

The Sacrifice of Enid

CHAPTER IV.
The Factory.

By MRS. HARCOURT-ROE

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

"SO you wish to see the works?" said the foreman. "It ain't usual you know before a hand commences."

"I must obey Mr. Westlake's orders," said Mary with a smile; "I did not ask to see the factory."

Like all men who had dealings with her, the foreman felt an instinctive desire to protect her, although she had no lack of force of character.

"I'm afraid, my dear," he said, "that you have been putting the master's back up somehow. Since I have been here I never heard him speak so sharp about one of the girls that work. Take my advice, don't do so again, for he is a good master and a kind one."

"He made me angry," said Mary laughing, "he thought I could not do the work, and I feel sure I can. You will help me, won't you?"

"That I will, you'll learn fast enough; there ain't no difficulty in it. My two girls worked here until they married. Now these are the unwashed and unsorted rags."

The spectacle was not beautiful; the work would be most unsavoury.

"Surely it is not men's work to pick and sort these!" she exclaimed ruefully, adding in her own mind, "and he so fastidious!"

"It ain't skilled work; as to who sorts 'em that's as the master chooses. But look at the difference when they're washed."

He showed her the great troughs where the rags were washed again and again, and prepared with lime until they assumed the appearance of cakes of whitening; when, after being dried, they were torn apart, again washed, and rolled out into long sheets. The watermark impressed her more than the whole of the rest of the processes.

"How clever!" she exclaimed, as she watched the various devices being indelibly stamped amidst running water, and then saw the long sheets passed over many rollers until dry, when they were pressed and cut into square sheets.

A number of women and girls were at work in this part of the factory. They handed the square sheets of paper to companions who placed each separately between sheets of metal. When a sufficient number had been piled one on another a man removed them for further pressure.

"That will be your work," said the foreman.

"That is easy enough," said Mary. "Very likely, but see how quick they are. How exactly they place the metal on the paper. You must learn to be quick and exact."

"I will," she replied firmly.

He spoke to an older woman who assigned her a place, she began her factory work forthwith. In one way it was easy enough, but, as the man had said, it required quickness and exactitude, and to keep up with the rate at which the paper was handed to her she had to put forth her utmost powers. The standing too she found very trying, being totally unaccustomed to it, and before an hour was over she felt her shoulders and limbs ache. But she continued her work bravely, although she was thankful when the dinner bell rang and she was at liberty to rest.

"You are to go to the master's office," said the foreman. "I've been telling him you'll do. Now be a good girl and don't be saucy to him, for he won't stand it from anyone."

Ronald was standing up, his face was very grave.

"I have ventured to ask you to come here again," he said, speaking in low tones, "to beg you to forgive me for my conduct and words to you. I have never spoken so roughly before to the lowest mill-hand amongst the women. Pray pardon me. My only excuse is that I was nearly driven beside myself by anxiety on your behalf. You know as well as I do that you are my master, not I yours."

"Pray say no more, Mr. Westlake," said Mary in a tone of deep feeling;

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.

"you have been all that is kind and good. I don't wonder at your feeling momentarily irritated, for the mystery I am compelled to observe gives you every reason for vexation. I know that you must treat me as one of the mill-hands, but I know also that you are my true friend. Did you suppose I really thought you would be harsh and cruel to me? I knew you would not."

"I assure you I was very angry with you."

"I know you were, and I daresay I shall make you very angry with me again."

"I must beg that you will not. You have the power of making me feel so intensely that I scarcely know what I am about; you stir depths in my nature that I did not know I possessed."

"I must ask you not to speak to me like this," she said gravely. "I am sorry I made you so angry. I will try not to do so again." She had chosen to refer to his anger, but she knew well enough that it was not to this he had alluded. "And I must also ask you not to send for me again unless really necessary. It will excite remark. As your servant you know that I am obliged to come."

"I wish you would not speak of yourself as my 'servant'; it hurts me more than I can tell you. But you are right, I must not send for you for some time. Surely though I can see you somehow."

SHE shook her head. "I am afraid not. If I am in any difficulty I will appeal to you; perhaps by letter."

"Ah!" he exclaimed joyfully, "the very thing. Yes, you must write to me, and I may surely write to you sometimes."

"Only if necessary."

"By the way, I have not yet asked you how you like your lodgings?"

"At present fairly well: they are far better than I have any right to expect."

