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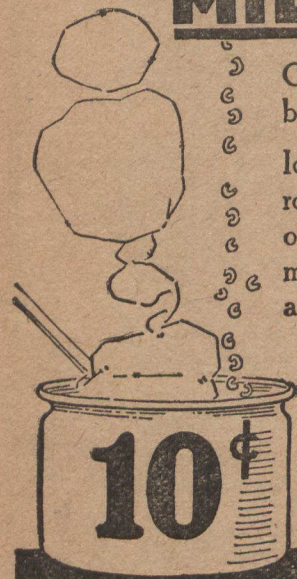
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reaching her own rooms that she appreciated that the meaning of this action was that she shrank from seeing Avery again that night. But she had been in her rooms only a few minutes when her house telephone buzzed, and answering it, she found that it was Donald speaking to her.

"Will you come down for a few minutes, please, Harry?"

She withheld her answer momentarily. Before Eaton had come into her life, Donald sometimes had called her like this,—especially on those nights when he had worked late with her father,—and she had gone down to visit with him for a few minutes as an ending for the day. She had never allowed these meetings to pass beyond mere companionship; but to-night she thought of that companionship without pleasure.

"Please, Harry!" he repeated.

Some strangeness in his tone perplexed her.

"Where are you?" she asked.

"In the study."

She went down at once. As he came to the study door to meet her, she saw that what had perplexed her in his tone was apparently only the remnant of that irritation he had showed at dinner. He took her hand and drew her into the study. The lights in the room turned full on and the opaque curtains drawn closely over the windows told that he had been working,—or that he wished to appear to have been working,—and papers scattered on one of the desks, and the wall safe to the right of the door standing open, confirmed this. But now he led her to the big chair, and guided her as she seated herself; then he lounged on the flat-topped desk in front of and close to her and bending over her.

"You don't mind my calling you down, Harry; it is so long since we had even a few minutes alone together," he pleaded.

"What is it you want, Don?" she asked.

"Only to see you, dear—Harry." He took her hand again; she resisted and withdrew it. "I can't do any more work to-night, Harry. I find the correspondence I expected to go over this evening isn't here; your father has it, I suppose."

"No; I have it, Don."

"You?"

"YES; Father didn't want you bothered by that work just now. Didn't he tell you?"

"He told me that, of course, Harry, and that he had asked you to relieve me as much as you could; he didn't say he had told you to take charge of the papers. Did he do that?"

"I thought that was implied. If you need them, I'll get them for you, Don. Do you want them?"

She got up and went toward the safe where she had put them; suddenly she stopped. What it was that she felt under his tone and manner, she could not tell; it was probably only irritation at having important work taken out of his hands. But whatever it was, he was not openly expressing it—he was even being careful that it should not be expressed. And now suddenly, as he followed and came close behind her and her mind went swiftly to her father lying helpless upstairs and her father's trust in her she halted.

"We must ask Father first," she said.

"Ask him!" he ejaculated. "Why?"

She faced him uncertainly, not answering.

"That's rather ridiculous, Harry, especially as it is too late to ask him to-night." His voice was suddenly rough in his irritation. "I have had charge of those very things for years; they concern the matters in which your father particularly confides in me. It is impossible that he meant you to take them out of my hands like this. He must have meant only that you were to give me what help you could with them!"

She could not refute what he said; still, she hesitated.

"When did you find out those matters weren't in your safe, Don?" she asked.

"Just now."

"Didn't you find out this afternoon—before dinner?"

"That's what I said—just now this afternoon, when I came back to the house before dinner, as you say." Suddenly he seized both her hands, drawing her to him and holding her in front of him. "Harry, don't you see that you are putting me in a false position—wronging me? You are acting as though you did not trust me!"

She drew away her hands. "I do trust you, Don; at least I have no reason to distrust you. I only say we must ask Father."

"They're in your little safe?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"And you'll not give them to me?"

"No."

He stared angrily; then he shrugged and laughed and went back to his desk and began gathering up his scattered papers. She stood indecisively watching him. Suddenly he looked up, and she saw that he had quite conquered his irritation, or at least had concealed it; his concern now seemed to be only over his relations with herself.

"We've not quarreled, Harry?" he asked.

"Quarreled? Not at all, Don," she replied.

She moved toward the door; he followed and let her out, and she went back to her own rooms.

CHAPTER XVI.

Santoine's "Eyes" Fail Him.

EATON, coming down rather late the next morning, found the breakfast room empty. He chose his breakfast from the dishes on the sideboard, and while the servant set them before him and waited on him, he inquired after the members of the household. Miss Santoine, the servant said, had breakfasted some time before and was now with her father; Mr. Avery also had breakfasted; Mr. Blatchford was not yet down. As Eaton lingered over his breakfast, Miss Davis passed through the hall, accompanied by a maid. The maid admitted her into the study and closed the door; afterward, the maid remained in the hall busy with some morning duty, and her presence and that of the servant in the breakfast room made it impossible for Eaton to attempt to go to the study or to risk speaking to Miss Davis. A few minutes later, he heard Harriet Santoine descending the stairs; rising, he went out into the hall to meet her.

"I don't ask you to commit yourself for longer than to-day, Miss Santoine," he said, when they had exchanged greetings, "but—for to-day—what are the limits of my leash?"

"Mr. Avery is going to the country-club for lunch; I believe he intends to ask you if you care to go with him."

He started and looked at her in surprise. "That's rather longer extension of the leash than I expected," he replied.

He stood an instant thoughtful. Did the invitation imply merely that he was to have greater freedom now?

"Do you wish me to go?" he asked.

Her glance wavered and did not meet his. "You may go if you please."

"And if I do not?"

"Mr. Blatchford will lunch with you here."

"And you?"

"Yes, I shall lunch here too, probably. This morning I am going to be busy with Miss Davis on some work for my father; what I do depends on how I get along with that."

"Thank you," Eaton acknowledged.

She turned away and went into the study, closing the door behind her. Eaton, although he had finished his breakfast, went back into the breakfast room. He did not know whether he would refuse or accept Avery's invitation; suddenly he decided. After waiting for some five minutes there over a second cup of coffee, he got up and crossed to the study door and knocked. The door was opened by Miss Davis; looking past her, he could see Harriet Santoine seated at one of the desks.

"I beg pardon, Miss Santoine," he explained his interruption, "but you did not tell me what time Mr. Avery