



THE Phantom Lover.

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

CHAPTER XXI.
June threw her cigarette into the fire.
"I did. I'll be honest—I did guess," she broke off. "Here's Esther," she added.
She got up and opened the door.
"The lady with the fur coat," she announced drily. "Pray come in, madame!"
"June, said Esther protestingly. She seemed to guess who was there. She looked past her friend at once to Micky.
She coloured faintly as he rose to greet her.
He had not seen her in the fur coat before. The dark fur suited her, fairness admirably; the heavy folds hung gracefully about her slim figure; her face rose like a flower from the big, upstanding collar.
"And where have you been all the afternoon?" June demanded. "We waited for you till nearly five."
"Esther made a little grimace. "I've had my tea out—with Mr. Harley."
"Harley?" said Micky sharply.
June laughed.
"He's one of the tribe who live here," she explained. "He's a great admirer of Esther's. And he's quite a nice boy too, isn't he?" she appealed to her friend.
"Very nice," Esther agreed. "I met him quite by chance, and so we went and had some tea."
Micky was frowning; it was odd that he felt more jealous of this man whom he had never seen than he had ever done of Ashton. He hated to feel that Esther had gone out with him wearing her new coat.
He stood by silently while the two girls chattered together; he felt very much out of it and unwanted.
"I'm glad everybody likes my coat," Esther said. She had taken it off and was holding it at arm's length, admiring its beauty.
"It was a lovely present, wasn't it?" she appealed to Micky.
"Yes," he said.
She laid her cheek to the big, soft collar.
"It's something I have wanted all my life," she told him.
"Micky put out his hand and took it from her. He hated to see her standing there looking so happy, because she believed it had come from Ashton; he threw it down on the couch.

