



**SIR WILLIAM'S  
WILL**

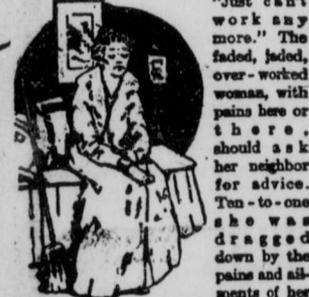
"What about him?"  
"He has been on the drink again, sir," said Merrill. "He has been away nearly a week; but he has come back again to-day—well, scarcely sober; not fit to put on a machine, anyway. I told him I should speak to you, sir; and I think it's my duty to do so. I am very sorry to have to make a complaint against any man, especially against Rawdon; for he was one of our best hands, until one of the girls, Seaton, went off. He's been a changed man since then; changed from a steady, useful workman to a regular—a regular raff. You have been very good, very lenient to him, sir; but he hasn't taken advantage of it, and the time has come when something ought to be done. He has gone quite beyond the mark this time—just narrowly escaped being taken up by the police for drunk and disorderly, in a row in Meadon street. He ought to go, sir; he ought, indeed."

Hesketh began to write his letter. "Send him in to me, will you please, Merrill?" he said, quietly, and with his usual courtesy to his subordinates. When Merrill had gone, Hesketh's pen stopped, and without raising his head, he gazed at the paper thoughtfully, as if he were trying to come to a decision; then he shook his head and resumed his writing, as a man's heavy step was heard and a knock came to the door. In response to Hesketh's cold "Come in," a young man entered.

He was a fine, strong-looking young fellow, was still good-looking, though heavy drinking had made its ravages in his face. His blue eyes were bloodshot, and a discolored circle round his left eye was cut, there was a heavy bruise on his cheek and forehead, and his fair hair was in a tangle of disorder; he wore a red scarf in place of a collar, and his clothes were torn and mud-stained. In short, he looked as if he had just come from a debauch of beer and cheap whiskey and fresh from a street fight.

He stood by the door, restlessly turning an old and muddy cap in his hands; and Hesketh let him wait for a minute or so, for Hesketh knew the value of the chastening influence of suspense. At last he glanced up sideways from his letter and said coldly:

"So you are getting into trouble again, Rawdon?"



"Just can't work any more." The faded, faded, over-worked woman, with pains here or there, should ask her neighbor for advice. Ten-to-one she was dragged down by the pains and ailments of her

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Rawdon eyed him with sullen expectancy, but said nothing. "Merrill tells me that you have been away from the works for the better part of a week. Drinking, I suppose?"

"Yes; I have been drinking, Mr. Hesketh," said Rawdon, almost defiantly.

"And fighting?" said Hesketh. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Perhaps I am, when I'm sober," retorted Rawdon, morosely.

Hesketh leaned back in his chair. "And you were once one of the best workmen we had," he said.

"Once; that's a long time ago, Mr. Hesketh," said Rawdon, with a short laugh. "Yes; I was steady enough at one time; I had something to work for, something to live for. It is easy enough to be steady and stick to your work when it's like that. But when everything is taken away from you, when you feel as if—the voice broke and his hands clutched his cap—"as if the world had turned black and your life with it, it don't seem worth while to be respectable. And you want to forget; and a man can't forget such a trouble as mine, unless he's drunk. That's what makes me go on the drink and take to fighting. Why, look here, Mr. Hesketh, you'd do the same, if you was in my place." He stretched out his hand with the cap in its appealingly. "If you'd lost, if you'd been robbed of your sweetheart, the girl you loved better than your wife, the girl who promised to be your wife, you'd take to drink, I can tell you."

"I think not," said Hesketh, with a cold smile. "I should remember that she was not worth fretting about. You should console yourself with the reflection that there are other girls in the world besides this—what is her name?"

"Mary—Mary Smeaton," replied Rawdon, as if it hurt him to speak her name.

"Ah, yes," said Hesketh, "I remember. Well, Rawdon, I advise you to forget her."

