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ST. JOHN'S

THE Phantom Lover.

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

CHAPTER XXX.

You used to say that you would not mind being poor, but in the end you'd have hated it as much as I should. He paused, as if expecting her to speak, but she was plucking at the blue-and-white fringe of the tablecloth with nervous fingers.

"What did he mean—that he might have written her a kinder letter—when she always remembered it as one of the dearest she had ever received?"

"He went on again—
"It hurt me more than you'll ever know." There was a sort of self-satisfaction in his voice. "It took me a long time to forget you, Lallie, and then, just as I was beginning, I saw you at the theatre—in the stalls . . . with Mellows." His brows met above his handsome eyes. "Mellows wasn't long picking you up," he added jealously.

Her lip quivered, but she did not raise her eyes.
"You saw me, too, didn't you?" he persisted. "I know you did, because Mellows came round afterwards and cursed me to all eternity." He laughed. "I should have made a point of seeing you the next day if it hadn't been for his confounded interference," he went on. "He told me to get out of London and leave you alone." He bent towards her a little. "What is Mellows to you?" he asked deliberately.

She raised her eyes now, and somehow it seemed as if, in the last few moments, the man she had known and loved had changed into a stranger—some one whom she had never seen before, whom she hoped never to see again.

"She forced her lips to smile; she felt at that moment she would die rather than let him see how she was suffering, or guess how she had suffered in the past.

"He's been kind to me," she said voicelessly. "That's all."
Raymond made a little, inarticulate sound.

"He's got me to thank for ever getting to know you," he said. "I gave him your address and asked him to take you out a bit if he fancied it. . . . I asked him to be kind to you."



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The hands in her lap twitched convulsively.

"If I'd had one-tenth of his beastly money," Raymond said then savagely, "we shouldn't be sitting here now as if we were strangers—as if . . . Lallie—do you remember the good time we used to have—"

"I remember everything," he bent closer.

"I never cared for any woman in all my life but you. It's cursed hard luck," he sighed. "You know I'm married?"

"Oh yes!" The words came stiffly.

His eyes searched her white face jealously.
"You don't seem to care. I've often wondered if you knew—and if you minded!" He sat staring before him, and there was a little smile in his eyes. "We do things in style now, I can tell you," he said with sudden change of voice. "She's as rich as you please, and she likes to spend her money."

Another silence.
"I hope you'll be happy," Esther said faintly.

Afterwards she wondered what made her say it, seeing that she did not care in the very least if he were happy or not; why should she care? This man was a stranger to her.
He laughed ruefully.
"Oh, I suppose we shall," he said. "She's not a bad sort, and she lets me alone . . ." He roused himself suddenly and bent closer to her. "Lallie—you'll let me see you again. There's no reason why we can't be—friends—just because I'm married—"

"You're not going to be a little prude?" he said in a whisper. "I can give you the time of your life if you'll let me. I've plenty of money now—"

"Your wife's money," said Esther with stiff lips.

He looked annoyed.
"If you like to put it that way—but she doesn't mind—she's too fond of me to mind how much I spend . . . Lallie—"

She hated to hear that name, because once she had loved it. She closed her eyes for a moment with a little sick shudder.

"Are you faint?" he asked anxiously. "I suppose it is warm in here. Take your coat off! Jove! that's a fine coat!"

He ran an appreciative hand down the soft fur sleeve; a sudden suspicion crept into his eyes. "Who gave you that?" he asked sharply. "Not Mellows—"

"No—at least . . ." She could not

go on. Micky had given it to her, she knew, but she would have bitten her tongue through rather than have told this man.

It had been Micky all the time—Micky. . . .

She thrust the thought of him from her; she did not want to think of him now. There would be plenty of time later on; plenty of time when she had shaken off the last rag of the past.

"It cost a pretty penny, whoever bought it," he said sulkily. "What else has he given you? If you can take presents from him you can't refuse to let me see you sometimes, and after all—you did love me once. . . . Esther, do you remember the way you cried that last day?"

