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The BLIND MAN'S EYES

BY WILLIAM MacHARG and EDWIN BALMER

Illustrations by R. H. Livingstone

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CHAPTER XXIII—Continued.

—19—

"In other words, you instructed them not to do so until you found out whether Overton could be handed over for execution and the facts regarding Latron kept secret, or whether some other course was necessary."

The blind man did not wait for any answer to this; he straightened suddenly, gripping the arms of his chair, and got up. There was more he wished to ask; in the bitterness he felt at his blindness having been used to make him an unconscious agent in these things of which Avery spoke so calmly, he was resolved that no one who had shared knowingly in them should go unpunished. But now he heard the noise made by approach of Eaton's captors. As Santoine stood listening, the sounds without became coherent to him.

"They have taken Overton, Avery," he commented. "Of course they have taken no one else. I shall tell those in charge of him he is not the one they are to hold prisoner but that I have another for them here."

The blind man heard no answer from Avery. Those having Overton in charge seemed to be coming into the house; the door opened and there were confused sounds.

Then Santoine heard his daughter's voice in a half cry, half sob of hopeless appeal to him. Harriet ran to him; he felt her cold, trembling fingers clasping him and beseeching him. "Father! Father! They say—they say—they will—"

He put his hands over hers, clasping hers and patting it. "My dear," he said, "I thought you would wait for me; I told you to wait."

He heard others coming into the house now; and he held his daughter beside him as he faced them.

"Who is in charge here?" he demanded.

The voice of one of those who had just come in answered him. "I, sir—I am the chief of police."

"I wish to speak to you; I will not keep you long. May I ask you to have your prisoner taken to the room he occupied here in my house and given attention by a doctor? You can have my word that it is not necessary to guard him. Wait! Wait!" he directed, as he heard exclamations and ejaculations to correct him. "I do not mean that you have mistaken who he is. He is Hugh Overton, I know; it is because he is Hugh Overton that I say what I do."

Santoine abandoned effort to separate and comprehend or to try to answer the confusion of charge and questioning around him. He concerned himself, at the moment, only with his daughter; he drew her to him, held her and said gently, "There, dear; there! Everything is right. I have not been able to explain to you, and I cannot take time now; but you, at least, will take my word that you have nothing to fear for him—nothing!"

He heard her gasp with incredulity and surprise; then she drew back from him, staring at him, she breathed deep with relief and clasped him, sobbing. He still held her, as the hall was cleared and the footsteps of those carrying Overton went up the stairs; then, knowing that she wished to follow them, he released her. She drew away, then clasped his hand and kissed it; as she did so, she suddenly stiffened and her hand tightened on his spasmodically.

Someone else had come into the hall and he heard another voice—a woman's, which he recognized as that of the stenographer, Miss Davis.

"Where is he? Hugh! Hugh! What have you done to him? Mr. Santoine! Mr. Santoine! Where is he?"

The blind man straightened, holding his daughter to him; there was anxiety, horror, love in the voice he heard; Harriet's perplexity was great as his own.

"Is that you, Miss Davis?" he inquired.

"Yes; yes," the girl repeated. "Where is—Hugh. Mr. Santoine?"

"You do not understand," the voice of a young man broke in on them.

"I'm afraid I don't," Santoine said quietly.

"She is Hugh's sister, Mr. Santoine—she is Edith Overton."

"Edith Overton? And who are you?"

"You do not know me. My name is Lawrence Hillward."

Santoine asked nothing more for the moment. His daughter had left his side. He stood an instant listening to the confusion of question and answer in the hall; then he opened the door into the library and held it for the police chief to enter.

CHAPTER XXIV

"It's All Right, Hugh"—at Last.

Eaton—he still, with the habit of five years, of concealment, even thought of himself by that name—awoke to full consciousness at eight o'clock the next morning. He was in the room he had occupied before in Santoine's house; the sunlight, reflected from the lake, was playing on the ceiling. His wounds had been dressed; his body was comfortable and without fever.

