

# THE PROMOTER'S WIFE

BY JANE PHELPS

## A FULL CONFESSION

### CHAPTER LXX.

"Will you remain to dinner with me?" I asked, as I returned to my guest. "Mr. Forbes is not able to come home. He had to dine with some of the town men. We will order the car and take a drive through the park, so that you will not be bored." Disregarding my invitation Mr. Frederick asked:

"Does this woman whom you said your husband visited with his out-of-town customers, or clients, live with her husband? Has she one?"

"Her husband died a short time ago. She is received to a certain extent in good society although she always has been very unconventional. "You aren't—jealous of her?" he asked the question haltingly, not looking at me.

"No, and yes.—I am not really jealous as one usually thinks of jealousy yet I am jealous that he spends his time with her.

"I see. Well I do not think I shall accept your invitation to dinner to night. I will hunt up Forbes and see if I can't trail along with his out fit. Excuse my expression, but I am Western, you know. I will drive with you, then go to his office. Perhaps you will let me telephone him."

"Certainly." The door was open Mr. Frederick talked rather loudly so I could not help overhearing his conversation with Nell who came to the telephone at once.

"Hello, this is Frederick. Are you going to be disengaged this evening?—I see—anyone I know—you don't say—why yes, if you are sure I won't be butting in. At the club—six-thirty—yes, that suits me—I'll be prompt Good bye." Not one word about being with me.

"Nothing like fishing," he laughed as he returned. "Forbes bit."

"I have something else to tell you I did something while Nell was away that angered him. I haven't had time to tell him just why I did it. That it was no lack of faith in him that urged me on, but a wish to see him right before my friends, and his—or those who pretend to be friendly to him. I went down to his office to see if I couldn't find something to refute what I thought, still think, were lies. His private office was locked, and of course I failed. I told him I had gone down there, and my reason,—as far as he would let me. But he was very angry."

"I don't really wonder. You see I am honest with you. No man wants anyone, even his wife, rummaging among his business papers. It would cause most men to lose their tempers if it were done."

"You also blame me?"

"Yes. You should have waited and told him what you had heard, and given him a chance to explain or not as he chose."

"But I couldn't bear to wait. Mr. Powers told Lorraine's father not to put any money into his, Nell's schemes, warned him that he would lose it if he did, adding that he, Nell was doing crooked work."

"Powers—um—that's too bad. He's a pretty big man, not a narrow one either."

"Yes, and I so wanted Mrs. Powers to be at my affairs."

"Um I see.—A wheel within a wheel. That was why your friend advised you to give up the idea of doing the society act at present?"

"Yes—I am so mortified."

"Had you sent out invitations?"

"No—but intended to this week."

"Don't!" Then: "I don't know much about society, but I know you and I don't want you to be hurt. If Powers is slandering your husband, be sure Mrs. Powers will slam you. Just put off this party idea until I have had a look in and see what I can do—if anything, to set Forbes right. He probably has been foolish, and given people some cause to talk."

shall know more after I have dined with that bunch tonight."

"Are they going to Mrs. Orton's?"

"I judge they may be going to as your husband told me to meet him at the club. Now don't worry. I guess on a second thought I won't drive with you. I might make it convenient to have some business with Powers before night. You go, and try not to worry. Your big brother has it in charge. Be sure I shall find some way to help you if it is possible."

"I know you will I replied, walking to the door with him, already happier. I had at least shifted my load upon broad shoulders.

## BARBARA SPENDS THE EVENING ALONE

### CHAPTER LXXI.

I did as Mr. Frederick suggested and ordered the car. At first I thought I would call for Lorraine or some other friend, then I decided I did not care to talk and would take my boy. He would chatter right along paying no attention if I did not answer.

We had gone but a little way when I saw someone bowing to me, not knowing at the same time. I told Thomas to draw up to the curb and greeted Mr. Rayburn whom I had not seen for a long time.

"Where have you kept yourself?" he asked. "I have been to every blessed affair in the hopes of seeing you, only to be disappointed. Been busy with that wonderful house I expect. I hear it is gorgeous."

"Yes, we think it very handsome. But really it is not the house which is to blame for my remaining at home. Mr. Forbes has been away a great deal lately, and I seldom if ever go without him."

