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THE PROMOTER'S WIFE

BY JANE PHELPS

BARBARA LUNCHES AT THE CLUB WITH NEIL—AND BLANCHE

CHAPTER XXXV.

Everything I did seemed so futile at this time—every move I made, without result. I was apparently nappy and contented—really was most of the time. But underneath was ever a current of anxiety, a fear of something, I knew not what.

Weeks passed and I never again questioned Neil. We had been very quiet save on the fourth anniversary of our marriage when we had given a large dinner and reception. But it had gone off wonderfully well and there had been nothing in Neil's manner to cause me worry. He had even been extremely temperate in his drinking with the guests, and had shown Blanche Orton—who was, of course, invited—no more attention than he had the others.

Neil was, however, with me less than he had ever been since we had been married. When I spoke of it, of how he was getting later and later for dinner when he came home, and of how often he remained out, he invariably pleading business, and told me to go to the theatre or something—not to sit alone.

One morning at breakfast—he had been out very late the night before—he said:

"Come down town to the club to luncheon with me today if you like, Bah."

I was delighted. It was a real treat for me to lunch at one of the business men's club and thought Neil often lunched there he seldom asked me.

I dressed very carefully. I wanted Neil to be proud of me. But in spite of my delight at his invitation I was a little peeved, and more than a little disappointed when he came to greet me, to see that Blanche Orton was there also.

"I thought you two could shop or go to a matinee afterwards," he said nonchalantly, although he flushed a little.

I had not wanted her. I could not help wondering just why Neil had asked me to come down when she was to be there, but I had learned to accept the unexpected where Neil was concerned.

Blanche looked lovely as usual quite putting me in the shade. Ordinary women, those of no particular individuality of coloring and features, cannot hope to cope with the unusual few who, like Blanche Orton attracted because they are so different.

Both Neil and Blanche drank cocktails, each of them two, although I frowned at Neil. This was one other thing I held against Blanche: Neil always drank when with her.

Neil was plainly preoccupied through lunch and both Mrs. Orton and I teased him about it.

"You shouldn't invite ladies if you are not going to be entertaining," she pouted.

The waiter had seemed to know Blanche. Was she accustomed to lunch here—with Neil? Had he been seeing her very much more than I dreamed? The thought was a painful one and I tried to dismiss it. If he had, what did it all portend? I could not try even to think it out there—with her sitting opposite me.

But it was with inexpressible relief that I saw Mr. Frederick make his way towards us. I had not known he was in town. Neil had not mentioned seeing him. He was very cordial, and accepted with alacrity when Neil asked him if he wouldn't lunch with us.

Neil however was still so quiet that Blanche rallied him upon it, declaring he must be bored with her society, and finally she turned her attention to Mr. Frederick, saying that he at least might appreciate her.

I imagined she acted as she did to please Neil. But it did not worry me as did his own actions. It was not usual for him to be so quiet and abstracted—especially when Blanche Orton was around.

BARBARA REFUSES TO GO TO A MATINEE WITH BLANCHE
CHAPTER XXXVI.

Our luncheon finished, I went directly home, although Mrs. Orton had asked me if I would go to the matinee. I distrusted her and disliked her. I must be civil when Neil was around or it would anger him and he would also think me jealous—which I had no intention he should do, although I was.

Mr. Frederick had evaded, when I asked him if he were not coming to see me while in New York. Neil had heard and seconded the invitation, and then Mr. Frederick had said:

"I am leaving so soon I fear I shall not have time. If I do I will certainly let you know." And with that we had to be content.

I can't explain the feeling which made me desire to see Mr. Frederick again. I surely had no intention of questioning him about Neil, or his

business. Yet he might have said something, let drop a remark that would have made me feel less unsettled, happier over Neil and his affairs, which he was so determined to keep to himself—as far as I was concerned.

Neil seemed to have recovered his vivacity when he came home to dinner. I said nothing about the quiet way he had acted at luncheon, but talked of Mr. Frederick and other things.

"Did you and Blanche go to a matinee?" he asked.

"No, I was a little tired and so I came right home."

"Didn't she want to go, didn't she ask you?"

"Yes,—though I don't think she cared particularly about going. She didn't act at all disappointed."

"I wish, after this, when she asks you to go anywhere with her you would accept. It was precisely with that object in mind that I arranged that lunch today."

"I'm sorry—but, you see, Neil, I didn't know. I don't understand why you wanted me to go with her; but if there was any real reason, you should have explained it to me."

He spoke so sternly, that I could not avoid thinking that there was something behind it all; he had not denied that he had planned for me to go out with Blanche Orton, while at the same time he had made no explanation of why he wanted me to do so.

Suddenly it flashed over me that for some reason he wanted me to be seen in public with Blanche. He had arranged that luncheon not because he wanted me to have a good time,

not because he wanted me with him; but because he wanted people to see Blanche and me together. Then he had wanted me to go to a matinee with her—doubtless for the same reason. Oh, it was shameful—the thought that intruded on the heels of this one. No, no, I would not believe that of Neil. If I did it would be to believe him guilty of some sort of immoral liaison with Mrs. Orton, and also to insult him by believing he would use me, his wife, to cover it up by being seen with her.

Should I say any more about it to Neil, or should I let it pass, as I had so many other things? I decided to do the latter. Neil had been very irritable lately, although we had not again come to an open quarrel. But the least contradiction angered him, and I felt I could not endure to go through another siege of the kind we had had so short a time before. My own nerves were strung to the highest pitch, I felt that hysterics were not very far away. So instead of saying more about Mrs. Orton I changed the subject.

Just as I came to this decision the telephone rang. Neil picked up the receiver.

"Hello—what's that?—My God—when did it happen—Dead! You are sure?—I'll be right down, go to the office and wait for me."

Neil sank heavily into a chair. "What is it, dear? Do tell me!" I said running to him.

"He's dead—Orton—and now that deal will be off—" he staggered to the cellarette and poured himself a drink. Then, without looking at me or answering my questions, he left the house.

BARBARA KNOWS NO PEACE OF MIND
CHAPTER XXXVII.

For the first time in my life I was almost physically afraid, so keen was

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a sense of danger about me. Some so dearly, he persisted in being almost a stranger to me. What could there be between him and Blanche Orton, that the death of her invalid husband should affect him as it had? I was burning with excitement, yet

Then I began to sob. I felt shaken and frightened,—like a child. Presently I ceased sobbing. I was, however, inundated with self-pity.

Continued on page three.

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