"Do you think I haven't tried?" said Rawdon, fiercely. "Ain't that what I've been trying to do? But I can't!" He groaned desperately. "She's with me all day, all night! And it ain't as if she'd died. I could have borne that. I could have thought of her kindly, could—could have waited until I'd gone to join her; for she's have been mine still. But to deceive me, to have gone away six weeks before our marriage! It's that that turns life bitter to me. It's that I can't forget, forgive. Though, mind, I'm more bitter against him, the man who lured her away, than I am against her. She was a good, straight girl till he got hold of her."

Hesketh looked gravely, calmly, before him; a little wearily, but patiently, as if it were his duty to listen to his men's troubles and to help them, if he could.

"You never discovered the man, never found out who he was?" he asked, not curiously, but again as if it were his duty to show some sympathy.

"No, Mr. Hesketh," replied Rawdon. "I never got any clue to him. I don't know where to look. You see I had no suspicion, she deceived me so well up to the very last; and I never saw anyone hanging about her. All the men knew that she and I were going to make a match of it; and they'd have been afraid—" He drew a long breath and stretched his broad chest. "No; I haven't a thing to guide me. She went off like a thief in the night—why, she kissed me, as usual."

His voice broke; then suddenly his face flushed redly, he flung his hand, still grasping the dirty cap, above his head and said between his clenched teeth: "But I'm still looking, still waiting; and I shall find him some day. And when I do—when I do!"—the words seemed to choke him, he had to struggle for breath—"I'll have a reckoning with that man, Mr. Hesketh, and when I've done with him, the mother that bore him wouldn't know him!"

"Tut, tut!" said Hesketh, leaning forward and taking up his pen. "All this wild talk is extremely foolish, Rawdon. You know that as well as I do. I should have thought, judging by your past, that you were too sensible a man to go to ruin because a girl, evidently not worthy of you, has de-

ceived you and gone astray. But that is your affair. I am very sorry for your trouble, and I would help you if I could; but, as you must see, yours is one of those cases in which no help is possible. I sent for you to tell you that I cannot tolerate your behavior. If I were to do so, I should be setting a precedent that would have the most disastrous results. If I permit you to go on to drink, to misbehave yourself, I must permit every man in the works to follow your example, if he chooses to do so. Frankly, Rawdon, we shall be very sorry to lose a good hand; but I am afraid you must go."

The man caught his breath, and, fumbling with his cap, drew it across his lip.

"I thought you'd say that, Mr. Hesketh; for they wouldn't take me on anywhere else, if I was turned out of the Pit Works. Not that I should care if I was by myself; I'd as lief die in a ditch as lead this dog's life; but I've got a mother, as you know. It'll mean breaking up the home, it will be hard on her. Give me—give me another chance, Mr. Hesketh," he pleaded, moistening his battered lips.

Hesketh was writing rapidly now, and he glanced sideways at the man as if hesitating; suspense again. At last he said coldly, as if he were yielding against the promptings of duty:

"I'm inclined to give you another chance, Rawdon, for your mother's sake. You have been at the works since you were a boy; and until this affair—but we won't hark back to that. But I will stretch a point, and give you another chance. Give me your promise that you will reform and conduct yourself as you used to do, and you may go back to your work."

Rawdon drew a long breath of relief, and he looked at the bent head gratefully.

"Thank you, sir, thank you, Mr. Hesketh. You have been very good to me, better than I deserve, and I'll try to turn over a new leaf, try to forget"

"Yes; try to forget," said Hesketh, with a preoccupied air, as he bent over his letter. "That's the best advice I can give you. The best resolution you can make, you may go to your machine now."

Hesketh wrote on until the door had closed on the penitent; then he suspended the pen and looked straight before him with narrowed eyes. After a moment or two, he went back to the letter; but there seemed to be some difficulty in it; and presently he rose and shutting the door after him, went into the sitting room, and poured out some brandy from a decanter on the ugly sideboard. But he arrested the glass on its way to his lips, flung its contents into the fire, and muttering, with a smile of self-entombment:

"I should be as bad as that fool Rawdon," he returned to the office, and took up his work again.

