

The BLIND MAN'S EYES

BY WILLIAM MACHARG AND EDWIN BALMER
Illustrations by R.H. Livingstone

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Gabriel Warden, Seattle capitalist, tells his butler he is expecting a caller, to be admitted without question. He informs his butler of a man named Warden, who 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 Conroy, 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—The two make Eaton's acquaintance. The train is stopped by snowdrifts.

CHAPTER IV—Eaton receives a telegram addressed to Lawrence Hillward, which he claims. It warns him he is being followed.

CHAPTER V—Passing through the car, Conroy notices Dorne's hand hanging outside the berth. He ascertains Dorne's bell has recently rung. Perturbed, he investigates and finds Dorne with his skull crushed. He calls a surgeon, Dr. Sinclair, on the train.

CHAPTER VI—Sinclair recognizes the injured man as Basil Santoino, who, although blind, is a peculiar power in the financial world as adviser to "big interests." His recovery is a matter of doubt.

CHAPTER VII—Circumstances point to Eaton as Santoino's assailant.

CHAPTER VIII—Eaton is practically glaced under arrest. He refuses to make explanations as to his previous movements before boarding the train, but admits he was the man who called on Warden the night the financier was murdered.

CHAPTER IX—Eaton pleads with Harriet Santoino to withhold judgment, telling her he is in serious danger, though innocent of the crime against her father. He feels the girl believes him.

CHAPTER X—Santoino recovers sufficiently to question Eaton, who refuses to reveal his identity. The financier requires Eaton to accompany him to the Santoino home, where he is in the position of a semi-prisoner.

CHAPTER XI—Eaton meets a resident of the house, Wallace Blatchford, and a young girl, Mildred Davis, with whom apparently he is acquainted, though they conceal the fact. Eaton's mission is to secure certain documents which are vital to his interests, and his belief that the house is a remarkable stroke of luck. The girl agrees to aid him. He becomes deeply interested in Harriet Santoino, and she in him.

CHAPTER XII—Harriet tells Eaton she and Donald Avery act as "eyes" to Santoino, reading to him the documents on which he bases his judgments. While walking with her, two men in an automobile deliberately attempt to run Eaton down. He escapes with slight injuries. The girl recognizes one of the men as having been on the train on which they came from Seattle.

CHAPTER XIII—Santoino questions Eaton closely, but the latter is reticent. The blind man tells him he is convinced the attack made on him on the train was the result of an error, the attacker having planned to kill Eaton. Santoino tells Harriet she is to take charge of certain papers connected with the "Latron properties," which had hitherto been in Avery's charge.

CHAPTER XIV—At the country club Eaton reveals a remarkable proficiency at polo, seemingly to Avery's gratification. Eaton induces Harriet to allow him to leave the grounds for a few minutes that night.

fon hurried ahead, he went almost noiselessly. She stood still, shivering a little now in the cold; and she listened, she no longer heard his footsteps. What she had done was done; then just as she was telling herself that it must be many moments before she would know whether he was coming back, she heard him returning; at some little distance, he spoke her name so as not to frighten her. She knew at once it was he, but a change in the tone surprised her. She stepped forward to meet him.

"You found your friend?"

"Yes."

"What did he tell you? I mean what is wrong that you did not expect?"

"She heard his breath come fast. 'Nothing,' he denied. 'No; you must tell me! Can't you trust me?'"

"Trust you!" he cried. He turned to her and seized her hands. "You ask me to—trust you?"

"Yes; I've trusted you. Can't you



She Removed the Books in Front of a Wall Safe to the Right of the Door.

"Believe in you, Miss Santoino!" He crushed her fingers in his grasp. "Oh, my God, I wish I could!"

"You wish you could?" she echoed. The tone of it struck her like a blow, and she tore her hands away. "What do you mean by that?"

He made no reply but stood staring at her through the dark. "We must go back," he said queerly. "You're cold."

She did not answer but started back up the path to the house. He seemed to have caught himself together against some impulse that stirred him strongly. "The man out there who saw us? He will report to your father, Miss Santoino?" he asked unsteadily.

"Reports for Father are first made to me."

"I see." He did not ask her what she was going to do; if he was assuming that her permission to exceed his set limits bound her not to report to her father, she did not accept that assumption, though she would not report to the blind man tonight, for she knew he must now be asleep. But she felt that Eaton was no longer thinking of this. As they entered the house and he helped her lay off her cape, he suddenly faced her.

"We are in a strange relation to each other, Miss Santoino—stranger than you know," he said unevenly. She waited for him to go on.