He saw and recognized, against the lighted square of the window, a man standing looking out at the lake.

"Lawrence," he said.

The man turned and came toward the bed. "Yes, Hugh."

Eaton raised himself excitedly upon his pillows. "Lawrence, that was he—last night—in the study. It was Latron! I saw him! You'll believe me, Lawrence—you at least will. They got away on a boat—they must be followed—" With the first return of consciousness he had taken up again that battle against circumstances which had been his only thought for five years.

But suddenly he was aware that his sister was also in the room, sitting upon the opposite side of the bed. Her hand came forward and clasped his; she bent over him, holding him and fondling him.

"It is all right, Hugh," she whispered—"oh, Hugh! It is all right now. Mr. Santoine knows; he—he was not what we thought him. He believed all the while that you were justly sentenced. Now he knows otherwise—"

"He—Santoine—believed that?" Eaton asked incredulously.

"Yes; he says his blindness was used by them to make him think so. So now he is very angry; he says no one who had anything to do with it shall escape. He figured it all out—most wonderfully—that it must have been Latron in the study. He has been working all night—they have already made several arrests and every port on the lake is being watched for the boat they got away on."

"Is that true, Edith? Lawrence, is it true?"

"Yes; quite true, Hugh!" Hillward choked and turned away.

Eaton sank back against his pillows; his eyes—dry, bright and filled still with questioning for a time, as he tried to appreciate what he just had heard and all that it meant to him—dampened suddenly as he realized that it was over now, that long struggle to clear his name from the charge of murder—the fight which had seemed so hopeless. He could not realize it to the full as yet; convalescent, fearful, the sense of monstrous injustice done him had marked so deeply all his thoughts and feelings that he could not sense the fact that they were gone for good. So what came to him most strongly now was only realization that he had been set right with Santoine—Santoine, whom he himself had misjudged and mistrusted. And Harriet? He had not needed to be set right with her; she had believed and trusted him from the first, in spite of all that had seemed against him. Gratitude warmed him as he thought of her—and that other feeling, deeper, stronger far than gratitude, or than anything else he ever had felt toward anyone but her, surged up in him and set his pulses wildly beating, as his thought strained toward the future.

"Where is—Mlss. Santoine?" he asked.

His sister answered. "She has been helping her father. They left word they were to be sent for as soon as you woke up, and I've just sent for them."

Eaton lay silent till he heard them coming. The blind man was unfamiliar with this room; his daughter led him in. Her eyes were very bright, her cheeks, which had been pale, flushed as she met Eaton's look, but she did not look away. He kept his gaze upon her.

Santoine, under her guidance, took the chair Hillward set beside the bed for him. The blind man was very quiet; he felt for and found Eaton's hand and pressed it. Eaton choked, as he returned the pressure. Then Santoine released him.

The Voice of One of Those Who Had Just Come in Answered Him. "I, sir —I Am the Chief of Police.

"Who else is here?" the blind man asked his daughter.

"Miss Overton and Mr. Hillward," she answered.

"I understand, I think, everything now, except some few particulars regarding yourself," he said. "Will you tell me those?"

"You mean—" Eaton spoke to Santoine, but he looked at Harriet. "Oh, I understand, I think. When I—escaped, Mr. Santoine, of course my picture had appeared in all the newspapers and I was not safe from recognition anywhere in this country. I got into Canada and, from Vancouver, went to China. We had very little money left, Mr. Santoine. What had not been—lost through Latron had been spent in my defense. I got a position in a mercantile house over there. It was a good country for me; people over there don't ask questions for fear someone will ask questions about them. We had no near relatives for Edith to go to and she had to take up stenography to support herself and—and change her name, Mr. Santoine, because of me."

"Go on," said Santoine. "You thought I knew who Latron's murderer was and morally, though not technically, perjured myself at your trial to convict you in his place. What next?"

