

THE BLIND MAN'S EYES

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

By WILLIAM McHARG AND EDWIN BALMER

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NOW her father had been attacked and injured—attacked foully, while he slept; he had come close to death, had suffered; he was still suffering. Certainly she ought to hate, at least be aloof from, any one, every one, against whom the faintest suspicion breathed of having been concerned in that dastardly attack upon her father; and that she found herself without aversion to Eaton, when he was with her, now filled her with shame and remorse.

She crouched lower against this desk which so represented her father in his power; she felt tears of shame at herself hot on her cold hands. Then she got up and recollected herself. Her father, when he would awake, would wish to work; there were certain important matters he must decide at once.

Harriet went to the end of the room and to the right of the entrance door. She looked about, with a habit of caution, and then removed a number of books from a shelf about shoulder high; she thus exposed a panel at the back of the bookcase, which she slid back. Behind it appeared the steel door of a combination wall-safe. She opened it and took out two large, thick envelopes with tape about them, sealed and addressed to Basil Santoine; but they were not stamped, for they had not been through the mail; they had been delivered by a messenger. Harriet reclosed the safe, concealed it and took the envelopes back to her father's desk and opened them to examine their contents preparatory to taking them to him. But even now her mind was not on her work; she was thinking of Eaton, where he had gone and what he was doing and—was he thinking of her?

Eaton had left the room, thinking of her. The puzzle of his position in relation to her, and hers to him, filled his mind too. That she had been constrained by circumstances and the opinions of those around her to assume a distrust of him which she did not truly feel, was plain to him; but it was clear that, whatever she felt, she would obey her father's directions in regard to him. And she had told that Basil Santoine, if he was to hold his prisoner as almost a guest in his house pending developments, was to keep that guest strictly from communication with any one outside. Santoine, of course, was aware from the telegram that others had been acting with Eaton; the incident at the telephone had shown that Santoine had anticipated that Eaton's first necessity would be to get in touch with his friends. And this, now, indeed was a necessity. The gaining of Santoine's house, under conditions which he would not have dared to dream of, would be worthless now unless immediately—before Santoine could get any further trace of him—he could get word to and receive word from his friends.

He had stopped, after leaving Santoine's study, in the alcove of the hall in front of the double doors which he had closed behind him; he heard Harriet fasten the inner one. As he stood now, undecided where to go, a young woman crossed the main part of the hall, coming evidently from outside the house—she had on hat and jacket and was gloved; she was approaching the doors of the room he just had left, and so must pass him. He stared at sight of her and choked; then he controlled himself rigidly, waiting until she should see him.

She halted suddenly as she saw him and grew very pale, and her gloved hands went swiftly to her breast and pressed against it; she caught herself together and looked swiftly and fearfully about her and out into the hall. Seeing no one but herself, she came a step nearer.

"Hugh!" she breathed. Her surprise was plainly greater than his own had been at sight of her; but she checked herself again quickly and looked warningly back at the hall;

then she fixed on him her blue eyes—which were very like Eaton's, though she did not resemble him closely in any other particular—as though waiting his instructions.

He passed her and looked about the hall. There was no one in sight in the hall or on the stairs or within the other rooms which opened into the hall. The door Eaton had just come from stayed shut. He held his breath while he listened; but there was no sound anywhere in the house which told him they were likely to be seen; so he came back to the spot where he had been standing.

"Stay where you are, Edith," he whispered. "If we hear any one coming, we are just passing each other in the hall."

"I understand; of course, Hugh! But you—you're here! In his house!"

"Even lower, Edith; remember I'm Eaton—Philip Eaton."

"Of course; I know; and I'm Miss Davis here—Mildred Davis."

"They let you come in and out like this—as you want, with no one watching you?"

"No, no; I do stenography for Mr. Avery sometimes, as I wrote you. That is all. When he works here, I do his typing; and some even for Mr. Santoine himself. But I am not confidential yet; they send for me when they want me."

"Then they sent for you to-day?"

"No; but they have just got back, and I thought I would come to see if anything was wanted. But never mind about me; you—how did you get here? What are you doing here?"

Eaton drew further back into the alcove as some one passed through the hall above. The girl turned swiftly to the tall pier mirror near to which she stood; she faced it, slowly drawing off her gloves, trembling, and not looking towards him. The footsteps ceased overhead; Eaton, assured no one was coming down the stairs, spoke swiftly to tell her as much as he might in their moment. "He—Santoine—wasn't taken ill on the train, Edith; he was attacked."

"Attacked!" Her lips barely moved.

"He was almost killed; but they concealed it, Edith—pretended he was only ill. I was on the train—you know, of course; I got your wire—and they suspected me of the attack."

"You? But they didn't find out about you, Hugh?"

"No; they are investigating. Santoine would not let them make anything public. He brought me here while he is trying to find out about me. So I'm here, Edith—here! Is it here, too?"

