

# THE SILENT WIFE!

Remarkable Drama of Married Life.

By MARK ENGLISH.

## THE FIRST PART.

Doris Thobury, the sister of the children's ward, was telling the little ones stories, when the door opened and the matron and Dr Weston came in. Doris's cheeks took a deep tint, for she loved the kindly, grave-faced young doctor deeply.

As the doctor went his rounds, she held each little patient's hand, for the pain never seemed so bad when Sister Doris was near, and when all the patients had been examined her duty for the day was over.

As she was going out of the Cottage Hospital gate, Paul Weston overtook her. "May I accompany you?" he asked, and she smiled and nodded. They spoke of many things, and at last when they had reached a more secluded spot the doctor seized her hand.

"Miss Thobury," he said, "I love you—I love you with all my heart and soul. Will you be my wife?" She looked at him steadfastly as she answered "Yes." It was some time later when they parted, and when they did so Doris was the happiest girl in the world.

The next morning she received a telegram: "Come home immediately," it ran. "You are wanted at once." And a little later she was speeding towards her home.

At the very moment she was answering Paul Weston on the previous night, an interview was going on which was to alter her whole life.

"Those are my terms; take them or leave them. Accept them and I pull you through; refuse and you are ruined!" The speaker, Roger Armer, was a strong, hard man; he was Walter Thobury's manager, and the man he faced as he uttered those words was Walter Thobury himself.

Doris's father was a failure; he was weak and lazy, and as he faced his manager he looked frightened. His uncle had died and left him the huge business of Thobury and Co. But he did not trouble himself about the business; he left it all in the hands of Roger Armer. And now he found that he was on the brink of ruin, and only Armer could pull him through, and that he would only do so on one condition, and that was that he should marry Doris. And in his weakness and fear of ruin the crushed man agreed—actually agreed to sacrifice his daughter to save himself.

When he told Doris she was horrified. "Father," she cried, "you are not in earnest. Marry Mr Armer? I couldn't. You can't mean it." At last she cast aside all her hopes for the future and promised. That evening she wrote a short note to Paul Weston telling him she had changed her mind and could never be his wife.

Her engagement to Armer was announced, and eventually Doris Thobury became Doris Armer.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### "HE TOLD YOU A LIE."

The honeymoon month had passed monotonously for Doris Armer. Roger had been unable to take a holiday and so the four endless weeks—to Mrs Armer—had been spent at her new home at West ways Court.

To the man the days had flown by, for Roger Armer was now partner, instead of manager, and under his firm if somewhat hard, rule Thobury and Armer prospered exceedingly.

His father-in-law purred with satisfaction. He could be as lazy as he liked, free to do what he liked with his income. "Armer was one of the best," he declared. "He had saved the business from ruin, had taken Doris without a dowry, given her a splendid home, loaded her with costly presents. On her birthday he had given her a diamond tiara. She was the envy of the neighbourhood; she had nothing to complain of."

So he argued in smug satisfaction, giving no heed to the sufferings of the girl who had paid the price of his selfishness and folly.

And Doris herself? What were her ideas on the subject?

She could not help feeling grateful at times to her husband for saving her weak father from ruin. Anyhow, Roger had

kept his part of the contract. All was well in the city.

"But," she thought, during one wet afternoon, as she sat in the window of her beautiful room looking out on the sodden gardens and the misty park beyond, "how much more grateful she would have been if Roger had not set the price of herself as his reward for doing what he had done! He called it love," she told herself drearily, "but it was only to show his power. He is hard; a vein of cruelty runs through him. To gain the mastery over creatures more helpless than himself he would do anything."

And then, as though to prove her words true, the sound of thundering hoofs struck upon her ears. She opened the window and stepped out on to the covered terrace.

Beyond the garden, in the meadow, Roger was scolding a young horse. He was a superb and fearless rider, and looked his best—and this was saying a good deal, for Roger Armer was a very handsome man.

The chestnut, a beautiful creature, flung up his head and refused again and again, and again and again Armer struck it.

Then, seeing that, for some reason or other, the horse still refused the jump, its rider dug his spurs savagely into it, until a small stream of blood flowed slowly down its glossy coat.

For several minutes the girl watched the unequal contest—for from the first she had no doubt as to who the victor would be—and then, unable to bear the sight any longer, she ran down the garden and called to her husband over the fence.

"Oh, how can you be so cruel, so brutal!" Her voice choked with pity, in which a note of contempt ran. "You know he's frightened. You will not break his spirit by fear. Be gentle with him. Try love."

He backed the quivering animal beneath the sunk fence and looked up at her. His eyes were blazing, his mouth set in a hard line.

"I tried love once, and it failed!" he said coldly. "I will be obeyed at all cost!"

"Oh!" she cried bitterly. "Don't I know that—I, the being you promised to love and cherish, know of what you are capable! But you will never conquer me as you have that poor dumb brute!"

