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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.

Paul Weston, a young doctor and her former lover, with whom she had been forced to break her engagement. He obtains for her a post as a nurse at a private house, which she thankfully accepts.

When he leaves her a waiter hands her a paper and in it she reads of herself, described as "the beautiful missing Mrs Armer." Her husband is offering a large reward for her discovery, and a portrait is published. Glancing up she sees the eye of the waiter who handed her the paper fixed furtively on her.

"IF I WAS ROBBED OF MY JEWELS I SHOULD DIE."

Doris's face became crimson. Did the waiter connect her with the portrait in the "Evening News"?

She knew that her uniform made a tremendous difference in her general appearance. Her hair was now put back under a white cap, whereas in the portrait it was beautifully dressed, piled elaborately on the top of her head, and surmounted by the diamond tiara that had now become famous.

It had been Roger's wish—in fact, his order—that she should be photographed like this. She remembered how her lip had curled when he had told her to wear his present. She had made no reply, only obeyed.

"I belong to him, so do the diamonds." He wants the world to see both."

That was what she had thought.

The waiter advanced to remove her plate.

"It's a queer job, that! Isn't it, miss?" He pointed to the headlines indicating the robberies.

"Is it?" stammered Doris. "Yes, I suppose it is. Mr Armer is prominent in both these unsolved mysteries."

The waiter laughed. He thought the pretty nurse a good sort. She didn't snub him, as some did.

"He's lost both his wife—and 'is jools. Bit rough on 'im, ain't it, miss?"

"Ye-es. As you say, it is rough. But—perhaps he wasn't kind to his wife."

The waiter looked important. He set an ice before her.

"That's where you make a mistake, miss. My cousin was valet to Mr Armer afore he married, and he said Mr Armer was one o' the best. A bit strict, but that just and generous. Thought a lot o' the women folk—kinder put 'em on a pedestal. No, miss. It's madame's fault—if there's any fault at all. A bit of a fool to run away. Armer's rolling in money."

"There may have been reasons," faltered Doris. "I wonder what has happened to her. People can't disappear easily these times."

"Oh, can't they, miss! They can!"

The waiter proceeded to quote instances of men and women who had disappeared, and had never been heard of again.

Doris went to her room. It was quite evident the waiter saw no resemblance between Nurse Angela and "the beautiful Mrs Roger Armer."

She took the paper with her, and read and re-read the florid accounts of Armer's wealth and her own popularity. The journalist had laid it on thickly!

She wondered if everyone would be as obtuse as the friendly waiter? It was the worst of luck, this publishing of her portrait.

And then from her own affairs her mind went to her husband's, what a master-criminal he must be. To steal his own jewels, so as to throw the police off the scent! It was the biggest act of hypocrisy she had ever heard of.

She looked at herself in the glass. At first she thought of changing the colour of her hair. Or should she buy a wig? And then she decided that she would leave matters to Fate, which had hitherto proved friendly towards her.

On the following day she left London to take up her new duties as nurse-attendant to the millionaire's daughter and heiress, Helena Farr.

A superb, somewhat gaudy-looking car was waiting for her at the station. A footman, in an equally gaudy livery, conducted her to it.

The drive from the station to Fairwell House seemed to the girl a long one, for she longed for the privacy of her patient's apartments, and fancied every eye was upon her.

The footman handed her over to an elderly maid, whom Doris discovered later had been Helena's nurse.

"You'll find her a bit of a trial, nurse," Martha said. "She's in one of her queer

moods this evening. There's no pleasing her when she's like she is to-day. I only hope she'll take a fancy to you. She's been awful to several as have been here lately."

"I must do my best to win her affection, Martha," Doris said gently.

"I don't believe Miss Lena knows the meaning o' the word. She's that domineering and selfish. Her father spoils her, and everyone else is afraid of her."

"I am not afraid of her," Doris said quietly, as she removed her bonnet and brushed her hair as far back under her cap as possible.

The violent ringing of a bell sent Martha Cox flying.

"That's her bell. I expect she wants you. She's been talking about your coming all day. She says she'll send you back to-night if you're ugly—like the last nurse was. A nice creature was Nurse Margaret, but uncommon plain. Well, anyways, you ain't that. I'd call you good-looking!"

Doris could not resist a smile. The "Evening News" had alluded to her as "the beautiful Mrs Armer."

"You're to come this very minute," exclaimed Mrs Cox, re-entering hurriedly. "You should see the way she's got herself up! All her jools on! My word! But she does look a poppy-show! There goes the bell again!"

The room into which Martha ushered Doris was an enormous one. As a matter of fact, it ran along the whole front of the great mansion. Three ordinary rooms had been converted into one. Miss Farr liked space.

The magnificence of the upholstery was in keeping with the grandeur of the sole occupant of this garish apartment. Helena's costume was almost grotesque.

