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THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS

(Copyright, 1895.) CHAPTER V.

When Paul Whittier said that he had photographs of the man who had been injuring the Kanapa steel and iron works, showing him in the act of opening the safe, Mr. Whittier and Mr. Wheatcroft looked at each other in amazement. Major Van Zandt stared at the young man with fear and shame straggling together in his face. Without waiting to enjoy his triumph Paul put his hand in his pocket and took out two squares of bluish paper. "There," he said, as he handed one to his father, "there is a blue-print of the man taken in this office at ten minutes past three yesterday afternoon, just as he was about to open the safe in the corner. You see he is kneeling with his hand on the lock, but apparently, just then, something alarmed him and he cast a hasty glance over his shoulder. At that second the photograph was taken, and so we have a full-face portrait of the man."

Mr. Whittier had looked at the photograph, and he now passed it to the impatient hand of the junior partner. "You see, Mr. Wheatcroft," Paul continued, "that although the face in the photograph bears a certain family likeness to Major Van Zandt's, all the same that is not a portrait of the major. The man who was in here yesterday afternoon was a young man—a man young enough to be the major's son!"

The old bookkeeper looked at the speaker. "Mr. Paul," he began, "you won't be hard on the—?" Then he paused abruptly. "I confess I don't understand this at all," declared Mr. Wheatcroft irascibly. "I am afraid that I do understand it,"

"I'm afraid I do understand it," Mr. Whittier said, with a glance of compassion at the major. "There," Paul continued, handing his father a second azure square, "there is a photograph taken here ten minutes after the first—at three-twenty yesterday afternoon. That shows the safe open and the same young man standing before it with the private letter book in his hand. As his head is bent over the pages of the book, the view is not so good. But there can be no doubt that it is the same man. You see that, don't you, Mr. Wheatcroft?"

"I see that, of course," returned Mr. Wheatcroft, forcibly; "what I don't see is why the major here should confess if he isn't guilty!"

"I think I know the reason for that," said Mr. Whittier, gently. "There haven't been two men at our books, have they?" asked Mr. Wheatcroft; "the major and also this fellow who has been photographed?"

Mr. Whittier looked at the old bookkeeper for a moment. "Major," he said, with compassion in his voice, "you won't tell me that it was you who sold our secrets to our rivals. And you might confess it again, I should never believe it. I know you better. I have known you too long to believe any charge against your honesty, even if you bring it yourself. The real culprit, the man who is photographed here, is your son, isn't he? There is no use of trying to conceal the truth now, and there is no need to attempt it, because we shall be lenient with him for your sake, major."

paused. "He told me that he had found a window unfastened." "I heard you asking about it," Major Van Zandt explained, "and I knew that if you were suspicious he was sure to be caught sooner or later. So I begged him not to try to injure you again. I offered him money to go away. But he refused my money—he said he could get it for himself now and I might keep mine till he needed it. He gave me the slip yesterday afternoon. When I found the safe was gone, I came here straight. The front door was unlocked; I walked in and found him just closing the safe here. I talked to him and he refused to listen to me. I tried to get him to give up his idea—and he struck me. Then I left him, and I went out, seeing no one as I hurried home. That's when Mr. Wheatcroft followed me, I suppose. The boy never came back all night. I haven't seen him since; I don't know where he is—but he is my son, after all, my only son. And when Mr. Wheatcroft accused me, I confessed at last, thinking you might be easier on me than you would be on the boy."

"My poor old friend," said Mr. Whittier, sympathetically, holding out his hand, which the major clasped gratefully for a moment. "Now we know who was selling us to the Kanapa people, we can protect ourselves hereafter," declared Mr. Wheatcroft. "And in spite of your trying to humbug me into believing you guilty, major, I'm willing to let your son off easy."

"I think I can get him a place where he will be out of temptation because he will be kept hard at work always," said Paul. The old bookkeeper looked up as though about to thank the young man, but there seemed to be a lump in his throat which prevented him from speaking. Suddenly Mr. Wheatcroft began, explosively: "That's all very well—but what I still don't understand is how Paul got those photographs?"

Mr. Whittier looked at his son and smiled. "That is a little mysterious, Paul," he said, "and I confess I'd like to know how you did it." "Were you concealed here yourself?" asked Mr. Wheatcroft. "No," Paul answered. "If you will look around the room you will see that there isn't a dark corner in which anybody could tuck himself."

