

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

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"Of course she wrote it herself," I gasped.

"I think so," Margola said. "I was positive, but it was typewritten, so I could not easily prove it. The next day I merely said to Eve that it was quite a coincidence that the theater door was ajar when she happened to be rehearsing my part. We never mentioned it again."

I resisted comment. I could sense Margola was working up to a big scene.

"Not long after this the John Bishop auditions came up."

I nodded. John Bishop is one of Broadway's better producers. Every season he holds auditions where talented unknowns can come and do a scene of their own choosing on the stage of his theater. The judges are other producers, talent scouts from film companies and agents. Mr. Bishop's official reason for this competition is his altruistic desire to give embryonic Thespians a chance to be seen; the winner often steps right into a Broadway show.

"Well, darling," Margola went on, "Eve was crazy to participate in Johnny's auditions. She went to Clem and pleaded with him to give her an introduction to Johnny. He said it wasn't necessary, that she merely had to fill in the application blank in Johnny's office, and when her turn came she would be called. She found that to be true, and from then on she was no use as a secretary at all; she was in a complete dither about what scene to do and wanted Clement to advise her and coach her. I told her to do a scene from 'A Kiss for Cinderella' as I felt she was rather the pathetic, wistful type, but Clem picked out a bit of Ibsen—Hilda in 'The Master Builder'—because it would suit her Scandinavian accent.

"She naturally took Clement's advice—not mine. She studied the scene, and when she had memorized it, Clement heard her go through it. He came home enthralled. Again, he thought she was marvelous. He insisted that I come down to the theater and give her some suggestions. By this time I was so curious to see this future Jeanne Eagels that I consented. One day before the matinee, I went to the theater early, and she did the scene for me."

"Was she really terrific?" I asked.

"I was impressed," Margola admitted reluctantly. "She was talented. There was no question about that. She had a marvelous voice, and she read the lines with great sincerity, though this didn't disguise the fact that she was utterly inexperienced and awkward. I suppose that didn't show up when she was copying me in my part because she had me for a model. I did what I could to help her to hide these defects and showed her a few other little tricks, and she picked them up quickly enough. I wasn't so excited as Clement, but I could see that there was something to his statements.

"The auditions took place in a few days. She got down to the finals, and then, on the big day, won them. Everybody was terribly excited about her. Movie scouts knocked themselves out to make tests of her, agents wanted to put her on their files. You've never seen such excitement. She thought she was made. She was a star overnight, so now the story could come out."

"What story?"

"Her story. Her true story. Pathetic, wistful, naive Eve Harrington gave out an interview to the newspapers on how she had fooled the finest actress in the theater for several months!"

"Fooled you? How?"

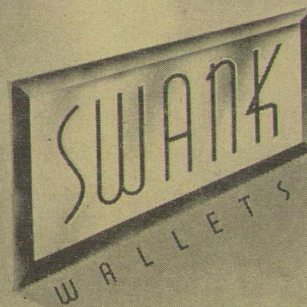
"In every way. Her entire story was a piece of fiction. She'd never been any closer to San Francisco than Milwaukee, where she was born. She was Norwegian



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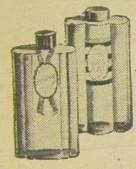


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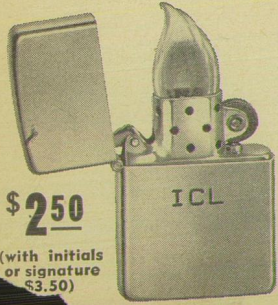
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by descent, but had picked up her accent from a waitress in her father's restaurant. Her parents were safely in Wisconsin."

"Why did she want an accent?"
"Glamour, my dear. So many foreign actresses are successful here. She thought an accent would make her."

"But the parents being trapped by the war in Norway. What was the point of that?" I asked.

"Sympathy. The husband was a plea in the same direction."

"You mean she wasn't a widow?"
"She'd never been married."

"My God!" I said.

"The entire plot was a masterpiece of detail," Margola went on, enjoying my amazement, "In Milwaukee she had been a secretary with stage ambitions. She saved enough money to come to New York and live for six months. Once here, she laid a careful campaign to get ahead in the theater. She made up her mind to become acquainted with Clem and me. I think her ideas went even further. I believe she planned to break up our marriage. Being married to a big producer-director would just suit Eve. She once made a remark to me that every important actress in the theater had a successful man behind her. That part hadn't jelled, but the rest had worked pretty well. As Clem's secretary she had met most of the big agents, playwrights and important actors. Now on top of these contacts, she had received a chance to show her ability and had come off the winner."

"It looked very amusing in print that Director Clement Howell had had a genius right in his own office and that it had remained for another producer to discover her. Poor Clem took a lot of kidding on that score. That interview was the loudest crowing I ever read. The funniest part was how I had fallen for that stuff about her being my great fan. It made her out an even greater actress—that she had played a rôle in real life so convincingly that we had both been taken completely for a ride. I could have strangled her. Naturally she didn't wait to be fired. She resigned as Clem's secretary. She told him she couldn't be tied down to an office any longer. She began to dress in clothes and costumes that would be noticed."

She began to wear make-up in quantity because the report on most of her screen tests was 'no sex appeal.'

"Why is she still standing at your stage door?" I asked. "I don't understand."

"That's where we had the last laugh," said Margola brightly. "The one thing happened that she hadn't bargained for. You know what Broadway is like. One day you're the toast of the town, and the next you're forgotten. She was too inexperienced to have learned that real and lasting success is only built on a long-term foundation. She thought she was all set, and it went to her head. She took a few screen tests but didn't photograph well enough to be sensational, and Hollywood doesn't bother to experiment with lights and make-up unless you have a real hit behind you. She was an odd type—certainly not the conventional ingénue—and no part turned up for her. Pretty soon the agents and producers just forgot all about her. She couldn't even get in to see John Bishop himself, and she was his official protégé. That's when she came crying back to Clem and me. She says that she will stand at my stage door every night until I forgive her. That she was a silly fool when she gave out that interview. That she really did love me, and at first her only thought was to get to know me. That she will be eternally grateful if we will only get to get

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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 9:

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

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