday comfort, and when Mr. Simpson appeared at half-past six the table wore an inviting aspect. There were flowers and fruit prettily set out, but there were also slices of beef, and ham and eggs, and cakes.

He had changed his working clothes for his Sunday best and he carefully spread his large handkerchief over his knees as he sat down. Then he shook his head.

"This won't do, my dear. This is a very nice tea, but it's extravagance in a girl with your wages."

"No, indeed; you must remember it is my first party, perhaps my last here. Surely I may give a friend a

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