

THE BLIND MAN'S EYES

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CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

THERE was a stir in the lower rooms now; the local police had arrived. Harriet went to the study, where they assumed charge nervously and uncertainly. She could not bear to be in that room; nevertheless she remained and answered their questions. She took them to Eaton's rooms on the floor above, where they searched through and took charge of all his things. She left them and came down again and went out to the front of the house.

The night was sharp with the chill preceding the day; it had cleared; the stars were shining. As she stood looking to the west, the lights of a motor turned into the grounds. She ran towards it, thinking it must be bringing word of some sort; but the men who leaped from it were strangers to her—they were the first of the reporters to arrive. They tried to question her, but she ran from them into the house. She watched from the windows and saw other reporters arriving. To Harriet there seemed to be scores of them. Every morning paper in Chicago, immediately upon receipt of the first flash, had sent at least three men; every evening paper seemed to have aroused half its staff from their beds and sent them racing to the blind millionaire's home on the north shore. Even men from Milwaukee papers arrived at four o'clock. Forbidden the house, they surrounded it and captured servants. They took flashlights till, driven from the lawn, they went away—many of them—to see and take part in the search through the woods for Blatchford's murderer. The murder of Santoine's cousin—the man, moreover, who had blinded Santoine—in the presence of the blind man was enough of itself to furnish a newspaper sensation; but, following so closely Santoine's visit to the Coast because of the murder of Gabriel Warden, the newspaper men sensed instantly in it the possibility of some greater sensation not yet bared.

Harriet was again summoned. A man—a stranger—was awaiting her in the hall; he was the precursor of those who would sit that day upon Wallace Blatchford's death and try to determine, formally, whose was the hand that had done it—the coroner's man. He too, she saw, was already convinced what hand it had been—Eaton's. She took him to the study, then to the room above where Wallace Blatchford lay dead. She stood by while he made his brief, conventional examination. She looked down at the dead man's face. Poor Cousin Wallace! he had destroyed his own life long before, when he had destroyed her father's sight; from that time on he had lived only to recompense her father for his blindness. Cousin Wallace's life had been a pitiable, hopeless, loving perpetuation of his penance; he had let himself hold nothing of his own in life; he had died, as she knew he would have wished to die, giving his life in service to his cousin; she was not unduly grieving over him.

She answered the man's questions, calmly and collectedly; but her mind was not upon what she was saying. Her mind was upon only one thing—even of that she could not think connectedly. Some years ago, something—she did not know what—had happened to Hugh; to-night, in some strange way unknown to her, it had culminated in her father's study. He had fought some one; he had rushed away to follow some one. Whom? Had he heard that some one in the study and gone down? Had he been fighting their battle—her father's and her's? She knew that was not so. Hugh had been fully dressed. What did it mean that he had said to her that these events would either destroy him or would send him back to

her as—as something different? Her thought supplied no answer.

But whatever he had done, whatever he might be, she knew his fate was hers now; for she had given herself to him utterly. She had told that to herself as she fled and pursued with him that night; she had told it to him; she later had told it—though she had not meant to yet—to her father. She could only pray now that out of the events of this night might not come a grief to her too great for her to bear.

She went to the rooms that had been Eaton's. The police, in stripping them of his possessions, had overlooked his cap; she found the bit of grey cloth and hugged it to her. She whispered his name to herself—Hugh—that secret of his name which she had kept; she gloried that she had that secret with him which she could keep from them all. What wouldn't they give just to share that with her—his name, Hugh!

She started suddenly, looking through the window. The east, above the lake, was beginning to grow grey. The dawn was coming! It was beginning to be day!

She hurried to the other side of the house, looking towards the west. How could she have left him, hurt and bleeding and alone in the night! She could not have done that but that his asking her to go had told that it was for his safety as well as hers; she could not help him any more then; she would only have been in the way. But now—She started to rush out; but controlled herself; she had to stay in the house; that was where the first word would come if they caught him; and then he would need her, how much more! The reporters on the lawn below her, seeing her at the window, called up to her to know further particulars of what had happened and what the murder meant; she could see them plainly in the increasing light. She could see the lawn and the road before the house.

Day had come.

And with the coming of day, the uncertainty and disorder within and about the house seemed to increase. . . . But in the south wing, with its sound-proof doors and its windows closed against the noises from the lawn, there was silence; and in this silence, an exact, compelling, methodic machine was working; the mind of Basil Santoine was striving, vainly as yet, but with growing chances of success, to fit together into the order in which they belonged and make clear the events of the night and all that had gone before—arranging, ordering, testing, discarding, picking up again and reordering all that had happened since that other murder, of Gabriel Warden.

CHAPTER XXI.

What One Can do Without Eyes.

