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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 one day Mrs Vanderdecken, the owner of a famous pearl necklace, is invited to dinner. Doris watches from behind a curtain, and hears Armer, who is also present, ask her if she is not fearful of her pearls being stolen.

HAD DORIS BROKEN HER VOW OF SILENCE!

"Afraid?" Nina's high American accent was extraordinarily carrying. Doris, behind her curtain, heard the laugh that accompanied her words. "Not much!" continued Mrs Vanderdecken. "I nearly always wear my pearls, and I don't mind telling you in confidence"—she smiled archly into Armer's impassive face—"that I sleep with them under my pillow."

Helena Farr leaned forward. "That's where I hid my jewels!" she cried excitedly. "Only for that, they'd have been stolen when the burglars came the other night. They ransacked my room but they never thought of looking under the mattress."

An awkward silence ensued. To Morton Farr the subject was, naturally, most distasteful, seeing that among the guests round his table sat, disguised as his secretary, one of the cleverest detectives of the day. He changed the subject abruptly.

"I expected Dr Weston," he said to Nina. "I still expect him. But a doctor's time is not entirely his own."

"Indeed, it isn't," agreed the sprightly widow, turning to Armer. "Of course," she said, "you know Dr Weston. A charming man, isn't he?"

"I know Dr Weston very slightly," Armer spoke stiffly.

Doris wondered at the coolness of the man. And then she saw a footman hurry round, and throw the door open.

"Dr Weston," he announced, and Paul, looking very well-bred and good-looking, came quietly in.

"I'm awfully sorry I am late," he said, as he shook hands with Lena and bowed politely to the table in general.

Conversation became general. Doris saw, to her amazement, that Armer was treating Paul, who sat opposite to him, in a most cordial manner. What his object for this was the girl could not imagine.

Paul met Armer's advances coolly. It seemed to Doris that Dr Weston was as much surprised at the change in her husband's manner as she was.

And, certainly, now she could have a long uninterrupted look at Roger.

He was very much changed in every way. His face, always stern, was now hard as well. A curiously furtive expression replaced the old straightforward glance.

"It's the awful life of sin and crime he's living," she thought. "It's bound to tell in time. Oh, if only he would give it up! Have I the right to stand aside, and not do all I can to save him? Have I? Have I?"

She stood back quickly. Helena had given the signal. The ladies rose, and filed to the door.

Armer detained Mrs Vanderdecken for a minute. It seemed to the distracted Doris that he could not bear to let the pearls out of his sight.

He had been most attentive to his partner during the meal. He was evidently saying something about the fastening of the clasp, for Nina put up her hands to the clasp, and made some laughing remark which Doris could not hear.

The ladies passed through the hall, and into the drawing-room, before Doris could recover herself sufficiently to slip away.

"Never mind," she thought; "I can easily slip round the terrace, and in at the side door."

She waited a short time, until the men had settled down to their wine and cigars, and then, quietly opening the window, she slipped out on to the gravelled path.

"After all, I need not be uneasy. So long as they remain clasped round Mrs Vanderdecken's neck, there's no danger."

This was what Doris told herself; but deep down in her mind lay an uneasy feeling that it was not so impossible as she would like to believe. It seemed that nothing that was bad and cruel was impossible for Roger Armer.

And then, even as she turned the angle of the house, she came face to face with the man of whom she was thinking.

How he got there, she didn't stop to think. That he was there she knew. The moon shone down upon his face—pale and hard as ever.

The faultlessly cut evening-dress showed off to perfection his equally faultless figure. He looked strikingly handsome, and Doris's heart contracted with a strangely sharp pain.

It was beyond doubt her husband on whom she gazed, and yet she experienced the sensation that a stranger stood before her.

"I beg your pardon!" he said formally. "I hope I did not alarm you. The fact is the dining-room became insufferably hot. I came out for a breath of air."

Sheer amazement held Doris silent. He was actually pretending that she was a stranger—she, the ill-treated, insulted wife of Roger Armer was being addressed by him as though he had never seen her before!

And then came swiftly an explanation of Armer's conduct. He believed her to be dead! She was dressed in uniform, and moonlight is deceptive, plays strange tricks with form and features. And she herself was changed. She looked older.

And yet it seemed impossible that he did not recognise her.

Well, let it be so. It made her task more easy. Nurse Angela must say to Roger Armer things that Doris Armer dare not utter.

"Roger Armer!"—she spoke in low, tense tones—"I will give you a word of warning. You are being watched. Do not return to the house. You cannot steal Mrs Vanderdecken's pearls. I know I ought to tell Mr Farr what you are. But if you will go—at once—I will not speak. Because of—the past, I will be silent."