"Yes," she said mechanically. "I remember; I remember everything."

"You loved me well enough then," he reminded her moodily. "You didn't behave like an iceberg then, Lallie, and I'm not really changed; I'm the same man I was—I care for you just as much."

"You're married!" she said.

She felt as if she had so much time mapped out before her during which she must put up with this man's society; as if each moment were another inch torn in the rags of disillusionment which had got to be destroyed thoroughly before she could ever hope to gather up the broken threads of her life again.

He laughed at her reminder.
"I'm not the only married man who sometimes forgets that he is no longer a bachelor," he said detestably.

He laid an arm familiarly along the back of her chair. He touched her chin with his fingers.

She moved back, the hot blood rushing riotously over her face. She was white no longer; she looked like a marble Gaiates suddenly brought to life.

Raymond Ashton laughed, well pleased. He was confident that he had not lost his power over her. For the moment his appalling vanity blinded him to the fact that it was not love in her eyes, but scorn.

"What are you thinking, Lallie?" he asked her.

She sat very straight and stiff in her loneliness rushed back. Where could she go?

"I am thinking," she said, "how impossible it seems that I can ever have thought that I cared for you." Her voice was low but very clear, and he heard each word distinctly. "I am thinking that you are the most contemptible thing I have ever met in my life—I am thinking how sorry I am for the woman who is your wife."

She pushed back her chair and rose. "Would you like to hear any more of my thoughts?" she asked.

Ashton had risen too; there was a look of bewildered amazement in his face; he tried to laugh. Eyn now he thought she was joking.

"Lallie—" he said hoarsely. He half held his hand to her. "Lallie—" he said again—but the cold contempt of her face struck the appeal from her lips.

He drew himself up with a poor attempt at dignity.

"So virtue is to be the order of the day, is it?" he said sneeringly. "Very well—" His eyes flamed as they rested on her face. "It makes one wonder why you are here—in Paris—alone!"

He said insultingly—"if you are alone."

There was a little point of silence. For a moment Esther scanned his handsome face as if she were trying to remember what it was she had ever loved in him—his eyes!—but they were so cruel and insolent—his lips . . . she shuddered, realising that in all her life she could never undo the memory of his kisses—then she pulled herself together with a great effort and turned away.

He followed. His amazement had gone now—he was barely furiously angry. "crimson—"

He caught her arm in a grip that hurt. "My God, you're not going like this," he said furiously. "It's only a few weeks ago that you were crying round my neck and begging me not to throw you over. Oh, that hurts, does it?"

Esther looked up at him.
"And can we—can we go back to London to-day?" she asked.

"We can go any time you like," he said.

He felt he had aged years during the morning.

(To be continued)

BEFORE AND AFTER CHILDBIRTH

Mrs. Williams Tells How Lydia E. Finkham's Vegetable Compound Kept Her in Health



Overpeck, O.—"Lydia E. Finkham's Vegetable Compound helped me both before and after my baby was born. I suffered with backache, headache, was generally run down and weak. I saw Lydia E. Finkham's Vegetable Compound advertised in the newspapers and decided to try it. Now I feel fine, take care of my two boys and do my own work. I recommend your medicine to anyone who is ailing. You may publish my testimonial if you think it will help others."—Mrs. CAROL WILLIAMS, Overpeck, Ohio.

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A wave of bitterest jealousy surged through him. He fell back a step, struck dumb by the force of his emotions, and Esther fled away from him down the street.

She seemed to have wakened all at once to her true position. She was alone, with only a few shillings in her pocket and in a strange city.

She was tired to death. She felt as if her limbs would give way beneath her. The driver of a fiacre looked at her and drew his horse to the curb.

Esther nodded; she threw her suitcase on to the seat and clambered in after it.