"Do you like a farm?"

"I scarcely know yet; I have been there so short a time."

"I do not myself care for pigs squeaking and wandering beneath your windows, and chickens running under your feet as you enter the house, and cows lowing at all hours of the night, accompanied by the crowing of cocks and other hideous noises, neither do I think you enjoy the cream and butter so much when you have too intimate an acquaintance with the dairy—but it is purely a matter of taste."

"Ah," she replied somewhat sadly, "no doubt your place of residence is a matter of taste."

He again felt that he had been a brute; how was it possible for anyone with a weekly income that could be counted by shillings to be fastidious and exacting.

"At all events," he continued, "you will be far quieter than in the noisy street, and I daresay you prefer the society of animals to that of factory hands and small shopkeepers."

He looked at the clock. "Good gracious, what a selfish brute I am!" he exclaimed with enormous compunction. You will have no time for your lunch, for I dare not let you begin by being unpunctual. Please oblige me by taking a glass of wine now and a biscuit."

He produced a pint bottle of champagne from a cupboard and opened it. "You look pale and as if you wanted something to eat. It is all my fault and you must show your forgiveness once more by drinking the wine."

She complied with his request. "Now go home quickly," he said, "you will still have time to reach home and eat something before joining the hands."

He watched the path anxiously and was relieved to find that no one was about.

"I must not send for her," he repeated more than once. "I thought myself a strong man, and I am proving myself a weak fool."

A week elapsed during which Mary kept steadily to her work. It was very trying; the long hours in the heat, the perpetual standing, the common companionship were all irksome, but she bore up bravely and the foreman told her she had been a good girl and done her work well. At first the hands assailed her with rude speeches, but, finding she smiled and looked at them with good-tempered curiosity as if she had been studying the manners and customs of the inhabitants of another world, they soon discontinued this amusement, and contented themselves with mocking her manner and gait, speaking of her as My Lady.

ON the first day they gave her a valuable hint. The principal part of her dress was of studied plainness, but she had not deemed it necessary to alter her footgear and was wearing expensive French shoes and embroidered stockings. Her eyes were quickly opened to her mistake by remarks which savoured more of plainness than politeness.

"Who gave you your shoes my dear? Did you buy them out of your wages? What a thing it must be to have good friends!" and so on.

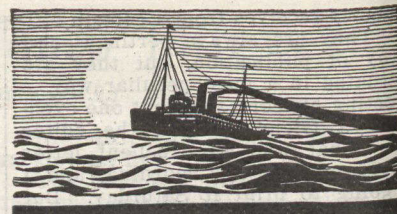
She went to the village shoemaker's as soon as the day's work was over and purchased the clumsiest pair of boots she could find; she had great difficulty in finding any to fit her at all. Her face wore a rueful expression as she put them on, but she said to herself resolutely: "It is only another small sacrifice to make for his sake."

She had seen Ronald Westlake passing through the mill, as was his daily custom, but he had not spoken to her, and on Sunday, although he looked in her direction at church several times, she resolutely avoided meeting his eye. She spent her evenings at the farmhouse, generally in the quiet orchard, or sometimes she would ramble by the river and watch the water rushing over the boulders beneath overarching trees, but when out of doors she dreaded lest some factory young man should come up and ask her to "keep company" with him, or make some equally dreadful remark, therefore did not feel safe. She would occasionally wander on to the Moorland. Once she saw him in the distance and forthwith turned into the road towards Harford Bridge. His society would have been a great solace in her desolation but she knew that she must not indulge in it, not only for her own sake but for his.

She was aware that it was as he had said, that she was his master, nor he hers, that if she chose she could obtain unlimited power over him, and yet at the same time that he held some strange mystery over her which she was by no means minded to encourage.

"My whole heart is another man's," she said; "oh that he had had the strength of Mr. Westlake."

Ronald was chafing inwardly. He had never been so restless before. He went into the mill on every excuse, he wandered past the farm gates, he took long rambles after dinner, but speech with Mary Williams he did not ob-



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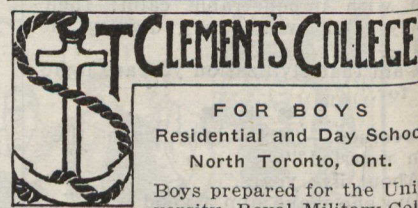


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