

CONTRACT WIFE

BY LOUISE HOLMES

CHAPTER X

questioning fingers found the small wedding ring. About to display the ring as evidence she dropped it back. It was valuable. No initials had been engraved inside. Her husband had been that kind of a marriage.

"What's the idea of the wig?" was the next question.

Pats opened her lips. The truth—nothing but the truth.

"If I wear it sometimes," she faltered.

"I see. Can't you first—whatever you're looking for?"

Pats shook her head. The bank book was not there. It was no doubt in the bag she carried that morning. She raised deep blue eyes—two huge tears were caught in the lashes.

"I can't find it," she quavered with a pitiful little catch in her voice. "But I'm telling you the truth—please let me go—"

After an hour's questioning, the attorney muttered something to himself. It sounded like, "Innocent as a baby." Then he commanded, "Get Monterey on the telephone. You, Johnson—"

Pats' thoughts raced wildly. Practically she yearned for Don. Although he was in the dark concerning her identity he would see her through this nightmare until explanations could be made. Throwing discretion to the winds she hastily told the district attorney where Don could be found. And, after a nerve-racking wait, Johnson was talking to him. Now, committedly, he told him where to come.

Blood sang in Pats' ears. Two was coming. He would try to help her but what could he do? She had a wild idea of donning the wig and glasses, even tremblingly opened her purse but with the cold eye of the law upon her she was incapable of action. The room grew dark, the edge of the desk seemed to be slipping from between her fingers. Faintly she heard Detective Johnson arguing with his chief.

"Mistake nothing. Just a clever actress—Monterey's wife dark—home—"

With every passing instant Pats' nerves grew more taut.

Then there was the sound of quick steps beyond the door and Don burst into the room. His face was white, his eyes, darting in search of Pats, terror-stricken, his mouth grim. For a split second her eyes implored him, her hands went out in frantic appeal. Then she flew to his arms.

"That man," she sobbed pointing at Johnson who watched them with narrowed eyes, "brought me here and I don't know why. And that man," moving her finger accusingly in the direction of the district attorney, "asked me questions. He asked me my name and when I told him I was your wife he didn't believe me." The tear-drenched eyes she raised were black with entreaty. At her words, a quiver ran through Don's big frame but he gathered her closer.

"There, there, darling," he said, and over her head, "What's the meaning of this?"

"Is she your wife?" asked the district attorney point blank.

"Well, rather," Don laughed fondly and took his handkerchief to wipe Pats' drowned eyes. "All right now?" He seemed undisturbed by the interested onlookers. "Come, darling, you need your tea or perhaps something a bit stronger." Gently he guided her toward the door. Johnson rubbed his chin uncertainly. The district attorney muttered, "I told you so," and went back to his desk. The reporters looked disappointed. Almost in the safety of the hall there was a had moment.

"Say, Monterey," said Detective Johnson. "I thought your wife had dark hair—saw you with her at the theatre."

Pats took a quick breath but Don laughed easily. "So that's the trouble." Laughing he touched Pats' cheek in a teasing gesture. "I'll tell you something, boys," he said over his shoulder. "You never know from one day to the next what color your wife's hair is going to be." With that he closed the door behind them and hurried Pats through the outer office.

The elevator was crowded. No chance for conversation there. The foyer was thronged with people. The foyer was thronged with people.

"Don—" Pats began as they reached the street.

"Not now, dear," he said quickly. "I don't know what it's all about but I'm on your side." Almost running they reached Don's car. Edging into the traffic he threw an anxious glance over his shoulder. Don was endeavoring where to begin. Don was endeavoring where to begin.

The congested street. He barely made a green crossing light and laughed exultantly caught the next at the last possible second and sped on.

"Don—" She must tell him.

"Later, darling—I'm thinking." Recklessly he slid between a bus and a taxi cab.

"But, Don—listen—I am your wife." Breathlessly she tried to marshal her explanations, to sort out the best words with which to meet his incredulous questions.

But if Don heard her the words made no impression.

"Look," he said earnestly. "I've got it figured out. I'll get in the outer traffic line and at the next stop for traffic you slip out. Those birds were only half convinced. They may be on your trail again right now but we've lost them for the moment."

"Don—Please listen to me—"

"Let me talk, sweetheart. Go into a shop and wait, say twenty minutes, then grab a taxi and go out on the Post road where we had tea. Those women are friends of mine, tell them the truth if you must. Wait there for me. I'll see Patricia, get her to attend to the annulment tomorrow morning and follow as soon as I can. He was talking in jerky sentences, working out the details as the Canadian line by morning.

"Traffic had stopped. Don leaned across to open the door on Pats' side. "Now, darling—don't be frightened—do as I say."

(To Be Continued)

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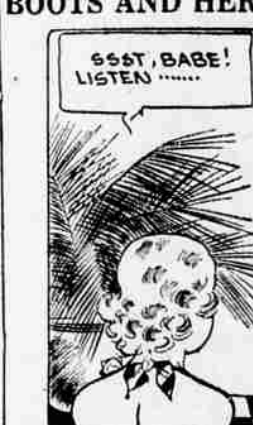
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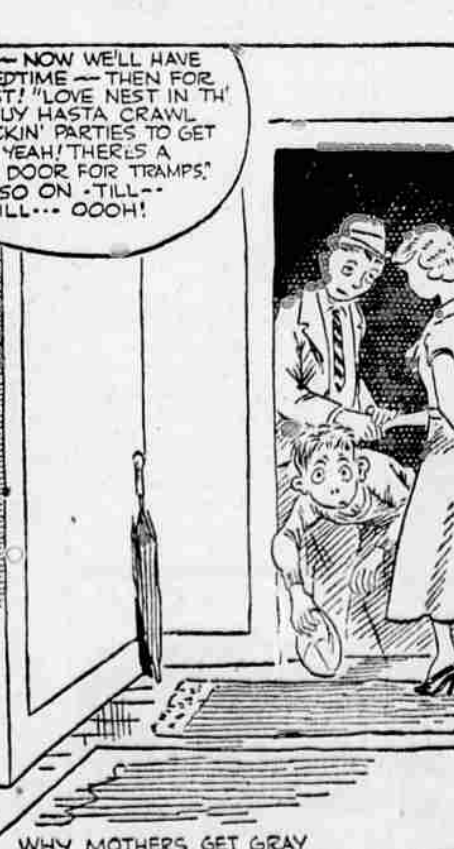
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