

TANGLED WIVES

By Peggy Shane



CHAPTER IX.—Doris tries to persuade Rocky to tell her who she is and what she has done. He finally consents to let her know what he has read in the newspapers. Her picture has been broadcast, and there seems no doubt she is Dianne Merrell, charged with having shot her husband right after her wedding ceremony, and escaping in a car.

(NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY)

She was so eager to be convinced. She clung to the lapels of his coat, looked earnestly into his face.

Rocky's hand pressed nervously over his hot brow. "I think you—perhaps you haven't been well," he stammered.

"You mean," the words dropped with a bedraggled courage, "you mean I've lost my mind?"

"I mean I think you lost it for a short time when—when this happened."

"How did you know? I mean how have you learned anything about me?"

"I—I thought you guessed. The papers have been full of it."

"What do they say?"

Rocky looked away as if he were detaching the subject from her. "Why, they say this girl is supposed to have killed her husband on her wedding night," he said again.

"Oh! She clung to his eyes for sympathy. Oh! And you think I did that?"

Rocky took her hand pityingly, but she drew away. "Doris—I didn't—but your photograph—"

"Why did you want to take me to Canada?"

"Why did I want to take you? I am taking you. The first thing tomorrow. If I can get to Quebec I can get you on a boat and—well, I think you'll be safe enough in Paris."

"But Rocky, that's insane. What about passports?"

"I've thought of everything. You'll see. I've got a passport made out for Doris. We'll change the picture get you a blonde wig—"

"But Rocky—"

He looked at her inquiringly. She wanted to ask "But why are you doing this for me?" Something in his eyes made her unwilling. She said instead, "I'll have to give myself up, you know."

He patted her shoulder gently. "I'll not let you."

She stared up at him earnestly. "Rocky, if I'm caught are you guilty, too?" I don't mean guilty—but isn't there some terrible penalty for hiding someone, like me? You're accessory before the fact—"

"Or what?"

"What a mind. What a legal mind. A master's, really."

She was not to be diverted by any attempt at fooling. In spite of all Rocky's precautions, she had been caught once. She would be caught again. Rocky would be arrested. Mrs. Du Val would—

She said huskily, "There's no use in your being involved. Think of your mother."

"I'm thinking of my mother. One of the first things she ever taught me was to stick by my—my friends."

Her heart contracted. "You're being rather wonderful. I wish I could do something to show you how much I appreciate you—your friendship—"

she walked nervously to the window. A light was moving far away in the woods. "A car is coming."

"I expect it's Beatrice coming home from the party. It's so late. Doris, you ought to get some sleep."

"What's my real name?"

"Diane. But I'd rather not call you that?"

"Is it so absolutely sure that I did this? Do you suppose losing my memory has transformed me into an entirely different sort of person?"

"I don't know what to think. I think you ought to get some sleep."

"If I married this man—I must have loved him, mustn't I?"

Rocky nodded gloomily. "I suppose so."

"Say I didn't," argued Doris. "Say I hated him. Even so—I hated the man in the cab. But I didn't want to hurt him. I wouldn't kill him if he walked into the room right now. She shivered slightly. "I don't know. It seems odd to me. I feel certain I couldn't kill anybody."

"It isn't that I don't believe in you, Doris. I believe in you beyond all sense. The thing that worries me is what you would have to go through—once you were in the hands of the police. You have been formally indicted for murder in the first degree. You'd even be denied bail. You—I'm afraid you'd collapse completely."

"I won't go to pieces again." She leaned her head on her arms confidently. "Now that I know what I have to fight—well—I'm going to fight it. Do you really think I'd deliberately let you in for a thing like this—?"

Rocky whirled and looked squarely at Doris. His lean features twisted bitterly. "Give yourself up then. I'll go with you to the police the first thing in the morning. But don't for get this. You speak about implicating me. I'm already implicated. More than that. St. Gardens is implicated. I don't say we can't get him out of it, but it will be a nice thing to have

happen to him just as his only daughter is about to be married. Beatrice is marrying the son of a governor. Rock Island or Delaware—something like that—but they're getting plenty of publicity. It's one of the biggest weddings of the year. A little murder publicity—"

Doris cried out. "I won't spoil her wedding. I'll go away—I won't do it." Her voice stopped in the middle of the sentence. She was thinking that she would have to slip away from Rocky too. A shiver ran up her spine. She knew then that most of her new-found courage sprang from Rocky's friendship. When she left him, what would become of her—police—prison—death?

