The BLIND MAN'S EYES

BY

WILLIAM MacHARG and EDWIN BALMER

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A rich but universally respected western man is murdered in his automobile. The crime is accomplished with such stealth that even the chauffeur is not aware of it. Some months previously an eastern business associate, but not an intimate of the western man, had met death in an equally mysterious manner. There is absolutely no clew to the murder and no apparent motive for the second crime.

Basil Santoine, a blind lawyer, with that remarkable inner perception frequently developed by the sightless, while traveling on an eastbound train from Seattle in the company of his daughter and his confidential secretary, is murderously assaulted in his berth. Some features of this assault are more mysterious than either of the other crimes.

There is no superdetective nor scientific investigator to deduce infallible theories fastening the guilt upon the right party or parties. Police efforts are futile and succeed only in fouling the trail, involving innocent parties and increasing the complications. The only tangible clews seem to point to one Philip Eaton, a mysterious young man, who was aboard the train. There is also a suspicion that he may have been connected with the murder of the rich man in Seattle.

Apparently against all dictates of sense and safety, Eaton is made a guest in the sumptuous home of Santoine. Here the mystery deepens to an extraordinary degree and the big queries arise: Who is Philip Eaton; what is the past of this strange man; what intuition or reasoning draws the blind man to him in face of the danger of his presence; in what way is Eaton connected with the sinister events which afterward occur in the Santoine home; what explanation is there for the growing interest of Harriet Santoine in the man who is believed to have made an attempt upon her father's life?

Here are mystery and romance different from anything you ever have encountered. The outcome of events and solution of the mystery are as unexpected as anything you possibly can imagine.

CHAPTER I

A Financier Dies.

Gabriel Warden—capitalist, railroad director, owner of mines and timber lands, at twenty a cow-puncher, at forty-eight one of the predominant men of the Northwest coast—paced with quick, uneven steps the great wicker-furnished living room of his home just above Seattle on Puget sound. Twice within ten minutes he had used the telephone in the hall to receive the same reply—that the train from Vancouver, for which he had inquired, had come in and that the passengers had left the station.

It was not like Gabriel Warden to show nervousness of any sort; Kondo, the Japanese doorman, who therefore had found something strange in his telephoning, watched him through the portieres which shut off the living room from the hall.

Warden turned suddenly and pressed the bell to call a servant. Kondo entered the room; he noticed then that Warden's hand, which was still holding the watch before him, was shaking.

"A young man who may, or may not, give a name, will ask for me in a few moments. He will say he called by appointment. Take him at once to my smoking room, and I will see him there. I am going to Mrs. Warden's room now."

He went up the stairs, Kondo noticed, still absently holding his watch in his hand.

Warden controlled his nervousness before entering his wife's room. She talked with him casually for a moment or so before she even sent away her maid. When they were alone, she suddenly saw that he had come to her to discuss some serious subject.

"Cora," he said, when he had closed the door after the maid, "I want your advice on a business question."

"A business question!" She was greatly surprised. He was one of those men who believe all business matters should be kept from their wives.

"I mean it came to me through some business—discoveries."

"And you cannot decide it for yourself?"

"I had decided it." He looked again at his watch. "I had quite decided it; but now— It may lead to some result which I have suddenly felt that I haven't the right to decide entirely for myself."

Warden's wife for the first time felt alarmed.

"You mean it affects me directly?"

He seized both her hands in his and held her before him.

"Cora," he said, "what would you have me do if you knew I had found out that a young man—a man who, four or five years ago, had as much to live for as any man might—had been outraged in every right by men who are my friends? Would you have me fight the outfit for him? Or would you have me—lie down?"

She stared at him with only pride then; she was proud of his strength, of his ability to fight, of the power she knew he possessed to force his way against opposition. "Why, you would fight them!"

"You want me to fight them?"

"Of course."

"No matter what it costs?"

She realized then that what he was facing was very grave.

"Cora," he said, "I didn't come to ask your advice without putting this squarely to you. If I go into this fight, I shall be not only an opponent to some of my present friends; I shall be a threat to them—something they may think it necessary to remove."

She cried out, "You mean someone might kill you?"

"Should that keep me from going in?"

She hesitated. He went on: "Would you have me afraid to do a thing that ought to be done, Cora?"

"No," she said; "I would not."

"All right, then. That's all I had to know now. The young man is coming to see me tonight, Cora. Probably he's downstairs. I'll tell you all I can after I've talked with him."