A cold smile flickered on the man's handsome face, but he gave no sign of his feelings—unless the fact that he dug his spurs into the horse's quivering flank could be taken as such.

"Had you not better go in, Doris?" he said quietly. "You are getting wet. I do not intend to leave the meadow until I have made the Demon take his jump. If you do not care for my particular method of making an obstinate animal obey me, why not go to a room that looks out another way? There are plenty, surely."

He set the horse once more at the obstacle. Doris, fascinated by this struggle of wills, passively hoping that the Demon would prove the victor, returned to the terrace.

Needless to say who won. With a snort of rage and despair, the Demon at last gave in. He rose high and leaped the fence.

Many a rider would have been unseated, Roger sat like a rock, and, as he turned to the stables, he patted the vanquished animal kindly on its flecked neck.

"Why couldn't you have given in sooner, old boy? You'd have saved yourself a lot of misery." He dropped from the saddle and flung the reins to a groom. "Give the Demon a warm mash," he said. "He was a bit obstinate, but I've mastered him."

"Ay, sir, that you have." The groom looked after the tall, fine figure. "Ay, he's a man, every inch o' him! A bit hard, maybe, but just. Mr Armer's a master worth having."

Had Doris seen Roger pet and encourage the horse—who, to show he bore his master no malice, rubbed his velvet muzzle against his coat-sleeve—she might have thought of him more kindly. But she did not, and the canker in her mind grew more deadly.

"Please, madam, can I have a word with you?"

Doris, stepping back through the window, turned startled eyes on the gaunt figure of a man who had suddenly appeared from behind a clump of evergreens.

"You're Mrs Armer, aren't you? Miss Doris Thobury that was? If you'll be so very good as to spare me five minutes, madam, I'll tell you something you ought to know."

Doris hesitated and looked more closely at the man. His face seemed familiar, but for the moment she could not recollect where she had seen him. He was smartly dressed in a morning coat and it was quite evident that he had held a good position.

"I waited for him to go." He pointed in the direction of the stables. "What I have to tell you is for your ears only, Mrs Armer."

"Come this way. I can't recall who you are, but I will hear what you have to say."

Doris guessed instinctively that the stranger's communication concerned her husband, and anything that had to do with the man to whom her life was linked fascinated her. She led him to her own sitting-room and bade him be seated.

"Your name and business?" she said, rather coldly.

For she felt that she was acting rashly. The man might be a burglar!

There was a desperate expression on the shallow face, as though he had tasted the very dregs of life.

And this was, indeed, the case. Henry Barlow, had reached the limit of endurance. His last chance lay in enlisting the sympathy of the girl before him.

"My name is Barlow, Mrs Armer. For years I was confidential clerk to Thobury and Armer, as it is now."

Doris experienced a sensation of relief. She knew now why the man's face was familiar. One day, when calling at the office for her father, she had spoken to Henry Barlow.

"Have you left them?" she asked, in surprise. "Why?"

"Because," he said bitterly, "I was sacked by Mr Armer."

"But—why?"

The man came closer. "Because, madam," he said hoarsely, "I knew too much."

Now, indeed, was Doris astonished.

"Please explain what you mean, Mr Barlow. How could you know too much? I thought it was your business to know everything connected with the firm."

"Ah!" said Barlow. "But this was private business. It had nothing to do with finance. And yet it had," he added, as an afterthought.

"Mr Barlow," Doris said firmly, "you have some information for me. What is it?"

For a few seconds the ex-clerk hesitated. Then he said:

"Mr Armer sacked me as he was afraid I'd tell you how he got you to marry him."

A dull flush stained Doris's cheek.

"Does everyone know the reason?"

"It's pretty common knowledge, Mrs Armer, that you would never have broken off with your sweetheart and married Mr Armer unless he had—well, forced your hand, Mrs Armer—told you the business was on the verge of ruin, and that unless you accepted his offer he would let it go. To save Mr Thobury, you consented. Isn't that the case, madam? But there, I know it is, and so I won't press for an answer. What I've come to tell you is that what Roger Armer told your father and you was a lie."

"A lie! Then—then the business—"

The words stuck in Doris's throat. "Was absolutely solvent! There was no truth—not a particle of truth—in Mr Armer's statement of ruin. Never had Thobury and Co. been in so prosperous a condition. Roger Armer won you by a trick!"

Won by a trick! Then all her sacrifice, all her misery was for nothing! A fierce hatred for Roger Armer swept through her and her eyes blazed with the tumult of her anger.

Half afraid that her anger was diverted against himself, Barlow was seized with panic.

"But you will help me, please. Remember my wife, my children, my—"

It was then that the door opened and Roger himself strode in!

"I ABSOLUTELY REFUSE."