"Foolish lady! does he never go without you?" A meaning in his wave voice which I ignored, although I felt myself flushing, and to cover my embarrassment I changed the subject by saying:

"Can't I set you down wherever you are going? Robert and I can easily make room for you." My son was sprawled boy-wise across the seat.

"Thank you, that will be an unexpected pleasure. I have an appointment at the club. But don't let me spoil your drive. I have half an hour yet."

"Then we will go on around the park before we let you off." I said as he took his seat. I had lifted Robert up and put him between us.

"Is Mr. Forbes at home now?" he asked.

"Yes, came back from the West last night."

"His business is prospering, I hear."

"Yes—but he works terribly hard. I so wanted to add; and what else have you heard?"

"It doesn't pay to push one's self too hard. To make money too fast."

"What do you mean?" I would draw him out.

"Oh, that one misses a lot. Enjoyment, comfort, many things which mere money do not compensate us for."

"What difference if one gets their enjoyment in work, Mr. Forbes fairly eats work." I gazed intently at him as I spoke. I would give him every chance. If he had anything to say about Nell I wanted to hear it—and deny it.

"Forbes is a wonderful fellow. Everyone says he is the cleverest money-maker in town." I did not stop to consider or look for a double meaning in his words. He was praising Nell, that was enough. I felt my lips curve in a smile. Even men recognized his ability. I had been silly, foolish, to listen to what Lorraine and those women in the decorator's shop had said. Nothing ever could come between me and Nell, nothing. Ever since I had first met him he had been all the world to me. I should be proud that a man whom other men thought so unusual loved me. I was proud. Self condemnation had me by the throat. The revelation from doubt and suspicion left me weak and trembling. It gave me almost acute pleasure to note signs of happiness upon the faces of the people we passed. Here was a man, my husband, who was strenuously fighting his way to the high places of finance. And because he didn't follow the beaten path, but hewed out a road for himself, I had been ready to blame him.

"A penny for your thoughts," Mr. Rayburn's voice started me. I had forgotten his very existence.

"It is time we turned.—Thomas the University Club please."

I dropped my whilom companion then went home. I found a message from Mr. Frederick.

"If convenient I will call upon you about eleven tomorrow morning. I knew he was coming to tell me what he had done for me. I smiled to think how needless it was. My mood again had changed. No one could make me distrust Nell.

## WHIMSICAL THOUGHTS KEEP BARBARA AWAKE

### CHAPTER LXXII.

It was with such thoughts that I waited for Nell. My confidence fully restored—so I thought; my heart filled with love. It was long after midnight when he came in.

"I thought you never would come, dear. I so wanted to explain things to you, and have scarcely seen you since you came home." I said after kissing him.

"You will oblige me very much if you will postpone your explanation, or forget it altogether. I am very tired and in no mood for talk."

Of course I said no more. I felt sure something had happened to upset Nell; something unpleasant. Had it been at Blanche Orton's? The thought was upsetting to say the least. I wished it were morning and Mr. Frederick would come. I perhaps then would get at the cause of Nell's abrupt repulse; his refusal to talk.

I was restless and unbidden thoughts, many of them unwelcome filled my mind. I recalled the time I found the imprint of Blanche Orton's check on the blotter in Nell's office. Even as long ago as that she had been mixed up in his affairs in some way. I seemed to be having a streak of bad luck, almost. I had been so happy, then came Lorraine her father, and the other things I had heard. Nell was still angry with me, would not listen when I tried to tell him I had not meant anything wrong when I went to his office. Yes, I was unlucky just now.

Then with the abruptness with which we turn from one thing to another in the night when lying awake, I recalled seeing a long ladder I had seen a few days previous raised against a building. It was one of the double sort, stretched wide apart for safety. I watched the people as they approached it, recalling the old superstition ancient passing under a ladder. Most of them who came along went away out into the street to avoid doing so, but occasionally I noticed someone would deliberately pass under the ladder. Finally quite an elderly woman came along laden with parcels, and she deliberately shifted her load so that she could pass under the ladder. I spoke to her.

"Why did you go under the ladder? It is bad luck?"

