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SOUTHLAND RUBBER STORES.

"Do you really wish this?" he asked her.

"More than anything else in the world," Doris answered, so earnestly as to leave no doubt on the subject.

"I had thought of suggesting that Mr Armer should be taken to a nursing home. I have an interest in one. A friend of mine is the physician in attendance; the matron is my cousin."

"That would be splendid, if you don't think the removal would hurt him." Doris's eyes sparkled with hope.

"Not in his present condition," Paul said. "Later on he would have had to be moved. An operation will be necessary."

Doris went white. "Is it as bad as that?" She clasped and unclasped her hands.

"Don't look so unhappy." He comforted her as best he could. "All, I hope, will be well. In the nursing home he will have the best advice, and I will arrange with my cousin that you shall nurse him."

And so it was decided; and so quickly were Dr Weston's arrangements made, that in a very short time Roger Armer was conveyed in an ambulance to Dr Graham's nursing home in London.

Isobel had not yet left the Court. She did not intend to yield up her position in the house without a fight to retain it.

Much depended on her holding her own, for Roger Armer, believing Doris to be dead, had made a will practically in Isobel's favour. If he died, Isobel would be a very rich woman.

She had thus a two-fold reason for her hatred of Roger Armer's wife.

Isobel's apartments were situated in a distant wing of the house, and as soon as she reached them after her interview with Doris, she retired to rest.

"I shall need all my strength," she thought. "I am worn out, as it is. A few hours' sleep will fit me to fight for my rights."

This was how Miss Vane looked at it. Unfortunately for her, she slept so soundly that she heard nothing of Roger's departure. It was from Mrs Spry she heard that the master had been taken away to a nursing home by Dr Weston's orders.

"And Mrs Armer?" Isobel cried. "Did she go, too?"

"Yes, the mistress went with the master. After all," said the good woman, who did not like Miss Vane or her methods of ruling the household, "it's quite right an' proper for a wife to nurse her own 'usband. I can't think however it got about that the mistress was that poor thing they buried by mistake."

Mrs Spry was apt to get a little mixed occasionally.

"No, Miss Vane," in answer to Isobel's frenzied queries, "I don't know where they went. The motor ambulance came, and they put the master in, and drove away, that's all I know."

"And if I did know, I wouldn't tell her," Mrs Spry said to herself as she waddled away. "Comin' between husband and wife like she does! She thought to have been missus here one day, and now she's mad because the rightful missus has turned up!"

WHAT THE DETECTIVE LEARNT.

Needless to say, the search revealed no trace of the stolen pearls. To Mark Lewis it was a mere farce; for he knew it was not on either Mr Farr's guests or servants Mrs Vanderdecken's pearls would be found. The woman who held the clue to the mystery was gone!

But it was Lewis's intention to follow Nurse Angela, and watch her movements.

And then into his head flashed an idea so extraordinary, so wildly improbable, that at first he dismissed it as impossible. But was it? Was it so impossible as it appeared?

He had no doubt at all that Nurse Angela and Doris Armer were one and the same, and that she was screening someone dear to her. Who was she screening? Was it Roger Armer?

He took out the handkerchief with the initials R.A. upon it. Did they stand for the name of "Nurse Angela's" husband, for Roger Armer? If they did not, it was certainly an extraordinary coincidence.

But in the course of his professional career, Mark Lewis had come across many stranger coincidences than this.

The female searcher had found nothing of an incriminating nature in Nurse Angela's room.

"Not so much as a torn letter," she reported.

"I'll go to Westways Court," he decided. "It's absurd, of course, but somehow I can't help thinking that Roger is in this! The affair of the telephone confirms me in the belief. And yet, Armer is a power in the city. His credit is good, his reputation as a sound man is beyond reproach."

For some time the detective sat deep in thought. Then he went to Morton Farr, and asked if he would be so good as to place a car at his disposal.

"Of course. Take any you like. I have three. Robbins is a capital chauffeur."

