

ON PAROLE

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On Parole by Mina Doyle

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MINA DOYLE

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By

Mina Doyle

(MRS. CHARLES W. YOUNG)



London

John Long

6 Chandos Street, Strand

1900

ON PAROLE

PROLOGUE

THE House was crowded.

The revival of a play that had been popular some years ago, was evidently in for a success. The audience was a fashionable one, not only so, it was attentive and good humoured. One or two of it were even listening to the strains of the Orchestra, the rest as usual were busy with their opera glasses, and their more or less vapid conversation. In the fifth row of the stalls, two men with a wide expanse of shirt front, and each with a button hole of Parma violets, were talking together in low tones.

"This is the Play in which Violet Forrest made a name for herself some years ago," remarked the taller of the two.

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"Violet Forrest—ah, rather a pretty woman wasn't she? Married a fellow named Armstrong—Good sporting chap, and lots of money—Haven't seen him for years—What's become of him, d'ye know?"

"Hush! I think he is here to-night; I passed him in the vestibule looking as dark and sardonic as Mephistopheles himself."

"Why what's the row?" the other asked with languid interest. "Didn't the fair Forrest turn out to be all his fancy painted her?"

"Can't say. Armstrong is not much given to fancies! All I know is she didn't run straight—Bolted with an actor fellow, Ladelli by name, and has never been heard of in London since. There was a rumour that she and Ladelli were living in the East-end somewhere in great poverty, and that he ill-treats her, and makes her work for him—Shouldn't wonder if it's true—He was a lazy beggar like most Italians. What on earth she saw to admire in him, beyond his voice, which was undeniable, it's hard to say—Women are strange creatures—But she is punished, if report speaks true."

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"Serve her right, the fool. And Armstrong what of him? Divorced her I suppose?"

"No. Went to the Devil on his own account till he got sick of it—Then vamoosed to Australia or North America or somewhere for years—He is back again now though, and as I said, I believe he is here to-night."

"Not thinking of that wretched woman, you don't mean, surely?"

"Can't say. She's not worth it anyhow. This next act is rot. Come out and have a smoke——" Thus carelessly they dismissed from their thoughts and conversation the wrecked life of their former favorite.

And the Orchestra played the "Adieu" of Schubert. There was a faint attempt at applause as the last notes in their despairing sadness quivered and died away. Before the curtain went up again, a tall dark man had left his place in the stalls, and passed out into the lamp-lit darkness of the street.

CHAPTER I

IT was a wild night. The rain was pouring in torrents. The wind blew in shrill gusts, and one solitary pedestrian cursed the folly, sentiment, call it what you will, which had brought him into a region where cabs were not. Suddenly a woman's piercing shriek rent the air, followed by another. In a moment, without stopping to reflect upon the wisdom of his act, John Armstrong flung the whole weight of his powerful form against the ramshackle door of the building, from whence the cries came, and as it crashed inwards, he sprang up the wretched staircase. It was as he expected—a drunken brute of a man was ill-treating a woman. He had seized her arm, and was about to strike her a heavy blow with his clenched fist, when Armstrong caught him fair and square between the eyes with one, straight

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from the shoulder, and the great brute went down like an ox. Armstrong waited a moment to see if he moved, but he lay like a log where he fell.

He had evidently received his quietus for the present. Then for the first time Armstrong turned to look at the woman he had rescued. The room was in semi-darkness, and at first he could not see her, but he heard a low sob, and following the direction of the sound with his eyes he saw her crouched in a distant corner, her face hidden in her hands.

He turned to go, though in a half-hearted sort of way. He felt sorry for the woman.

"Don't go—He will kill me when he recovers," sobbed a voice that had once been sweet, and was still refined. Armstrong started violently, and turning, looked full at her. For an instant their eyes met. Each recognised the other. For each the agony of a life time seemed crowded into that one moment of recognition. But the spell was quickly broken. Two strides brought Armstrong to the unconscious figure of the man on the floor.

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With a steely look in his eyes, he pulled out a pistol from his breast and took deliberate aim, but with a wilder cry than that which had brought him to her rescue, the woman threw herself upon him, and clung to his arm in such a manner that he could not fire, without risk of hurting her. "I am not worth it," she sobbed, "I am not worth it."

Armstrong gazed down at her with a kind of contemptuous pity. She covered her face with her hands, and sank on the ground at his feet. Once more, he made a movement to go, but raising herself on her knees, her long bright hair streaming back in disorder from her shoulders, she implored him not to leave her.

It was a weird scene. The miserable room in semi-darkness, fitfully illumined by the sickly glimmer from a street-lamp, the light of which fell full on the kneeling figure of the woman, her face wild with terror, her hands clasped and up-raised imploringly. Before her the tall muscular figure of Armstrong stood like a tower of strength, while in the back ground lay the motionless form