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**Bovril**



**THE Phantom Lover.**

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

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ether wrote to Mrs. Ashton that same night and told her she must regretfully decline the offered position; she gave no reason, but she permitted herself a little sigh of regret when the letter was dispatched.

She would like to have gone; she would like to have seen Raymond's home and to have got to know his mother, but it was his wish that she should not go.

She tried to believe that she was happy in the knowledge of his love, but in her heart she knew that she was restless and dissatisfied.

"If I had something to do I should be ever so much happier," she told June again and again, and June quite agreed.

"It must be awful, killing time," she said. "When I think of the life I used to lead at home before I started trying to improve people's complexions, I wonder I didn't go mad. Nothing, but silly tea-parties and scandals. . . . Right! But all the same Micky and I agreed that you wouldn't like being at Mrs. Ashton's."

"Micky!" said Esther scornfully. "As if I care what he thinks. . . ."

June looked mildly amazed.

"Oh, all right," she said smoothly. "I suppose I may mention his name sometimes, mayn't I?" She began to laugh. "Do you know that for once in my life I've been totally wrong with regard to you two? I was so sure you'd more than like each other—I even thought it quite possible that Micky would fall in love with you—you're so exactly suited to him."

"I'm glad you think so," said Esther drily. "I'm sorry I can't oblige you by agreeing."

Jane said "Humph!" She yawned. "All the same," she added after a moment, "I'm convinced that things would have been different if it hadn't

been for that phantom lover of yours; you're so crazy about him." There was a touch of exasperation in her voice.

Ether flushed angrily. "It's absurd of you to talk like this," she said. "Mr. Mellowes is the last man on earth I should ever have looked at, even supposing Raymond . . ."

She had spoken the name before she was aware of it; in her momentary flash of temper she had so carefully guarded herself.

It was too late to attempt to cover what she had said; she knew by the sudden expression of June's face that she had heard.

There was a poignant silence, then June sat up with a little jerk.

"Of course, that's let the cat out of the bag," she said curtly. "And you let me run him down! How mean how ungenerously mean of you, Esther! . . . I can't think now why I never guessed Raymond Ashton!"

Ether had flushed scarlet. "I never said that was his name," she tried to defend herself. "It's purely your imagination. And even supposing it is, do you think I mind what you say about him, or Mr. Mellowes either? Neither of you know him as I do, or you would never say such cruel, wicked things." She stopped with a sob in her voice.

"Then it is Raymond Ashton?" June said gently. She got up and came over to where Esther was sitting. "Oh, I am sorry I said anything about him!" she cried impulsively. "You ought to have stopped me. How on earth was I to know?"

"I don't care what you said; it's all untrue," Esther protested stormily. "Nothing you could ever say about him would influence me or make me feel any differently."

June got up for a cigarette; when she was nonplussed she invariably had to smoke; she took several agitated puffs before she looked at her friend again.

"Well, anything I said was in absolute innocence, you know that," she said in distress. "I'd no more idea than the dead that you and he . . . So that's why he doesn't want you to go to his mother?"

"He doesn't know; I never told him it was Mrs. Ashton's—I just said I had had an offer of a berth. I suppose you are trying to make out now that he—"

"Heaven bless the child!" June cried. "I'm not trying to make out anything! I'm struck all of a heap like! as Lydia says. So he's the phantom lover, is he? . . . Well—I can't find any words to suit the case."

"He's not a phantom lover," Esther protested. "He's a real lover, a very real lover."

June stopped and took her hand. "I'm not going to let you quarrel with me over him, no matter how badly you want to," she said. "No man is worth two friends having a row over. I'm quite prepared to take him to my arms and love him if you do. . . . Oh, Esther, don't look like that!"

There were tears in Esther's eyes, and her lips were trembling. "You're making fun of me," she protested. "It's unkind of you."

June turned away; she wondered if perhaps, after all, she and every one else had thoroughly misunderstood Raymond, and if this girl's warm championing of him was deserved.

"He's not nearly good enough for her," she was telling herself indignantly. "She'll never really be happy with him."

"I hope you won't tell Mr. Mellowes, or any one else," Esther was saying defiantly. "I don't want my affairs talked over by every one."

"I shall not tell any one," June said quietly.

She stood looking down into the fire, and her face was troubled.

Presently she walked to Esther, and, stooping, kissed her.

"I'm awfully glad I know," she said. "It makes our friendship seem so much more real."

Ether smiled faintly.

But June was ill at ease. She felt instinctively that things were not all right.

"It isn't the man himself," she told herself obstinately. "It's some foolish, mistaken ideal of him that she has created."

She wondered what he really was

doing in Paris. Micky would know—he and Micky had been such great friends. There would be no harm in speaking of him to Micky, at least that would not be betraying any secret or confidence.

