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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.

One day Mr Farr's house is burgled and Doris, recognising her husband's work in this, rushes off to her old home to warn him. From the garden, she sees the figures of Armer and Isobel Vane sil-

houetted on the blind. Then suddenly a heavy hand is laid on her shoulder.

"HER SPIRIT HAUNTS ME—ALWAYS."

With great difficulty, Doris Armer stifled a shriek that rose to her lips.

The scene of domestic happiness, in which her husband and Isobel Vane were the central figures, had wounded her to the heart's core. And now another had been a witness of the quiet, homelike picture beside herself.

"Hush!"

A hand was laid lightly across her lips.

She lifted her eyes, and found herself gazing into the face of the man whom she knew as Philip, the man who had rescued her from the lonely house in the woods.

And then suddenly she remembered that this unknown man was her husband's accomplice in guilt, that even now they were probably plotting together, arranging further robberies, fresh outrages.

And to save such a criminal as Roger Armer she had come prepared to break her vow of silence.

"Hush! Don't attract their attention, Mrs Armer."

With a firm hand, he drew the girl away further into the shadow. They passed out of earshot, but not from the range of vision.

The couple on the couch by the fire had drawn close together. Isobel's head, with its heavy coils of rich red hair, was very close to Roger Armer's shoulder.

A wild, fierce feeling of jealousy flamed up within Doris's heart. She held her breath, expecting every moment to see their lips meet in a lover's kiss of perfect understanding.

A strong sensation of resentment against Isobel Vane was prominent in her curiously mixed emotions. Oh, how dare she? While Roger's wife crouched outside, like the outcast a cruel fate had made her.

And then there came a sickening sense of hopelessness and despair. By the silent assumption of her own death she had raised up an eternal barrier between herself and Roger Armer. It was, to the man and woman on whom she gazed, no sin to love.

Only she knew that they could never marry; she only stood between them and happiness!

An awful wave of misery surged over the unhappy girl, whose obstinacy had caused so much misery.

She saw Roger rise, and caught a glimpse of Isobel's face, on which disappointment was writ large.

Roger stood by the high, flower-garlanded Adams mantelshelf. In the centre stood a portrait, flanked on either side by a crystal vase of tall lilies. Her own portrait! Her own favourite flowers!

He raised the heavy silver frame, and, holding it in his hand, turned and said something to the woman.

Doris, of course, could not hear what he said. Had she been able to do so, she would not have been so utterly wretched.

"Somehow, Isobel," Roger was saying, "I cannot forget her. Oh, I know, all you would say—all that you can urge against this mad delusion of mine! But I cannot believe she has left me for ever. Her spirit is with me, haunts me always. Time may remove this strange, almost uncanny, feeling, but it will be many long years before I can put another in her place."

Isobel hid her face, so that he could not read the bitter expression upon it.

"I will wait for years if need be, Roger, for I love you as that cold, silent woman never did. She is dead. How can you believe otherwise? You saw her—"

"Yes," he sighed; "I saw her. As you say, I have proof that Doris—has gone—for ever. But so long as the strange feeling of unreality remains, it must be as it is."

Very tenderly, he placed the portrait on the shelf. Isobel, with a yearning look, turned slowly, and left the room.

Roger crossed over to the window, and drew the curtains closer, and the familiar fire-lit room and its solitary occupant were blotted out.

"And now, Mrs Armer," said Philip, "will you please tell me what brought you here? It is unwise of you to meddle in affairs that may have disastrous consequences to yourself."

The significant tone did not escape Doris.

"I don't understand you."

She turned startled eyes upon her companion.

That the man was ill at ease was evident. He kept sending furtive glances at the house, as though he feared detection. He laughed shortly.

"If it is discovered that Mrs Roger Armer is alive, she will find herself in a very unpleasant position. Her husband—he sent her a peculiarly penetrating glance—"is the head of the gang."

This was a bow drawn at a venture. But Doris did not know this, and a low moan escaped her.

"I know—I know! It was to warn him I ran the risk of coming here."

Philip turned away to hide a smile. How simple this woman was! How easy a dupe he had found her! How her every action had helped them in their career of crime! He felt very kindly disposed towards this innocent victim of roguery.

"Had you not better get back before your absence is discovered?" he asked. "Believe me, it will be best. Should you be discovered here, your object will be defeated. In fact, your presence at your old home would give away your husband."

"I must ask you a few questions before I return," the girl said desperately. "You saved me from him once, and so, somehow against my better judgment, and in defiance of common-sense, I'm going to trust you."

She raised such imploring eyes to his face that somehow Philip felt more of a blackguard than ever.

"I may, mayn't I?"