He went directly downstairs; as he passed through the hall, the telephone bell rang. Warden himself answered it. Kondo overheard Warden's end of the conversation. Apparently the other person wished to see Warden at once. Warden finished, "All right; I'll come and get you. Wait for me there." Then he hung up.

Turning to Kondo, he ordered his car. Kondo transmitted the order and brought Warden's coat and cap; then Kondo opened the house door for him and the door of the limousine, which had been brought under the porte-cochere. The chauffeur was Patrick Corboy, a young Irishman who had been in Warden's employ for more than five years; his faithfulness to Warden was never questioned. Corboy drove to the place Warden had directed. As they stopped, a young

As They Stopped, a Young Man of Less Than Medium Height, Broad-shouldered, and Wearing a Mackintosh, Came to the Curb and Spoke to Warden.

man of less than medium height, broad-shouldered, and wearing a mackintosh, came to the curb and spoke to Warden. Corboy did not hear the name, but Warden immediately asked the man into the car; he directed Corboy to return home. The chauffeur did this, but was obliged on the way to come to a complete stop several times, as he met street-cars or other vehicles on intersecting streets.

Almost immediately after Warden had left the house, the doorbell rang and Kondo answered it. A young man with a quiet and pleasant bearing inquired for Mr. Warden and said he came by appointment. Kondo ushered him into the smoking room, where the stranger waited. In about forty minutes, Corboy drove the car under the porte-cochere again and got down and opened the door. There was no motion inside the limousine. The chauffeur looked in and saw Mr. Warden lying back quietly against the cushions in the back of the seat; he was alone.

Corboy noticed that the curtains all about had been pulled down; he touched the button and turned on the light at the top of the car, and then he saw that Warden was dead; his cap was off, and the top of his head had been smashed by a heavy blow.

The chauffeur drew back, gasping; Kondo, behind him on the steps, cried out and ran into the house calling for help. Two other servants and Mrs. Warden, who had remained nervously in her room, ran down. The stranger who had been waiting, now seen for the first time by Mrs. Warden, came out from the smoking room to help them. He aided in taking the body from the car and helped to carry it into the living room and lay it on a couch; he remained until it was certain that Warden had been killed and nothing could be done. When this had been established and further confirmed by the doctor who was called, Kondo and Mrs. Warden looked around for the young man—but he was no longer there.

The news of the murder brought extras out upon the streets of Seattle, Tacoma and Portland at ten o'clock that night. Seattle, stirred at once at the murder of one of its most prominent citizens, stirred still further at the new proof that Warden had been a power in business and finance; then, as the second day's dispatches from the larger cities came in, it stirred a third time at the realization—for so men said—that this was the second time such a murder had happened.

Warden had been what was called among men of business and finance a member of the "Latron crowd"; he had been close, at one time, to the great western capitalist Matthew Latron; the properties in which he had made his wealth, and whose direction and administration had brought him the respect and attention of other men, had been closely allied with or even included among those known as the "Latron properties"; and Latron, five years before, had been murdered. Latron's murderer had been a man who called upon him by appointment, and Warden's murderer, it appeared, had been equally known to him, or at least equally recommended. Of this as much was made as possible in the suggestion that the same agency was behind the two.

The statements of Kondo and Corboy were verified; it was even learned at what spot Warden's murderer had left the motor unobserved by Corboy. Beyond this, no trace was found of him, and the disappearance of the young man who had come to Warden's house and waited there for three quarters of an hour to see him was also complete.

CHAPTER II

The Express Is Held for a Personage.

Bob Connery, special conductor for the Coast division of one of the chief transcontinentals, was having late breakfast on his day off at his little cottage on the shore of Puget sound, when he was treated to the unusual sight of a large car stopping before his door. The chauffeur hurried from the car to the house with an envelope in his hand. Connery, meeting him at the door, opened the envelope and found within an order in the handwriting of the president of the railroad and over his signature.

"Connery:

"No. 5 being held at Seattle terminal until nine o'clock—will run one hour late. This is your authority to supersede the regular man as conductor—prepared to go through to Chicago. You will facilitate every desire and obey, when possible, any request even as to running of the train, which may be made by a passenger who will identify himself by a card from me.

"H. R. JARVIS."

The conductor, accustomed to take charge of trains when princes, envoys, Presidents and great people of any sort took to travel publicly or privately, fingered the heavy cream-colored notepaper upon which the order was written and looked up at the chauffeur.