THE blind man, lying on his bed in that darkness in which he had lived since his sixteenth year and which no daylight could lessen, felt the light and knew that day had come; he stirred impatiently. The nurse, the only other occupant of the room, moved expectantly; then she sank back; Santoine had moved but had not roused from that absorption in which he had been ever since returning to his bed. He had not slept. The connections of the electric bells had been repaired—the wires had been found pulled from their batteries—but Santoine had not moved a hand to touch a button. He had disregarded the warning of the doctor who had been summoned at once after the murder and had come to his room again just before dawn to warn him that after his recklessness of the night he must expect a reaction. He had given such injunctions in regard to any new development that he was certain that, even if his servants believed him

asleep, they would report to him. But there had been no report; and Santoine expected none immediately. He had not lain awake awaiting anything; he felt that so much had happened, so many facts were at his command, that somewhere among them must be the key to what they meant.

The blind man knew that his daughter was concealing something from him. He could not tell what the importance of the thing she was concealing might be; but he knew his daughter was enough like himself for it to be useless for him to try to force from her something she did not mean to tell. The new intimacy of the relation between his daughter and Eaton was perfectly plain to Santoine; but it did not cause him to try to explain anything in Eaton's favour; nor did it prejudice him against him. He had appeared to accept Avery's theory of what had happened in the study because by doing so he concealed what was going on in his own mind; he actually accepted it only to the point of agreeing that Eaton must have met in the study those enemies—or some one representing the enemies—who had attacked him with the motor-car and had before attempted to attack him on the train.

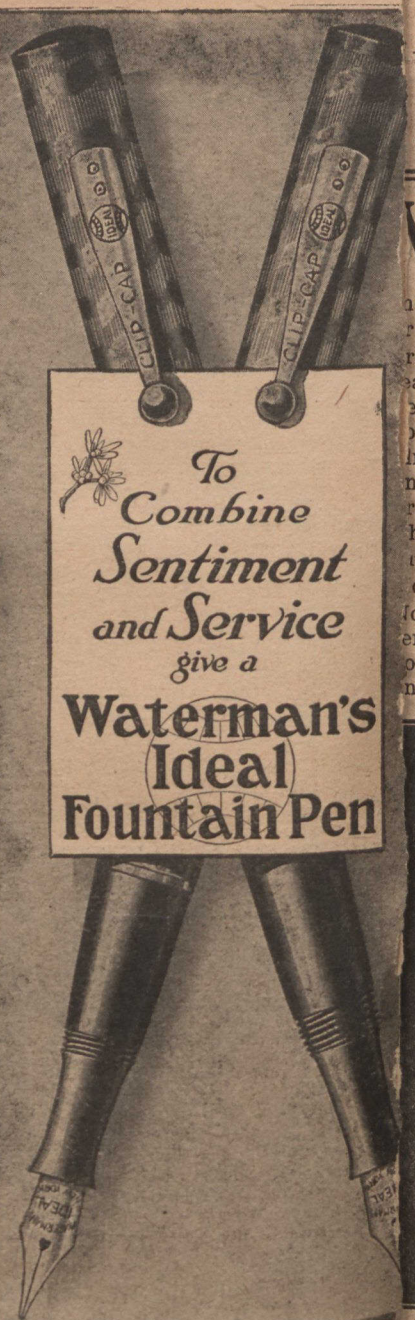
THREE men—at least three men—had fought in the study in Santoine's presence. Eaton certainly had been the only one from the house present when the first shots were fired. Had Eaton been alone against the other two? Had Eaton been with one of the other two against the third? It appeared probable to Santoine that Eaton had been alone, or had come alone, to the study and had met his enemies there. Had these enemies surprised Eaton in the study or had he surprised them? Santoine was inclined to believe that Eaton had surprised them. The contents taken from the safe had certainly been carried away, and these would have made rather a bulky bundle. Eaton could not have carried it without Harriet knowing it. Santoine believed that, whatever knowledge his daughter might be concealing from him, she would not have concealed this. It was certain that some time had been necessary for opening the safe, before those opening it suffered interruption.

Santoine felt, therefore, that the probabilities were that Eaton's enemies had opened the safe and had been surprised by Eaton. But if they had opened the safe, they were not only Eaton's enemies; they were also Santoine's; they were the men who threatened Santoine's trust.

Those whom Eaton had fought in the room had had perfect opportunity for killing Santoine, if they wished. He had stood first in the dark with the electric torch in his hand; then he had been before them in the light after Blatchford had entered. But Santoine felt certain no one had made any attack upon him at any moment in the room; he had had no feeling, at any instant, that any of the shots fired had been directed at him. Blatchford, too, had been unattacked until he had made it plain that he had recognized one of the intruders; then, before Blatchford could call the name, he had been shot down.

It was clear, then, that what had protected Santoine was his blindness; he had no doubt that, if he had been able to see and recognize the men in the room after the lights were turned on, he would have been shot down also. But Santoine recognized that this did not fully account for his immunity. Two weeks before, an attack which had been meant for Eaton had struck down Santoine instead; and no which had been meant for Eaton had been made until it had become publicly known that Santoine was not going to die. If Santoine's death would

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