"Then where was the photographer hidden?" Mr. Wheatcroft inquired, with increasing curiosity. "In the clock," responded Paul. "In the clock?" echoed Mr. Wheatcroft, greatly amazed. "Why, there isn't room in the case of that clock for a thin midget, let alone a man."

Paul enjoyed puzzling his father's partner. "I didn't say I had a man there, or a midget, either," he explained. "I said that the photographer was in the clock—and I might have said that the clock itself was the photographer." Mr. Wheatcroft threw up his hands in disgust. "Well," he cried, "if you want to go on mystifying us in this absurd way, go on as long as you like! But your father and I are entitled to some consideration, I think."

"I'm not mystifying you at all. The clock took the pictures automatically. I'll show you how," Paul returned, getting up from his chair and going to the corner of the office. Taking a key from his pocket he opened the case of the clock and revealed a small photographic apparatus inside with the tube of the objective opposite the round glass panel in the door of the case. At the bottom of the case was a small electrical battery and on a small shelf over this was an electro-magnet.

"I begin to see how you did it," Mr. Whittier remarked, "but I'm not an expert in photography, Paul, and I'd like a full explanation. And make it as simple as you can." "It's a very simple thing, indeed," said his son. "One day while I was wondering how we could best catch the man who was getting at the books, that clock happened to strike, and somehow it reminded

me that in our photographic society at college we had once suggested that it would be amusing to attach a detective camera to a time-piece and take snap shots every few minutes all through the day. I saw that this clock of ours faced the safe and that it couldn't be better placed for the purpose. So when I had thought out my plan, I came over here and pretended that the clock was wrong, and in setting it right I broke off the minute-hand. Then I had a man I know send for it to repair it; he is both an electrician and a pho-

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toographic expert. Together we worked out this device. Here is a small snap shot camera loaded with a hundred and fifty films; and here is the electrical attachment which connects with the clock so as to take a photograph every ten minutes from six in the morning to seven at night. We arranged that the magnet should turn the spool of film after every snap shot."

"Well," cried Mr. Wheatcroft, "I don't know much about these things, but I read the papers and I suppose you mean that the clock 'pressed the button,' and the electricity 'pulled the string.'"

"That's it, precisely," the young man responded. "Of course I wasn't quite sure how it would work, so I thought I'd try it first on a weekday when we were all here. It did work all right and I made several interesting discoveries. I found that Mike smoked a pipe in this office and that Bob played leadfrog in the store and stood on his head in the corner there up against the safe—"

"The confounded little rascal!" interrupted Mr. Wheatcroft. Paul smiled as he continued: "I found also that Mr. Wheatcroft was captivated by a pretty book agent and bought two bulky volumes he didn't want."

Mr. Wheatcroft looked sheepish for a moment. "Oh, that's how you knew, is it?" he growled, running his hands impatiently through his shock of hair. "That's how I know," Paul replied. "I told you I had an eye on you, it was the lone eye of the camera. And on Sunday it kept watch for us here, working every ten minutes. From six o'clock in the morning to three in the afternoon it winked ninety times, and all it saw was the same scene, the empty corner of the room here, with the safe in the shadow at first and at last in the full light that poured down from the glass roof over us. But a little after three a man came into the office and made ready to open the safe. At ten minutes past three the clock and the camera took his photograph—in the twinkling of an eye. At twenty minutes past three a second record was made. Before half past three the man was gone, and the camera winked every ten minutes until 7 o'clock quits in vain. I came down early this morning and got the roll of negatives. One after another I developed them, disappointed that I had almost counted a hundred of them without reward. But the ninety-second and the ninety-third paid for all my trouble."

Mr. Whittier gave his son a look of pride. "That was very ingeniously worked out, Paul, very ingeniously, indeed," he said. "If it had not been for your clock here I might have found it difficult to prove that the major was innocent—especially since he declared himself guilty."

Mr. Wheatcroft rose to his feet to close the conversation. "I am glad we know the truth, anyhow," he asserted, emphatically. And then as though to relieve the strain on the old bookkeeper he added, with a loud laugh, at his own joke: "That clock had its hands before its face all the time—but it kept its eyes open for all that!"

"Don't forget that it had only one eye," said Mr. Whittier, joining in the laugh. "It had an eye to its duty." "You know the French saying, father?" added Paul: "In the realm of the blind the one-eyed man is king."

[THE END]

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