"Yes, I'll answer you to the best of my ability. Believe me, I am deeply sorry for you. But, come, let us get away from the house. See, there is a light in the upstairs rooms!"

"My room! I mean those that were given to me when I came here a bride—long ago—so very—long ago."

The blinds were up. The light shone, rosy and mellow, over the silver and blue rooms that Doris had called her prison.

Had he given her rooms to Isobel Vane? She could not tear herself away till she knew.

But it was Roger who entered the room. He stood in the centre, gazing round; then suddenly he flung himself on the sofa, and buried his face in his hands.

Philip touched her gently.

"Come!" he said. "Why pain yourself by remaining here?"

They went into the cold, bare woods, towards the spot where Doris had left the car.

"Now ask your questions. If I refuse to answer some of them, it will be—for your husband's sake."

"How long," tear were in her voice, "has my husband led this double life?"

Philip hesitated just an instant.

"Armer has always led it," he said. "He could never run straight. It isn't in him."

"But his business! Surely he does not need to rob?"

"Armer's business is merely a blind. He organised the gang of which he is now the head. I am one of them. Henry Barlow another. Whilst enlisting your sympathy Barlow was acting as Armer's tool."

Doris beat her hands together.

"And I have been the blindest tool of all! He married me so that, as the wife of a supposed honourable and wealthy man, I could bring him into touch with those who possessed jewels and valuables. He won me by a lie—he kept me with him by lies. He is false, cruel, unutterably wicked, and yet—I want to save him!"

"Of course, you do! Are you not his wife?"

"Heaven help me, I am!"

The sound of the stable clock striking

recalled Doris to the lateness of the hour. "Tell me all that has happened at Fairwell Court since the burglary was discovered," Philip urged. "I will see Armer, and warn him. You don't want to see him after what you and I have just witnessed."

He saw her shudder, and smiled to himself. Jealously had accomplished what plain speaking would never have done.

"No—no!"

She hid her face, so that he might not see how his stab had gone home. And then rapidly, she gave him a brief account of how a great London detective, called Mark Lewis, had undertaken the case.

Philip listened in silence, his expression growing graver and graver.

"You must go back at once. Already they are beginning to suspect you, and if they arrest you as an accomplice they will force you to speak—to give evidence against your husband."

"That they shall never do! I became a silent wife—I will be a silent witness, if necessary."

Philip placed her in the two-seater, and watched her till she was out of sight.

"What a woman!" he muttered. "A woman in a thousand! A woman who can make a vow of silence, and stick to it, is a rare thing. If only she was one of us! Wanda's infatuation for Armer will lead to mischief, I'm afraid. Although she is my sister, I see her faults, and intense jealousy is one of them. And now to business. That girl's sudden appearance has upset all our calculations. I only hope they haven't gone away."

Lifting his finger to his lips, he gave a low, penetrating whistle, once—twice—three times was it repeated. And then, in quick response, two masked men crept from behind a thicket.

"I thought," said the taller of the two, "that you weren't going to get rid of her. Who was she?"

"That," said Philip, "was Roger Armer's wife."

"THAT DAY IS AT HAND."

That night Westways Court was entered and burgled for the second time. The strong room, where a quantity of valuable plate was deposited was broken open and robbed.

At the Manor House the first intense excitement caused by the burglary had, in a measure, died down. Miss Farr was in a fair way to recovery; already she had doctored herself with the faked jewels.

The news of this second burglary at Westways Court had electrified the police. Whilst they had been engaged in seeking the burglars at the Manor House, the miscreants were robbing Mr Farr's neighbour at the Court!

Mark Lewis alone said nothing. He was working the case in his own way. He would brook no interference from the local police.

"Yes, I have a clue," he owned; "and I intend to follow it up. I either undertake the case alone, or I throw it up."

Mr Farr was only too willing to agree to Lewis's terms.

"Don't forget," Lewis said, when ostensibly leaving the Manor House, that, as your secretary, I am to meet Mr Roger Armer at dinner on the seventeenth."

"I doubt," said Farr, "that Mr Armer will be well enough to come. The robbery gave him a nasty shock. He has never been the same since his wife's death."

"I suppose," Lewis said thoughtfully, "he felt it deeply."

"I believe so. Their married life was an unhappy one. One does not care to talk about it now. Mrs Armer is dead, but she was quite impossible, you know."

"I have heard her called the Silent Wife," Lewis smiled. "An unusual characteristic in a woman."

Before he left, Mark Lewis sought and obtained an interview with Nurse Angela.

"You were late in coming home last night," he said, fixing his dark eyes upon the pale, lovely face.

"Late!" she stammered. "I—"

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