

The WISDOM OF EVE

Orr, Mary

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ABSTRACT

Sooner or later Eve Harrington's sins will catch up with her. Not today, perhaps, or tomorrow but eventually...

FULL TEXT

** Due to publisher restrictions, full text is restricted to a single page or page spread. **

The Wisdom of Eye

(Continued from page 75)

evening performance was over she was still there. This time, when I got rid of the crowd, I spoke to her. I asked her if there was anything I could do for her, and she said no. I said I had noticed her at the matinee and that my husband had seen her before. She said she stood there every night. I couldn't believe my ears. I said, 'Well, what do you want?' She said, 'Nothing.' I said, 'There must be something,' and finally she said that she knew if she stood there long enough, eventually I would speak to her. I asked if that was all she wanted and she said, 'Yes.' That she had first seen me in San Francisco when I toured in 'Have a Heart.' (That was my husband's first play in which Margola had appeared.) That she had followed me to Los Angeles and had eventually come on to New York."

"Just to stand at your stage door?" I asked, amazed.

"She went to the play," Margola added, "as often as she could afford to."

"What devotion," I said.

"That," said Margola sadly, "is what I assumed. I was most impressed. I thought: This is my most ardent fan. She follows me clear across the Great Divide. She sees my plays constantly when she obviously has very little money. She stands night after night at my stage door just to see me come out and finally to have me speak to her. I was moved."

I could imagine that Margola was speaking the truth. Her voice sounded husky. "So what went on?" I urged.

"Well," Margola answered, "I felt that I had to do something to repay this child for her admiration. She's only twenty-two. I thought: I'll give her an evening that she'll always remember. So I invited her to come home with me. She acted as if she were in a seventh heaven. She had a slight accent which she told me was Norwegian. She said that her people had come over here six or seven years before, and had finally left her with an aunt and gone back to Norway on a trip. Of course, because of the war, they hadn't been able to return, and she hadn't heard from them in months. In the meantime, she had married a young American flier and had been living in San Francisco because he had gone to the Pacific from there. I asked her how she got along and she said that at first she had had her husband's allotment, but then he had been killed over Bougainville and since then she had lived very meagerly on his insurance."

"How sad," I exclaimed.

"Exactly what I thought," Margola said. "She told me that seeing me act and watching my plays had been her only happiness since she had had the wire about her husband. It seemed to me that I must do something for her. I found out that she could type and do shorthand. She'd worked as a secretary in San Francisco. It suddenly came to me that this girl might make just the secretary for me; you know I am hard to please, but here was someone who adored me; who would be loyal; who was quiet and at the same time well-bred. She spoke English beautifully and seemed intelligent. So I asked her if she'd like to work for me. You've never seen such a response. She burst into tears and kissed my hand. I generally hate that sort of thing because I know it's insincere, but this time I was sure it was genuine. She was so naive, so subtle."

"The way you read that line suggests she wasn't."

"Don't jump cues," Margola snapped. "And for my impatience, I had to wait

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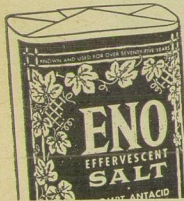
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until she had drawn three or four puffs on her cigarette.

"Well, I gave the wretched girl clothes to wear. I gave her twenty-five dollars a week. All she had to do was tend to my correspondence, send out pictures and so forth. Some letters she was to answer without bothering me, but anything that she felt needed my particular attention she was to show to me. At first she was ideal. Then after a month or so she began to annoy me."

"How?" I couldn't help asking.
 "By staring at me. She stared at me all the time. I would turn around suddenly and catch her eyes on me. It gave me the creeps. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer. I suddenly realized that she was studying me, imitating my gestures, my ways of speech, almost doing the same things. It was like having a living shadow. At last I told Clement that he should use the girl at the office; that she could attend to my mail there instead of at home. I wanted to get her out of the house, and at the same time I didn't want to fire her. I still felt sorry for her. Besides, her work was very satisfactory."

"Clement was delighted with her," Margola continued, a little thin-lipped. "His own secretary had just left to be married, and this girl fitted right in to her place. She began to read plays for us and made some quite intelligent observations. Then one day we had a rehearsal—it was when we were putting Miss Caswell into the sister part—and I had a toothache and didn't go. My understudy hadn't been called. She was out, and the stage manager wasn't able to get in touch with her. Eve had gone to the rehearsal with Clement to take his notes, and when there wasn't anybody to do my part, she volunteered. Clement told the stage manager to give her the script so that she could read it, and to his amazement she said, 'Oh, I don't need that.' Well, my dear"—Margola leaned closer to me as the car spun around a corner—"would you believe it, she knew every line of my part? Not only every line but every inflection, every gesture. Clement was there to watch Miss Caswell, and he said he forgot all about her, he was so fascinated by Eve's unexpected performance."

