

# The Sacrifice of Enid

By MRS. HARCOURT-ROE

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

THE author of the story "The Sacrifice of Enid" is an Englishwoman who spent several years in Australia, afterwards in London, and now lives quietly in the country. She is the daughter of a senior officer in the Australian naval station, and spent much of her time reading in preparation for her work as a novelist. Her first novel, "The Man of Mystery," was warmly recommended to the publishers by the eminent novelist George Meredith. Her success with this was so great that she has written several others of which "The Sacrifice of Enid" is the most recent and one of the most powerful. The story is frankly a love story, but by no means hackneyed. It deals with a curious struggle between love and conscience and develops into a plot of tragic intensity.

## CHAPTER I.

### Her Request.

IT was six o'clock. The bell of the great paper factory which stood beside the river, was clanging, a stream of workpeople poured out, the men respectable looking, the women, as a rule, clean and well dressed in neat cotton blouses.

A tall, young, delicate-featured woman, with an expressive and refined face, and no small share of beauty, stood on the bridge over the river, and scrutinised them with interest. After a time she nerved herself, apparently by a supreme effort, to go and knock at the door of the manager's office.

"Come in," said a pleasant and cultivated voice, and the girl stood before the manager, Mr. Ronald Westlake, who was a tall, finely formed man of some two and thirty, with handsome features, keen brown eyes, and an expression of great determination, kindness and honesty. His face was clean-shaven, his hair dark and parted in the middle. He was a man of culture, and had received a University education, being the only son of the proprietor of the factory, a man of great wealth, who had grudged his boy no advantage. In actual fact Mr. Ronald Westlake had the whole working of the large concern in his hands; he saw to every detail, and his constant care and vigilance, combined with his undoubted talent, had served to increase the business greatly.

He looked at the girl attentively, wondering what her business was; she wore no gloves, but she had the appearance of a lady. "What can I do for you?" he asked courteously.

"I came," she replied in a hesitating voice, "to inquire if you could give me work."

"Our work is of a humble character. I don't think it would be suitable for you. And the pay is small."

"I should be thankful for employment of any kind. I have been told that the work does not require much previous training. If you have a vacancy I should be truly grateful if you would take me on."

"H'm!" exclaimed Mr. Ronald dubiously. "Sit down and let us talk it over. I might possibly find room for you, but I warn you you will have to mix with people of all sorts."

He was now certain she was a lady; her voice was low, her accent that of a woman accustomed to mix in good society—an accent that is seldom acquired by those beneath a certain social standing,—her hands were white and soft.

"Why do you talk to me as if I were not a working woman?" she asked with sudden indignation. "Is there anything in my appearance or dress incompatible with the fact of my getting my own living?"

She wore a pink cotton blouse and a plain black serge skirt, but he remarked that both were admirably cut, and fitted in a way no factory hand's clothes fitted.

"As to your dress," he replied with a laugh, "it seems to me that every girl in the country or at the seaside, be she princess or peasant, wears a straw hat, a blouse and a skirt, so that there is not much to be learned, except as to cut and style, from that, but it is idle to attempt to disguise from me that you are not accustomed to hard work."

"You are right; I am not. But if earnest endeavour and a fixed purpose will compensate for lack of great physical strength you will not find me wanting."

"If I give you any work it will not be of a nature to require much strength; it will simply require deftness and quickness, but you will find it tedious, and the hours are long."

"I am willing to accept tedious work; I am willing to accept any work."

"Pardon me," said the manager, who had through the interview addressed his companion with marked deference, "but do you not think you could find something to do more in keeping with your—your station? Believe me, I only say this from a desire to assist you."

"I thank you, but I wish for this work in preference to any other. I can trust you, your face speaks for you. I have reasons for wishing to live among the working classes. There is no occasion they should know I am not one of themselves."

He laughed. "My dear young lady, I am afraid you do not credit factory hands with much 'cuteness. They will spot you before a day is over."

"Let them. It is of small consequence."

"Are you actuated by philanthropic motives? If so, I am afraid you will make a mistake, for the people are quite capable of looking after themselves, although ladies and gentlemen very often seem to doubt this."

"I am not. I shall hire a couple of rooms if I can get them in some respectable house cheaply; (I am going to earn my living), and I shall live a secluded life as far as I am able to do so."