CHAPTER VI.  
"Behold, the first strawberries of the year!" exclaimed Mollie, as she burst—whenever that impetuous young lady moved—a tornado followed in her train—into the dining-room, which, in the Bramley's time, had been called the ladies' boudoir, where Clytie sat writing at an antique bureau which would have brought water to the mess with my own hands." She extended a pink palm upon which two strawberries, scarcely more pink, reclined, "and under the forbidding eyes of Mr. McWhirtle, the head gardener. I foresee there will be trouble between the aforesaid Mr. McWhirtle and my-

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self. He appears to labor under the oppressive delusion that the gardens, the numerous hothouses, and the fruits and flowers thereof, belong to him. That is the point on which Mr. McWhirtle and I differ. They belong to you; and I have just told him so as pleasantly but as firmly as the occasion demanded. He remarked that he would collect a dish for the table. I informed him, with that sweetness of tone and manner which is my chief charm, that I and you, preferred to take them singly, as spies and not battalions. Result—the great McWhirtle goes off vanquished and discomfited, and the conqueror offers you half of her spoil. Take the larger, Clytie, and leave the small one to me; and as a reward for my unselfishness, I shall have the smaller stomach-ache. No? Then I will take both and suffer in silence."

Clytie laughed, but she looked rather rather worried, and leaning back in her chair sighed.

"What is the matter?" asked Mollie. "Why this cloud, this expression of weariness on the brow of the princess?"

"I'm worried," said Clytie, as she pushed her hair from her forehead and knit her brows. "People, all sorts of people, are writing to me; and I don't know what to answer."

"Don't answer," said Mollie, cheerfully, as she arranged a blossom, of one of Mr. McWhirtle's most cherished flowers, in the bosom of her dress. "Didn't some great man say that if you don't answer letters, they would answer themselves? Wonderful what a lot of clever things some persons seem to get off."

"That's all very well," said Clytie; "but there are letters that must be answered—business letters. Mr. Granger sent me a pile of them this morning. And what can I say? I can't tell them that I'm not the actual mistress here, that I am a kind of locum tenens, a caretaker, until Sir Willfrid returns."

"No news from that mysterious young man, I suppose?" asked Mollie, as she held a kitten aloft and shook her red hair at it tantalizingly.

"No," said Clytie, with a sigh. "None whatever. No reply has come from Mr. Granger's letter; no news whatever."

"Perhaps he's dead," returned Mollie, as cheerfully as before.

"Why should he be dead?"

"I don't know. Come to that, why should he be alive. Men have a habit of dying. But the more important question is, my dear, why should you fret yourself. Here we are, as the clown at the pantomime says, installed at Bramley, the house of our forefathers, with all the necessities, and what is more important, with all the luxuries, with plenty of money, with all the materials for a pronounced spree—"

"My dear Mollie!"

there, kitty? In fact, my dear Clytie, I have a presentiment that this lank and gawky form of mine will wax fat, if I don't take care. You, on the contrary, if you continue to grizzle, will grow thin and spare like—like Mr. Hesketh Carton, for instance. Has he been here to-day?"

"Yes," replied Clytie. "He came up to see me about some business connected with the estate. He is so very kind as to help me, or try to do so. Yes, he is very kind to take so much trouble with a pair of lonely and helpless orphans."

"Let me see, he has been up to the Hall every day this week, hasn't he?"

"Yes—no—I don't remember," replied Clytie absently.

"That's ungrateful," remarked Mollie. "Kitty, keep your claws in—like Mr. Hesketh Carton."

Clytie looked at her reprovingly.

"Mollie, you should not say such things, even in jest!"

"How do you know that I am in jest?" asked Mollie, her shrewd eyes peering under her tousled wig at Clytie's troubled face.

"You are unjust, Mollie; and that's not like you. You don't give Mr. Hesketh Carton credit for his magnanimity."

"Magnanimity is a grand word," said Mollie to the kitten.

"Put yourself in his place," went on Clytie, her generous spirit warming to its task; "Sir William's son had deserted him—"

"Oh, I thought they had quarreled, and that Sir William had turned him out of the house. But, no matter; go on, most just judge."

"My opinion of Lady Winchfield is unprintable, kitty; but I will go as far as to say that of all the old busy-bodies and scandal-mongers, with or without a wig, Lady Winchfield takes the chief product of the confectioner. I think that's an elegant way of saying 'takes the cake,'" Mollie remarked, in an undertone, and still to the kitten.

(To be continued.)

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