

not to eat them. Her oak coffer was never without choice fruit.

"Who takes it away when I do not eat it?" she asked one day.

"I do. I throw it away."

"How wicked of you, when so many people would be glad of it!"

"I can't help that. When you don't eat it I suppose it's not good enough for you, and so, of course, I don't offer it to anyone else. It goes into the river, and furnishes me with a text on the sermon entitled *The Impossibility of Pleasing Some Women.*"

"Have you adopted a theory that I consider nothing good enough for me? If so, I must be a very ungrateful girl."

"If you were really grateful you would accept my humble offering in the spirit in which it is made."

"Which means that in the future I must eat everything. I obey your orders, sir."

"When you call me sir I know you are laughing at me."

"I am laughing at you, sir."

"Yes," he replied, his deep feeling suddenly expressing itself in rage. "I know you are. I know that if I were to wear my life out in efforts to serve you it would not weigh one jot with you, and I should be of no more consequence to you than I am now."

He went into his office and shut the door.

She resumed her work, going on without a moment's cessation, a pink spot of colour burning in her cheeks. At half-past five she collected her pile of papers, and, after putting on her hat, took them in to Ronald.

"I have finished the work, Mr. Westlake."

HE had been fidgetting for the last half hour, wondering why she did not make her appearance. He longed for her to do so, but he would not intrude upon her. He was heartily ashamed of his outbreak.

"Finished it!" he exclaimed. "How you must have worked! You must not work overtime, Miss Williams," he added gravely.

"I very often work undertime. Good afternoon."

"I beg you to remain a moment," he said in a low tone. "Once more I entreat your pardon. Why do you rouse me as you do?"

"I have nothing to forgive. Once more, good afternoon."

"The coldness of your voice shows me that you have not forgiven me. Can you not be generous?"

"I think this conversation a little uncalled for, Mr. Westlake. I have already told you that I have nothing to forgive."

She went away as she spoke. But she had purposely assumed this coldness, for she was afraid to be kind. She felt very unhappy, and, instead of going back to the farm took the road behind the factory, and wandered on to the moor.

Ronald was wretched. "She works me up until I am beside myself," he said, "and then I behave like an unmitigated brute, knowing as I do that she must see me." His self-reproach was perhaps somewhat exaggerated, but it was very genuine.

She had reached the moor when he overtook her. The evenings were closing in fast, and already the sunset lights and shadows were falling over the grand hills. As soon as she saw him a charming smile appeared on her face, and his own lit up with joy. She had forgiven him, and he had the sense to know that further apology would be out of place.

"As you are with me," she said, "I think we might walk to Sharp Tor. It is too far for me to go alone, now that the days are getting shorter."

Both thought of her journey across the moor, when she had slept two nights in the open air, but neither alluded to it. It was a most painful subject to both—to her because of the actual facts; to him because he sought in vain to realize what reason there could be for such an extraordinary proceeding.

"This moor makes me feel," she said. "I could watch it for hours. It is like the sea, having always some new beauty."

"I am very glad you are of one mind with me about it. It is so good of you to let me walk with you this evening.

It is the first time you have allowed me to do so. I wish I could show you more of the beauties of the moor. Do you ride?"

"I used to do so. I am very fond of horse exercise."

"Why should you not ride with me here?"

She smiled. "I think you forget our respective circumstances. It would slightly surprise the mill hands to see me set out in a habit accompanied by you."

"I could meet you outside the village."

"It is out of the question, Mr. Westlake."

"Not just once?"

"Not once."

"Would you do so if we were differently situated?"

"I would do so with pleasure. It would delight me to gallop over the moors on one of those ponies, but the thing is impossible. On reflection you will see this."

"Perhaps you are right. Yet why should you, in your youth and beauty, be cut off, as you said the other day, from nearly everything that makes life pleasant. Where are your friends? What can they be made of?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed sadly. "It feels to me as if my feet were in a net. In coming here I thought that I should work for some hard, business employer, and live amongst the poor, unknown and unnoticed—in that case matters would have been simple enough—but, instead of this, you treated me from the first as a friend, and I seem now incapable of distinguishing right from wrong. I should like to tell you everything; perhaps I ought to do so. I feel that I am deceiving you in accepting your kindness; as it might be, if you knew everything, you would shut your doors upon me. Alter your conduct; treat me as an ordinary clerk, and then perhaps I shall not feel this compunction. But one thing I must tell you. My people are not to blame—from their point of view—and whatever I have gone through has been from my own voluntary choice."

"I SHUT my doors upon you?" he returned, speaking with excitement. "I must speak. I can be silent no longer. From the first day I saw you I have not only loved, but worshipped, you. You are never out of my thoughts, morning, noon, or night. When you choose to exercise it you have the power of driving me almost beside myself. Were you about to marry a man in your own station I would be silent, let it cost me what it would; but I entreat you to consider well whether you are doing wisely, in marrying a man who has not even sufficient determination to come and claim you. Give him up, and make me the happiest man in the world by marrying me."

"You must not speak to me in this way again, Mr. Westlake," she said in low tones, and he saw that her usually bright eyes were dim with tears. "And you are mistaken in two points. He is not below me in station, and he is coming the very moment he can do so."

"The mystery is beyond me," he continued, "but I will trust you now as I have trusted you from the first. Are you quite sure you will not marry me?"

"I am quite sure," she replied in low troubled tones.

"Then from henceforth my lips shall be sealed. I hope I have some manliness about me, and I will not persecute you. I expected this answer—that is to say, I should have expected it had I intended to propose to you, which I did not—but still it is a heavy blow. Give me a little time."

He turned his back on her and went a little distance away. She remained standing, looking at the ranges of hills across the valley with a heart full of pain. As before, droves of ponies ran about merrily, the stately red cattle grazed around, the heather was still in bloom, but she looked on all around her with unseeing eyes, the perplexed tangle of existence oppressing her.

"So good to me, so kind, so manly, and clever, and honourable, and yet it is my hand that causes him this pain."

(To be continued.)

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