Doris looked at her husband, bitter contempt expressed on every delicate feature. Yet never, in the days Roger Armer had known this girl, had she looked so desir-

able in his eyes. It is not exaggerating to say that he would have given half the fortune he had amassed to gain one glance of love from those beautiful, contemptuous eyes.

But Armer was no fool. He knew this to be utterly impossible; and so there was but one thing to be done—rule her by fear!

But Doris did not look as though that would be an easy matter. There was something dauntless in her attitude that gave Armer qualms about the matter, and he waited as calmly as he could for her to speak.

She turned first to Barlow with, "Will you please leave me and wait in the hall?" and then waited as calmly as she could until the door closed behind him. Then she turned to Roger.

"You coward! you cad!" she rapped out so vehemently that Roger was startled from his iron coolness.

"What is it now?" he asked, although from the minute he saw Barlow he knew full well what was coming.

"Stand there! Don't come near me, for you are foul and unclean! I knew you for a cruel, merciless brute—now I know you for an unscrupulous, lying cheat. That man has told me all. My father was never bankrupt—and I, a weak, helpless girl, have been made to pay a price that was never on my head. Where is your honour, Roger Armer?"

"Do you want me to defend myself?" was the reply. "Then my defence is that I wanted you. All's fair in love and war. You made it war—not I."

"Love!" Doris' lip curled. "Don't desecrate a word of which you don't know the meaning. You gained me by a deliberate lie! I thought I was doing a noble thing to sacrifice myself for my father, and, after all, I have suffered and paid in vain."

The agony in the low, sweet voice cut Roger Armer to the heart; but, though inwardly he winced, he made no visible sign.

"And—my father," continued the young wife, "did he know? Was he in this horrible conspiracy to deceive me, or was he a victim as well as me?"

Armer shrugged his shoulders.

"If you like to put it so, he was."

"Oh, you coward!" The words came from between her clenched teeth. "Men and women are nothing to you. You crush hearts as though they were no more than stones. First my father, then me; and now you have brought an innocent man who found out your lie to destitution. What are you going to do for Henry Barlow?"

"Nothing."

"You are going to let him and his sick wife and ailing children starve?"

"No man with a brain need starve," Armer said coldly.

He was very angry with Barlow, and even more angry with himself—because, by reason of his hard dealing with his ex-clerk, he had placed himself in the man's power.

But then, he reasoned, his harshness was not altogether due to the fear that Doris should discover the secret he had so successfully concealed from his indolent partner, Thobury; who had not even brain or courage enough to investigate the truth of his assertion of impending ruin.

Henry Barlow had one terrible fault. His downfall was due to drink. Armer, who liked the man, had spoken to him kindly though firmly—begging him, for the sake of his wife and family, to give up a vice which was bound in the end to ruin him.

Barlow had promised to do this, but failed to keep his word; and at length Armer had been obliged to threaten summary dismissal.

It was then that Henry Barlow, casting about for some means of preventing this, had discovered the reason why beautiful Doris had thrown over her fiancé to marry a man she evidently loathed.

Armed with this information, he had gone to Armer and dared him to dismiss him.

"I will let her know—she and her father, too," he said.

For answer, Roger Armer had ordered him out of the office there and then.

"Repeat your threat," he said, "and I will prosecute you for blackmail. Here is your week's salary."

Now, in the face of this fresh develop-

WE  
ARE OFFERING IN ALL DE  
PARTMENTS A  
SUPERIOR SELECTION  
OF

SUMMER APPAREL

AND  
CORDIALLY INVITE  
YOUR INSPECTION.

Price & Bulleid

LIMITED.

TAY STREET, INVERCARGILL

AND BLUFF.

FOUNTAIN PENS.

THE kind that are always at your service; that never balk, splutter, or cultivate bad language. The tried and proved stalwarts of the pen world. You'll get them here

The Dedonne, Self-filler, 10/-

The Capitol, Lever Self-filler, 12/6.

The Conklin, Crescent Self-filler, 20/-

The Cameron Waverley, secure, Self-filler, 22/6; gold-mounted, 30/- and 35/-

The Onoto, Self Filler, 20/-

The Waterman, Lever Self Filler, 25/-

The self-filling principle saves bother and ink fingers and the quality of the above pens is beyond dispute. Post free anywhere.

HYNDMAN'S,

INVERCARGILL,

AGENTS.

NEW HATS

NOW SHOWING. Black, Brown, and Mouse shades in

GENTS' VELOUR HATS.

Superior FUR HATS in assorted reliable shades.

TWEED HATS,

TWEED and CRAVENETTE CAPS.

LATEST COLLARS, WIDE-END TIES,

BOWS, and ENGLISH MADE BRACES.

SPECIAL LINE

OF WIDE-END TIES all being cleared now at 2/6 each. Worth nearly double.

McNeil & Clark

CLOTHIERS AND MERCERS

94 Dee St.