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La Diva
NON-RUSTABLE CORSET

2-120

THE Phantom Lover.

(By the Author of "A Bachelor Husband.")

CHAPTER IV.

"I think you're just wonderful," Esther said. She picked up a lid from one of the little pots and looked at the mauve and white label.

"June Mason's natural beautifier."

She looked at the glowing face opposite to her.

"Do you use it for your own skin?" she asked shyly.

Miss Mason chuckled; she pushed the tray to one side along the floor.

"I don't mind telling you that I've never used cream to my skin at all," she said. "But people think I do, and so there you are! Have some more tea."

She refilled Esther's cup and lit another cigarette. "So that's what I am," she said. "And now go on, and tell me about yourself. You said you were at Eldred's."

"Yes, I was there for two years. I rather liked it! I love pretty things, and I was in the workshop. They paid me quite well, too, though it was hard work, and then—well, then I left—" her voice changed subtly.

"Why?"

The query was only interested, and not at all impertinent.

Esther flushed.

"Well—well—I thought I was going to be married. He—well, he asked me to leave to marry him, and so I did."

"But you're not married?"

"No—" Esther was looking away into the fire. "No, I'm not married," she said in a stifled voice. "He—my fiancé—had to go away on business—abroad, and I don't know when I shall see him again."

Her voice sounded sad and dispirited.

"You poor little thing!" said June Mason. She leaned over and laid her hand on Esther's "Never mind! The time will soon pass, and then he'll come back and you'll live happily ever after—"

Esther smiled.

"I know, I keep on telling myself to be foolish to worry. I felt quite happy this morning. I had a letter from him, and somehow when I read it things didn't seem half so bad; but—"

"And you'll have another to-morrow, I expect." Miss Mason insisted. "And another the next day, and one every day while he's away. There! That's better," she added cheerily as Esther laughed.

room, and then it was only the chinking of a clock on the shelf that roused her.

"Nearly seven!" She started up in dismay. "I had no idea it was so late. I am sorry for having stayed so long."

"There's nothing to be sorry for," June declared. "You may go shares with this room if you like. I'm out so much, it isn't used half the time. Think it over, will you?"

Esther flushed nervously.

"It's awfully kind of you; I should love to, but I couldn't afford it. I'm really paying more money now than I ought to. I want to save, too—"

Miss Mason laughed.

"For the wedding! Lucky girl! I hope you'll ask me to come and see you married—and I hope he's very nice," she added.

"He is," said Esther eagerly. "And he's very handsome," she added shyly.

But Miss Mason was not impressed.

"I don't care a fig if a man is handsome or not," she said bluntly. "If he's just manly and straightforward and kind, that's all I expect him to be. Now look here—we have dinner at half-past seven in this establishment. It's only supper really, but we all put on our best blouses—if we've got any—and call it dinner. I'll call for you on the way down and we'll go in together. I'll tell Mrs. Elders you are going to share my table, if you like; it's decidedly dull sitting alone."

"I'm going to like her—I'm going to like her awfully," she told herself. She hurried to be ready in time, but the rather unmelodious dinner-bell had clanged through the house twice before June came to the door.

"You've unpacked, then?" she said. She looked round the small room approvingly. "I can see you're one of the tidy ones," she said. "I'm not; I wish I were. However, we can't all be the same. Are you ready?"

She took Esther's arm and they went downstairs together.

"Every one knows you're coming," June said as they neared the dining-room. "Every one always knows everything that goes on here. Don't take any notice if they stare a lot; they must stare at something, poor darlings. I'll tell you who they all are and all about them."

The dining-room was a long, narrow sort of room that looked as if it once had been two rooms recently thrown into one; the floor was covered with slippery green linoleum, and there was a long table running almost the length of the room, with a few smaller ones on either side.

A grey-haired woman with pimple glasses stood at the head of the long table; Esther recognised her as the proprietress, Mrs. Elders.

She said good-evening to Esther and stared frigidly at June, as if she did not like to see the two girls together.

"I don't like to see you look as sad. I'm going to cheer you up. I shan't allow you to be miserable. And anyway," she added, with a sudden softening, "you've got some one who loves you, and that's worth everything else in the world."

"Yes," said Esther. Her eyes shone and she thought of the letter which was even then lying against her heart. Somehow she had never realised how much he really cared for her till to-day.

"And what are you going to do till he comes home?" Miss Mason asked interestedly. "If you had something to do you'd find the time pass ever so much quicker."

"It's a question of having to do something rather than how to pass the time," Esther said. "I haven't any money except what I can make. My aunt left me a little when she died, but it was only a very little, and I spent most of it at first while I was looking for work. So I'm going back to Eldred's—if they will have me, and I think they will."

