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THE BLACK BOX

(Continued from Page 2.)

"I will take you to her," the professor replied.

Mrs. Rheinholdt's story, by frequent repetition, had become a little more coherent, a trifle more circumstantial, the perfection of simplicity and utterly incomprehensible. Quest listened to it without remark and finally made his way to the conservatory. He requested Mrs. Rheinholdt to walk with him through the door by which she had entered and stop at the precise spot where the assault had been made upon her. There were one or two plants knocked down from the tiers on the right-hand side, and some disturbance in the mold where some large palms were growing. Quest and Lenora together made a close investigation of the spot. Afterwards, Quest walked several times to each of the doors leading into the gardens.

"There are four entrances altogether," he remarked, as he lit a cigar and glanced around the place. "Two lead into the gardens—one is locked and the other isn't—one connects with the back of the house—the one through which you came, Mrs. Rheinholdt, and the other leads into your reception room, into which you passed after the assault. I shall now be glad if you will permit me to examine the gardens outside for a few minutes, alone with my assistant, if you please."

For almost a quarter of an hour Quest and Lenora disappeared. They

all looked eagerly at the criminologist on his return.

"It seems to me," he remarked, "that from the back part of the house the quickest way to reach Mayton avenue would be through this conservatory and out of that door. This is a path leading from just outside straight to a gate in the wall. Does anyone that you know of use this means of exit?"

Mrs. Rheinholdt shook her head.

"The servants might occasionally," she remarked doubtfully, "but not on nights when I am receiving."

The butler stepped forward. He was looking a little grave.

"I ought, perhaps, to inform you, madam, and Mr. Quest," he said, "that I did, only a short time ago, suggest to the professor's servant—the man who brought your mackintosh, sir," he added, turning to the professor—"that he could, if he chose, make use of this means of leaving the house. Mr. Craig is a personal friend of mine, and a member of a very select little club we have for social purposes."

"Did he follow your suggestion?" Sanford Quest asked.

"Of that I am not aware, sir," the butler replied. "I left Mr. Craig with some refreshment, expecting that he would remain until my return, but a few minutes later I discovered that he had left. I will inquire in the kitchen if anything is known as to his movements."

He hurried off. Quest turned to the professor.

"Has he been with you long, this man Craig, professor?" he asked.

The professor's smile was illuminating, his manner simple but convincing.

"Craig," he asserted, "is the best servant, the most honest mortal who ever breathed. He would go any distance out of his way to avoid harming a fly. I cannot even trust him to procure for me the simplest specimens of insect life. Apart from this, he is a man of some property, which he has no idea what to do with. He is, I think I may say, too devoted to me to dream of ever leaving my service."

"You think it would be out of the question, then," Quest asked, "to associate him with the crime?"

The professor's confidence was sublime.

"I could more readily associate you, myself or young Mr. Rheinholdt here with the affair," he declared.

His words carried weight. The little breath of suspicion against the professor's servant faded away. In a moment or two the butler returned.

"It appears, madam," he announced, "that Mr. Craig left when there was only one person in the kitchen. He said good-night and closed the door behind him. It is impossible to say, therefore, by which exit he left the house, but personally I am convinced that, knowing of the reception here tonight, he would not think of using the conservatory."

"Most unlikely, I should say," the professor murmured. "Craig is a very shy man. He is at all times at your disposal. Mr. Quest, if you should desire to question him."

Quest nodded absently.

"My assistant and I," he announced, "would be glad to make a further examination of the conservatory, if you will kindly leave us alone."

They obeyed without demur. Quest took a seat and smoked calmly, with his eyes fixed upon the roof. Lenora went back to her examination of the overturned plants, the mold and the whole ground within the immediate environs of the assault. She abandoned the search at last, however, and came back to Quest's side. He threw away his cigar and rose.

"Nothing there?" he asked laconically.

"Not a thing," Lenora admitted.

Quest led the way toward the door.

"Lenora," he decided, "we're up against something big. There's a new hand at work somewhere."

"No theories yet, Mr. Quest?" she asked, smiling.

"Not the ghost of one," he admitted gloomily.

Along the rain-swept causeway of Mayton avenue, keeping close to the shelter of the house, his mackintosh turned up to his ears, his hands buried

in his pockets, a man walked swiftly along. At every block he hesitated and looked around him. His manner was cautious, almost furtive. Once the glare of an electric light fell upon his face, a face pallid with fear, almost hopeless with despair. He walked quickly, yet he seemed to have no idea as to direction. Suddenly he passed. He was passing a great building, brilliantly lit. For a moment he thought that it was some place of entertainment. The thought of entering seemed to occur to him. Then he felt a firm touch upon his arm, a man in uniform spoke to him.

"Step inside, brother," he invited earnestly, almost eagerly, notwithstanding his monotonous nasal twang.

"Step inside and find peace. Step inside and the Lord will help you. Throw your burden away on the threshold."

The man's first impulse at being addressed had seemed to be one of terror. Then he recognized the uniform and hesitated. The man took him by the arm and led him in. There were the best part of a hundred people taking their places after the singing of the hymn. A girl was standing up before them on a platform. She was commencing to speak, but suddenly broke off. She held out her arms to where the professor's confidential servant stood hesitating.

"Come and tell us your sins," she called out. "Come and have them forgiven. Come and start a new life in a new world. There is no one here who thinks of the past. Come and seek forgiveness."

For a moment the wail from the rain-swept world hesitated. The light of an infinite desire flashed in his eyes. Then he dropped his head. These things might be for others. For him there was no hope. He shook his head to the girl, but sank into the nearest seat and on to his knees.

"He repents!" the girl called out. "Some day he will come! Brothers and sisters, we will pray for him."

The rain dashed against the windows. The only other sound from outside was the clanging of the street cars. The girl's voice, frenzied, exhorting, almost hysterical, pealed out to the roof. At every pause the little gathering of men and women groaned in sympathy. The man's frame was shaken with sobs.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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