The order was surprising enough even to Connery. Some passenger of extraordinary influence, obviously, was to take the train; not only the holding of the transcontinental for an hour told this, but there was the further plain statement that the passenger would be incognito. Astonishing also was the fact that the order was written upon private note-paper. There had been a monogram at the top of the sheet, but it had been torn off; that would not have been if Mr. Jarvis had sent the order from home. Who could have had the president of the road call upon him at half past seven in the morning and have told Mr. Jarvis to hold the Express for an hour?

Connery was certain of the distinctive characters of the president's handwriting. The enigma of the order, however, had piqued him so that he pretended doubt.

"Where did you get this?" he challenged the chauffeur.

"From Mr. Jarvis."

"Of course; but where?"

"You mean you want to know where he was?"

Connery smiled quietly. If he himself was trusted to be cautious and circumspect, the chauffeur also plainly was accustomed to be in the employ of one who required reticence. Connery looked from the note to the bearer more keenly. There was something familiar in the chauffeur's face—just enough to have made Connery believe, at first, that probably he had seen the man meeting some passenger at the station.

"You are—" Connery ventured casually.

"In private employ; yes, sir," the man cut off quickly. Then Connery knew him; it was when Gabriel Warden traveled on Connery's train that the conductor had seen this chauffeur; this was Patrick Corboy, who had driven Warden the night he was killed. But Connery, having won his point, knew better than to show it.

"Waiting for a receipt from me?" he asked as if he had abandoned his curiosity.

The chauffeur nodded. Connery took a sheet of paper, wrote on it, sealed it in an envelope and handed it over; the chauffeur hastened back to his car and drove off. Connery whistled softly to himself. Evidently his passenger was to be one of the great men in eastern finance who had been brought west by Warden's death. As the car disappeared, Connery gazed off to the sound.

The March morning was windy and wet, with a storm blowing in from the Pacific. From Eliot bay reverberated the roar of the steam-whistle of some large ship signaling its intention to pass another to the left. The incoming vessel loomed in sight and showed the graceful lines, the single funnel and the white and red-barred flag of the Japanese line, the Nippon Yusen Kaisha. Connery saw that it was, as he anticipated, the Tamba Maru, due two days before, having been delayed by bad weather over the Pacific. It would dock, Connery estimated, just in time to permit a passenger to catch the Eastern Express if that were held till nine o'clock. So, as he hastened to the car line, Connery smiled at himself for taking the trouble to make his earlier surmises.

Old Sammy Seaton, the gateman, stood in his iron coop twirling a punch about his finger. Old Sammy's scheme of sudden wealth—everyone has a plan by which at any moment wealth may arrive—was to recognize and apprehend some wrongdoer, or some lost or kidnaped person for whom a great reward would be given. His position at the gate through which must pass most of the people arriving at the great Coast city, or wishing to depart from it, certainly was excellent; and by constant and careful reading of the papers, classifying and memorizing faces, he prepared himself to take advantage of any opportunity. Sammy still awaited his great "strike."

"Any one off on Number Five, Sammy?" Connery questioned carelessly as he approached.

Old Sammy shook his head. "What are we holding for?" he whispered. "Ah—for them?"

A couple of station-boys, overloaded with hand-baggage, scurried in from the street; someone shouted for a trunk-truck, and baggagemen ran. A group of people, who evidently had come to the station in covered cars, crowded out to the gate and lined up to pass old Sammy. The gateman straightened importantly and scrutinized each person presenting a ticket. Connery inspected with attention the file at the gate and watched old Sammy also as each passed him.

The first in line was a girl—a girl about twenty-two or three, Connery guessed. She had the easy, interested air of a person of assured position. When Connery first saw her, she seemed to be accompanying the man who now was behind her; but she offered her own ticket for perusal at the gate, and as soon as she was through, she hurried on ahead alone. Connery was certain he did not know her. He noticed that old Sammy had held her at the gate as long as possible, as if hoping to recollect who she might be; but now that she was gone, the gateman gave his attention more closely to the first man—a tall, strongly built man neither heavy nor light, and with a powerful, patrician face. His eyes were hidden by smoked glasses such as one wears against a glare of snow.

Connery found his gaze following this man; the conductor did not know him, nor had old Sammy recognized him; but both were trying to place him. He, unquestionably, was a man to be known, though not more so than many who traveled in the transcontinental trains.

A trim, self-assured man of thirty—his open overcoat showed a cutaway underneath—came past next, proffering the plain Seattle-Chicago ticket.

