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# 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 he 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.

She found her husband domineering, and determined to break her proud spirit. She discovered, too, that she had been won by a trick, for her father's business had never been anything but perfectly solvent.

"I WILL NEVER OPEN MY LIPS TO YOU AGAIN."

"We must give a large dinner-party, Doris," Roger said one day.

"As you please," she said listlessly. "If you will give me a list of the guests you desire, I will send out the invitations."

"You shall have the list of City guests," he said. "To you I leave the county folk. And, Doris, I wish no expense spared. Please get yourself something quite new and splendid in the way of a dress."

He hesitated. He realised he had not spoken quite as he intended, but did not know how to alter his request. Doris smiled bitterly.

"I see," she said. "You want people to see that, after all, you didn't pay too big a price—that I am worth what you paid."

"You are just," Armer turned coldly away, and for a few seconds Doris felt sorry she had spoken so bitterly.

"But it's true!" she clenched her hands. "All quite, quite true! I am like everything he possesses—of the best. I rank only with those old historic masters he has

purchased, with his superb automobile; his stable of blood mares; his kennel of pedigree dogs. His wife ranks but a little above these because she is flesh and blood, and he can wound her through her tenderest feelings."

It was in this mood, a worse than which cannot easily be imagined, that Doris Armer was destined to meet the man to whom she had once been engaged.

The October leaves were falling fast round Doris Armer's feet, as she passed along the woodland path that led to the village. It was a still afternoon, rather melancholy, but this well suited young Mrs Armer's frame of mind.

How utterly hopeless did the future appear! She had just reached this pessimistic conclusion when, round a bend in the path, she almost ran into Paul Weston.

For a space, neither spoke to the other. Their surprise at meeting there was too intense, at first, for speech.

"You—here, Paul?" It was Doris who spoke first. "I thought you were miles away. Miss Dalty told me you had joined her exploration party—after—"

She broke off, confused. What was she saying?

"After—?" Doctor Weston spoke quietly. "After your letter breaking off our engagement. Yes—I started. But before we had got far our leader died suddenly, and the affair fell through."

"But how do you come here?" the girl asked, still bewildered by this unexpected meeting.

"I have bought a partnership with Doctor Leech. My partner lives in Westways."

"Didn't you know?" cried Doris, "that my home is at the Court?"

His voice was not quite under control as he answered:

"If I had, do you think I could have come here—to find you—a happy wife with another?"

She made no answer. Loyal as ever to her husband and her wifely duty, she would not utter a word that might appear the reverse.

"You are happy?" Paul said quickly. The shadow in the face that had once been the dearest to him did not escape his keen eyes.

"Is anyone in the world really happy?" she asked lightly, evading a direct reply.

"I suppose not." He sighed, and absently plucked a golden brown leaf.

"Where are you going?" Doris asked after an awkward pause.

"Strange to say, I was on my way to—to your house. I had a letter from a Mrs Spry, asking me to call. One of the maids is ill. Naturally, I imagined this Mrs Spry to be the mistress of the Court."

"Mrs Spry is Mr Armer's housekeeper," Doris said coldly. "She should have informed me that it was necessary to send for a doctor."

Paul Weston's vague suspicion that all was not well with Doris Armer deepened. The very fact that his late fiancée was another man's wife completely changed his feelings with regard to her.

One of the most honourable minded of men, Paul Weston looked upon the marriage tie as the most sacred bond on earth. No one, in his eyes, was so despicable as the man who tried to break it. He was only deeply grieved that the girl he adored should be unhappy.

Love was not for him; but friendship remained. He would always be Doris Armer's friend, though he had lost her love for ever.

"I will walk back with you," she said, and, turning the conversation into impersonal channels, they walked up to the house together.

Somehow, hearing of old friends brightened Doris wonderfully. As she approached the house she found herself laughing at a quaint story of one of his small patients.

Roger, sitting in the portico, had never heard that silvery laugh from his wife's lips, looked up for the cause. He saw her pass by, accompanied by a tall man with a pleasant, kindly face.

"Who can he be, to make her laugh like that? I never have."

She passed from his sight, and Roger experienced a quick stab of jealousy. He envied the stranger who could win a smile like that. Presently she joined him, the smile still on her beautiful face. The maid's illness was but a trifling one, Paul Weston had hastened back, to send up the medicine. He would call again the

next day. Doris had invited him to their dinner.

"I want you to meet Mr Armer."

"I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance," Paul Weston smiled back. He did so want to make sure he had been mistaken in his first hasty judgment.

"Who was your friend?" Roger asked, in a strained tone.

Unfortunately, Doris hesitated a second before replying. For the first time it struck her that possibly Roger might not care for Paul Weston's acquaintance.

"That was Doctor Weston. He—he is Doctor Leech's partner. One of the maids is ill. Paul—I mean Doctor Weston—is attending her."

Suddenly a furious gust of passion shook Roger Armer.

"Then that man shall not enter my house again. Do you hear?" And then, as Doris shrank from him: "How long has this been going on?"

"I only met Doctor Weston just now. He wants to—to meet you, Roger. I have asked him to be one of our guests next week."

"And I refuse to see him. Go in and say you have made a mistake in inviting him, that I—the master—forbid you to speak to him again."

"And what," cried Doris, her whole soul in revolt at this unjust tyranny on Roger's part—"what if I refuse?"

"You will not refuse. Let me tell you, once and for all, now you are my wife, I will be obeyed," he said, his face working with anger.

