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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.

A few days after, she reads in the paper that the "missing Mrs Armer" has been found drowned, but actually the unrecognisable body that was discovered belonged to an unknown girl to whom Doris had given her clothes.

Then one day a new housekeeper arrived at Mr Farr's house, and Doris was horrified to recognise in her one of her thief-husband's accomplices.

THE VOICE OVER THE TELEPHONE.

By a strong effort of will, Doris pulled herself together sufficiently to answer the woman's remark.

"No wire has come," She spoke mechanically her eyes fixed on the pale face of Wanda. "You are Mrs Warren?" she forced herself to say.

Her voice sounded strange in her own ears. She hoped the housekeeper did not notice anything, for she must have time to think.

"Yes. And you— Mrs Warren smiled— "are Miss Farr's nurse."

It was evident that Mrs Warren did not recognise her as the girl whom the man Philip had brought in a drugged condition to the thieves' den.

"I am—Nurse Angela," Doris said, and then something urged her to say: "Your face is familiar, Mrs Warren. I wonder if we have ever met before?"

Doris fixed her eyes on the haggard face. She fancied it changed colour, but Mrs Warren said quietly:

"It is quite possible. As nurse, you must come across all sorts of people. I, as a housekeeper, do the same. I hope you and I will be friends, nurse, I hear Miss Farr is rather impossible."

At this moment Martha Cox returned, with a glass in which she had mixed some brandy and water.

"Drink it, nurse—" she began, and then started as she saw that Doris was not alone.

Mrs Warren came forward quickly, full of apologies and explanations.

"I can't imagine how it is you did not receive my telegram," she said. "I sent it off quite early to-day."

Mrs Cox looked hard at Mrs Warren.

"Well," she said, "we didn't get one."

She spoke bluntly. Doris could tell by her manner that Martha was not prepossessed by the stranger.

"I hope it hasn't put you out?"

"No, your room's ready. Perhaps you'd like to go to it. And your luggage? Did you drive—or how did you come?"

Mrs Warren held up a small portmanteau.

"I sent my luggage in advance. I walked from the station."

"Walked?" Why, it's nearer five miles than four! You must be a good walker, Mrs Warren!"

"I am," was the quiet remark. "And thank you, Mrs—" she paused interrogatively.

"Cox. Martha Cox is my name," Martha said curtly.

"I would like to go to my room. I feel untidy. I should not care to see Mr Farr until I make myself presentable."

"You won't see the master to-night, anyhow," said Martha. "He is in London."

Was it fancy on Doris's part? Or did an expression of relief flit over Wanda's pallid countenance?

"I'm glad of that," Mrs Warren said.

"One doesn't feel, or look, one's best after a railway journey."

"Supper'll be ready in half an hour," Martha said, as she led the way to the house-keeper's room.

Doris's sensations can be easily imagined. Too well did she know where her duty lay. She should at once ring up the police, and tell them her suspicion that all was not as it should be. But that would mean giving Roger away.

Roger—her husband.

First she decided on waiting till the morning; and no sooner had she decided on this than it occurred to her that to-morrow might be too late.

In this miserable state of indecision, Mrs Cox found her on her return from Mrs Warren's room.

"Well—what do you think of her, my dear?"

"I—I don't know. There's something odd about her!"

Martha nodded vigorously.

"That just what I think. There is summat I can't make out—and yet she's outspoken enough. Nice, lady-like manners

too. She's been telling me a lot about herself—how she was left a widow with one boy." Got him to support as well as herself."

Doris said nothing. Too well did she know that Wanda's story was a tissue of lies, invented for the occasion.

"Cook's sending 'er supper up now," Martha volunteered. "She's got a nervous headache, and wants to git to bed right away. And you, nurse—I'd go too."

"Not just yet, I think, Martha."

"You look that worn and worried. It's all that Helena—with her scares and nonsense," muttered Mrs Cox. "There now, you never drank your brandy, arter all!"

"I'd sooner have a cup of coffee, if there's one going," Doris smiled wanly.

"I'm making some for Mrs Warren, I'll send you a cup to your room. You just look worn out!"

If she could only know that her husband was safe at Westways Court! This thought hammered in Doris's brain. Knowing that he had been seen—surely he would not attempt a robbery to-night?

Doubtless he had been hidden somewhere in the grounds, and had seen the searchers looking for him.

She went slowly into Helena's sitting-room. A telephone on a desk attracted her attention, and a wild idea entered her head.

She would ring up Roger Armer! Voices sounded so different over the 'phone. He would never recognise hers. She would disguise it. Besides, she thought grimly, she was dead! The dead cannot speak!

How well she knew the number! No need to look in the telephone book for it. She rang up.