An Englishman, with red-veined cheeks, fumbling, clumsy fingers and curious, interested eyes, immediately followed.

The remaining man, carrying his own grips, set them down in the gate and felt in his pocket for his transportation.

This person had appeared suddenly after the line of four had formed in front of old Sammy at the gate; he had taken his place with them only after scrutiny of them. His ticket was a strip which originally had held coupons for the Pacific voyage and some indefinite journey in Asia before; unlike the Englishman's—and his baggage did not bear the pasters of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha—the ticket was close to the date when it would have expired. It bore upon the line where the purchaser signed, the name "Philip D. Eaton" in plain, vigorous characters without shading or flourish.

As a sudden eddy of the gale about the shed blew the ticket from old Sammy's cold fingers, the young man stooped to recover it. The wind blew off his cloth cap as he did so, and as he bent and straightened before old Sammy, the old man suddenly gasped; and while the traveler pulled on his cap, recovered his ticket and hurried down the platform to the train, the gateman stood staring after him as though trying to recall who the man presenting himself as Philip D. Eaton was.

Connery stepped beside the old man.

"Who is it, Sammy?" he demanded.

"Who?" Sammy repeated. His eyes were still fixed on the retreating figure. "Who? I don't know."

The gateman mumbled, repeating to himself the names of the famous, the great, the notorious, in his effort to fit one to the man who had just passed. No one else belated and bound for the Eastern Express was in sight. The president's order to the conductor and to the dispatcher simply had directed that Number Five would run one hour late; it must leave in five minutes; and Connery, guided by the impression the man last through the gate had made upon him and old Sammy both, had no doubt that the man for whom the train had been held was now on board.

Connery went out to the train. The passengers who had been parading the platform had got aboard; the last five to arrive also had disappeared into the Pullmans, and their luggage had been thrown into the baggage car. Connery jumped aboard.

The three who had passed the gate first—the girl, the man with the glasses and the young man in the cutaway—it had now become clear were one party. They had had reservations made, apparently, in the name of Dorne; the girl's address to the spectacled man made plain that he was her father; her name, apparently, was Harriet; the young man in the cutaway coat was "Don" to her and "Avery" to her father. His relation, while intimate enough to permit him to address the girl as "Harry," was unfailingly respectful to Mr. Dorne; and against them both Dorne won his way; his daughter was to occupy the drawing room; he and Avery were to have sections in the open car.

"You have Sections One and Three, sir," the Pullman conductor told him. And Dorne directed the porter to put Avery's luggage in Section One, his own in Section Three.

The Englishman was sent to Section Four in Car Three—the next car forward—and departed at the heels of the porter. Connery watched more closely, as now it came the turn of the young man whose ticket bore the name of Eaton. Eaton had no reservation in the sleepers; he appeared, however, to have some preference as to where he slept.

"Give me a Three, if you have one," he requested of the Pullman conductor. His voice, Connery noted, was well modulated, rather deep, distinctly pleasant. At sound of it, Dorne, who with his daughter's help was settling himself in his section, turned and looked that way and said something in a low tone to the girl. Harriet Dorne also looked, and with her eyes on Eaton, Connery saw her reply inaudibly, rapidly and at some length.

"I can give you Three in Car Three, opposite the gentleman I just assigned," the Pullman conductor offered.

"That'll do very well," Eaton answered in the same pleasant voice.

As the porter now took his bags, Eaton followed him out of the car. Connery went after them into the next car. He expected, rather, that Eaton would at once identify himself to him as the passenger to whom President Jarvis' short note had referred. Eaton, however, paid no attention to him, but was busy taking off his coat and settling himself in his section as Connery passed.

The conductor, willing that Eaton should choose his own time for identifying himself, passed slowly on, looking over the passengers as he went. He stood for a few moments in conversation with the dining-car conductor; then he retraced his way through the train. He again passed Eaton, slowing so that the young man could speak to him if he wished, and even halting an instant to exchange a word with the Englishman; but Eaton allowed him to pass on without speaking to him. Connery's step quickened as he entered the next car on his way back to the smoking compartment of the observation car, where he expected to compare sheets with the Pullman conductor before taking up the tickets. As he entered this car, however, Avery stopped him.

"Mr. Dorne would like to speak to you," Avery said.

Connery stopped beside the section, where the man with the spectacles sat with his daughter. Dorne looked up at him.

"You are the train conductor?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Connery replied.

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