Composed of rich materials, more suited to a married woman than a slim girl of eighteen, the colour scheme was vivid. And yet, somehow, Doris thought it suited the weird, elf-creature who wore it.

But it was the display of jewellery that attracted Doris Armer's attention most. Necklaces of emeralds and rubies, linked by large diamonds, hung on the too thin neck; bracelets to match; a diamond band bound round the "bobbed" dark hair—Miss Farr certainly presented a startling appearance.

Doris, prepared though she was by Doctor Weston for something unusual in the way of patients, was certainly taken aback.

"Is that you, Nurse? Come up! Don't be afraid of me. I don't bite!"

Doris smiled, and held out her own beautiful white hand.

"I'm sure you don't, and I'm not at all afraid of you."

Helena gripped her hand with her own beringed fingers. Doris was surprised at the strength of the girl's hand. She looked so fragile.

The dark eyes looked long and steadily into the quiet grey eyes of Nurse Angela. And then suddenly they dropped before Doris's steady gaze.

"I like you," Helena murmured. "There's something soothing about you."

"I am glad to hear that," Doris replied cheerfully. "I am here for that purpose."

A gorgeous footman now entered, and set a table for two at the further end of the long room. It was Helena's whim that Nurse Angela should dine with her.

"My father is away," she said. "He will be home to-morrow, and then he will want me to dine with him in the big dining-room. I wonder if you will like my father?"

"I expect I shall," Doris smiled. "The question is, will Mr Farr like me?"

"He will; because father adores beauty, and you are beautiful."

Doris made no remark. She did not want Mr Farr to admire her.

The dinner was a triumph of art, and was served as ceremoniously as though it was a dinner-party, instead of a tete-a-tete between a couple of young women.

Though Helena was the younger by several years, she looked as old as Doris, and was far more worldly-wise.

"Do you love jewels?" Helena asked suddenly.

The menservants had left the room, and by Nurse Angela's advice her patient was reclining on the specially made couch. Doctor Weston had advised.

Love jewels? A swift shudder ran through Doris. She hated them. Ever since she had seen her husband's gloating eyes fixed on the pile of jewels in the house in the nameless street, the mere sight of precious stones sent a sickening thrill through her.

"I—I don't think I do," she murmured. The sharp eyes seemed to pierce through her.

"Then," said Helena, "you're not like me. I live for them, I worship them! I'm only happy when I'm touching them—when I look in the mirror and watch their sparkle, their wonderful, changing hues. If I was robbed of my jewels I should die!"

Doris looked at the young girl in dismay. Helena appeared a changed person. She sat up, her dark eyes fixed on the mirror-lined walls.

Her sallow face was flushed, her breath came and went in uneven pants. She looked like one possessed.

Doris had heard of such a mania, the love of precious stones that drove men and women to crime. In this young girl it was horrible.

"Look at them!" She pointed to the ropes of jewels reflected in the mirrors. "How wicked these rubies and emeralds look! The green and the crimson. There! Did you see how the big diamond flashed? It's worth thousands of pounds, that one diamond! It belonged to a Rancee. They say it's bewitched, and brings ill luck. But not to me. You see, I love it so!"

"Come, Miss Farr!" Doris spoke with authority. "I can't allow you to excite yourself like this. Let me remove your jewels. And try and rest—don't think about them. Believe me, the possession of precious stones brings no happiness."

Helena laughed contemptuously.

"You say that because you never had any of your own."

Doris let the challenge pass. She remembered her diamond tiara, and the well-stocked jewel-case she had left behind.

Presently all the fire died out of Helena's face. She looked pathetically young and tired.

"Yes, take them off," she said.

Doris unfastened the clasps, the safety devices and pins, and laid the jewels on a small table by Miss Farr.

Of course, you have a safe. Had you not better lock them up?" She went very white, as she added: "There have been several jewel robberies lately, you know."

"Yes. Westways Court, Mr Armer's place, was burgled last week. But"—Helena clenched her sharp little teeth—"they would find it a hard matter to steal my jewels. I sleep with them under the mattress of my bed. In the safe are duplicates in paste." Abruptly she rose. "I'm tired. I'm going to bed."

Doris followed her from the room. On the other side of the long corridor lay the sleeping apartments belonging to Miss Farr's suite of rooms. All were on the first floor.

"Bring my jewels, nurse, please."

Helena led the way, Doris following, unwillingly carrying the jewels in her apron.

As they passed the big oriel window on the landing, Doris paused. She thought she saw a white face pressed against the panes. But, of course, this was impossible. The rooms were too high up for anyone to look in.

Doris had been given a couple of rooms next to her patient's, but Helena would not allow the door of communication to be left open.

"I've never allowed it," she said. "And though I like you better than any nurse I've had, I'm not going to have it now."

Doris said nothing. Paul was right; her patient was a difficult one to manage. She almost began to regret having accepted

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