She rang Micky up the following morning. She made the excuse that she wanted to see him on business. She took him to lunch at her club.

"You don't look well," was her greeting. "What's the matter, Micky?"

Micky frowned. If there was one thing he hated it was for any one to remark on his appearance. He answered brusquely that he had never been better in his life.

"By the way, I was going to write when you rang up," he said. "I've got some tickets for a first night to-morrow. Would you care to come along and—bring Miss Shepstone?"

June beamed. She liked going out with Micky.

"I should love it," she said with enthusiasm. "I can't answer for Esther, though."

"Try to persuade her," he urged carelessly. "I don't suppose she's been about much; it would do her good."

"She told me she loves theatres," June admitted; "but the trouble will probably be that she hasn't got a dress."

"A dress?" Micky echoed vaguely. "Can't you lend her one of yours?"

June laughed. "My dear boy, she's much taller than me and slimmer. . . . However, I'll see what can be done. Where shall we meet you?"

"I'll call for you at seven. We'll have some grub first."

"Good! And if Esther won't come?"

"Oh, well, if she won't, you come along, of course; but try and persuade her."

"She's refused Mrs. Ashton's offer, you know," June said presently. She kept her eyes lowered; she felt self-conscious and guilty.

"Has she?" Micky did not sound particularly interested.

"Yes; the phantom lover objected, or something, and I think it's just as well."

"She said something about it when I had tea with you the other day," June nodded.

"So she did. I dare say that wretched Raymond would have tried to make love to her if she had gone," she added deliberately.

"He's away just now," Micky said quickly. "I ran across him when I was over in Paris last week."

June looked up quickly. "Did you? What's he doing there?"

"Nothing particular; he often goes over, you know."

"I can't stand that man," June said, after a moment.

"No?" Micky's voice was casual. "I never could see why you were so thick with him," she went on.

Micky laughed lazily. "Perhaps because I haven't your gift of second sight, my dear," he said. "I shouldn't have thought it would need second sight to see what he is," June declared.

She looked across at Micky and was surprised by the hard expression of his face. "I hate men who flirt," she added. "Micky, do you know that I've got a kind of feeling about Esther's phantom lover that he doesn't really exist?"

Micky sat up with sudden attention. "What do you mean?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I mean that he isn't really a tangible man," she explained haltingly.

Micky laughed. "Oh, yes, he is," he said.

June caught her breath. "You don't mean—oh, do you mean that you know him?" she asked excitedly.

Micky met her eyes with a faintly ironical smile in his own.

"Yes, I know him," he answered hardly. "And so do you. My dear, I may be very green, but your careful questioning wouldn't deceive a mouse."

"Micky!" said June indignantly. She flushed all over her face, and her queer eyes blazed angrily. She really felt that she had done a dreadful thing in having allowed him to guess. "You needn't look so upset," Micky said. "You've not told me anything; I knew it long before you did."

"When? How—oh, Micky, do tell me!"

(To be continued.)



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**Fashions and Fads.**

The collars on wool serge or crepe gowns are made of heavy lace. Fancy piquets are used for the waistcoat blouses worn with two-piece suits.

Very large evening hats are made of heavy lace, horsehair and crepe de chine.

Chantilly lace is being displayed in shrimp pink, grass green and copper.

Brilliant-colored bands of embroidered trim coats, suits and street dresses.

Foulards are incrustated on chiffon in smart black and white combinations.

Paillettes in square and oblong shapes are in much demand for evening gowns.

Cream lace is draped over black satin, taffeta or chiffon, for afternoon wear.

Broad Bertha collars of heavy Italian lace are used on serge and taffeta dresses.

Chic, allover embroidery jackets are worn with plain skirts, giving a two-fabric effect.

Voiles will not be worn as much as they usually are, while voile slacks has been successful.

Afternoon dresses feature fullness between hips and knees given by stiffened godet gores.

**TALKSMITHS.**

My neighbor Hiram Henry Hicks is fond of talking politics; that is a theme that makes me sore, so Hiram Henry seems a bore. But I'm the sort of sap-head who always strives to be polite, so I pretend that he is not.

H. Hicks, with all his talk of politics, is holding me entranced, spell-bound; I do not yawn or rubber round, but hang upon his throbbing words as though they well might charm the birds. But when H. Henry Hicks runs dry, and I would talk of books or pie, or any topic I adore, he looks upon me as a bore; he interrupts and yawns and sighs, and hot tears gather in his eyes, and then he reaches for his hat, his parasol, brass knuckles and gat, and hastens from my humble shack—he cannot bear to hear me clack. And Hiram Hicks is short of friends; the people shun him as he wends along the main street of our town; he as a bore has wide renown. But when I trip along the street I'm smiled upon by all I meet. This morn'g, then, these facts afford: You must be willing to be bored if you would bore the other foff; and talk his blooming whickers off.

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