

The BLIND MAN'S EYES

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Gabriel Warden, Seattle capitalist, tells his butler he is expecting a caller, to be admitted without question. He informs his wife of danger that threatens him if he pursues a course he considers the only honorable one. Warden leaves the house in his car and meets a man whom he takes into the machine. When the car returns home, Warden is found dead, murdered, and alone. The caller, a young man, has been at Warden's house, but leaves unobserved.

CHAPTER II.—Bob Connery, conductor, receives orders to hold train for a party. Five men and a girl board the train. The father of the girl, Mr. Dorne, is the person for whom the train was held. Philip D. Eaton, a young man, also boarded the train. Dorne tells his daughter and his secretary, Don Avery, to find out what they can concerning him.

CHAPTER III

Miss Dorne Meets Eaton.

Dorne motioned Avery to the aisle, where already some of the passengers, having settled their belongings in their sections, were beginning to wander through the cars seeking acquaintances or players to make up a card game. Eaton took from a bag a handful of cigars with which he filled a plain, uninitialed cigar case, and went toward the club and observation car in the rear. As he passed through the sleeper next to him—the last one—Harriet Dorne glanced up at him and spoke to her father; Dorne nodded but did not look up.

The observation room was nearly empty. The only occupants were a young woman who was reading a magazine, and an elderly man. Eaton chose a seat as far from these two as possible.

He had been there only a few minutes, however, when, looking up, he saw Harriet Dorne and Avery enter the room. They passed him, engaged in conversation, and stood by the rear door looking out into the storm. It was evident to Eaton, although he did not watch them, that they were arguing something; the girl seemed insistent, Avery irritated and unwilling. Her manner showed that she won her point finally. She seated herself in one of the chairs, and Avery left her. He wandered, as if aimlessly, to the reading table, turning over the magazines there; abandoning them, he gazed about as if bored; then, with a wholly casual manner, he came toward Eaton and took the seat beside him.

"Rotten weather, isn't it?" Avery observed somewhat ungraciously.

Eaton could not well avoid a reply. "It's been getting worse," he commented, "ever since we left Seattle."

"We're running into it, apparently." Again Avery looked toward Eaton and waited.

"Yes—lucky if we get through."

The conversation on Avery's part was patently forced; and it was equally forced on Eaton's; nevertheless it continued. Avery introduced the war and other subjects upon which men, thrown together for a time, are accustomed to exchange opinions. But Avery did not do it easily or naturally; he plainly was of the caste whose pose it is to repel, not seek, overtures toward a chance acquaintance. His lack of practice was perfectly obvious when at last he asked directly: "Beg pardon, but I don't think I know your name."

Eaton was obliged to give it. "Mine's Avery," the other offered; "perhaps you heard it when we were getting our berths assigned."

And again the conversation, enjoyed by neither of them, went on. Finally the girl at the end of the car rose and passed them, as though leaving the car. Avery looked up.

"Where are you going, Harry?" "I think someone ought to be with Father."

"I'll go in just a minute."

She had halted almost in front of them. Avery, hesitating as though he did not know what he ought to do, finally arose; and as Eaton observed that Avery, having introduced himself, appeared now to consider it his duty to present Eaton to Harriet Dorne, Eaton also arose. Avery murmured the names. Harriet Dorne, resting her hand on the back of Avery's chair, joined in the conversation. As he replied easily and interestedly to a comment of Eaton's, Avery suddenly reminded her of her father. After a minute, when Avery—still ungracious and still irritated over something which Eaton could not guess—rather abruptly left them, she took Avery's seat; and Eaton dropped into his chair beside her.

"Now, this whole proceeding—though within the convention which, forbidding a girl to make a man's acquaintance directly, says nothing against her making it through the medium of another man—had been so unannounced that Eaton understood that Harriet Dorne deliberately had arranged to make his acquaintance, and that Avery, angry and objecting, had been overruled.

She seemed to Eaton less alert;



She Had Halted Almost in Front of Them.

boyish now than she had looked an hour before when they had boarded the train. Her cheeks were smoothly rounded, her lips rather full, her lashes very long. He could not look up without looking directly at her, for her chair, which had not been moved since Avery left it, was at an angle with his own.

