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Soon Weston, with Roger's distracted wife, was driving rapidly through the London streets towards Golden Buildings.

"Have you no theory on the subject, Doris?" Paul asked after a long silence.

"Yes—a terrible one!" she breathed. "Oh, Paul, I dare hardly voice my suspicions! No; they're more than that"—she choked down a sob—"they're almost certainties!"

"Doris," Paul said gravely, "this is no time for sentiment. Tell me all that's in your mind. What are these suspicions that are 'almost certainties'?" He laid his hand on hers. "You know you can trust me, Doris."

His heart ached as he noted the havoc anxiety had made on the young wife's delicate beauty.

"Yes," with sudden resolution, "I can trust you, and I will." And into Paul's astonished ears she poured forth all that was pent up within her.

And what a strange story it was that Doris Armer confided to her old friend! Weston did not utter a word until she had finished.

"What am I to do?" she asked him piteously.

He looked down upon the lovely face with its stricken expression.

"Surely you don't believe your husband to be one of a gang of burglars and scoundrels?"

She wrung her hands beneath the light rug that covered them.

"What am I to think?" she retorted. "I saw them all. I saw Roger with them. Henry Barlow, too."

"Where does Barlow live?" asked Weston suddenly.

"In a little house in Balham," she told him. Paul turned the car in that direction.

"We will go there first. I own there's a mystery, Doris—something that will need a lot of explanation; but, my dear, it isn't what you think. Roger has his faults, but he is no thief."

A feeling of shame swept over the girl, and yet, somehow, she felt strangely comforted.

But there was Wanda! What of her? Jealously stirred afresh within her.

As they neared Balham Doris's agitation increased. She dreaded what might lie before her. Supposing Wanda herself should be there. How would she greet her?

Paul's voice roused her from her unpleasant thoughts.

"It's a pity you don't know the name of the street where you were taken that night. You were evidently drugged."

"No, I don't know a bit. I ran miles from it in my fright. I never thought of looking. But does it matter—now?"

"I was thinking it was not impossible that Armer has been decoyed away by the man who is evidently personating him. Doris, are you quite certain it was your husband you saw?"

"Yes, quite certain," she answered decidedly. "There couldn't be two men so much alike. And you forget—he was at Mr Farr's party. I saw him as plainly there as I see you now."

By this time they had reached the address Barlow had given to Doris, and to which, from time to time, she had sent such sums of money as she could spare.

It was shut up!

A neighbour volunteered the information that "them Barlows" had cleared out bag and baggage the day before. "Barlow's got a job in the country, Barlow has."

Nothing was to be gained by further inquiries in this direction; and, though Paul took the precaution of going over the empty house, he found no trace of the Barlow family.

In the city offices they found the head clerk much perturbed.

Yes, Mr Armer had been there. He must have been, since he had taken some valuable deeds and the cash-box from his private safe.

"When was that?" Doris asked quickly. "It must have been last night" the clerk said, "after the office was closed."

Doris turned to Paul.

"The gang has been at work again," she said, in a tone of anguish, as they went down to the car. "I shall never see Roger again! And if I do—" She broke down utterly.

"If you do," Paul said, "you will take him back, and listen to the explanation I know he can give you. Doris, I know how hard it seems to go against the evidence of your own senses, but I know the mystery will be cleared up. Won't you trust your husband?"

"How can I?" she wailed. "It is good of you to plead for him—you, whom he insulted—"

"That was nothing," Paul Weston said. "But it was," she persisted. "My whole life with Roger Armer has been nothing but misery. My marriage was a mistake, Paul." She spoke sadly, as one speaks who has lost hope. "You see," she continued, "I didn't love him, and when I discovered he had won me by a fraud indifference turned to hatred."

"No, Doris," Paul said, very low. "That is where you make a mistake. Indifference turned to love. You love Roger now, and I am glad, for your sake."

The colour rushed to her face, her eyes filled with tears.