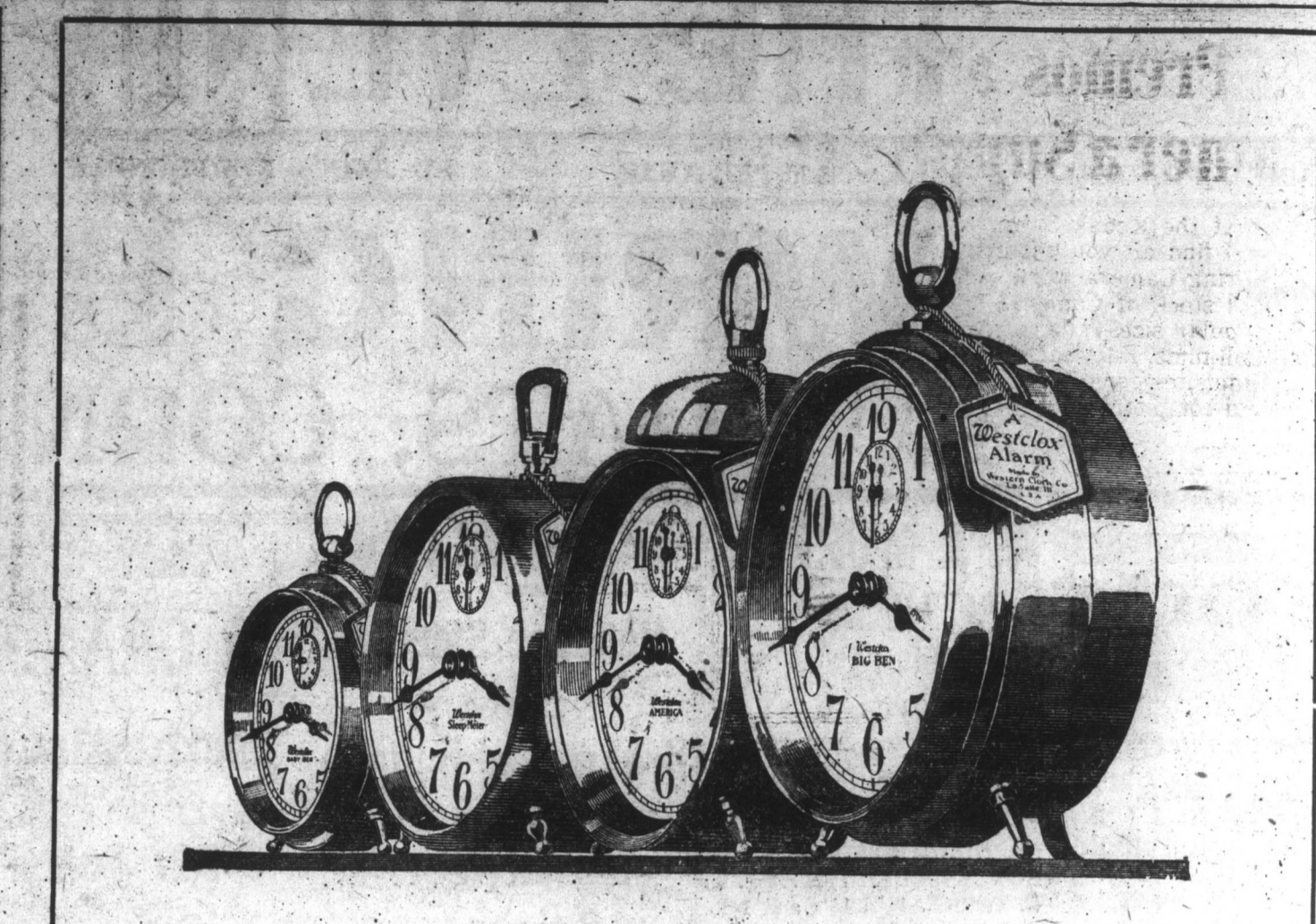
"I shall have to be going," he said abruptly. He shook hands with June, but he walked out of the room without speaking to Esther.
"I don't want any dinner," he told Driver when he got in. "I'm going to bed."
Driver opened his mouth to say something and closed it again; he brought the evening papers and his master's slippers and turned to leave the room. At the door he stopped and looked back.
"Have you seen the evening paper, sir?" he asked deprecatingly.
"No," said Micky. Something in the man's voice arrested his attention; he turned in his chair. "Why?" he asked curiously.
Driver came back a step.
"There's a notice of Mr. Ashton's marriage in it, that's all, sir," he said woodenly. "I thought that you'd be interested."
CHAPTER XXII.
So it had come at last. Micky sat staring down at the small paragraph which briefly announced the marriage of Tubby Clare's wealthy widow to Mr. Raymond Ashton.
The ceremony, so the paper declared, which had taken place quietly in Paris, would be a complete surprise to everybody. Mrs. Clare, as all the world knew, inherited something like £30,000 under the will of her late husband.
Micky whistled softly. Raymond had done well for himself. He would be able to live in luxury for the rest of his life; to discharge all his debts; if his wife chose to allow him to do so; all but one debt—the greatest of them all, and one which he could never hope to liquidate—a woman's broken heart.
"Esther—what would she say if she knew? And supposing she knew now—?" It was quite likely that a copy of this same paper had fallen into her hands. The thought, turned Micky cold; he looked up hurriedly at the clock—not yet eight! On what pretext could he go back to Elphinstone Road? He threw the paper down and rose to his feet. His gloves! He would make them the excuse—he could go back for his gloves. He taxied down the whole way; he sent his name up to June and waited in the hall. After a moment she came flying down the stairs.
"Micky! Is anything the matter? What in the world?"
He explained in stammering haste.
"Have you seen the evening paper?" No, well, take care not to let Miss Shepstone see it. I had to come back and tell you, Ashton—the damned outsider—!" He ground his teeth.
"Not dead!" said June with a gasp.