To avoid the appearance of studying her too openly, he turned slightly, so that his gaze went past her to the white turmoil outside the windows.

"It's wonderful," she said, "isn't it?" "You mean the storm?" A twinkle of amusement came to Eaton's eyes. "It would be more interesting if it allowed a little more to be seen. At present there is nothing visible but snow."

"Is that the only way it affects you? An artist would think of it as a background for contrasts—a thing to sketch or paint; a writer as something to be written down in words."

Eaton understood. She could not more plainly have asked him what he was.

"And an engineer, I suppose," he said, easily, "would think of it only as an element to be included in his formulas—an x, or an a, or a b, to be put in somewhere and square-rooted or squared so that the roof-truss he was figuring should not buckle under its weight."

"Oh—so that is the way you were thinking of it?"

"You mean," Eaton challenged her directly, "am I an engineer?"

"Are you?"

"Oh, no; I was only talking in pure generalities, just as you were."

"Let us go on, then," she said gayly. "I see I can't conceal from you that I am doing you the honor to wonder what you are. A lawyer would think of it in the light of damage it might create and the subsequent possibilities of litigation." She made a little pause.

"A business man would take it into account, as he has to take into account all things in nature or human; it would delay transportation, or harm or aid the winter wheat."

"Or stop competition somewhere," he observed, more interested.

The flash of satisfaction which came to her face and as quickly was checked and faded showed him she thought she was on the right track.

"Business," she said, still lightly, "will—how is it the newspapers put it?—will marshal its cohorts; it will send out its generals in command of brigades of snowplows, its colonels in command of regiments of snow shovellers and its spies to discover and to bring back word of the effect upon the crops."

"You talk," he said, "as if business were a war."

"Isn't it?—like war, but war in higher terms."

"In higher terms?" he questioned, attempting to make his tone like hers, but a sudden bitterness now was betrayed by it. "Or in lower?"

"Why, in higher," she declared, "demanding greater courage, greater devotion, greater determination, greater self-sacrifice. Recruiting officers can pick any man off the streets and make a good soldier of him, but no one could be so sure of finding a satisfactory employee in that way. Doesn't that show that daily life, the everyday business of earning a living and bearing one's share in the workaday world, demands greater qualities than war?"

Her face had flushed eagerly as she spoke; a darker, livid flush answered her words on his.

"But the opportunities for evil are greater, too," he asserted, almost fiercely. "How many of those men you speak of on the streets have been liberated, mercilessly, even savagely

sacrificed to some business expediency, their future destroyed, their hope killed!" Some storm of passion, whose meaning she could not divine, was sweeping him.

"You mean," she asked after an instant's silence, "that you, Mr. Eaton, have been sacrificed in such a way?" "I am still talking in generalities," he denied ineffectively.

He saw that she sensed the untruthfulness of these last words. Her smooth young forehead and her eyes were shadowy with thought. Eaton was uneasily silent. Finally Harriet Dorne seemed to have made her decision.

"I think you should meet my father, Mr. Eaton," she said. "Would you like to?"

He did not reply at once. He knew that his delay was causing her to study him now with great surprise.

"I would like to meet him, yes," he said, "but"—he hesitated, tried to avoid answer without offending her, but already he had affronted her—"but not now, Miss Dorne."

She stared at him, rebuffed and chilled.

"You mean—" The sentence, obviously, was one she felt it better not to finish. As though he recognized that now she must wish the conversation to end, he got up. She rose stiffly.

"I'll see you into your car, if you're returning there," he offered.

Neither spoke, as he went with her into the next car; and at the section where her father sat, Eaton bowed silently, nodded to Avery, who coldly returned his nod, and left her. Eaton went on into his own car and sat down, his thoughts in mad confusion.

How near he had come to talking to this girl about himself, even though he had felt from the first that that was what she was trying to make him do! Was he losing his common sense? Was the self-command on which he had so counted that he had dared to take this train deserting him? He felt that he must not see Harriet Dorne again alone. In Avery he had recognized, by that instinct which so strangely divines the personalities one meets, an enemy from the start; Dorne's attitude toward him, of course, was not yet defined; as for Harriet Dorne—he could not tell whether she was prepared to be his enemy or friend.