Miss Mason said "Humph!"

"I think you're too good for a petticoat shop," she said bluntly. "You're wanted there! Nobody sees you, and you're so pretty—"

"Oh, what nonsense!" Esther exclaimed. She laughed in sheer amusement. To her it seemed absurd for this girl to call her pretty; she considered June Mason such a personality—so attractive!

She really did make a picturesque figure as she sat there with her mauve cushions all around her. Her yellow blotches and dark hair and wonderful rose-leaf skin reminded one of some brilliant portrait painted by a master-hand.

Esther would have been surprised could she have known the thought in June's mind at that moment.

"She's just sweet! I don't know when I've seen a face I admire more. Micky would adore her! She's just the sort of woman he always raves about. I must ask him to tea to meet her one day."

"There are heaps of other berths going besides Eldred's, you know," she said earnestly. "However, you must do as you like, of course." She threw away another unfinished cigarette.

"Do you think we are going to be friends?" she asked.

"I am sure we are," Esther said. She really did think so; she had never met any one in the least like June Mason before. She began to feel glad that she had come to this house. It was much more expensive than the Brixton Road, certainly, but it was well worth it, even if only because she had met this quaint little woman.

It was nearly seven o'clock when she thought of going back to her own

room, and then it was only the chinking of a clock on the shelf that roused her.

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"You never told me that you knew Miss Shepstone," he said to June. "I didn't know her till this afternoon," she answered promptly; "but I make friends quickly, as you know."

"You'll like Harley," she told Esther presently in an undertone. "He's very clever, but so delicate, poor boy! He ought to live in the country instead of in London. He's the sort of person I should love to help if I were rich."

"It must be wonderful to be rich," Esther said. There was a little flush in her cheeks; she was really enjoying herself. "It's the dream of my life to have enough money to be able to do anything I like," she added earnestly. "Just for a month! If I could be really rich just for one month I wouldn't mind going back to being poor again."

Miss Mason said "Rubbish!" briskly. "Money can't buy happiness, my dear, and don't you forget it. My people think it can, and lots of other people think the same. It only shows what fools they are. It was the money my people couldn't get over when I declined to marry Micky Mellowes."

"She made a little wry face. "I remember my mother coming into my room one night in her dressing-gown—poor soul!—when she heard I told Micky there was nothing doing, and saying tragically, 'June, you must be mad—stark, staring mad! Why, the man's as rich as Croesus!'"

"Rich!" Esther was conscious of an odd little sinking at her heart. "I'm Mr. Mellowes rich, then?" she asked constrainedly.

(To be continued.)

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"Altogether brighter and happier"

161, Cambridge Road, Seven Kings, Essex.

Dear Sirs,

My baby seemed to be quite healthy at birth, but being unable to feed him I tried different foods at various times. At first he appeared to be making progress, but after a few months it became evident he was wasting, and I was advised to try Virol. He soon began to pull round, and in a short time made considerable weight. This satisfactory progress has continued, thanks to Virol, which has built up his strength, making him a splendidly sturdy little fellow. In view of the gratifying results obtained, I do not hesitate to recommend Virol whenever the question arises of the best alternative food for baby.—Yours truly,

G. C. COLEMAN.

For tiredness, nervous exhaustion, and sleeplessness take Virolised milk three times a day. (A teaspoonful in half-pint of warm milk.)

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British Made & British Owned.

Fashions and Fads.

Satin and crepe de chine are much used for spring millinery.

Flat tassels of silky fibre fringe appear on frocks of jersey cloth.

Shiny buttons and military braid trim the suit for the 16-year-old.

It won't be long before the streams will wake from all their winter dreams.

And start to laugh and race again Down hillsides and the level plain. Making their journey to the sea Most human-like it seems to me; For we are headed seaward, too—

Each morning here we wake anew To toss and race and move along Towards that great unnumbered throng.

Which went before, and at the end Our lives with greater lives to bend.

It won't be long before the Spring Shroud strengthen faith that's faltering.

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Just Folks
29
Basar Guest

RETURNING SPRING.

It won't be long before we'll hear The robins calling loud and clear, And hear the blackbirds on the fence With all their feathered consequence, Chattering and sputtering over things. And getting mad and locking wings And hilly and feet, the way men act. At times about some simple fact. Disputing one another there As though the Lord on high will care Which one of them was fed the best Or which one had the finest nest.

It won't be long before we'll see The green returning to the tree, An' over all our lives anew Will stretch a kindly sky of blue; The tulips will come springing up To catch the sunbeams in a cup And everyone of them will say, "We were not dead, but just away. For we are headed seaward, too—"

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