

The Sacrifice of Enid

CHAPTER VI.

Arrangements.

By MRS. HARCOURT-ROE

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

"THIS young woman is the only one," said Simpson, as he entered the office; "I've been telling her she'll have to work hard, and mayhap you'll increase her pay before long."

"She will certainly have to work hard," said Ronald with a smile. "I won't detain you now, Simpson; I must see if Miss Williams is suitable."

"Factory work ain't suitable to her, sir," Simpson replied as he departed, "she looks fit to drop sometimes when the day is over."

"And you never told me the work was so trying," said Ronald reproachfully when the door had closed upon the foreman.

"The standing was a little trying during the heat, but it was the same for me as for everyone else. What would have been the use of complaining? Would you have provided arm-chairs for all of us?"

"I am afraid I should not."

There was an expression of delight in his eyes as he spoke; he was rejoiced that he could now secure her society every day.

"And surely the conditions of your factory are very superior to those of a large number of mills; there is plenty of air, and every reasonable comfort."

"I believe our mill to be very superior to a great many others. All the same it isn't fit for you. How glad I am that you are coming here. Guileless Simpson!"

"You will remember, sir," she said demurely, "that the appointment is altogether Simpson's."

"I will remember it. Are you going to call me 'Sir'?"

"I certainly am during business hours."

"And out of them?"

"I shall not see you."

"I suppose you will have too much of my society in them."

"Very likely, sir," she replied mockingly.

"Now as to business. Have you mastered the machine?"

"I have. It is very easy to learn. I cannot write fast as yet, but I shall devote as much time as possible to practising out of office hours."

"You will do nothing of the kind. You will write quite fast enough for me. Besides, you can't practise out of hours, for the machine will be here. Now as to pay."

"I am not worth much at present."

"You will receive market price, neither more nor less. You will begin with two pounds a week, and I make you a present of the machine. If we quarrel at the end of a week it will be yours to take away."

"I accept your handsome present with gratitude. I will pick a quarrel with you, and then offer my services, and my machine, to someone else."

"You had better not."

"Seriously, Mr. Westlake, you must not give me so much at first. I am not worth it. It is the price of a skilled typist, while I am only a learner."

"Am I the master of the mill or are you?"

"You are very much master."

"As I unfortunately had occasion to tell another young lady who was staying in our house. She went away this morning in consequence."

"Do you mean that handsome girl who went over the factory with that young officer?"

"Yes. I am indeed sorry that you were subject to any annoyance, and so was Mr. Haselfoot. You will surely be glad to avoid strangers."

"I am delighted to avoid them."

"You will work in the inner room at transcribing my letters and papers. Sometimes I shall come in and dictate them to you, otherwise you will be entirely undisturbed. Your hours will be from ten to one, and from two

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.

to five. I hope six hours will not be too much, but you needn't work all that time, you know."

"I certainly shall, if there is any work to do."

He smiled; he was resolved that some of the time, at all events, should be spent in talking to him.

"What a determined young lady you are!"

"I am obliged to be with so determined a man. The hours are by no means long, and I repeat I am not worth so much money yet."

"But you are. I shall give you my confidential letters to write, and trust you as I should trust no other person on the premises. You will have it in your power to betray my trade secrets to other employers, and injure my business vastly."

"BUT why do you trust me? As I said before, what possible grounds have you for doing so?"

"Are our senses given us for nothing? You are true as steel. You could as soon betray a trust as a statue turn into a living being."

"I think," she said softly, "my one virtue is that I am straightforward—as far as circumstances will allow me to be. Oh, Mr. Westlake, suppose one day you turn round on me and reproach me for having kept you in the dark. But it is not my wish to do so."

"I will never reproach you."

She looked at the clock.

"Do you know what time it is, Mr. Westlake? I must be off at once or I shall be late for the factory."

"You are not going back to the factory. I will speak to Simpson. Take a holiday this afternoon, and come tomorrow morning at ten. Oh, I forgot to tell you; Saturday is a half day, and whenever you want a holiday you have only to ask for it."

"Thank you, sir," she replied with merry eyes, and the mocking air which always made him feel he was her humble slave instead of her master, and that she knew it well.

"But you must ask deferentially, you know."

"Certainly, sir; I will go on my knees to you, sir, if you desire it."

"That is a very safe 'If,' and you know it."

"I do know it, sir, and I have the honour to wish you good morning."

Her radiant air died away as soon as she had left the mill premises. It was as if a heavy weight had been lifted from her shoulders to quit the uncongenial toil and society of the mill, and every day she appreciated Ronald's kindness more, let it proceed from his regard for her or not. She knew that he would treat her with every deference, and never presume on their respective positions by word or deed, still the load of care which she always carried could never be wholly removed. She might forget it for a

short time, but the bitter, black facts remained, and could not be set on one side, or more than momentarily forgotten. Her life, as she regarded it, must continue to be one of trouble and anxiety.

"I'm afraid your dinner's cold," said Mrs. Mason, who met her at the gate of the farm house. "I thought you were in as usual, and put it on the table."

"It doesn't matter at all," replied Mary. But she was tired after her morning's work, and the coarse tablecloth, the black-handled blunt knife, the worse fork, the common crockery ware, all filled her with disgust, which was not lessened at the sight of the dish of half-cold meat and potatoes mixed, with fat floating on the top of the gravy.

She pushed it away and ate some biscuits and ripe currants, then took herself severely to task as she suddenly remembered the convicts she had seen engaged at Princetown in hard toil.

"You are not a bit better than some of them," she said to herself. "What you want is to be treated to some real hardships as they are, and perhaps after you had eaten prison fare of suet pudding and gruel, with at times only bread and water when you committed the smallest offence, you would not grumble at good meat which is cold through your own fault. And if you were shut up for a week in solitary confinement, with only a plank bed to sleep on, it would, no doubt, be the best thing for you, and would teach you to value such blessings as are left to you."

She laughed, and finally went upstairs, and indulged in a good cry. Simpson was quite right when he had said factory work was unsuitable to her. In spite of her fine constitution it had already affected her nervous system. Happily that time was over.

Ronald Westlake returned home joyful. He was in the highest spirits, and both he and Haselfoot roared with laughter at one another's anecdotes.

"You are two heartless fellows!" said Mr. Westlake. "You ought both to have been in tears over Louise's departure. You made a great mistake, Haselfoot, in not inducing her to stay. Are you aware she has thousands of pounds in her own right, an uninterfering mother and no father?"

"But what has that to do with me?"

"I thought perhaps it might have something to do with you. Never heard of such a thing in your life before, did you; no naval man ever has."

"I will not profess to misunderstand you," said Haselfoot with a smile, for no one ever took Mr. Westlake's jokes in bad part even if they objected to them, as they were given with such evident good-heartedness; "but as far as I am concerned I like to be captain in my own ship, and I intend to be."

"AND you think Miss Ormonde would take command? Well, I daresay she would. Ronald seems to be of your opinion."

Ronald made no reply; he did not think it necessary to publish his disagreement with Louise, even if she had mentioned the fact herself. He followed his mother when she left the table instead of going back to the office.

"Simpson has been telling me," he said, "that my handwriting is the despair of the mill, it is so vile, and that I ought to engage a typist. I have accordingly done so."

"Dear me! that's quite a new-fangled notion," returned his father; "in my time people could write plainly without all these modern inventions. Still I must say it may be an improvement when anyone writes like you do."

"He writes a beautiful hand," said Mrs. Westlake, "not a bit like a business clerk would. It is a thorough gentleman's hand."

"I grant you it is excellent to look

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