"When the time comes that you comprehend what our actual relation is, I—I want you to know that I understand that whatever you have done was done because you believed it might bring about the greater good. I—I have seen in you—in your father—only kindness, high honor, sympathy. If I did not know—"

She started, gazing at him, what he said had absolutely no meaning for her. "What is it that you know?" she demanded.

He did not reply; his hand went out to hers, seized it, crushed it, and he started away. As he went up the stairs—still, in his absorption, carrying cap and overcoat—she stood staring after him in perplexity.

CHAPTER XVI

The Fight in the Study.

Eaton dismissed the man who had been waiting in his rooms for him; he locked the door and carefully drew down all the window shades. Then he put his overcoat, folded as he had been carrying it under his arm, on the writing table in the center of the room, and from its folds and pockets took a "breast-drill" such as iron workers use in drilling steel, an automatic pistol with three clips of cartridges, an electric flashlight and a little bottle of nitroglycerin. He loaded the pistol and put it in his

pocket; then he carefully inspected the other things.

He raised a shade and window, and sat in the dark. The night was cloudy and very dark. He gazed at the south wing of the house; the windows of the first floor were closed and the curtains drawn; but tonight there was no light in the room. Then in the dark he moved to the table where he had left his overcoat, and distributed in his pockets and within his clothing the articles he had brought; and now he felt again in the overcoat and brought out a short, strong bar of steel curved and flattened at one end—a "jimmy" for forcing the windows.

Eaton slipped off his shoes and went to his room door; he opened the door and found the hall dark and quiet. He stepped out, closing his door carefully behind him, and with great caution he descended the stairs. He went to a window in the drawing room which was set in a recess and so placed that it was not visible from other windows in the house. He opened this window and let himself down upon the lawn. He gained the south corner of the wing, unobserved or at least without sign that he had been seen, and went on around it.

He stopped at the first high French window on the south. As he tried to slip his jimmy under the bottom of the sash, the window, to his amazement, opened silently upon its hinges; it had not been locked. The heavy curtains within hung just in front of him; he put out his hand and parted them. Then he started back in astonishment and crouched close to the ground; inside the room was a man moving about, flashing an electric torch before him and then exploring an instant in darkness and flashing his torch again.

Eaton had not been at all prepared for this; now he knew suddenly that he ought to have been prepared for it. If the man within the room was not the one who had attacked him with the motor, he was closely allied with that man, and what he was after now was the same thing Eaton was after. He drew his pistol, and loosing the safety, he made it ready to fire; with his left hand, he clung to the short, heavy jimmy. He stepped into the great room through the curtains, and treading noiselessly in his stocking feet, he advanced upon the man, moving forward in each period of darkness between the flashes of the electric torch.

Now, at the further side of the room, another electric torch flashed out. There were at least two men in the room, working together—or rather, one was working, the other supervising; for Eaton heard now a steady, almost inaudible grinding noise as the second man worked. Eaton halted again and waited; if there were two, there might be others.

His pulses were beating faster and hotter, and he felt the blood rushing to his head and his hands growing cold with his excitement; but he was conscious of no fear. He crouched and crept forward noiselessly again. No other light appeared in the room, and there was no sound elsewhere from the darkness; but the man who supervised had moved closer to the other. The grinding noise had stopped; it was followed by a sharp click; the men, side by side, were bending over something; and the light of the man who had been working, for a fraction of a second shot into the face of the other. He muttered some short, hoarse imprecation, but before Eaton heard the voice, he had stopped as if struck, and his breath had gone from him.

His instant's glimpse of that face astounded, stunned, stupefied him. He could not have seen that man! The fact was impossible! He must have been mad; his mind must have become unreliable to let him even imagine it. Then came the sound of the voice—the voice of the man whose face he had seen! It was he! And, in place of the paralysis of the first instant, now a wild, savage throes of passion seized Eaton; his pulses leaped so it seemed they must burst his veins, and he gulped and choked. He had not filled in with insane fancy the features of the man whom he had seen; the voice witnessed to that the man in the dark by the wall was he whom Eaton—if he could have dreamed such a fact as now had been disclosed—would have circled the world to catch and destroy; yet now with the destruction of that man in his power— he had but to aim and empty his automatic pistol at five paces—such destruction at this moment could not suffice; more shooting that man would be petty, ineffectual. Eaton's fingers tightened on the handle of his pistol, but he held it now not as a weapon

to fire but as a dull weight with which to strike. The grip of his left hand clamped onto the short steel bar, and with lips parted—breathing once, it seemed, for each heartbeat and yet choking, suffocating—he leaped forward.