"Thanks! But I'd sooner drive myself," Mark Lewis declared; and soon he was seated in a small car, driving rapidly towards Westways Court.

As he approached the magnificent mansion, his retentive brain recalled the occasion of his previous visit. Every detail was clear to his mind. The words of the anonymous letter Roger Armer had shown him, of which he had made a copy, came vividly before him.

The writer had referred to Mr Armer's "double life"—warned him that "exposure was bound to follow."

Suppose Doris Armer had written that letter! Now that he knew Doris was alive, the detective went back to his original theory, that Mrs Armer was the writer of the anonymous epistle that had mystified both him and Armer.

And, if she had written it, she knew as much about the robberies as the gang who were responsible for them!

Only a couple of hours had elapsed since Roger Armer, accompanied by Doris and Dr Weston, had left the Court, when Lewis's car drew up at the front entrance. His quick eye noticed the traces of wheels on the damp gravel.

"A car has been here lately," he thought.

"Can I see Mr Armer?"

"I'm afraid not, sir; but Miss Vane is at home. What name, sir?"

The detective drew out a card on which was inscribed the name of Jeffrey Smart. The footman was new, and did not recognise it as that of the detective Mr Armer had engaged to trace his wife and the jewels.

But immediately Isobel recognised it, and was all excitement.

"Show him up at once! Quick! Don't lose a moment!"

Though Isobel had not met Jeffrey Smart personally, she knew all about him. Roger had confided many things to Miss Vane he would have withheld had he not believed Doris to be dead.

She went eagerly forward.

"Have you brought me news, Mr Smart? Did Mr Armer send you with a message?"

He looked his surprise.

"No. I've come to see Mr Armer, but I understand it is impossible to see him."

"It is!" shrilled Isobel. "Roger Armer's wife has been here. Where she came from, or where she has been hiding ever since the news of her supposed death, I don't know. But Doris Armer turned up during the night!"

"Are you sure it was Mrs Armer?"

Jeffrey Smart watched Isobel closely. He saw at once that she hated beautiful Doris. He could have no better tool for his purpose than this red-haired woman, who evidently regarded Roger Armer's young wife as her rival.

"Sure!" Isobel cried contemptuously. "Of course I'm sure! She took her place as coolly as though she had a right to nurse him—"

"Then Mr Armer is ill? Too ill for me to see him? It is important, or I wouldn't press the point."

"Ill—terribly ill. But she has taken him away, and Paul Weston has helped her."

"Try and calm yourself, Miss Vane," the detective urged quietly. "Tell me everything. I am acting in Mr Armer's interests—not in Mrs Armer's."

He emphasised the last words, but Isobel looked at him suspiciously.

"How am I to know that?"

"Isn't it to my interest to be on Mr Armer's side?" he said quietly. "Mrs Armer did not seek my services. It is Mr Armer's interests I am watching."

Jeffrey Smart drew from Isobel all that there was to know; which, after all, amounted to very little.

"I suppose," Smart rose to go, "Mr Armer was coming from Mr Farr's dinner-party when the accident occurred?"

"Oh, no. He wasn't there at all! He was coming from London. He sent an excuse to Mr Farr that important business would prevent him joining the party. It's a pity he was not there. He would have avoided the accident, and might have been of assistance in helping trace the thieves who stole Mrs Vanderdecken's pearls. Is there no trace of the gang?"

"None at present. Only a clue that I am following up. Did Mr Armer write or 'phone to Mr Farr?"

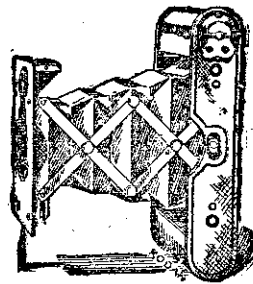
"He said he would ring him up. But, really, I don't know. I only know he left for London, and was brought back unconscious."

"Was no one with him?"

Isobel shook her head.

"No one. Mr Armer prefers to drive his own car, and leaves it in a garage near the station. You will let me know where Mr Armer is?"

(Continued on page 4.)



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