For the moment he had lost complete control over himself. Roger Armer did not often lose his self-control, and when he did it was like the loosening of a fierce torrent that nothing could check.

"Do you understand? Write to—to your former lover, and say I—I forbid him to set foot inside my house."

"I cannot do that," Doris spoke quietly, though inwardly she, too, was raging with outraged pride. "I have invited a good and noble man—my friend—to our house, and I see no reason to insult him."

"You—you call Paul Weston your friend?" Roger looked dangerous.

"Certainly do. One of the few real friends I possess."

"Have you forgotten that he was once your acknowledged lover? I have not."

She looked at him, her face very pale; but in her steady grey eyes Roger read something that shamed him. They were proud and pure and true.

"I have never forgotten," she said quietly, "that Paul Weston and I were once betrothed to one another. That except for—a lie, I should have been his wife. But, Roger, I am your wife now—your loyal wife—and why do you object to my keeping up my relationship with a man to whom I behaved badly? Paul Weston has one of the finest characters in the world. He does not know the meaning of dishonour. You are jealous, it seems, a paltry characteristic, and in your case it is not even dictated by love. It is simply to prove your power over me."

There was so much truth, and yet so much that was not truth, in Doris's words, that Armer's anger rose to a higher pitch. For there was love for this lovely creature who dared him so courageously—love, but no pity.

"You will take steps to prevent Doctor Weston attending our dinner party," he said coldly, as he turned on his heel.

Later on—when too late—Roger Armer would have given the whole world not to have laid this order upon Doris, his wife.

Upstairs, in her own room, Doris wrestled with herself. Her conscience told her to obey her husband. Inclination whispered contrarily, "What harm is there in having an old friend to see you in your husband's house? Don't give way in this. Let Roger see you are mistress if he is master. He will not disgrace himself, and you, by making a scene in public."

So the argument went on and ended in no letter being sent to prevent Paul Weston entering Mr and Mrs Armer's house as their guest.

Doris looked wondrously beautiful as she ascended the great staircase, dressed in an exquisite creation of her favourite white and green. It was the production of a celebrated maison in Hanover Square.

After all it was Roger's desire that she should look her best. Also, she wanted Paul to believe she was a happy wife,

and her lovely clothes expressed the cheerfulness which she had forced on her face.

If her husband should again forbid her to invite her late fiancée to the house, she had made up her mind to obey. After she had sworn obedience not so long before God's altar. Nothing could alter that.

Roger's face flushed with love and anger as this peerless being entered the drawing-room. Isobel, looking extremely handsome in a black sequined dress, fitted her rather full but graceful figure like a sheath, had already arrived, and was in earnest conversation with Roger.

The guests arrived rapidly. Merchants and their portly, supercilious wives, mingled with the more frigid country folk, one and all curious to see how the bride would comport herself at this, her first formal dinner-party.

The hum of conversation filled the study room. Every moment they expected to hear the portly butler announce dinner.

Suddenly the door was flung wide, and Tompkins did appear; but it was no announcement of dinner that he made!

"Doctor Paul Weston!"

With a sweet, shy smile at her husband Doris went forward.

"Roger, this is Doctor Paul Weston. And then the enormity of the wrong she had done to Weston, in allowing him to come without her husband's sanction was born in upon her.

Looking apprehensively into the stern handsome face of Roger Armer, she saw it change into an expression of such deadly hatred that her very spirit sank.

Paul advanced, his good-looking face full of pleasurable interest.

"How do you do, Mrs Armer?" The he turned to Roger. "I am very pleased to meet you, Mr Armer. Your wife—"

The words died on his lips. On no human face had Paul Weston ever seen so diabolical an expression. What was going to happen?

"I have not the pleasure of knowing Doctor Paul Weston, nor do I intend to know him. He has thrust himself into my house in spite of my wishes."

Roger placed his hands behind his back, and faced Weston sternly. Then he turned to Doris.

"You have disobeyed me. I am going to send for Doctor Weston's car. He does not dine at my table to-night."

The guests stared at each other, and at three central figures in this horrible scene.

Deliberately Roger rang the bell.

"Doctor Weston's car," he said to the amazed Tompkins.

But before Paul Weston could realise the full humiliation which had befallen him Doris's clear voice rang out.

"One moment, Roger Armer. This insult reaches the utmost limit of my endurance. I have kept my bargain with you—the bargain you gained with a lie. I am your wife and your wife I must remain, but I hate you now! You are beneath my notice—beneath my contempt. Never will I open my lips to you again!"

### WHAT THE SILENCE LED TO.

To depict the consternation that followed Doris Armer's extraordinary speech would be impossible. Some the guests were too taken aback for words, others whispered excitedly among themselves.

"What does it all mean? Not open lips to him again! Why, the thing is impossible—no wife could live in the house with her husband and not speak—if it was only to nag at him."

The last remark was made by a certain Mrs Vandeleur, a woman renowned for her nagging propensities.

The man she addressed looked thoughtfully at Doris, as she stood a little apart, her face white, stern and set, displaying outwardly no emotion, unless the beating of the laces on her breast could be so described.

"I'm not sure about that. There's something about Mrs Armer that shows she is no ordinary woman. But if she keeps her word I pity Roger Armer. By Jove!—the mere idea of living with a Silent Woman—and such a woman as Doris Armer—makes my blood run cold."

Mrs Vandeleur laughed contemptuously.

"As if she meant it! Not much." But Doris did mean every word she had uttered. Wounded in her pride, outraged in her own house, one of her guests—her old friend—insulted before the whole