Eaton went into the men's compartment of his car, where he sat smoking till after the train was under way again. The porter looked in upon him there to ask if he wished his berth made up now; Eaton nodded assent, and fifteen minutes later, dropping



Eaton Went into the Men's Compartment of His Car, Where He Sat Smoking Till After the Train Was Under Way Again.

the cold end of his cigar and going out into the car, he found the berth ready for him. A half hour later the passage of someone through the aisle and the sudden dimming of the crack of light which showed above the curtains told him that the lights in the car had been turned down. Eaton closed his eyes, but sleep was far from him.

Presently he began to feel the train beginning to labor with the increasing grade and the deepening snow. It was nearing the mountains, and the weather was getting colder and the storm more severe. Eaton lifted the curtain from the window beside him and leaned on one elbow to look out. The train was running through a bleak, white desolation; no light and no sign of habitation showed anywhere. The events of the day ran through his mind again with sinister suggestion. He had taken that train for a certain definite, dangerous purpose which required his remaining as obscure and as inconspicuous as possible; yet already he had been singled out for attention. So far, he was sure, he had received no more than that—attention, curiosity concerning him. He had not suffered recognition; but that might come at any moment. Could he risk longer waiting to act?

He dropped on his back on the bed and lay with his hands clasped under his head, his eyes staring up at the roof of the car.

In the card-room of the observation car, playing and conversation still went on for a time; then it diminished as one by one the passengers went away to bed. Connery, looking into this car, found it empty and the porter cleaning up; he slowly passed on forward through the train, stopping momentarily in the rear Pullman opposite the berth of the passenger whom President Jarvis had commended to his care. His scrutiny of the

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his clothes down from the hooks; then, as abruptly, he stopped dressing and sat absorbed in thought. He had let himself sink back against the pillows, while he stared, unseeing, at the solid bank of snow beside the car, when the door at the farther end of the coach opened and Conductor Connery entered, calling a name.

"Mr. Hillward! Mr. Lawrence Hillward! Telegram for Mr. Hillward!" car told him all was correct here; the even breathing within the berth assured him the passengers slept.

Connery had been becoming more certain hour by hour all through the evening that they were going to have great difficulty in getting the train through. Though he knew by President Jarvis' note that the officials of the road must be watching the progress of this special train with particular interest, he had received no train orders from the west for several hours. His inquiry at the last stop had told him the reason for this; the telegraph wires to the west had gone down. To the east communication was still open, but how long it would remain so he could not guess. Here in the deep heart of the great mountains—they had passed the Idaho boundary line into Montana—they were getting the full effect of the storm; their progress, increasingly slow, was broken by stops which were becoming frequent and longer as they struggled on.

At Fracroft—the station where he was to exchange the ordinary plow which so far had sufficed, and couple on the "rotary" to fight the mountain drifts ahead—Connery swung himself down from the train, looked in at the telegraph office and then went forward to the two giant locomotives, on whose sweating, monstrous backs the snow, suddenly visible in the haze of their lights, melted as it fell. As they started, he swung aboard and in the brightly lighted men's compartment of the first Pullman checked up his report sheets with a stub of pencil.

Again they stopped—once more went on. Connery, having put his papers into his pocket, dozed, awoke, dozed again. The progress of the train halted again and again; several times it backed, charged forward again—only to stop, back and charge again and then go on. But this did not disturb Connery. Then something went wrong.

All at once he found himself, by a trainman's instinctive and automatic action, upon his feet; for the shock had been so slight as barely to be felt, far too slight certainly to have awakened any of the sleeping passengers in their berths. He went to the door of the car, lifted the platform stop, threw open the door of the vestibule and hanging himself by one hand to the rail, swung himself out from the side of the car and looked ahead. He saw the forward one of the two locomotives wrapped in clouds of steam, and men arm-deep in snow wallowing forward to the rotary still farther to the front, and the slight con-

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