

The Phantom Lover

By Ruby Ayres

THIS STARTS THE STORY
Micky Malloys, matrimonial catch, discovers the mind of a girl he finds crying on the street from the thoughts of suicide with which she had been tormented. Returning to his apartment he finds his friend, Ashton, who says he is leaving town and his sweetheart of his mother's request and asks Micky to deliver a letter to her. Micky discovers the girl, Esther Shepperson, to be the one he had met crying on the street. He writes her a letter, a kinder one, and signs Ashton's name to it. The letter comforts Esther. One day when she returns to her room she finds June Mason, another boarder in the house, there. June expresses the wish that they should be friends.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES
There was something so broadly disarming about her that Esther held out her hand.

"You're very kind. I hardly know what to say."
"Don't say anything," Miss Mason answered airily. "I'm going to like you. I know I should sooner when I first heard your name. Oh, I hope you don't think it's awful cheek," she broke out with a sort of embarrassment. "I've got a sitting room here, as well as a bedroom, and always make my own tea. It's a bargain, you can get downstairs. I've got a fire there, too, and if you're ever cold I hope you'll come up and sit with me. I'm out a good deal, but you can always use my room when I'm not there. If you want to see me you can come and see it now, or are you too tired? I don't want to worry you."

"I'm not a bit tired," Esther said, laughing; she felt a little bewildered by the sudden offer of friendship. June Mason interested her, and after a moment she took off her hat obediently. "Well, bring the cat," Miss Mason said; she swooped down with a quick movement and caught the cat up in her arms. "I love cats," she said. "What's his name?" "He's called 'Eldred,'" said Esther shyly. "He's very thin, but they weren't kind to him where he belonged before."

"What a shame! I simply loathe people who are not kind to animals. Never mind, he'll soon get all right. Now come along—I'll help you unpack your boxes presently. She led the way upstairs, and Esther followed. She had been feeling a little scared of this new boarding house. She felt grateful for this girl's unaffected overture.

"Mine's the best room in the house," Miss Mason informed her. She pushed open the door of a room immediately above Esther's. "Sit down and make yourself at home. I'll get the tea in half a minute. I know you'll have another cup. I shall, anyway. Do you smoke?" "No," said Esther.

"Well, I do. I hope you're not shocked. I find it so soothing when I'm nervous; and I'm a frightfully nervous person. I am hardly ever still; I'm always on the go."
She went back to the teapot, made the tea, and poured out a cup for Esther. "It's that chair that looks like back!" What are you looking at? Oh, my photographs! Yes, I have got a lot, haven't I?"

She turned with one of her rapid movements, caught up a photograph from the shelf and handed it to Esther. "There! That's one of the nicest men I ever met in my life," she said enthusiastically. "Don't you think he's got a ripping face?" Esther took the portrait laughing. "—she thought it was too occupied with the most amusing people she had ever met—then she caught her breath on a little smothered exclamation as she found herself looking straight into the pictured eyes of Micky Malloys.

June Mason was too occupied with a fresh cigarette to notice the blank look she flitted across Esther's eyes. She sat there on the big chair, staring at Micky's portrait with a sense of foreboding. "Surely that was something bigger than just chance that introduced him into her life for the second time."

"My people wanted me to marry him at one time," June went on airily. "I might have done so, only I liked him too well. He didn't care for me, except as a friend, and it seemed a shame to spoil it, so I put my foot down."
"You mean that you refused him?" Esther was interested; she was remembering how Micky told her that he had never really cared for any woman in all his life.

"He never asked me, my dear," Miss Mason answered candidly. "I let him see that it wouldn't be any good if he did, and I know he was frightened. I love with one another as we were when we first knew that we didn't mean to get married." She chuckled reminiscently. "It finished me with my people, though," she added, "so I cleared out and came here."

"And Micky?" Esther asked. "I mean Mr. Malloys." "I should love to see him happily married to a girl with as much heart as his own. I think I know him better than you do, and his little corner of the world would be amazed if they knew the amount of good Micky manages to do."

said it was low-down to make face cream and sell it—they're awful snobs! So I just cleared out and changed my surname and came here. I'm quite as happy, and if I haven't got as much money as I had, I don't mind—I've got my liberty, and that's worth everything."

"I think you're just wonderful," Esther said. She picked up a tin of one of the little pots and looked at the mauve and white label. "June Mason of natural beautifier." "But you're not married?" asked June suddenly.

"No, I'm not married," she said in a stifled voice. "He—my fiancé—has had to get away on business—abroad—and I don't know when I shall see him again."

Her voice sounded sad and despondent. "You poor little thing!" said June Mason. She leaned over and laid her hand on Esther's. "Never mind! The time will soon pass, and then he'll come and you'll live happily ever after."

Esther smiled. "I know. I keep telling myself it's foolish to worry. I feel quite happy this morning. I had a letter from him, and somehow when I read it things didn't seem half so bad, but—"

"And you'll have another tomorrow, I expect," Miss Mason insisted. "And another the next day, and one every day while he's away. There! That's better," she added cheerily as Esther laughed.

"I don't like to see you look so sad. I'm going to cheer you up. I shan't allow you to be miserable. And, anyway," she added, with a sudden softening, "you've got someone who loves you, and that's worth everything else in the world."

"Yes," said Esther. Her eyes shone and she thought of the letter which was even then lying against her heart. Somehow she had never realized how much he really cared for her all along. "And what are you going to do till he comes home?" Miss Mason asked interestedly. "If you had something to do you'd find time pass ever so much more quickly."

"It's a question of having to do something, rather than how to pass the time," Esther said. "I haven't any money except what I can make myself. My aunt left me a little when she died, but most of it at first while I was looking for work. So I'm going back to Eldred's. They will have me, and I think they will."

Miss Mason said "Humph!" "There are heaps of other berths going besides Eldred's, you know," she said earnestly. "However, you must do as you like, of course." She threw away another unfinished cigarette. "Do you think we are going to be friends?" she asked.

"I'm sure we are," Esther said. She really did think so; she had never met any one in the least like June Mason before. She began to feel glad she had come to this house.

THE GUMPS—Andy's Cozy Corner

By Sidney Smith



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—She Can't See Wearing Glasses

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The Young Lady Across the Way

MOTHER RETURNED TO FIND DAD HAD ALL HER NEW SOFA CUSHIONS ON THE FLOOR UNDER THE RUG

SCHOOL DAYS

THE WORRY CLUB



The young lady across the way says she hasn't seen anything about it in the papers, but it was such a landslide she supposes we elected a solid Republican cabinet also.

— So that he could practice putting on a "Rolling Green"

THE WORRY CLUB

PETEY—He'll Have to Fix It Himself

By C. A. Voight



THE CLANCY KIDS—Why Teachers Get Nervous Prostration

By Percy L. Crosby