"Hallo?" The answer came quickly in a woman's voice.

"Is Mr Armer there?"

"Yes. Who is it speaking?"

Isobel Vane's voice! What was she doing in her old home—in Roger's house? Doris's hand trembled so that she nearly dropped the receiver.

"One of Mr Farr's servants," she replied. "I have a message for Mr Armer."

"Hold the line a minute. I'll send Mr Armer."

In an agony of suspense and suppressed excitement, Doris Armer waited to hear her husband's voice. And then suddenly she realised that by speaking to her husband over the telephone she would be breaking her vow of silence.

"Hallo! Hallo! Roger Armer is speaking."

Her husband's voice came to her over the wire, and she shook all over. Still masterful and strong, it had power to stir her to her very heart's core—a sensation which surprised her. She had thought that the sound of it would be hateful, but she knew that the thrill she felt was not fear or dislike.

"Mr Farr would be glad to know which day it is you will dine with him?" she said, disguising her voice as much as she could.

"I thought the seventeenth was arranged," said Roger.

Mr Farr is going away, and cannot keep that date, or indeed any other at present."

What possessed Doris to say this she could never after explain. The words seemed forced from her against her will.

"But—but—" began Roger, evidently astonished at this extraordinary speech. But Doris rang off, and hung the receiver up.

She was shaking all over, but she had gained the information she wanted. Roger was in his own home. It was not likely that the gang would start work without him.

All the same she determined to sit up all night, and so be ready to give the alarm if necessity arose.

Before going to her room she carefully inspected the fastenings of all the windows of Miss Farr's suite. She gave a last glance at the sleeping Helena, and then, unlocking the door between her sleeping apartment and Helena's, she left the door ajar.

Her coffee had been brought during her absence at the telephone. She needed it, and drank it off at a draught. Then she sat down to keep her all-night vigil. No one could possibly enter Helena's room without her knowledge.

But presently to her dismay, an extraordinary drowsiness took possession of her senses. She felt her eyes closing. In vain did she try to keep her heavy lids open.

She tried to rise, so that she could walk off this horrible, unnatural sleepiness. Her limbs refused to move—seemed weighted with lead.

"It's no use—I—I—can't—"

This was Doris's last conscious thought as she fell back in her chair, dragged for the second time!

Meanwhile, at Westways Court, Roger and Isobel were discussing the extraordinary telephonic communication from Mr Farr.

"The servant—whichever she might be—is evidently entirely in Mr Farr's confidence."

Roger spoke thoughtfully. He sat opposite to Isobel in the study. They had been going through some accounts together and had sat up later than usual to finish them.

"She certainly must be," Isobel agreed. "Do you know, Roger, there's something strange about it all. When did you see Mr Farr last?"

"As a matter of fact," returned Roger, "I ran against him in town to-day. He told me he was not coming down to Fairwell Manor to-night. Of course, he may have changed his mind. He sang out as he left me: 'Don't forget the seventeenth.'"

He smoked awhile in silence. Isobel lighted a cigarette and looked curiously at him. She was wondering if the same thought was in his mind as in hers—that the voice of Farr's servant was not unlike that of the dead Doris.

Ridiculous idea; of course, Roger thought nothing of the kind. Her own nerves must be out of order. She wanted a tonic.

"If I were you, Roger, I should call at Fairwell Manor to-morrow evening. There's something mysterious about it I don't like."

"Oh?" Roger laid down his pipe and rose. "I expect it's all right. Good-night, Isobel!" He held out his hand.

Isobel waited a moment hesitatingly. Perhaps she thought he would bid her a warmer good-night. Roger was a widower now. Still it was early days. Wounds such as Roger Armer had received don't heal up over quickly.

"WANDA! WHERE IS SHE?"

Wake up, nurse! Nurse Angela—don't you hear? Wake up! We've been burgled in the night! Laws! Whatever's the matter with her? I can't wake her! Sure to goodness they ain't bin and killed her as well as took all the gold plate from the safe! Thank Heaven Miss Lena's jewels are safe."

Martha Cox it was, who, on going into nurse's rooms, discovered her in a drugged sleep.

"Ring up the doctor, Charles! Don't stand staring like a fool." The footman hurried away. "And the police!" Mrs Cox shrieked after him. Then she turned to Doris, who lay like a log in her chair.

Several women servants crowded round. It was eight o'clock. The burglary had been discovered by the under-footman on going to the butler's pantry.

An alarm had been raised at once, but no trace of the burglars had been as yet discovered. The butler was busily engaged, with the upper footman, searching for footprints, for any clue as to how the miscreants entered the house, as neither doors nor windows had apparently been tampered with. One of the housemaids showed signs of hysterics.

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