"No, Miss. It brings you good luck. Although some folks think the other way."

So as I lay wide-awake I thought that no matter what one did perhaps it didn't make much difference in the end. If you went around the ladder or under it, it all depended upon your point of view whether it brought luck or not. Wasn't it so with life? Then my thoughts shifted again to my hope for a social career, a successful one. I recalled the many lists of those whom I wished to cultivate I had made, and destroyed until the final one which suited me, was complete.

The clock struck four. I remembered nothing more until Ada called me.

"It is nearly eight o'clock ma'am."

I had not heard Nell when he got up, so soundly had I slept in the late morning. Now I heard the water running and knew he was in his bath. I should have to hurry. I did so want to talk to him. He had fallen asleep almost immediately he had gone to bed, and would be rested. Perhaps he would listen to me.

I was down almost as soon as he. "Now Nell you must let me talk a little." I commenced after he had his first cup of coffee. "I didn't mean to do anything to displease you, anything wrong by going to your office. I did it because I loved you. If I did not, I shouldn't care so much when people told lies about your business." He scowled, making no reply. It wasn't going to be as easy to explain, as I had imagined. "You see I had so planned upon having Mrs. Powers—and when Lorraine said Mr. Powers was the man who had warned her father—why—I thought I would find something to show that—oh, that everything was all right."

"I never want you to repeat that performance, Barbara!" that was all he said. He kissed me good bye in an absent-minded way. I was sure he

was worried and anxious over something. It was exactly eleven o'clock when Ada announced Mr. Frederick. Now I should perhaps learn something of the cause.

## MR. FREDERICK AGAIN AROUSES BARBARA'S DISTRUST

### CHAPTER LXXIII.

I hurried down to meet my guest. I thought I detected a look of something very near pity in his eyes, a halting in his speech and manner unusual to him. I wanted to ask: "What do you know? Did you go to Blanche Orton's?" Instead of which I used the trite greeting of society.

"Good morning Mr. Frederick! this is so good of you to give me so much of your time. I know you are a busy man, and seldom in New York," offering my hand.

"It is a great pleasure to be allowed to see you—the greatest I have," he replied as he released my hand.

For a moment we both seemed tongue-tied. Then with his usual straightforward almost brusque manner he said:

"I dined with Mr. Forbes last night—at Mrs. Orton's. Scot was here, and others."

"Yes—what others? Any one I know?" I asked eagerly when he paused for a moment.

"That I do not know. Some of them I hope you do not claim as acquaintances. It was quite a large party. And—"

"Were there any other women there, besides Mrs. Orton?" Something in his manner had aroused my suspicions.

"Yes, two others. Very charming women, very beautifully dressed but not your sort at all—not Mr. Forbes sort either. You have no reason to be distressed upon that score. They were invited, I imagine, to help entertain Thompson and Lane, perhaps Scott, although he paid them very little attention. Then there was Connor and Tearle."

"Connor—Tearle—do I know them? Their names sound familiar."

"I don't think you have met them—in fact I am sure from something that was said that you have not. You may have heard your husband mention them."

"Do you mind telling me what was said to lead you to think I did not know them?" He flushed, before he answered:

"I do mind, yet I think I will tell you. They intimated that you were too highbrow for them. Nothing against you surely," he smiled, rather in your favor."

"Please tell me if there was anything—if you heard anything I should know. I am sure Lorraine was mistaken, that Mr. Powers must have listened to some man who is jealous of Nell's success. He is very young, and has gone ahead of many much older in a business way. I am positively convinced he has done nothing wrong—at least either intentionally or knowingly."

"Your faith is—well, what might be expected of you. But I am afraid I shall have to hurt you. I am a plain man you know, I never learned to camouflage my words. But even if I hurt you I shall also help you—if I can. Sometimes people have to be hurt before it is possible to help you know."

I felt myself trembling, growing faint and weak with apprehension. What had he found out? What had Nell done?

"Please tell me everything you know."

Well in the first place, Mr. Forbes does know that some of his schemes will not stand daylight. Not all of them of course. Connor and Tearle are men absolutely devoid of conscience. They are the kind who would take the last penny a widow or orphan had and give them a fancy engraved certificate for it—and that is all they would give. No one can have them as associates and not have straight business men afraid of them."

