

THE BLIND MAN'S EYES

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CHAPTER XIX.

Pursuit.

HARRIET SANTOINE, still clad only in the heavy robe over her nightdress and in slippers, went from her father's bedroom swiftly down into the study again; what she was going to do there she did not definitely know. She heard, as she descended the stairs, the steward in the hall outside the study calling up the police stations of the neighbouring villages and giving news of what had happened and instructions to watch the roads; but as she reached the foot of the stairs, a servant closed the study doors. The great, curtained room in its terrifying disorder was brightly lighted, empty, absolutely still. She had given directions that, except for the removal of Blatchford's body, all must be left as it was in the room till the arrival of the police. She stood an instant with hands pressed against her breast, staring down at the spots upon the floor.

There were three of these spots now—one where Blatchford's body had lain. They were soaking brownly into the rugs but standing still red and thick upon the polished floor. Was one of them Eaton's?

Something within her told her that it was, and the fierce desire to go to him, to help him, was all she felt just now. It was Donald Avery's and her father's accusation of Eaton that had made her feel like this. She had been feeling, the moment before Donald had spoken, that Philip Eaton had played upon her that evening in making her take him to his confederate in the ravine in order to plan and consummate something here. Above her grief and horror at the killing of her cousin and the danger to her father, had risen the anguish of her guilt with Eaton, the agony of her betrayal. But their accusation that Eaton had killed Wallace Blatchford, seeing him, knowing him—in the light—had swept all that away; all there was of her seemed to have risen in denial of that. Before her eyes, half shut, she saw again the body of her cousin Wallace lying in its blood on the floor, with her father kneeling beside it, his blind eyes raised in helplessness to the light; but she saw now another body too—Eaton's—not here—lying somewhere in the bare, wind-swept woods, shot down by those pursuing him.

She looked at the face of the clock and then down to the pendulum to see whether it had stopped; but the pendulum was swinging. The hands stood at half past one o'clock; now she recalled that, in her first wild gaze about the room when she rushed in with the others, she had seen the hands showing a minute or so short of twenty minutes past one. Not quite a quarter of an hour had passed since the alarm! The pursuit could not have moved far away. She reopened the window through which the pursuers had passed and stepped out onto the dark lawn. She stood drawing her robe about her against the chill night air, dazed, stunned. The house behind her, the stables, the chauffeurs' quarters above the garages, the gardeners' cottages, all blazed now with light, but she saw no one about. The menservants—except the steward—had joined the pursuit; she heard them to the south beating the naked woods and shrubbery and calling to each other. A half mile down the beach she heard shouts and a shot; she saw dimly through the night in that direction a boat without lights moving swiftly out upon the lake.

Her hands clenched and pressed against her breast; she stood straining at the sounds of the man-hunt. It had turned west, it seemed; it was coming back her way, but to the west of the house. She staggered a little and could not stand; she stepped

away from the house in the direction of the pursuit; following the way it seemed to be going, she crossed the lawn toward the garage. A light suddenly shone out there, and she went on.

The wide door at the car driveway was open, and some one was within working over a car. His back was toward her, and he was bent over the engine, but, at the glance, she knew him and recoiled, gasping. It was Eaton. He turned at the same instant and saw her.

"Oh; it's you!" he cried to her.

Her heart, which almost had ceased to beat, raced her pulses again. At the sound she had made on the driveway, he had turned to her as a haunted thing, cornered, desperate, certain that whoever came must be against him. His cry to her had recognized her as the only one who could come and not be against him; it had hailed her with relief as bringing him help. He could not have cried out so at that instant at sight of her if he had been guilty of what they had accused. Now she saw too, as he faced her, blood flowing over his face; blood soaked a shoulder of his coat, and his left arm dangling at his side; but now, as he threw back his head and straightened in his relief at finding it was she who had surprised him, she saw in him an exultation and excitement she had never seen before—something which her presence alone could not have caused. To-night, she sensed vaguely, something had happened to him which had changed his attitude toward her and everything else.

"Yes; it's I!" she cried quickly and rushed to him. "It's I! It's I!" wildly she reassured him. "You're hurt!" She touched his shoulder. "You're hurt! I knew you were!"

HE pushed her back with his right hand and held her away from him.

"Did they hurt your father?"

"Hurt Father? No."

"But Mr. Blatchford—"

"Dead," she answered dully.

"They killed him, then!"

"Yes; they—" She iterated. He was telling her now—unnecessarily—that he had had nothing to do with it; it was the others who had done that.

He released her and wiped the blood from his eyes with the heel of his hand. "The poor old man," he said, "—the poor old man!"

She drew toward him in the realization that he could find sympathy for others even in such a time as this.

"Where's the key?" he demanded of her. She stared over her again but without surprise even in his eyes, at her state; if she was there at all at that time, that was the only way she could have come.

"The key?"

"The key for the battery and magnet—the key you start the car with."

She ran to a shelf and brought it to him; he used it and pressed the starting lever. The engine started and he sprang to the seat. His left arm still hanging useless at his side; he tried to throw in the gears with his right hand; but the mechanism of the car was strange to him. She leaped up beside him.

"Move over!" she commanded. "It's this way!"

He slipped to the side and she took the driving seat, threw in the gears expertly, and the car shot from the garage. She switched on the electric headlights as they dashed down the driveway and threw a bright white glare upon the roadway a hundred yards ahead to the gates. Beyond the gates the public pike ran north and south.

"Which way?" she demanded of him, slowing the car.

"Stop!" he cried to her. "Stop and get out! You mustn't do this!"

"You could not pass alone," she said. "Father's men would close the

gates upon you."