"Was she really good?" I asked.
 "Good!" Margola raised a painted eyebrow. "Good! She was marvelous. Clement even hinted she was slightly better than I am. He didn't dare say so, of course, but he teased me that she was. He said if he'd closed his eyes, he wouldn't have known the difference."

"What about the Norwegian accent?"
 "Apparently," Margola shrugged, "that just went. I understand why, now."

"I don't," I said.
 "You will," Margola stated bluntly. "Anyway, Clement was so amazed at the girl's exhibition that he took her out to tea afterwards. She confessed to him that she had always wanted to be an actress and asked him to help her. Asked him—not me! Don't you think that was hatefully deceitful?"

I admitted that it was, but I thought privately the girl had been rather smart. Great actresses are not noted for encouraging brilliant ingénues.

"She told him that she had only stood around my stage door because she wanted to meet him, that she considered him the most brilliant director and producer in New York. He didn't tell me that. I found it out later. But Clem was very flattered. After all, he's only a man, and I get more than my share of attention. He's always introduced as Miss Cranston's husband; it probably irritates him more than he admits. But here was somebody looking up at him with saucer eyes, tell-

ing him he was wonderful, and he fell for it. He told me she was the most talented young girl he had seen in years, that we must help her. I said nothing. I knew I had to handle this very carefully. I asked Eve why she hadn't told me she wanted to be an actress and asked me to help her. She had the nerve"—Margola paused for effect—"to tell me she knew I wouldn't like the competition."

I laughed out loud. It was so ridiculous. Even the best actors in her supporting casts have a tendency to melt into the scenery when Margola gets into her stride. "She doesn't lack ego," I chuckled.
 "Ego!" Margola spat out the word. "Wait till I tell you about the letter . . . It arrived several days after this rehearsal. Eve came to my dressing room before the performance with four or five letters. This particular one was among them. She told me that she thought I ought to give them my personal attention. I put them into my purse, took them home and forgot about them."

"Several days later, Eve asked me if I had read them, and I said that I hadn't. She particularly urged me to do so. I promised to, but I still put it off. I hate reading mail. In a few days, she was nagging me again to know if I had read the letters. I still hadn't. That night Alice told me that Miss Harrington had come to my dressing room while I was on the stage and had gone all through my pockets and my purse looking for something. I didn't like that, and after the show I called Eve down for it. She said she was looking for those letters, that there was one that, on second thought, she felt I ought not to see. I said that as she had given me the letter in the first place, it was a little absurd to decide now that I shouldn't see it. But whether I read the letters or not, she was never again to go through things."

"She burst into tears and cried that she only wanted to spare me pain. I had been so kind to her, she didn't want my feelings hurt. She had only given me the letter because when she had first read it she had been so thrilled that she wanted me to see it; thinking it over she realized that it might hurt me."

"I remarked that after the things critics had written about me, nothing in any letter could possibly faze me."

"I realize now that this entire performance was to get me to read that letter without any more delay, and I am sorry to say it worked. That night when I got home it was the first thing I did. It was very easy to pick out the one she was referring to. It went something like this.

"Dear Miss Cranston,

"Today I was buying a ticket to see a performance of your play. The door to the theater was open, and as I could hear voices and no one was watching the door, I wandered inside to see what was going on. It seemed to be a rehearsal. A young girl was playing the part that I recognized, when I saw the actual performance, as your rôle. I presume she was your understudy. I know that stars of your caliber are always jealous of the ability of young people, but my dear Miss Cranston, I put you above such petty feelings. I am sure that loving the theater as you do, you will wish to enrich it. In your company, hidden backstage, is the most brilliant young performer I have ever seen. I was spellbound. She brought all your ability plus youth to the part. I waited outside for this young girl and asked her name. It was Harrington. Do help her to get the break she so richly deserves.

"It was signed: 'One of your devoted followers.'"

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Image 7:

Caption: She just stood there, odd-looking and aloof, staring at the stage door.

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Image 8:

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Image 9:

Caption: "The first thing I did when I got home was to read the letter."

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