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Mrs. Nichols, of Amherst, Nova Scotia, writes on March 23rd, 1920:—

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THE Phantom Lover.

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

"No—I'm going to this evening."

"But you won't let him know what I've told you? Promise me!"

"It is likely that I should? Men don't gossip."

"Oh, don't they?" June answered tartly. "I wouldn't trust one of them, not even you," she added with a melting smile.

In spite of her promise to Esther, it was past tea-time when she got back home; she threw her hat and coat down anywhere and poked up the fire.

"Haven't you had tea?" What have you been doing all day?" she demanded crisply. "You haven't had tea!—Good gracious, I'll make some at once; I had some with George, but I'm quite ready for some more. My word! what a difference a man can make in one's life," she said, suddenly grave. "And to think that I ever talked piffle about not wanting to get married."

She bustled round the room singing blithely; she was brimful of happiness. "You needn't be surprised to hear that I'm going to be married quite soon," she said with elaborate carelessness. "Lord! won't people have forty fits? Except for Micky, my crowd don't know I'm engaged yet. I'm going to take George home to see them on Sunday. I've discovered that he's fourth cousin, about ninety times removed, to a baronet, so, perhaps, that will put them all in a good temper with him. My people do love titles! Give them a lord, or something, and it doesn't matter what else he is, or isn't. . . . You're not listening, Esther."

"I am. I heard every word you said." Esther was sitting by the fire with Charlie curled up in her lap; her face looked very sad and thoughtful. So she was to lose June quite soon!—her lips trembled; what was there left for her in all the world? It almost seemed as if time had stood still for a moment, and then suddenly rushed her back again with breathless speed, to leave her bereft of hope and happiness, as she had been before she met Micky.

Charlie had been her only friend then. Was he all that was to remain to her now?

June watched her across the room.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked suddenly; but Esther only shook her head.

* * * * * *

For two days Micky Mellowes never left his rooms, and hardly ate a thing, and for once in his life Driver permitted a spark of anxiety to creep into his dull eyes. He was sure that his master was ill; he tried tempting dishes and alluring cock-tails, but Micky refused them all.

"My good man, I'm not an invalid," he protested irritably.

He hated it, because he knew his agitation was apparent; he tried to settle to read, but whenever a bell rang through the house he started up with racing pulses.

She must have got his letter, he knew. If there was any hope for him at all she would write at once or send for him. His nerves began to wear to rags.

Sometimes his hopes soared to the skies, to drop to zero again. Once in a fit of despondency he told Driver to pack his bag, as they would be leaving early in the morning.

"Yes, sir—where shall we be going, sir?" Driver asked stolcally.

Micky swore.

"You do ask such damned silly questions," he complained irritably.

An hour later, when he found Driver packing, he called him a fool, and told him to unpack at once.

And so the days dragged away.

"Any more posts to-night?" Micky asked jerkily, on the second day.

Driver eyed the clock.

"There should be one at nine, sir."

But nine came, and half-past, and no post.

"Is it too late for the post now, Driver?" Micky asked feverishly, when it was nearly ten.

"The post went by, sir," was the answer. "I was down at the door and saw the postman pass."

Micky went back to his chair. It was all he could expect, he told himself—there had been no answer to his letter: there never would be an answer now.

When Driver came into the room again, Micky said without looking up—

"Pack that bag again, there's a good fellow; we'll go."

"Yes, sir," said Driver imperturbably.

He hesitated, then asked—

"And—er—where did you say we should be going, sir?"

"I didn't say," said Micky. "And I don't care—on the Continent—anywhere you like—look up some hotels. . . ."

One place was as good as another, he argued, as he sat and watched Driver pack. Wherever he went he was going to be internally miserable, so what did it matter?

When Driver stoically inquired how long he expected to be away, Micky answered violently that he was never coming back if he could help it; he said he hated London—he said he was sick to death of his flat and wanted a change.

"I shan't come back till the autumn anyway," he declared recklessly.

"Very good, sir," was the stolid reply. Driver knew his master; he could remember another occasion when Micky had left London in a rage never to return, and ten days had seen him back again.

Certainly this was rather a different case from that other; this time there was a woman behind it. Driver knew this perfectly well, though beyond the posting of letters and the buying of the fur coat he had had no first-hand evidence.

But he kept his thoughts to himself and packed shirts and socks and coats by the score, as if to keep up the belief that they were really going for months, instead of the days which were the limit he prescribed in his own mind.

When Rochester called later on in the evening, Micky was almost rude to him. The American looked so unfeignedly happy that it got on Micky's nerves; but George P. Rochester was difficult to snub; he looked on at the packing with childlike amazement.

"It's a sudden idea of your, this flitting!" he submitted mildly. Micky did not answer.

"Hope you'll be back in time for my wedding, Sonnie," Rochester said again.

Micky flushed crimson; there was something rather pathetic about him at that moment.

"Oh, I'll be back all right," he said shortly.

Rochester laughed.

"You won't have to stay away long then," he said insignificantly.

(To be continued)

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THE Lady of the Night

—OR—

Amelia Makes a Success

CHAPTER I.