At the same instant—so that he could not have been alarmed by Eaton's leap—the man who had been working moved his torch, and the light fell upon Eaton.

"Look out!" the man cried in alarm to his companion; with the word the torch vanished.

The man toward whom Eaton rushed did not have time to switch off his light; he dropped it instead; and as Eaton sprang for him, he crouched, not; but below his knees. Eaton felt a man's powerful arms tackling him; as he struggled to free himself, a swift, savage lunge lifted him from his feet; he was thrown and hurled backward.

Eaton ducked his head forward and struggled to turn, as he went down, so that a shoulder and not his head or back would strike the floor first. He succeeded in this, though in his effort he dropped the jimmy. He clung with his right hand to the pistol, and as he struck the floor, the pistol slipped off; the flash of flame spurting toward the ceiling. Instantly the grip below his knees was loosed; the man who had tackled him and hurled him back had recoiled in the darkness. Eaton got to his feet but crouched and crept about behind a table, aiming his pistol over it in the direction in which he supposed the other men must be. The sound of the shot had ceased to roar through the room; the gases from the powder only made the air heavier. The other two men in the room also waited, invisible and silent. The only light, in the great curtained room, came from the single electric torch lying on the floor. This lighted the legs of a chair, a corner of a desk and a circle of books in the cases on the wall. As Eaton's eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, he could see vague shapes of furniture. If a man moved, he might be made out; but if he stayed still, probably he would remain indistinguishable.

The other men seemed also to have recognized this; no one moved in the room, and there was complete silence. Eaton knelt on one knee behind his table; now he was wildly, exultantly excited; his blood leaped hotly to his hand pointing his pistol; he panted, almost audibly, for breath, but though his pulse throbbed through his head too, his mind was clear and cool as he reckoned his situation and his chances. He had crossed the Pacific, the continent, he had schemed and risked everything with the mere hope of getting into this room to discover evidence with which to demand from the world righting of the wrong which had driven him as a fugitive for five years; and here he found the man who was the cause of it all, before him in the same room a few paces away in the dark!

For it was impossible that this was not that man; and Eaton knew now that this was he who must have been behind and arranging and directing the attacks upon him. Eaton had not only seen him and heard his voice, but he had felt his grasp; that sudden, instinctive crouch before a charge, and the savage lunge and tackle were the instant, natural acts of an old linesman on a championship team in the game of football as it was played twenty years before. That lift of the opponent off his feet and the heavy lunge hurling him back to fall on his head was more what one man—in the rougher, more cruel days of the college game—had been famous for. On the football field that throw sufficed to knock a helmeted opponent unconscious; here it was meant, beyond doubt, to do more.

Upon so much, at least, Eaton's mind at once was clear; here was his enemy whom he must destroy if he himself were not first destroyed. Other thoughts, recasting of other relations altered or overturned in their bearing by the discovery of this man here—everything else could and must wait upon the mighty demand of that moment upon Eaton to destroy this enemy now or be himself destroyed.

Eaton shook in his passion; yet coolly he now realized that his left shoulder, which had taken the shock of his fall, was numb. He shifted his pistol over to cover a vague form which had seemed to move; but, if it had stirred, it was still again now. Eaton strained to listen.

It seemed certain that the noise of the shot, if not the sound of the struggle which preceded it, must have raised an alarm. Basil Santoino, as Eaton knew, slept above; a nurse must be waiting on duty somewhere near. Eaton had seen the row of buttons which the blind man had within arm's length with which he must be able to summon every servant in the house. So it could not last much longer now—this deadlock in the dark. And one of the two, at least, seemed to have recognized that.

Eaton had moved, warily and carefully, but he had moved; a revolver flashed before him. Instantly and without consciousness that his finger pulled the trigger, Eaton's pistol flashed back. In front of him, the flame flashed again, and another spurt of fire spat at one side.

Eaton fired back at this—he was prostrate on the floor now, and whether he had been hit or not he did not yet know, or whether the blood flowing down his face was only from a splinter sprayed from the table behind which he had hid. He fired again, holding his pistol far out to one side to confuse the aim of the other; he thought that they too were doing the same and allowed for it in his aim. He pulled his trigger a ninth time—

he had not counted his shots, but he knew he had had seven cartridges in the magazine and one in the barrel—and the pistol clicked without discharging. He rolled over farther away from the spot where he had last fired and pulled an extra clip of cartridges from his pocket.