"You look very young to live alone. May I ask your age?"

"I am not so young as I look. I am twenty-three."

"A great age indeed!"

"And," she added with a blush, "I may not be alone very long. It is possible my—my husband may be with me."

"YOUR husband!" exclaimed Mr. Donald with marked surprise, and, in truth, a feeling of keen disappointment; "I did not think you were married."

He glanced at her ringless hand as he spoke, and hot colour overspread her face.

"I am not married yet; I hope to be before long."

"When?"

"That I cannot tell you. I have a further favour to ask. Do you think you could find employment for him also?"

"What is he doing now?"

"He is working at a trade."

"What trade?"

This question was unexpected. "Tailoring," she replied after a moment's pause. Her voice was painfully embarrassed, vivid colour still overspread her cheeks.

"I am afraid we do not want any tailors here."

"He would do anything."

"Would he pick and sort dirty rags? It is filthy work."

"He would."

"Very good. I will try him. I would rather give him work than you, because I know the work is not fit for you. When do you want him to come?"

She glanced at the door uneasily as if she feared some one might be listening.

"There is no one about; they have all gone," said the manager. "Now when is your—husband coming?"

"Oh," she replied sadly, "you will think me both ungrateful and stupid, but it is the truth when I say I do not

know; he may come at any time—in which case I wish work to be ready for him—or—he may never come at all."

Mr. Ronald Westlake was now completely mystified.

"Who is this man that plays fast and loose with you?" he asked sharply. "A man with no prospects whatever, who cannot even succeed in his own trade. Let me entreat you to consider what you are doing. I fear your family ought to be communicated with, suppose I took steps to find them out."

"For Heaven's sake do not," she exclaimed beseechingly; "I have trusted you. I have considered the matter until I am sick with arguments for and against. But it is too late to draw back; I do not wish to do so."

"You have in reality told me nothing."

"Forgive me, but I cannot tell you more. Will you employ me next week?"

"What recommendation or reference can you give me?"

"None," she replied boldly.

HE lifted his eyebrows. "A young woman of twenty-three who desires work can generally refer to some friend."

He had no desire to be cruel, but he was intensely anxious to solve the mystery. She looked him in the face, and said in icy tones, "I apologise for having troubled you. Good afternoon."

He was at her side before she could unfasten the door.

"I will not allow you to go yet. Sit down again, Miss—. You have not told me your name."

There was a pause. "You can call me Mary Williams."

"Which is not your real name."

"It is not."

"You come here to me enveloped in mystery, and candidly own to a false name. But I know something of physiognomy, and I am quite sure that, whatever you may wish to hide, you yourself have done no wrong. Your face speaks for you. It is usual to give references, but this establishment is not governed by the laws of the Medes and Persians, which alter not. You shall have work whenever you want it."

"I thank you warmly. I should like to come next Monday."

"Do so, but do not go in with the work-people. Come to me here, and I will take you to the foreman. Remember you will only receive a few shillings a week, you will be under the thumb of an older woman, and if by any chance you are reported to me for idleness or bad behaviour I shall be very severe with you," he said with a laugh.

"I am not afraid of anything you have mentioned," she replied, her blue eyes for the first time lighting up with laughter, which caused her to appear singularly youthful and pretty. "Of course you will be severe, only I thought the foreman looked after the work-people."

"So he does, but I shall tell him to report you to me. I always like to know how new hands get on." He added mentally, "I will not have a great hulking brute rowing her," though the foreman had never figured in his mind in this light before, indeed as a matter of fact he was a kind old man.

"I shall try not to be reported. You may rely on my doing my best. And now good afternoon, and thank you so much."

"Thank me for what?" he thought when she had gone. For putting her in the way of dreary, mechanical, badly paid work. If I increase her wages out of my own pocket the other hands will be angry. She is a beauty, while her figure is admirable, her manner leaves nothing to be desired. And yet such a girl is going to marry a worthless tailor! A case of elopement from home probably. But I am certain that, suspicious as the circumstances are, she is both innocent and good. As to the rascal, her lover, until I have tested him he shall have some of the worst work in the factory."

This reflection appeared to console him. After meditating for some little while he went home. His father's house adjoined the factory. It was large and well-built, standing in spacious and ornamental grounds.

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