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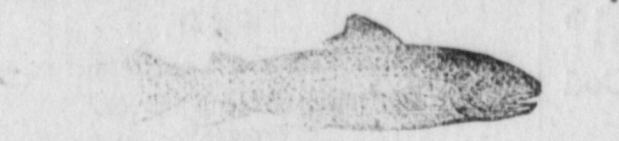
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HER LOVE FOR HER LIFE.

"Despatch, doctor." I opened the envelope and read:—"My daughter is very ill. Disease unknown. Come at once."

"HELEN TREVOR." I had never met Mrs. Trevor, though her name was familiar to me as that of a widow of large fortune and high social position, residing with her daughter upon a handsome estate a few miles of town. It was certainly very flattering that, with the services of the most celebrated specialist at her command, she should summon me, a young practitioner who had worked himself up from poverty and obscurity. But I was beginning to be known, I reflected, as I prepared to start, and if I were to be successful in this case, Mrs. Trevor's influence would throw open to me the doors of the fashionable world, where she was an acknowledged leader.

I found Mrs. Trevor in a state of the deepest anxiety and distress. Her daughter had been ill for some weeks already, and was growing slowly and steadily worse every day. The disease, which seemed to be a strange, painless decline of strength, without visible cause, had baffled the utmost skill and experience of the physicians. None of them could even give it a name, and one after another they had retired, confessing their defeat.

She had heard of me, she said, in connection with some remarkable cures, and with tears in her eyes she besought me to save her darling.

I promised to do my best. I was shown to Miss Trevor's room. She was about 18, and, despite her languor and paleness, one of the most beautiful beings I had ever seen. A physician is supposed to be hardened to the emotions of ordinary humanity, but as she raised her large, soft eyes to mine in mute appeal I was conscious of a thrill of tenderness and pity in my heart which was new in my experience.

After a long and anxious examination I, too, was compelled to acknowledge my complete ignorance of the nature of the malady from which she was suffering. I could detect no fever, no organic lesion, nothing but a slow, fatal sapping of the vital forces. The symptoms were so strange and contradictory, that I was literally confounded.

While I was questioning the girl, there was a cautious rap at the door, and a voice enquired:—"May I come in, dear Helen?"

What was there in the voice that affected me disagreeably? I am not given to fancies, but something in those smooth, persuasive tones chilled me like a note of warning. I saw the person who had spoken; the impression was deepened.

She was a woman of 26 or 28, tall and slender of figure, pale of complexion, with very light hair and prominent features. Her eyes—I had never seen such eyes in a human countenance! They were of a dull blue, so faint as to be hardly discernible from the surrounding whites; and when her face was in shadow they seemed to disappear in a sort of greenish haze. The effect was not pleasant. This person was introduced to me as Miss Misane, a cousin of Mrs. Trevor's husband.

As she leaned over the sick girl's couch touching the lace about her neck with her long, gaunt fingers, I had an ugly idea that those fingers would gladly press the soft, white throat and press the frail young life out of the body. It was an absurd fancy and I banished it with a smile at my own folly. But I could not help it—I had taken a strong dislike to the woman, and I was relieved when Mrs. Trevor invited me into her boudoir.

Perplexed and ill at ease, I sat listening to the poor lady's gossip without heeding her words, until I was suddenly aroused from my reverie by an important sentence.

"If my poor girl dies, Martha Misane will inherit the whole of Mr. Trevor's fortune."

I started and looked at her with a strange thought taking shape in my mind.

"The whole of your husband's fortune?" I repeated mechanically.

"Yes. She is his only blood relation. Aside from my dower, the estate would go to her—nearly a million."

I arose to my feet and moved restlessly about the room, giving little further heed to her talk. I was striving to grasp that intangible suspicion which was floating before my mental vision. A million and only one fragile, young life between it and that woman! Again that soft appealing look in the girl's eyes came back to my mind irresistibly. Turning abruptly to Mrs. Trevor, I said:

"I do not profess at present to understand the malady with which your daughter is affected. But I do not despair. If human skill and devotion can cure her, I believe I shall do it. With your permission I will send to my assistant in town and remain here where I can give my whole attention to Miss Trevor."

Mrs. Trevor clasped my hand in the fulness of her gratitude, and I departed to give the necessary directions for my installation in the house. I watched Martha Misane's face furtively as my intention was announced. Was it imagination, or did I catch a quick, malignant gleam in the glance she cast at me?

For the next two weeks I gave my whole time to studying my patient—and watching Miss Misane. Wild as it seemed, I had come to believe firmly that if I were eventually to overcome the disease which was surely draining the young girl's life, it must be through discovering Martha Misane's secret. Yes, I had got so far as that in my blind groping among the gloomy suspicions which haunted me. But even yet I could not have put my distrust of her in plain words. It was there, however, and night and day I watched and waited.

The woman's devotion to the sick girl had been inexhaustible. It was she who sat by the bedside night after night. It was she who prepared the food with her own hands. The mother herself was not more untiring in her ministrations. Yet, day by day my dislike of her grew stronger, until it became positive abhorrence.

I was not unwise enough, however, to betray my feelings to her. Nor did I breathe a hint of them to Mrs. Trevor. I could make no accusation; I had not a shadow of evidence to offer.