A GAIN steps sounded in the hall above. The girl busied herself with gloves and hat; Eaton stood in suspense. The servant above—it was a servant they had heard before, he recognized now—merely crossed from one room to another overhead. Now the girl's lips moved again.

"It?" She formed the question noiselessly.

"The draft of the new agreement."

"It either has been sent to him, or it will be sent to him very soon—here."

"Here in this house with me!"

"Mr. Santoine has to be a party to it—he's to draft it, I think. Anyway, he hasn't seen it yet—I know that. It is either here now, Hugh, or it will be here before long."

"You can't find out about that?"

"Whether it is here, or when it will be? I think I can."

"Where will it be when it is here?"

"Where? Oh!" The girl's eyes went to the wall close to where Eaton stood; she seemed to measure with them a definite distance from the door and a point shoulder high, and to resist the impulse to come over and put her hand upon the spot. As Eaton followed her look, he heard a slight and muffled click as if from the study; but

no sound could reach them through the study doors and what he heard came from the wall itself.

"A safe?" he whispered.

"Yes; Miss Santoine—she's in there, isn't she?—closed it just now. There are two of them hidden behind the books, one on each side of the door."

EATON tapped gently on the wall; the wall was brick; the safe undoubtedly was backed with steel.

"The best way is from inside the room," he concluded.

She nodded. "Yes. If you—"

"Look out!"

Some one now was coming downstairs. The girl had time only to whisper swiftly, "If we don't get a chance to speak again, watch that vase." She pointed to a bronze antique which stood on a table near them. "When I'm sure the agreement is in the house, I'll drop a glove button in that—a black one, if I think it'll be in the safe on the right, white on the left. Now go."

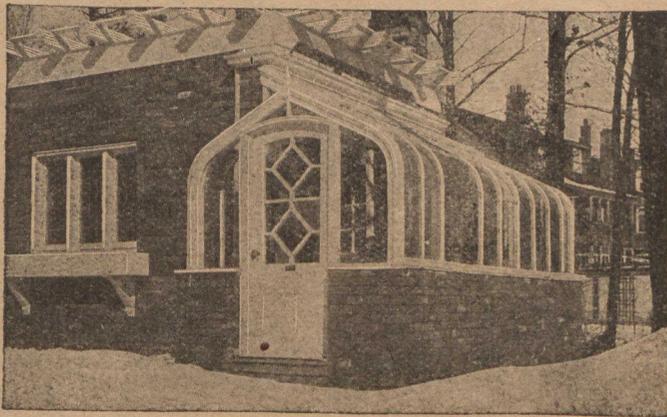
Eaton moved quietly on and into the drawing-room. Avery's voice immediately afterwards was heard; he was speaking to Miss Davis, whom he had found in the hallway. Eaton was certain there was no suspicion that he had talked with her there; indeed, Avery seemed to suppose that Eaton was still in the study with Harriet Santoine. It was her lapse, then, which had let him out and had given him that chance; but it was a lapse, he discovered, which was not likely to favor him again. From that time, while never held strictly in restraint, he found himself always in the sight of some one. Blatchford, in default of any one else, now appeared to assume the oversight of him as his duty. Eaton lunched with Blatchford, dined with Blatchford and Avery—Blatchford's presence as a buffer against Avery's studied offence to him alone making the meal endurable. Eaton went to his room early, where at last he was left alone.

The day, beginning with his discov-

ery of the fact that he was in Santoine's house and continuing through the walk outside, which first had shown him the lay of the grounds, and then the chance at the sight of Santoine's study followed by the meeting just outside the study door—all this had been more than satisfactory to him. He sat at his window thinking it over. The weather had been clear and there was a moon; as he watched the light upon the water and gazed now and again at the south wing where Santoine had his study, suddenly several windows on the first floor blazed out simultaneously; some one had entered Santoine's workroom and turned on the light. Almost at once the light went out; then, a minute or so later, the same windows glowed dully. The lights in the room had been turned on again, but heavy, opaque curtains had been drawn over the windows before the room was relighted. These curtains were so close over the windows that, unless Eaton had been attracted by the first flash of light, he scarcely would have noticed that the lights were burning within the room.

He had observed, during the day, that Avery or Harriet had been at work in that room—one of them or both—almost all day; and besides the girl he had met in the hall, there had been at least one other stenographer. Must work in this house go on so continuously that it was necessary for some one to work at night, even when Santoine lay ill and unable to make other than the briefest and most important dispositions? And who was working in that room now, Avery or Harriet? He let himself think, idly, about the girl—how strange her life had been—that part of it at least which was spent, as he had gathered most of her waking hours of recent years had been spent, with her father. Strange, almost, as his own life! And what a wonderful girl it had made or her—clever, sweet, lovable, with more than a woman's ordinary capacity for devotion and self-sacrifice.

But, if she were the one working there, was she the sort of girl she had seemed to be? If her service to her father was not only on his personal side but if also she was intimate in



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