

lower hall the stenographer, Miss Davis, sitting waiting. There was no adequate reason for the girl's being there at that hour; she had come—she said, as she rose to greet Harriet—to learn whether she would be wanted the next day; she had already seen Mr. Avery, and he would not want her, Harriet, telling her she would not need her, offered to send a servant home with her, as the roads were dark. Miss Davis refused this and went out at once. Harriet, as the door was closed behind the girl, looked hurriedly about for Avery. She did not find him, nor at first did she find Eaton either. She discovered him presently in the music-room with Blatchford. Blatchford at once excused himself, tired evidently of his task of watching over Eaton.

HARRIET caught herself together and controlled herself to her usual manner.

"What shall it be this evening, Mr. Eaton?" she asked. "Music? Billiards?"

"Billiards, if you like," he responded.

They went up to the billiard room, and for an hour played steadily; but her mind was not upon the game—nor, she saw, was his. Several times he looked at his watch; he seemed to her to be waiting. Finally, as they ended a game, he put his cue back in the rack and faced her.

"Miss Santoine," he said. "I want to ask a favour."

"What is it?"

"I want to go out—unaccompanied."

"Why?"

"I wish to speak to a friend who will be waiting for me."

"How do you know?"

"He got word to me at the country club to-day. Excuse me—I did not mean to inform on Mr. Avery; he was really most vigilant. I believe he only made one slip."

"He was not the only one observing you."

"I suppose not. In fact, I was certain of it. However, I received a message which was undoubtedly authentic and had not been overseen."

"But you were not able to make reply."

"I was not able to receive all that was necessary."

"She considered for a moment."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Either because of my presence or because of what has happened—or perhaps normally—you have at least four men about the grounds, two of whom seem to be constantly on duty to observe any one who may approach."

"Or try to leave."

"Precisely."

"There are more than two."

"I was stating the minimum."

"Well?"

"I wish you to order them to let me pass and go to a place perhaps ten minutes' walk from here. If you do so, I will return at the latest within half an hour," (he glanced at his watch) "—to be definite, before a quarter of eleven."

"Why should I do this?"

"He came close to her and faced her."

"What do you think of me now, Miss Santoine?"

"Why—"

"You are quite certain now, are you not, that I had nothing to do with the attack on your father—that is, in any other connection than that the attack might be meant for me. I denied yesterday that the men in the automobile meant to run me down; you did not accept that denial. I may as well admit to you that I knew perfectly well they meant to kill me; the man on the train also meant to kill me. They are likely to try again to kill me."

"We recognize that too," she answered. "The men on watch about the house are warned to protect you as well as watch you."

"I appreciate that."

"But are they all you have to fear, Mr. Eaton?" She was thinking of Donald Avery.

"He seemed to recognize what was in her mind; his eyes, as he gazed intently at her, clouded, then darkened

still more with some succeeding thought. "No, not all."

"And it will aid you to—to protect yourself if you see your friend to-night?"

"Yes."

"But why should not one of Father's men be with you?"

"Unless I were alone, my friend would not appear."

"I see."

He moved away from her, then came back; the importance to him of what he was asking was very plain to her—he was shaking nervously with it. "Miss Santoine," he said intently, "you do not think badly of me now. I do not have to doubt that; I can see it; you have wanted me to see it. I ask you to trust me for a few minutes to-night. I cannot tell you whom I wish to see or why, except that the man comes to do me a service and to endanger no one—except those trying to injure me."

She herself was trembling with her desire to help him, but recollection of her father held her back; then swiftly there came to her the thought of Gabriel Warden; because Warden had tried to help him—in some way and for some reason which she did not know—Warden had been killed. And feeling that in helping him there might be danger to herself, she suddenly and eagerly welcomed that danger, and made her decision.

"You'll promise, Mr. Eaton, not to try to—leave?"

"Yes."

"Let us go out," she said.

She led the way downstairs and, in the hall, picked up a cape; he threw it over her shoulders and brought his overcoat and cap. But in his absorption he forgot to put them on until, as they went out into the garden together, she reminded him; then he put on the cap. The night was clear and cool, and no one but themselves seemed to be about the house.

"Which way do you want to go?" she asked.