Her voice choked; she hardly knew what she said.

Armer continued to gaze at her. She could see his face change colour. Then the look of blank astonishment faded.

"It is good of you, Armer said. "Only—I don't understand you. Surely you are not making a mistake—taking me for someone else?"

"—no." A strange doubt gripped her. This man was Roger, and yet—he was not Roger. She determined to make sure. "You are Roger Armer?"

"Yes, I am—Roger Armer, but—"

"Quick!" She pushed him from her. Her quick ear had caught the sound of an opening window. She glanced up, to see the shock head and coloured spectacles of Mr Smith leaning out of the passage window above them. "I've warned you. Go."

Without a backward glance, she sped away, nor did she pause until she had gamed her own room. She locked the door and threw herself down into a chair, her heart beating as though it would suffocate her, every nerve tingling with excitement.

"How will it end?" she moaned. "How can it end? He believes me dead, and I—I alone—can save him. I am his wife. Nothing can undo that. I have broken my vow of silence, a vow I should never have taken."

She sat for what seemed to her a long time, her face hidden in her hands, thinking what was best to be done, praying to be shown clearly where her duty lay. At last she rose, and bathed her tear-stained face.

"I will go to him to-morrow. I will tell him that it was his most unhappy wife to whom he spoke to-night. I will implore him to give up his double life, to make amends to his victims, and return the jewels he has stolen. If anyone knew that Nurse Angela was Doris Armer, what would they think? But no one knows, except Paul—my one, my only friend."

Armer waited till the white-capped fig-

ure had disappeared, and then, casting a quick glance round, to see no one else was looking, he slipped into the shrubbery.

Had not Mr Walter Smith been so intent on following Nurse Angela's movements, he would have gained some valuable information respecting Mr Roger Armer.

But even the greatest detectives occasionally make mistakes, and this was one of Mark Lewis's biggest, as no one was more ready to concede than himself—later on.

Meanwhile, Armer had reached the wicket gate leading to the woods. A low soft whistle, and a man appeared before him.

"I've had an adventure, Barlow," Armer said. "Come further away and I'll tell you. Oh, yes, we've plenty of time! Farr and the other men won't leave their wine for some time. The port is too good—cigars, too, beyond reproach."

"A pity," said Henry Barlow, who was so disguised that recognition was practically impossible, "that you can't have that adventure. I was watching at the time from behind those ribs of evergreen. I saw you and Doris—"

"Doris! Was that Doris?" Armer's tones were full of astonishment. "How she's changed! I'd never have recognised her. My goodness, you have amazed me!"

"You're too reckless, Armer," Henry Barlow complained. And then in a tense whisper, he added: "Is everything arranged?"

"Yes, Nina Van is ripe for a flirtation and I understand the fastening of her necklace. It's intimate, but it's practically the same as that Russian woman's necklace I pinched with my own hands! necklace I pinched as she was leaving the opera in July."

"Well, be careful! Doris Armer knows—"

"Or thinks she knows," laughed the other. "The odd part about it all is—that everybody believes her to be dead!"

"Oh, well!" Armer shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "We can't bother about Doris. I've got to get on with the pearl business. I expect my character is wondering why I don't put in an appearance. If there was no Wanda, I might do worse than consider Nina Vanderdecken."

"There is Wanda—and there is Doris, also," said Henry Barlow.

They conversed in low tones for a few minutes, and presently Armer strolled leisurely in, through the dining-room window, and he joined the other men.

"All right, Armer?" Morton Farr asked.

"Oh, yes! Never could stand a hot room."

Paul Weston looked steadily at him. There was something about Roger Armer to-night that he did not understand. Roger Armer did not look in the least ill. But, yes, there certainly was something strange about him.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE WINTER GARDEN.

Nina Vanderdecken looked up invitingly into Mr Armer's face. She swept aside her rich dress, and made room for him on the sofa beside her.

The group of ladies had broken up. Helena had attacked herself to Paul Weston. Morton Farr was wishing that Doris was present. Her dislike to joining the party rather puzzled him.

"Have you seen the winter garden, Mrs Vanderdecken?" Armer whispered, as he slowly waved the widow's jewelled fan to and fro.

"No; not for ever so long. Mr Farr was telling me of some wonderful orchids he had secured."

She sent him a flirtatious glance.

"Will you allow me to show it to you?"

Nina shivered affectingly.

"Won't it be cold?"

"No; quite the reverse. It is over-

heated, I think."

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