"No—he was married yesterday in Paris."
June sat down on the bottom stair; she felt as if all the strength had gone out of her.
"It can't be true," she said at last. "Why, she had a letter from him only yesterday. Are you sure? It must be another Ashton."
"It isn't—I knew it was coming. He's married Tubby Clare's widow—for her money, of course. If Esther knows—"
"It will break her heart," said June. There were footsteps on the landing above. Micky glanced up hurriedly.
"Can't we go somewhere and talk? Everybody will hear if we stay here. Where is Miss Shepstone?"
"She's in my room; she's writing to him at this minute—"
"She broke off, drawing in her breath hard. "Oh, Micky, are you quite, quite sure?" I don't believe it," she started at him for a moment, then she laughed incredulously. "Why, it's only three days ago he sent her that fur coat—and the collar for Charlie. Oh, I'm sure it's a mistake!"
"It's not a mistake," said Micky fiercely; he looked away from her. "Confound it, isn't there a room—where we can go and talk?" he broke out again.
She got up from the stairs and led the way across the hall.
"There's the drawing-room. Nobody uses it now because it's so cold." She opened the door and peeped in. "There's nobody there."
Micky followed her, shutting the door behind him. The room was chilly and uninviting, with a lofty ceiling and a hideous wallpaper. There was a gas stove at the far end of the room, turned very low, and hissing softly as if in protest.
June knelt down and turned the tap on its fullest extent.
"The thing is," Micky said hurriedly, "what are we going to do? If she stays in London, she's bound to hear about it. All the papers will be full of it to-morrow. They'll probably publish his confounded portrait. Can't you get her out of London? We've got to do something."
"June did not look at him. The odd little twings of jealousy tore her heart again. Even though she did not love Micky, she quite realized what she was losing. After all it must be a very beautiful thing to be cared for as Micky cared for Esther.
"She raised her eyes with a little ghost of a smile.
"I'll do anything I can, Micky. If you've got anything to suggest—"
"I thought out crowds of plans coming along in the cab, but they're all rotten," Micky admitted dejectedly. "I thought you'd be able to help me. Can't you be called on to a relative in the country or something, and ask Miss Shepstone to go with you?"
June started up.
"Of course I can. I've got an aunt down at Enmore. She's always asking me to go and see her. I'll send her a wire. It's too late to-night, but in the morning—"
Micky felt in his pocket for a pencil.
"Give me the address and I'll send it first thing." He paused. "Supposing Miss Shepstone won't go, though?"
"Oh, she'll go," said June quickly. "I'll tell her it means business for me. I'll do the pathetic. I wonder what time there's a train."
"I'll look up all the trains, and arrange everything. Does Miss Shepstone know I'm here now?"
"No."
"Very well, tell her one of your business agents called, and that you've got to go off early to-morrow. You can write her a note and post it to-night, asking me to see you off. It's quite a usual thing for you to do, you know."
June smiled rather sadly.
"Poor old Micky!" she said.
Micky frowned.
"Don't talk rubbish," he said rather shortly. "I'd do the same for any one."
June knew it would be useless to contradict.
"If you can keep her out of town for a week, I may have blown over," he went on. "I'll run down and see you if I may—"
"You know you may; but, Micky—don't you think all this is rather mistaken kindness? She'll have to know sooner or later; why not tell her at once? When the letter's stop coming she'll begin to worry, and then—"
"Micky shook his head obstinately.
"It's my own reasons; be a pal and help me, June."
"Very well, old boy."
"I think you're making a mistake, but I suppose you know your own business best. At any rate, I've warned you."
"You're a dear," said Micky gratefully.
June went to the front door with him; in spite of her promise she was not feeling happy. Esther would have to know. She went slowly back up the stairs.
"It's a mistake," she told herself again, with a sense of foreboding. "Micky's making a mistake."
But she determined to act up to her part. She ran up the last flight of stairs with a great noise and show of excitement. She burst into their sitting-room breathless.
"Such news! Esther! Are you game for a dash down into the wilds of nowhere? I've got to go off on business. One of my agents has just been. He's made a mess of things, as usual, and I've got to go down and put things