"That was it," Eaton assented. "We thought you knew that some of those around you who served as your eyes must know it, too."

Harriet gasped. Eaton, looking at her, knew that she understood now that had come between them when she had told him that she herself had served as her father's eyes all through the Latron trial. He felt himself flushing as he looked at her; he could not understand now how he could have believed that she had aided in concealing an injustice against him, no matter what influence had been exerted upon her. She was all good; all true.

"At first," Eaton went on, "Edith did not find out anything. Then, this year, she learned that there was to be a reorganization of some of the Latron properties. We hoped that, during that, something would come out which might help us. I had been away almost five years; my face was forgotten, and we thought I could take the chance of coming back to be near at hand so I could act if anything did come out. Lawrence met me at Vancouver. We were about to start east when I received a message from Mr. Warden. I did not know Warden and I don't know now how he knew who I was or where he could reach me. His message merely said he knew I needed help and he was prepared to give it and made an appointment for me to see him at his house. You know what happened when I tried to keep the appointment.

"Then you came to Seattle and took charge of Warden's affairs. I felt certain that if there was any evidence among Warden's effects as to who had killed Latron, you would take it back with you with the other matters relating to the Latron reorganization. You could not recognize me from your having been at my trial because you were blind; I decided to take the train with you and try to get possession of the draft of the reorganization agreement and the other documents with it which Warden had been working on. I had suspected that I was being watched by agents of the men protecting Latron's murderer while I was in Seattle. I had changed my lodgings there because of that, but Lawrence had remained at the old lodging to find out for me. He found there was a man following me who disappeared after I had taken the train, and Lawrence, after questioning the gateman at Seattle decided the man had taken the same train I did. He wired me in the cipher we had sometimes used in communicating with each other, but not knowing what name I was using on the train, he addressed it to himself, confident that if a telegram reached the train addressed to 'Lawrence Hillward' I would understand and claim it.

"Of course, I could not follow his instructions and leave the train; we were snowed in. Besides, I could not imagine how anybody could have followed me onto the train, as I had taken pains to prevent that very thing by being the last passenger to get aboard it."

"The man whom the gateman saw did not follow you; he merely watched you get on the train and notified the others, who took the train at Spokane. They had planned to get rid of you after you left Seattle so as to run less risk of your death being connected with that of Warden. It was my presence which made it necessary for them to make the desperate attempt to kill you on the train."

"Then I understand. The other telegram was sent me, of course, by Edith from Chicago, when she learned here that you were using the name of Horne on your way home. I learned from her when I got here that the documents relating to the Latron properties, which I had decided you did not have with you, were being sent you through Warden's office. Through Edith I learned that they had reached you and had been put in the safe. I managed to communicate with Hillward at the country club, and that night he brought me the means of forcing the safe.

"Eaton fell himself flushing again, as he looked at Harriet. Did she resent his having used her in that way? He saw only sympathy in her face.

"My daughter told me that she helped you to that extent," Santoine offered, "and I understood later what must have been your reason for asking her to take you out that night."

"When I reached the study," Eaton continued, "I found others already there. The light of an electric torch flashed on the face of one of them and I recognized the man as Latron—the man for whose murder I had been convicted and sentenced! Edith tells me that you know the rest."

There was silence in the room for several minutes. Santoine again felt for Eaton's hand and pressed it. "We've fired you out," he said. "You must rest."

"You must sleep, Hugh, if you can," Edith urged.

Eaton obediently closed his eyes, but opened them at once to look for Harriet. She had moved out of his line of vision.

Santoine rose; he stood an instant waiting for his daughter, then suddenly he comprehended that she was no longer in the room. "Mr. Hillward, I must ask your help," he said, and he went out with Hillward guiding him.

Eaton, turning anxiously on his pillow and looking about the room, saw no one but his sister. He had known when Harriet moved away from beside the bed; but he had not suspected that she was leaving the room. Now suddenly a great fear filled him.