She ran out of hearing of Martha's adjurations, and crossing the big hall, as worn and dingy as the exterior of the house, opened the library door, and, entering the room on tiptoe, put her arm round her father's neck. He had fallen asleep before the fire, and he woke with a start, and looked round at her with a confused and startled air.

Reginald Ryall was a strange and moving contrast to his daughter. Strength spoke in every feature, every movement, every word, of hers; and every word, movement, and feature of his were pitifully eloquent of weakness. He was a man of little more than middle age, good looking, but a fairness which accentuated the almost effeminate weakness of his face. The expression of his blue eyes was uncertain and wavering; his lips were loose with a foolish deprecatory smile, which seemed to be always hovering about them. The father and daughter were absolutely dissimilar; Nora had got her strength from her mother, a Scottish woman, who had died long since—probably of sheer weariness of her husband; Ryall had got his weakness from a long line of weak-minded men. This feebleness of his was accompanied, as is usual, by an inordinate pride; the Ryalls were one of the best families in the country, and this man never forgot the fact, unless remembrance of it stood in the way of self-interest or some selfish desire; though his ancestral home was in ruins, and every acre mortgaged, he was still Ryall of the Grange, and he walked about his starved lands as if they were flowing with milk and honey.

It is not difficult to imagine the attitude of such a girl to such a father. From almost as long as she could remember Nora had managed the estate, the house, and himself; and her greatest difficulty was with the last object, for, like most feeble-minded men, Ryall was shifty and evasive, even with the child upon whom he depended.

They farmed their own land, for the simple reason that no man in the locality would have rented it, and Nora ran the farm. Young as she was, there were few better judges of a horse or a heifer, and she was almost as strong as Ned, the farm-boy, who followed her about, and hung on her words as devotedly as did Beb, the sheep collie.

Accustomed as one is in Devonshire to rain, rheumatism comes sometimes; but Nora seemed to be amphibious. She was never sick or sorry, and never caught cold; her hair, cut as short as she dared to cut it, was in little wavy curls, and when they were wet she shook them, and they were soon dry. Her skirts were abnormally short; she generally wore riding boots of the most workmanlike description; and her headgear was a thick tam-o'-shanter, not of the fanciful kind in vogue, but of the rough, serviceable kind worn by a Scottish cotter.

She was of a dark, but singularly clear complexion; her hair was black, but soft and silky, and presented a striking contrast to the grey eyes, which were brilliant and expressive, and full of resolution. Her mother was a Cameron, and she had inherited the small hands of that clan; but though they were small, they were wonderfully strong. So also were the arms, which had done almost as much farm work as Ned's. Every woman has a touch of vanity about her somewhere, and Nora was, in an inoffensive way, proud of her hands; she always wore gloves out of doors, and when at work. It has been said that she was graceful; but it was with the grace which comes from a long training in the open air, from much walking and riding, and from a close intercourse with Nature in her sunniest and wildest moods.

This is but a poor picture of the girl, but it must go at that.

"Where have you been, Nora?" asked Ryall, with the peevishness of a suddenly-awakened man. "You have been away all day, and it's precious lonely here; besides, there were ever so many things I wanted to speak to you about."

The most dutiful of daughters might have reminded him that she had been out all day in the rain and the mist on his business; but a woman will cover any amount of injustice with the mantle of her love, and Nora was a sweet-hearted girl. She was gentle and long-suffering with everybody, with the most foolish of the animals, even with this father of hers, who was the most foolish of them all.

"I have been over to Nelsworthy, father, with steers," she said cheerfully.

"Oh," he said, "I suppose you haven't sold them?"

"Oh, yes, I have."

"At a precious bad price, I suppose?"

"Well, not so much as I expected. Cattle are low."

"Then why didn't you let Ned bring them back?" grumbled Ryall weakly.

Nora shook her head.

"We wanted the money too badly, father. There's the interest to pay; we are behind time now. But I need not worry you about that, dear; with the money from the steers I shall just make up the amount. We shall have to be very careful for this next quarter; for Mitchell's bill becomes due——"

"Careful! Bills! I'm sick of the words," he burst out fretfully. He rose from the chair, and leant against the mantelshelf, as if he were too indolent to stand upright. "I'm sick of the whole thing!" He raised his lids, with their light lashes, and looked at her, and then evasively away from her, as if something were working in his feeble mind, and he could not meet the direct gaze of the girl's eyes. "One might just as well be dead as go on living in this fashion; one dreary round of debts and difficulties, without any break or change."

"Why, father, it's scarcely a month since you were in London," said Nora, with a laugh.

Ryall coloured and lowered his eyes. "'Fraid I shall have to go up again," he answered awkwardly, and shuffling one foot into its carpet slipper.

(To be continued)

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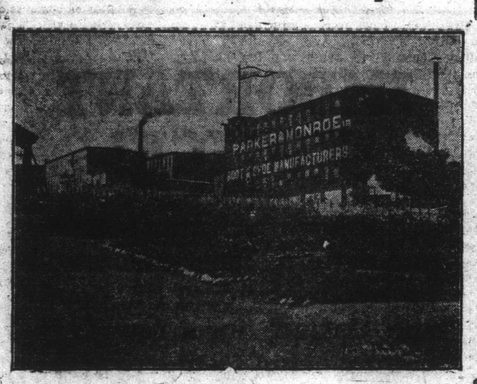

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