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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.

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.

Doris invites Paul Weston, the young doctor to whom she had been engaged, to dinner. When he comes, Roger insults him in front of the other guests, and orders him from the house. In sudden anger, Doris tells him she will never open her lips to him again. At last finding his threats of no avail, and that she has become a "silent wife," he takes her to a house in the middle of a lonely wood, and leaves her there in the charge of a nurse, whom he tells she is mad.

When Doris is thinking over her terrible situation in her room a sliding panel opens and a man appears, who helps her to escape from her prison and conducts her to a waiting car. Then he gives her a drink, which causes Doris to fall asleep.

A DEN OF THIEVES.

"Where am I? What has happened?" These were Doris Armer's first conscious thoughts on waking from her drugged sleep. For a few moments she gave herself up to the delicious sensation warmth and drowsiness induces.

Everything was very silent. The room in which she lay was in darkness, except for a smouldering fire in the grate. By this dim light Doris got an idea of the room she was in.

Presently she discovered she was not lying in a bed, as she had at first believed herself to be. She reclined upon an enormous divan heaped with silken cushions. She was fully dressed, and over her was spread a sumptuous coverlet of softest down.

It was all very comfortable, the girl thought, as she watched the firelight flickering on pale-tinted walls, on which a few good pictures were hung.

Gradually Doris's mind became normal. Her last recollection, of being driven through the night in a car, came before her with startling force.

It was certainly strange that she had fallen asleep as soundly as she must have done, seeing she remembered nothing since the stranger beside her had made her drink from his flask. What extraordinarily strong brandy it must have been!

The unknown had told her it was the very best, but she had only taken a sip or two.

And then, swiftly, came a sensation that set her heart beating, and sent her leaping from her couch. A strange dizziness overcame her. Her head swam, the floor seemed to be rising up to meet her.

"The stuff must have been drugged!" she thought, a pang of fear darting through her every nerve. "I must discover in whose house I am."

She listened intently. To her ears there came an occasional rumble. She must be in some town; the sounds she heard were not those of the country. She crawled over to the fireplace, and stirred the embers into a blaze.

The watch on her wrist was still going. The hands pointed to three.

She ran her hand round the walls, in search of an electric switch. Presently she touched one. She turned it, but with no result. The electric current must have been cut off!

By the light of the dancing flame she was able to grope her way to the door, softly she turned the handle, but it would not open.

Somehow, Doris was not in the least surprised to find the door locked. She even smiled a little. It seemed to be her luck to exchange one prison for another!

The faint, dizzy sensation had nearly gone. She sat down on the edge of the divan to consider what she had better do.

Only three o'clock! It would be hours before anyone in the house would be stirring. She peered into the shadows. A pair of heavy curtains hung across what was probably the window. How foolish of her not to think of the window.

She rose, stumbled over a footstool, but at length reached the curtains. Very cautiously she drew them back. Some instinct warned her to make no noise. Whoever had placed her on the divan no doubt thought she was still sleeping.

The window was a casement, opening out on each side. Doris raised the latch. To her intense delight it gave instantly to her touch.

Noiselessly she flung it open, and inhaled a draught of pure night air. Oh, what worlds of good it did the girl, whose brain had been numbed by one of the most powerful narcotics known to science.

She leaned out over the narrow balcony, breathing her fill, and soon the last must have cleared from her brain.

Doris Armer was extraordinarily strong and healthy. She had an enviable capacity for throwing off ailments, mental or physical, quicker than most people.

Looking down, she saw she was in a street, one of those ordinary respectable-looking streets of which there are miles and miles in London.

From the distance there came the rumble of a train; the hoot of a motor broke the stillness that falls upon the great city in the early hours.

"I'll go out on the balcony, and see if I can discover any familiar landmarks," Doris decided.

It was an easy though somewhat risky matter to step on to the balcony, which was only protected by a very low iron parapet.

Peering over this, Doris saw below her a narrow stretch of leads. No balcony ran along the lower floor of the house. This struck Doris as being rather peculiar.

"I believe this must be the back of the house," she thought, "although it's odd that the back looks out upon the street!"

Doris had yet to discover many odd things about the house to which the mysterious stranger had brought her in the dead of night.

Suddenly, to her amazement, a streak of light shone across the strip of leads below. She heard a window open; voices came distinctly to her ears. Breathless with excitement, the girl leaned as far over the parapet as she dared.

A man's voice was speaking. The words he uttered reached Doris distinctly.

"Are you sure she's safe? Oughtn't someone to go up and have a look at her?" A woman laughed.