"Why did Miss Santoine go away? Why did she go, Edith?" he questioned.

"You must sleep, Hugh," his sister answered only.

Harriet, when she slipped out of the room, had gone downstairs. She could not have forced herself to leave before she had heard Hugh's story, and she could not define even to herself what the feeling had been that had made her leave as soon as he had finished; but she sensed the reason vaguely. Hugh had told her two days before, "I will come back to you as you have never known me yet"—and it had proved true. She had known him as a man in fear, constrained, carefully guarding himself against others and against betrayal by himself; a man to whom all the world seemed opposed; so that her sympathy—and afterward something more than her sympathy—had gone out to him. To that repressed and threatened man, she had told all she felt toward him, revealing her feelings with a frankness that would have been impossible except that she wanted him to know that she was ready to stand against the world with him.

Now the world was no longer against him; he had friends, a place in life was ready to receive him; he would be sought after, and his name would be among those of the people of his own sort. She had no shame that she had let him—and others—know all that she felt toward him;

Eaton Felt Himself Flushing Again, as He Looked at Harriet.

she gloried still in it; only now—now, if he wished her, he must make that plain; she could not, of herself, return to him.

So unrest possessed her and the suspense of something hoped for but ungualified. She went from room to room, trying to al-sort herself in her daily duties; but the house—her father's house—spoke to her now only of Hugh and she could think of nothing but him. Was he awake? Was he sleeping? Was he thinking of her? Or, now that the danger was over through which she had served him, were his thoughts of someone else?

Her heart halted at each recurrence of that thought; and again and again she repeated his words to her at parting from her the night before. "I will come back to you as you have never known me yet!" To her he would come back, he said; to her, not to anyone else. But his danger was not over then; in his great extremity and in his need of her, he might have felt what he did not feel now. If he wanted her, why did he not send for her?

She stood trembling as she saw Edith Overton in the hall.

"Hugh has been asking for you continually, Miss Santoine. If you can find time, please go in and see him."

Harriet did not know what answer she made. She went upstairs; she ran, as soon as she was out of sight of Hugh's sister; then, at Hugh's door, she had to halt to catch her breath and compose herself before she opened the door and looked in upon him. He was alone and seemed asleep; at least his eyes were closed. Harriet stood an instant gazing at him.

His face was peaceful now but worn, and his paleness was more evident than when he had been talking to her father. As she stood watching him, she felt her blood coursing through her as never before and warming her face and her fingertips; and fear—fear of him or of herself, fear of anything at all in the world—fled from her; and love—love which she knew that she need no longer try to deny—possessed her.

"Harriet!" She heard her name from his lips and she saw, as he opened his eyes and turned to her, there was no surprise in his look; if he had been sleeping, he had been dreaming she was there; if awake, he had been thinking of her.

"What is it, Hugh?" She was beside him and he was looking up into her eyes.

"You meant it, then? All you said and—and all you did when we—you and I—were alone against them all? It's so, Harriet? You mean it?"

"And you did too! Dear, it was only to me that you could come back—only to me?"

"Only to you!" He closed his eyes in his exultation. "Oh, my dear, I never dreamed—Harriet in all the days and nights I've had to plan and wonder what might be for me if everything could come all right. I've never dreamed I could win a reward like this."

"Like this?"

He opened his eyes again and drew her down toward him. "Like you!"

She bent until her cheek touched his and his arms were about her. He felt her tears upon his face. "Note that; not that—you mustn't cry, dear," he begged. "Oh, Harriet, aren't you happy now?"

"That's why. Happy! I didn't know before there could be anything like this."

"Nor I. . . . No, it's all right, Harriet; everything is all right now."

"All right? Oh, it's all right, now, if I can make it so for you," she answered.

(THE END)

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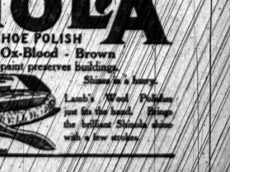

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