"But I thought they put in money themselves—into things, like Mr. Scott, and others."

"No, they are promoters pure and



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## Let Nature Clear Your Blood

With pure, rich blood—a healthy stomach—and an active liver—you may laugh at disease, and you may have all three by taking

simple. Their job is to get the other fellow's money. Fellows like Scott and Thompson, another rich man they have on the string. Both Scott and Thompson are fond of women, and are gamblers. That is why they are easily duped. The women are provided, also the game. It sounds raw as I tell it. But as I told you I cannot camouflage words. The food is excellent, as well as the wine. But the servants in the house must talk. Although Mrs. Orton assured me they did not."

"What do you think of Mrs. Orton?" Would he tell me the truth, what he thought the truth of her connection with Nell?

### CHAPTER LXXIV.

When I asked Mr. Frederick what he thought of Blanche Orton my heart seemed to almost stop beating so anxiously did I await his reply. "Would he think that she and Nell—"

"Mrs. Orton is hard up. She is the kind of women we see occasionally in the west," he interrupted my thoughts. "She is hard as nails, too clever—to be wicked, knowing she is not, caring nothing what people say—at least I judge she does not."

"No, she never did! Even when Mr. Orton was alive. But then people simply smiled at her actions; now they talk."

"I see. I know very little of society folks. I know a good woman when I see her, and an honest man. I know, too, a clever woman like this Mrs. Orton. How long have your husband and his friends been going there?"

"A long time—nearly six or eight months. Ever since I refused to entertain those men here. I did wrong, didn't I?"

"That's a question I can't answer. You certainly could not entertain that bunch at Mrs. Orton's last night. Whether you could have prevented Forbes from getting mixed up with some of them if you had allowed a few like Scott to come here, I don't know. I doubt it however. And it is too late to think of that. I would rather lose every dollar I have in the world than see you making free with those people I was with last night."

"You are so good to me, I don't see why" I murmured, at the time knowing why—that he cared for me. Then before he could answer my tactless question I asked another: "How can Blanche Orton endure them? She is educated accomplished, dainty. As I spoke I remembered what she had said about resting so she would be at her best when she was going to be bored."

"If she wasn't all those things she

wouldn't be the kind of a woman who could help in promoting. Add to what you have said, cleverness, need of money, love of luxury, and you have the typical woman add to any promoter."

"Then you think that—"

"That you have cause to fear her?" reading my thoughts unawfully. "I do not think so—not in the way you mean. She is fascinating, and very beautiful. But a man with a wife like you would hardly allow himself to be duped by a woman of her type. Then too when men and women are in any sort of business deals, either honest or dishonest, they seldom have love affairs also. They don't go together. I would not worry about that phase of the matter if I were you."

I was so relieved I sighed audibly. This man's plain common sense view of the matter had taken away the jealousy I felt—at least for the present.

"Then you think that what Mr. Powers, and the others said is true? That Nell, Mr. Forbes is not quite honest?" My face burned as I put the question, yet I must know.

"I am afraid that all his schemes won't stand daylight as I said. He can't be entirely ignorant of the fact, as he is the brains of all the things he goes into. There are usually three or four types in all promoting outfits. The society man, the man with education and appearance, the bluff common man whose very bluntness causes confidence, the politician often, and either some woman like this Mrs. Orton, or another man who is equally clever at entertaining. Wine and women sometimes

play a big part if the deal is crooked."

"Do they blame Nell for being so—I was going to say generous, but instead I changed to 'extravagant' For this?" I gestured to include house, everything."

"Yes. They say he uses other people's money to live as you do, instead of trying to make them the profits he promises. I am sorry. But I must tell you the truth."

"No wonder Lorraine—and you also discouraged my social plans."

"You are young, just put them off a while. I must go now. I shall be in town a few days. I am going to talk with your husband like a Dutch uncle, as we say. Then I will tell you of a plan I have."

"You are the only real friend I have in the world!" I said impulsively, giving him both my hands. He drew me to him, kissed me once on my forehead, as he might have kissed a child, then left without another word.