The blood was flowing hot over his face. He made no effort to staunch it or even to feel with his fingers to find exactly where or how badly he had been hit. He jerked the empty cartridge clip from his pistol butt and snapped in the other. He swept his sleeve over his face to clear the blood from his brows and eyes and stared through the dark with pistol at arm's length loaded and ready. Blood spurting over his face again; another sweep of his sleeve cleared it; and he moved his pistol-point back and forth in the dark.

Surely now the sound of firing in that room must have reached the man in the room above; surely he must be summoning his servants.

Eaton listened; there was still no sound from the rest of the house. But overhead now, he heard an almost imperceptible pattering—the sound of a barefooted man crossing the floor; and he knew that the blind man in the bedroom above was getting up.



Eaton's Pistol Flashed Back.

CHAPTER XVII

Under Cover of Darkness.

Basil Santoino was oversensitive to sound, as are most of the blind; in the world of darkness in which he lived, sounds were by far the most significant—and almost the only—means he had of telling what went on around him; he passed his life listening for or determining the nature of sounds. So the struggle which ended in Eaton's crash to the floor would have waked him without the pistol-shots immediately following. That roused him wide-awake immediately and brought him sitting up in bed, forgetful of his own condition.

His hand went at once to the bell-board, and he rang at the same time for the steward outside his door and for the steward.

Santoino did not consider the possibility of robbery of plate or jewelry long enough to have been said to consider it at all; what he felt was that the threat which had been hanging vaguely over himself ever since Warden's murder was being fulfilled. But it was not Santoino himself that was being attacked; it was something Santoino possessed. There was only one sort of valuable article for which one might enter that room below. And those articles—

Santoino pressed all the bells again and then got up. He had heard absolutely no sound outside, as must be made by anyone escaping from the room below; but the battle seemed over. One side must have destroyed the other.

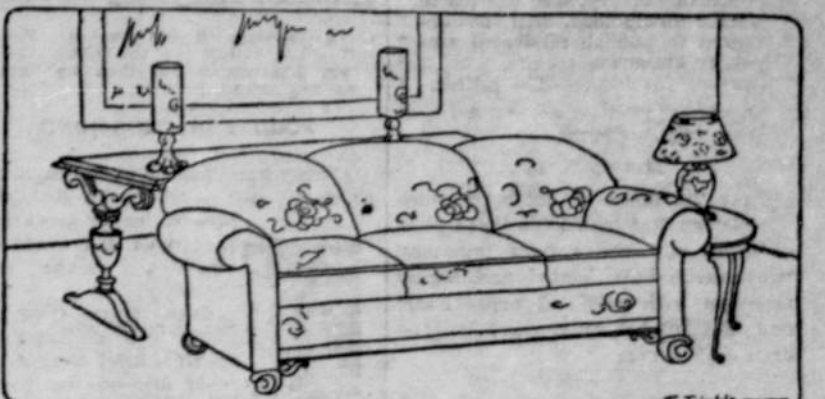
The blind man stood barefooted on the floor, his hands clasping in one of the bitterest moments of his rebellion against, and defiance of, his helplessness of blindness. Below him—as he believed—his servants had been sacrificing life for him; there in that room he held in trust that which affected the security, the faith, the honor of others; his guarding that trust involved his honor no less. And particularly, now, he knew he was bound, at whatever cost, to act; for he did not doubt now but that his half-prisoned guest, whom Santoino had not sufficiently guarded, was at the bottom of the attack. The blind man believed, therefore, that it was because of his own retention here of Eaton that the attack had been made, his servants had been killed, the private secrets of his associates were in danger. Undoubtedly there was danger below; but that was why he did not call again at the other door for some one else to run a risk for him.

He put his hand on the rail and started to descend the stairs. He was almost steady in step and he had firm grasp on the rail; he noticed that now to wonder at it. When he had aroused at the sound of firing, his blindness, as always when something was happening about him, was obtunded upon him. He felt helpless because he was blind, not because he had been injured. He had forgotten entirely that for almost two weeks he had not stirred from bed; he had risen and stood and walked, without staggering, to the door and to the top of the stairs before, now, he remembered. So what he had already done showed him that he had merely again to put his injury from his mind and he could go on. He went down the stairs almost steadily.

The first known log house, built by white men within the bounds of what is now Colorado, was erected in 1816 for a troop of Spanish cavalry patrolling the Arkansas, near the site of Pueblo.

In a volcanic crater in the Sangro de Cristo Mountains in San Isabel National Forest is an apparently bottomless pit, with black marble sides, in which depth soundings of 1,500 feet have failed to touch bottom.

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STAPLES---The Jeweler

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"It's All Right, Willis," She Said Quietly.