"How good you are—how noble, Paul! If only Roger was more like you!"

He laughed lightly, but he was deeply touched.

"Roger is Roger, and I am I," he joked. "And now I think it would be as well to go to Westways Court. He may have gone there."

To the young wife the run down seemed endless. But at length the car turned in at the gates of her old home. Mrs Spry hastened to the door to receive her young mistress.

"The detective that the master called in when he was burgled, ma'am, is here, and wants to see you. I'm that glad you've come, ma'am." She beamed at Doris.

"Is Mr Armer here?" Doris inquired breathlessly.

"No, ma'am. He ain't been here not since you and the doctor took him away in the motor ambulance."

At this moment Jeffrey Smart came into the hall.

"I am glad to see you have come, Mrs Armer," he said. "Will you please come in here?"

He threw open the door of the library.

Doris looked at Paul, asking him mutely to come with her. The detective's manner was grave, and she felt she could bear no more. Her powers of endurance had reached their limit, and she dreaded fresh trouble.

Dr Weston moved forward, but Smart waved him back.

"What I have to say is for your ears alone, Mrs Armer," he said.

"I am Mrs Armer's friend," Paul said, as he followed them into the library. "She has taken me into her confidence. There are no secrets between her and me."

"Is that so?" Smart looked from one to the other.

"Yes, Dr Weston has been helping me to find my husband."

"And have you found him?"

Doris shook her head.

"No; I wish we had."

"But"—Jeffrey Smart fixed his keen, dark eyes on Doris—"you know where he is?"

"Indeed I don't."

"Mrs Armer, you are hiding something. It is foolish of you to do so. You are screening someone. That also is foolish, as you are in danger of being arrested as an accomplice of the gang of swill crooks that have been about, brazenly robbing town and country houses. As Nurse Angela you gained admittance to Mr Farr's residence. What happened during your service there? Miss Farr's jewels were stolen! On the night of the dinner-party, at which Mr Armer was present, Mrs Vanderdecken's pearls were cleverly removed from her neck. Later, whilst the guests and staff were being searched you disappeared. Does the theory that you are mixed up in these robberies seem strange? I think not."

Doris sank into a chair, and gazed piteously at Paul. Weston was terribly distressed, for he saw that if Doris was to save herself from being arrested as an accomplice of the gang, she would have to give her husband away. And this he was quite certain she would not do.

Even as Paul hesitated what to advise Doris to do Smart said suddenly:

"I know what you are thinking, Mrs Armer. You are unwilling to speak, fearing that your husband may be injured by your doing so. You have the gift of silence. I have heard you called 'the Silent Wife.'"

And then, as the colour flamed in Doris's cheeks, he smiled.

"There comes a time when it is well to speak. That time has come now. Will you not tell me where Mr Armer is?"

"I would gladly if I could."

"You really don't know?"

Paul began to get vexed at Jeffrey Smart's persistent questioning of Doris.

"Mrs Armer has not the least idea where her husband is. He disappeared from the nursing home in which I placed him. Mrs Armer was nursing him for loss of memory due to a motor accident."

"Which Mr Armer was supposed to have met with on his way from Mr Farr's party?"

"Which he did meet with on that occasion," Paul said shortly.

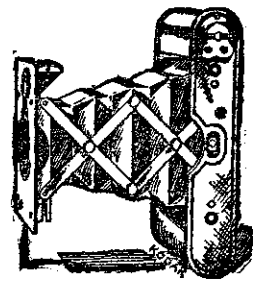
A quiet smile of enjoyment dawned on the detective's face. He was about to give them the surprise of their life, and Jeffrey Smart liked surprising people.

"Your husband did not dine at Mr Farr's house that night."

Doris stared at him in astonishment. He seemed to know so much, this clever detective whom Roger had called in. And yet it seemed he knew very little.

"He was there." The words escaped her unthinkingly. "I saw him myself."

Continued on page 4.



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