He turned toward the forested acres of the grounds which ran down to a ravine at the bottom of which a little stream trickled toward the lake. As they approached the side of this ravine, a man appeared and investigated them. He recognized the girl's figure and halted.

"It's all right, Willis," she said quietly.

"Yes, ma'am."

THEY passed the man and went down the path into the ravine and up the tiny valley. Eaton halted.

"Your man's just above there?" he asked her.

"Yes."

"He'll stay there?"

"Yes; or close by."

"Then you don't mind waiting here a few moments for me?"

"No," she said. "You will return here?"

"Yes," he said; and with that permission, he left her.

Both had spoken so that the man above could not have heard; and Harriet now noticed that, as her companion hurried ahead, he went almost noiselessly. As he disappeared, the impulse to call him back almost controlled her; then she started to follow him; but she did not. She stood still, shivering a little now in the cold; and as she listened, she no longer heard his footsteps. What she had done was done; then just as she was telling herself that it must be many moments before she would know whether he was coming back, she heard him returning; at some little distance, he spoke her name so as not to frighten her. She knew at once it was he, but a change in the tone surprised her. She stepped forward to meet him.

"You found your friend?"

"Yes."

"What did he tell you?" Her hand caught his sleeve in an impulse of concern, but she tried to make it seem as though she grasped him to guide her through the trees of the ravine. "I mean what is wrong that you did not expect?"

She heard his breath come fast.

"Nothing," he denied.

"No; you must tell me!" Her hand

was still on his arm.

"I cannot."

"Why can you not?"

"Why?"

"Can't you trust me?"

"Trust you!" he cried. He turned to her and seized her hands. "You ask me to—trust you!"

"Yes; I've trusted you. Can't you believe as much in me?"

"Believe in you, Miss Santoine!" He crushed her fingers in his grasp. "Oh, my God, I wish I could!"

"You wish you could?" she echoed. The tone of it struck her like a blow, and she tore her hands away. "What do you mean by that?"

He made no reply but stood staring at her through the dark. "We must go back," he said queerly. "You're cold."

She did not answer but started back up the path to the house. He seemed to have caught himself together against some impulse that stirred him strongly. "The man out there who saw us? He will report to your father, Miss Santoine?" he asked unsteadily.

"Reports for Father are first made to me."

"I see." He did not ask her what she was going to do; if he was assuming that her permission to exceed his set limits bound her not to report to her father, she did not accept that assumption, though she would not report to the blind man to-night, for she knew he must now be asleep. But she felt that Eaton was no longer thinking of this. As they entered the house and he helped her lay off her cape, he suddenly faced her.

"We are in a strange relation to each other, Miss Santoine—stranger than you know," he said unevenly.

She waited for him to go on.

"We have talked sometimes of the likeness of the everyday life to war," he continued. "In war men and women sometimes do or countenance things they know to be evil because they believe that by means of them there is accomplished some greater good; in peace, in life, men—and women—sometimes do the same. When the time comes that you comprehend what our actual relation is, I—I want you to know that I understand that whatever you have done was done because you believed it might bring about the greater good. I—I have seen in you—in your father—only kindness, high honour, sympathy. If I did not know—"

She started, gazing at him; what he said had absolutely no meaning for her. "What is it that you know?" she demanded.

He did not reply; his hand went out to hers, seized it, crushed it, and he started away. As he went up the stair—still, in his absorption, carrying cap and overcoat—she stood staring after him in perplexity.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Fight in the Study.

EATON dismissed the man who had been waiting in his rooms for him; he locked the door and carefully drew down all the window-shades. Then he put his overcoat, folded as he had been carrying it under his arm, on the writing table in the center of the room, and from its folds and pockets took a "breast-drill" such as iron workers use in drilling steel, an automatic pistol with three clips of cartridges, an electric flashlight and a little bottle of nitroglycerine. He loaded the pistol and put it in his pocket; then he carefully inspected the other things.

The room he was in, the largest of his suite, resembled Santoine's study on the floor below in the arrangement of its windows, though it was smaller than the study. The writing-desk in its centre occupied much the position of Santoine's large desk; he moved it slightly to make the relative positions coincide. The couch against the end wall represented the position of the study's double doors. Eaton switched out the lights, and starting at the windows, he crossed the room in the darkness, avoiding the desk, and stopping a few feet to the right of the couch; here he flashed

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