right. Oh, it's quite country! I don't know if you like the country. I adore it myself. A place called Enmore. I've got an amiable aunt who lives there, and we'll go and visit ourselves on her. She's always asking me to go and see her, so she'll be delighted. Well, what do you say?"
"You haven't given me a chance to say anything," Esther protested laughing. "You're like a whirlwind, sweeping every one off their feet. Where is Enmore to start with? And how can I go?"
"Your aunt doesn't know that."
"She'll love you because I do," said June promptly. "Now don't spoil everything. The greatest fun of it all is rushing off at a moment's notice. I shall send Micky a note to-night and tell him to look up trains for us and come and see us. Micky's always to be relied on. If I look trains up myself I always go by the wrong ones and never get there." She was sitting down to her desk as she spoke; she looked across at Esther, pen in hand. "Well?" she queried.
"Esther looked down at Charlie sprawling in the freight."
"What's going to become of Charlie?" she asked.
"Lydia will look after him," June said promptly. "She adores cats; that's one excuse surmounted. Any more?"
"Esther laughed.
"I should like to come, but—"
"Then that's settled. We'll stay a week if we're not bored to death. It's a desolate spot—just a handful of houses and a haystack and a few things like that, but if you like the country we ought to have a good time. I wish I'd got a car—"
"Isn't it rather a funny place to go to for business?" Esther asked innocently.
"Not in the least," June declared. "All the ingredients for my skin food come from the country—herbs and all that sort of thing. Besides, she swallowed hard before uttering the biggest fib of all—"my agent lives down there, you see."
"Oh!" said Esther. She was rather pleased at the idea of a change.
"I suppose we can have letters sent on?" she asked after a moment.
"June's scratching pen stopped for a moment; then flew on again faster than before.
"Oh, of course!" she said airily.
Her kind heart gave a little throb of pity as she realized that there would never be any letters to send on—not any, at least, of which Esther was thinking.
The phantom lover had gone for ever.
She looked round at the girl pityingly. She looked so happy and uncondemning sitting there in the freight, and all the time if she knew what had just happened over in Paris her heart would surely break.
"Best!" said June under her breath.
"Esther turned.
"What did you say?" she asked.
"I was only talking to the pen," June answered irascibly.
(To be continued.)

Fashions and Fads.

A wrap of gray crepe de chine is effectively trimmed with monkey fur. The present mode harks back to the Directoire period for inspiration. The skirt edge may be finished with the new diamond-shaped scalloping.
Shells, straw flowers, leather cut-outs and wooden beads trim the spring hats.
Gray and blue, and gray and black are fashionable color combinations. A frock of blue linen is trimmed with applique linen of a contrasting color.
A chic hat of black milan is faced with red and trimmed with burnt goose.
White stockings are worn with black slippers, and with evening frocks.
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White stockings are worn with black slippers, and with evening frocks.



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In the Cradle of the Deep

(From the Boston Herald.)
The poet was not thinking of babies when he wrote the song, "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," yet it is literally true that a good many children are cradled and rocked for the first time at sea. And in these days of spacious steamships and numerous passengers, very fortunate are the little ones that are born far from the land. A birth at sea is an event that interests all on board the ship, and the passengers vie with one another to celebrate the arrival of the new passenger by making a monetary presentation that shall express their good wishes. This being known, does any one plan the birth of a child on board a vessel at sea? This question is answered by a correspondent of the London Daily Mail, who has recently crossed the Atlantic twice and been asked each time to contribute to a fund for a baby born on board. He inquired of the ship's doctor, who told him that sea voyages are "very popular with expectant mothers," especially emigrants from the European continent, many of whom realize that they can avoid an expensive time and get money enough to give baby born at sea a good start in life. A Cunard line official is reported as saying that collections on board for "the baby" have been very successful of late—as, for instance, the collection of £450 for one infant and the gift of a motor car in addition to money for another.

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(From the Pittsburg Chronicle-Telegraph.)
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"How long have you been doing this?" he asked.
"Tin years, sorr,"
"And how many bucketfuls do you carry off in an hour?" continued the traveller.
"Tin to fifteen, sorr," replied the Irishman.
"And how much water would you say you had carried since you started?" pursued the inquisitive gentleman.
"All the water you don't see there now, sorr."
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