"No need at all. Philip knows what he's about. One sip of his cordial is enough to send anyone to sleep for twelve hours right away."

"Well, I hope you're right," the man rejoined. "We can't afford to run any risks. What do you say, Armer?"

Doris's hand went to her heart. Armer! Her husband here in this house, the very name of which she did not know. Her husband within hail of her! Roger, from whom she had fled, had followed her here!

And then into her head there came a swift resolution. They believed her to be upstairs, sleeping off the effects of the drug they had administered to her. So far, so good.

She looked down, and measured the height from the balcony to the leads below. She was strong and athletic for a woman. As a child they had called her a "tomboy." Climbing trees had been a favourite pastime.

Catching firm hold of the low iron parapet, she swung herself over, and alighted safely on the leads beneath. She now saw that from this an iron staircase wound down into a closed-in yard.

Crouching, she moved cautiously towards the window. The window was ajar, the two doors being fastened together by a hook.

Doris wished she could have got a full view of the interior of the room; but, as this was impossible, she had to be content with what she could see by peering round the open shutters.

And what she saw might well have staggered a less dauntless woman than Doris Armer.

The scene on which she gazed beggared description. The occupants of the room were three men and a woman, the latter a haggard person who had once been beautiful, but on whose face the signs of dissipation were all too clearly visible.

In one of the men, Doris at once recognised the stranger who had liberated her. The other two she knew only too well. One was the ex-clerk, Henry Barlow; the other was her husband, Roger Armer!

Yes, though he sat with his back turned to her, she knew beyond doubt that it was her husband on whom she gazed.

What was he doing there? What was the meaning of all the money they were busily counting, that heaped-up pile of jewels?

"This is worth more than a bit," she heard the man they called "Philip" say.

To Doris's further amazement he held up her diamond tiara, Roger's birthday present to herself!

"You've got me to thank for that," her husband said. And then he turned half-round, and Doris got a good view of his profile.

How changed he was, she thought, how much older he looked! How strained and careworn his expression! Was it possible that she was mistaken after all, and that the man on whom she was gazing, her heart in her throat, was not Roger?

She looked again at the handsome profile. No; she had made no mistake. It was Roger Armer!

Nearer to the window she crept, and now every word reached her with hideous distinctness.

In a few minutes she realised what this strange scene meant. The three men and the woman before her were crooks! She was in a den of thieves; and, oh—horror of all horrors!—her husband, the man whom she had respected in spite of his sternness, was one of the leaders!

Everything pointed to this. Although they wrangled and disputed certain points, in the end they all bowed to Armer's decision.

Presently Roger got up, stretched himself, and yawned. The woman and Barlow began packing up the jewels in parcels that might contain anything.

"These are old Blinkiron's wife's emeralds. There's a ball at the Mansion House to-morrow night. Her ladyship will have a fit when she discovers she's been robbed!"

They all laughed. Doris shrank with horror. Lady Blinkiron and her husband, a city magnate, had been their guests on the night when she made her vow of silence.

And all the time her husband had been leading a double life. Passing in the city as a man of means, a financier of high repute, he had been all the time a thief and a rogue! His deceit appalled her.

His treatment of Henry Barlow had been but a blind. He had pretended to be disgusted with Barlow, while all the time he was working with him!

Doris's one thought was to get away—get away and hide herself, so that never in this world would Roger Armer find her again. She decided that the mystery that surrounded the whole affair must remain one. She had neither the heart nor the desire to unravel it—at least, this was what Doris thought in her first hideous awakening.

Later on, it became the one end and aim of her life to discover the secret of Roger Armer's life.

"I HAVE NO HOME NOW ANYWHERE."

Then Doris contemplated the immediate future. It was impossible for her to return to the room above. The drop down had been attended with difficulty; to get back was out of the question.

She wore no hat or coat; but, fortunately, at this early hour she was not likely to meet anyone. Even the trains seemed to have stopped running.

A movement inside the room sent her crouching down into the shadows. She saw her husband standing beside the woman, his arm flung familiarly round her shoulder. His voice reached her distinctly.

"You'd better get off to bed, Wanda," he said. "We're going to break up almost immediately."

He dropped a careless kiss on her radiating hair. A stab of pain went through the silent watcher outside.

"False in every way!" she murmured bitterly. "False to me, false to the world! And to think I am his wife—fied to a man like that!"

However, this was no time to analyse her own sensations. She must get away before the gang of thieves made a movement. The woman would probably go upstairs to see if she was still asleep. Not finding her, she would naturally raise an alarm. Doris shuddered at the idea of coming face to face with her husband.

Down the twisted iron staircase she

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