But where to go? The old blinding fear of her loneliness rushed back. Where could she go?

Then she suddenly remembered the hotel from which Micky had written to her. She would go there. It would be somewhere at least to sleep and rest.

It was only a little drive to the hotel; she wished it had been longer.

A commissionaire came forward, and said something in French. She looked up at him, but his face seemed all indistinct and unreal. She tried to answer, but her own voice sounded as if it were miles away.

They were in the small, rather dreary lounge. Esther passed a hand across her eyes. She must conquer this absurd weakness. She forced herself to remember that she was alone, but she felt as if she had no will-power left.

A door in front of her opened suddenly, and a man came into the lounge.

When he saw Esther he stopped. The hot colour rushed to his face. He seemed to be waiting for some sign from her. For a moment their eyes met; then, hardly knowing what she did, Esther held out her hand.

"Oh, please," she said faintly, "oh, please tell me—what I am to do?"

But for the next few minutes she was all remembering anything, though she never really lost consciousness. She only knew that everything was all right now Micky was here, and the sheer relief the knowledge brought with it for the time threw her into sort of apathy.

Some one took off her hat and the big fur coat that had grown so heavy; some one had bathed her face and unlaced her shoes, and now Micky stood there looking down at her with eyes that hurt, though they smiled.

"I've told them to bring lunch in here," he went on. "You'll like it better than the public room—and I haven't had mine yet."

Esther looked up at him.
"And can we—can we go back to London to-day?" she asked.

"We can go any time you like," he said.

He felt he had aged years during the morning.

(To be continued)

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Mother's been a good pal
She sat up nights with us
When we were sick.
She kissed our
Bumps and bruises well.

Care of us and
Spending all her
Money on us
Worrying about us
Petting us and
Praising us
All her life
That she never could
Afford to have music
Right at home
So we're going to buy her
A Columbia Grafonola

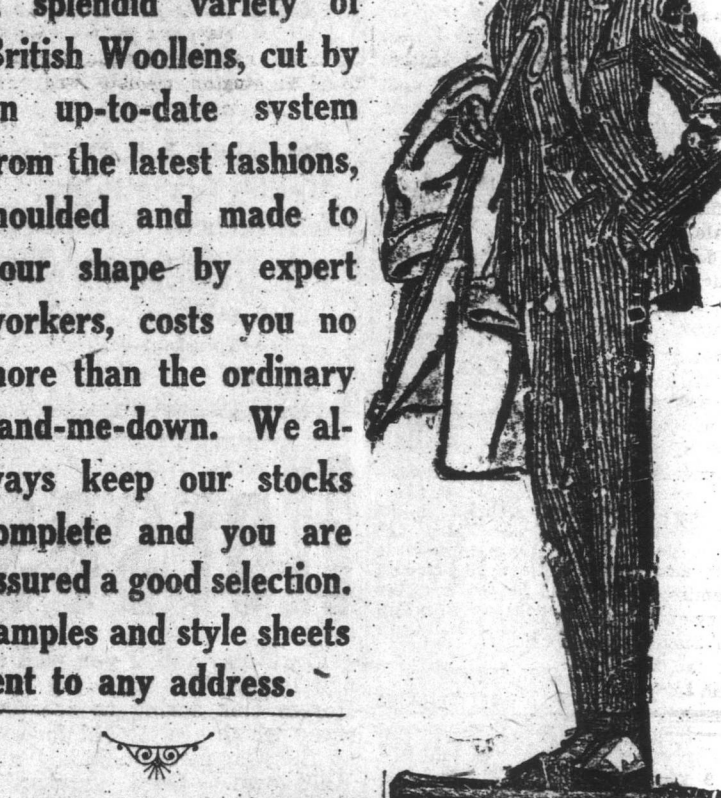
She washed and ironed
And cooked and scrubbed.
She helped us all
With our lessons
And taught us manners
And truth
And courage
And honesty
And faith.

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