Meantime my interest in Edna Trevor grew with the progress of the mysterious disease which was consuming her. At length I knew my own secret, the secret of the terror and misery which smote my heart like an icy hand as I saw her fading slowly before my very eyes, while I looked on helpless to save her. I loved her—loved her with the whole strength of my soul! And she—was I a presumptuous fool? Or did her eyes brighten, her pale cheek flush as I sat beside her and spoke to her with the tenderness I could not keep wholly out of my voice?

One morning, after a night disturbed by harassing anxiety, I arose early and went downstairs to walk in the extensive grounds surrounding the dwelling. I had supposed that all the inmates besides myself were still asleep; but on turning into a path in a distant corner of the garden I came suddenly upon Miss Misane, bending over a flower bed which she seemed to be weeding. She wore thick gloves and carried a small box in her hand.

She seemed strangely agitated at the sight of me. She dropped the box and stood gazing at me in positive terror. I asked myself what it was she feared I had discovered; but I was very careful to conceal my thoughts. I addressed her easily and smilingly.

"You are a devoted gardener, I see," I remarked, at the same time casting my eyes about to catch, if possible, some sign of what she had been engaged in.

"Yes," she stammered, confusedly. "I love flowers—that is, Mrs. Trevor is kind enough to set apart this portion of the garden for me, knowing my taste."

"That is a very peculiar plant," I said, pointing to a low, odd-looking shrub over which she was bending. "What is its name? I have never seen anything like it before."

Her agitation increased as I approached the plant.

"I—yes—it's very peculiar, as you say. It is a native of Java, I believe. The seed was given me by a friend who brought it from the East. It is called Coluber, the Snake Plant."

While she had been speaking I had bent over the plant in turn, and stretched out my hand to touch it. She uttered a suppressed exclamation and seemed about to restrain my arm.

"It is unsafe to handle it without gloves," she said, in an almost inaudible voice. "It is said to irritate the skin."

"Poisonous?" I queried, drawing back and looking at her.

"Oh, no," she replied quickly, "not poisonous! Oh, dear, no! Only irritating."

With my mind full of a new suspicion, or rather, with a new direction of the old suspicion, I bowed politely and resumed my stroll. But as soon as I saw her enter the house I returned to the spot and examined the Coluber closely.

It was an evil-looking thing. The leaves were thick and fleshy, shaped somewhat like a serpent's head, and covered with venomous looking brown spots. Here and there, between opposite pairs of the leaves, were small green globes, about the size of a pea; no doubt the fruit of the shrub. I struck one of them with my cane and crushed it upon the ground. A black viscid fluid escaped, while a strange, suffocating odor diffused itself through the air. It was an odor not to be forgotten, and so oppressive that I was glad to leave the spot; but I did so fully determined to keep an eye upon Miss Misane's gardening operations.

At early dawn on the following morning I quietly left the house and concealed myself in the shrubbery opposite the bed containing the Coluber. I had not long to wait. A soft, cat-like tread warned me of her approach. She carried the same box I had noticed on the previous morning and wore the same thick gloves. Pausing before the Coluber, she glanced cautiously around. Apparently satisfied that she was not observed, she plucked one of the green berries I have described and put it in the box; keeping it, as I saw, at the utmost distance from her face. Then with the same feline tread and furtive manner, she hurried away.

As soon as she was out of sight I stepped from my place of concealment and likewise cut off one of the berries, which I secured in a small vial I had about me. Then I, too, returned to the house. Going to my room I sat down to examine my specimen of the Coluber. With the means of analysis which I had at hand I was unable to discover anything as to the properties of the berry, and was about to give up the task for a time, when I happened to observe on a plate a piece of bread from my last night's supper, which had been served in my apartment. Breaking off a small fragment, I squeezed a drop of the juice upon it.

I went to the window and looked out. Just below me a stray fowl was scratching in the edge of a garden bed. I tossed the morsel within reach of the bird, who swallowed it promptly. I awaited the result with breathless anxiety. For some moments longer the creature continued its search for food; then it appeared to grow uneasy. Its eyes closed, its wings drooped and its head fell upon its breast. Suddenly it dropped in a heap and lay motionless.

I had discovered the properties of the Coluber. I had discovered Martha Misane's secret. I now knew the disease from which Edna Trevor was slowly dying.

Alert and with a heart kindled by love I acted quickly. Another dose of that subtle, mysterious poison, administered by as subtle a woman as any of the Borgias, must not reach Edna—I called her Edna now, and dwelt lovingly on the name.

Prompt though esoteric means soon rid the house and my darling of the presence of Martha Misane.

Slow was her recovery, but at its end my probation was over—love had won what hate had failed to secure.

Water Pipes Need Not Freeze. A simple expedient for the prevention of the bursting of water pipes by frost has been invented by a Londoner. He inserts within the pipes suitable lengths of a sufficiently elastic material, such as cork, protected by a thin covering of metal or canvas. This material may be round, flat or semi-circular in section, and it is to be kept in place by light projecting arms. The so-called "preventer" is supposed to be compressed under the pressure of the expanding, frozen fluid and thus to relieve the pipes. The inventor says that the preventer is of such dimensions as not to materially diminish the water supply.

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