"The men? There are no men there now—they went to the beach—before! They must have heard something there! It was their being there that turned him—the others back. They tried for the lake and were turned back and got away in a machine; I followed—back up here!"

Harriet Santoine glanced at the face of the man beside her. She could see his features only vaguely; she could see no expression; only the position of his head. But now she knew that she was not helping him to run away; he was no longer hunted—at least he was not only hunted; he was hunting others too. As the car rolled down upon the gates and he strained forward in the seat beside her, she knew that what he was feeling was a wild eagerness in this pursuit.

"Right or left—quick!" she demanded of him. "I'll take one or the other."

"Right," he shot out; but already, remembering the direction of the pursuit, she had chosen the road to the right and raced on. He caught the driving wheel with his good hand and tried to take it from her; she resisted and warned him:

"I'm going to drive this car; if you try to take it, it'll throw us both into the ditch."

"If we catch up with them, they'll shoot; give me the car," he begged.

"We'll catch up with them first."

"Then you'll do what I say?"

"Yes," she made the bargain.

"There are their tracks!" he pointed for her.

The road was soft with the rains that precede spring, and she saw in the bright flare of the headlights, where some heavy car, fast driven, had gouged deep into the earth at the roadside; she noted the pattern of the tires.

"How do you know those are their tracks?" she asked him.

"I told you, I followed them to where they got their machine."

"Who are they?"

"The men who shot Mr. Blatchford."

"Who are they?" she put to him directly again.

He waited, and she knew that he was not going to answer her directly. She was running the car now at very high speed; the tiny electric light above the speedometer showed they were running at forty-five miles an hour and the strip was still turning to higher figures.

Suddenly he caught her arm. The road had forked, and he pointed to the left; she swung the car that way, again seeing as they made the turn, the tire-tracks they were following. She was not able now to watch these tracks; she could watch only the road and car; but she was aware that the way they were following had led them into and out of private grounds. Plainly the men they were following knew the neighborhood well and had chosen this road in advance as avoiding the more public roads which might be watched. She noted they were turning always to the left; now she understood that they were making a great circle to west and north and returning toward, but well west of, her father's house; thus she knew that those they were following had made this circuit to confuse pursuit and that their objective was the great city of the south.

THEY were racing now over a road which bisected a forested section still held as acreage; old, rickety wooden bridges spanned the ravines. One of these appeared in the radiance of the headlight a hundred yards ahead; the next instant the car was dashing upon it. Harriet could feel the shake and tremble of the loosely nailed boards as the driving wheels struck; there was a crash as some strut, below, gave way; the old bridge bent but recoiled; the car bounded across it, the rear wheels

skidding in the moist earth as they swung off the boards.

Harriet felt Eaton grab her arm.

"You mustn't do that again!"

"Why?"

"You mustn't do that again!" he repeated the order; it was too obvious to tell her it was not safe.

She laughed. Less than five minutes before, as she stood outside the room where her father's cousin had just been murdered, it had seemed she could never laugh again. The car raced up a little hill and now again was descending; the headlights showed another bridge over a ravine.

"Slow! Stop!" her companion commanded.

She paid no attention and raced the car on; he put his hand on the wheel and with his foot tried to push hers from the accelerator; but she fought him; the car swayed and all but ran away as they approached the bridge.

"Harriet!" he pleaded with her.

She steered the car on, recklessly, her heart thumping with more than the thrill of the chase. "They're the men who tried to kill you, aren't they?" she rejoined. The speed at which they were going did not permit her to look about; she had to keep her eyes on the road at that moment when she knew within herself and was telling the man beside her that she from that moment must be at one with him. For already she had said it; as she risked herself in the pursuit, she thought of the men they were after not chiefly as those who had killed her cousin but as those who had threatened Eaton. "What do I care what happens to me, if we catch them?" she cried.

"Harriet!" he repeated her name again.

"Philip!"

She felt him shrink and change as she called the name. It had been clear to her, of course, that, since she had known him, the name he had been using was not his own. Often she had wondered what his name was; now she had to know. "What should I call you?" she demanded of him.

"My name," he said, "is Hugh."

"Hugh!" she called it.

"Yes."

"HUGH—" She waited for the rest; but he told no more. "Hugh!" she whispered to herself again his name now. "Hugh!"

Her eyes, which had watched the road for the guiding of the car, had followed his gesture from time to time pointing out the tracks made by the machine they were pursuing. These tracks still ran on ahead; as she gazed down the road, a red glow beyond the bare trees was lighting the sky. A glance at Hugh told that he also had seen it.

"A fire?" she referred to him.

"Looks like it."

They said no more as they rushed on; but the red glow was spreading, and yellow flames soon were in sight shooting higher and higher; these were clouded off for an instant only to appear flaring higher again, and the breeze brought the smell of seasoned wood burning.

"It's right across the road!" Hugh announced as they neared it.

"It's the bridge over the next ravine," Harriet said. Her foot already was bearing upon the brake, and the power was shut off; the car coasted on slowly. For both could see now that the wooden span was blazing from end to end; it was old wood, swift to burn and going like tinder. There was no possible chance for the car to cross it. The girl brought the machine to a stop fifty feet from the edge of the ravine; the fire was so hot that the gasoline tank would not be safe nearer. She gazed down at the tire-marks on the road.

"They crossed with their machine," she said to Hugh.

"And fired the bridge behind. They must have poured gasoline over it and lighted it at both ends."

She sat with one hand still straining at the driving wheel, the other playing with the gear lever.

"There's no other way across that ravine, I suppose," Hugh questioned her.

"The other road's back more than a mile, and two miles about." She