Rocky grasped her elbow. He had read her thoughts. "You mustn't try to run away from me. Whatever happens you'll stick with me. Promise?"

"I can't promise that." She looked up at him. His eyes were full of tragedy. "But don't look like that. I'm afraid I haven't the courage to run away from you."

Relief flooded his face. He smiled. "Then listen, Mr. Conscientious. I've got an idea. I know you're right in everything you say. You ought not to run. You ought to fight. Here's another idea—Supposing that you stay here quietly for a few days. I could leave you with Beatrice. Then I'll go back to Morristown, New Jersey and get in touch with your real family. Perhaps we can arrange to get you out on bail if you do give yourself up."

"I don't know why you want to do all this for me."

Downstairs a door closed. Rocky went to the door. "I'm going to speak to Beatrice now. Will you go to bed?"

Doris shook her head. "No, I'd like to talk to her, too."

"All right," Rocky opened the door. "Wait. I'll bring her back up here."

When Rocky had gone, Doris turned out the light and sat down by the windows. In spite of all that he had said she knew that there was only one thing for her to do—She must not repay his great friendship by involving him in her trouble. The time must come when she would go on alone.

"But not tonight," she whispered. "Perhaps it's awfully cowardly. But not tonight."

What was Beatrice saying in answer to Rocky's disturbing story? Would she think Rocky was crazy to have done so much for a criminal and a murderer? At the thought of Rocky the dark outlines of the room dissolved. A host of magic particles illuminated the darkness, assailed her senses. She lost herself in a dream.

She heard Rocky at the door and sprang up. She turned on the light as he came in with Beatrice, St. Gardens.

Beatrice stared fixedly at Doris for a short moment. Then she turned her head and looked at Rocky.

"This child! You mean—she Dianne Merrell?"

Beatrice smiled. "Nonsense!" she said vigorously.

"Of course she isn't! She never murdered anybody. Any person of sense can see that. She held out her hand to Doris cordially. "Forgive me for talking about you as if you were deaf, dumb and blind—but it's all so extraordinary. Anyway, I'm glad you're come."

Doris took her hand shakily.

"You're awfully sweet," she said. Beatrice sat down. "Then let's talk quickly, because I can see you're tired to death. Rocky has told me everything. You know Rocky is just like my brother. We spent all of our vacations together as children, so I hope you won't mind his having told me. I don't think anyone else should know—"

"Your father," began Doris.

"No, I don't think so. I'm sure he'd approve but if anything comes up it's better if he doesn't know. I have a small sitting room with a patch of my own downstairs. You shall spend your time there. I have everything planned. You need see no one, except Mary, a maid who's been with us a long time and is practically blind besides. And Rocky shall go and see your people."

"But your wedding—"

"Yes, I'm afraid I shall be rather busy. I won't be able to see as much of you as I'd like. But it's not until Saturday. That's four days, and that's oceans of time for Rocky to get to New Jersey and back. He'll take the train. The bishop is arriving Saturday morning—so he'll be in time for the wedding rehearsal which is to be at eleven on the day of the wedding. And Friday night my bridesmaid is coming from Mount Kisco and several friends of father's are coming—the Du Vals, of course, will be here."

"Oh I don't think you ought to stay," said Doris. "But we'll get away long before the wedding."

"Oh no! You must stay for the wedding."

Rocky shook his head gravely. "I will have to get Doris away before then. She'll be recognized."

"That's true, isn't it? But surely you'll have everything cleared up by then."

Doris said: "If I do stay, couldn't I write letters for you—or do something useful?"

"That's an idea. I'll have about a million letters to write. You are an

angel. She rose. "Now you must sleep. This is Wednesday night. Rocky will get a train in the morning and be with you family—if it is your family which I doubt—by tomorrow night. To-night to be able to go back here by Friday will give you a very busy week."

She kissed Rocky on the cheek and went to her room. Rocky stood for a moment, looking after her. "I don't know what to think. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. I don't know what to feel. I don't know what to do."

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WEEK OF PRAYER OBSERVED AT METHODIST CHURCH

The Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist church observed the Week of Prayer on Tuesday with an all-day meeting at the church. Mrs. Dennis Atkins, president, presided.

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of the morning session in the dining room of the church. About twenty-five members of the missionary society were present.

"GRACEFUL IN THE ROYAL FAIRNS" WAS THE TITLE OF THE PROGRAM. Mrs. M. L. Hays, secretary of the society, presided.

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