

THE BLAZING BEE

PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

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SECOND INSTALLMENT

SYNOPSIS.

In her apartment at the Leland Ella, daughter of Lord Ashleigh, is murdered and the Ashleigh diamond necklace stolen. The New York police place the case in the hands of Sanford Quest, known and feared as the master criminologist of the world. He takes Lenora, Ella's maid, to his own apartment and through hypnosis and the use of electro-telepathy appliances discovers her connection with the crime, recovers the diamonds and arrests the murderer, Macdougall, Lenora's husband, though nearly trapped to his death in a tough tenement house while engaged in the work.

"THE HIDDEN HANDS"

CHAPTER VI.

Sanford Quest and Lenora stood side by side upon the steps of the courthouse, waiting for the automobile, which had become momentarily entangled in a string of vehicles. A little crowd of people were elbowing their way out on to the sidewalk. The faces of most of them were still shadowed by the three hours of tense drama from which they had just emerged. Quest, who had lit a cigar, watched them curiously.

"No need to go into the court," he remarked. "I could have told you, from the look of these people, that Macdougall had escaped the death sentence. They have paid their money—or rather their time, and they have been cheated of the one supreme thrill."

"Imprisonment for life seems terrible enough," Lenora whispered, shuddering.

"Can't see the sense of keeping such a man alive myself," he declared, with purposeful brutality. "It is a cruel murder, fiendishly committed."

They were on the point of crossing the pavement toward the automobile when Quest felt a touch upon his shoulder. He turned and found Lord Ashleigh standing by his side. Quest glanced towards Lenora.

"Run and get in the car," he whispered. "I will be there in a moment."

"I would not have stopped you just now, Mr. Quest," said Lord Ashleigh, "but my brother is very anxious to renew his acquaintance with you. I think you met years ago."

Sanford Quest held out his hand to the man who had been standing a little in the background. Lord Ashleigh turned towards him.

"This is Mr. Quest, Edgar. You may remember my brother—Professor Ashleigh—as a man of science. Quest? He has just returned from South America."

The two shook hands, curiously diverse in type, in expression, in all the appurtenances of manhood.

"I am very proud to make your acquaintance again, professor," Quest said. "Glad to know, too, that you hadn't forgotten me."

"My dear sir," the professor declared, as he released the other's hand with seeming reluctance, "I have thought about you many times. Your doings have always been of interest to me."

"I am sorry," Quest remarked, "that our first meeting here should be under such distressing circumstances."

The professor nodded gravely. "If you'll excuse me, professor," said Quest, "I think I must be getting along. We shall meet again, I trust."

"One moment," the professor begged, eagerly. "Tell me, Mr. Quest—I want your honest opinion. What do you think of my ape?"

"Of your what?" Quest inquired dubiously. "Of my anthropoid ape which I have just sent to the museum. You know my claim? But perhaps you would prefer to postpone your final decision until after you have examined the skeleton itself."

A light broke in upon the criminologist. "Of course!" he exclaimed. "For the moment, professor, I couldn't follow you. You are talking about the skeleton of the ape which you brought home from South America, and which you have presented to the museum here?"

"Naturally," the professor assented, with mild surprise. "To what else? I am stating my case, Mr. Quest, in the North American Review next month. I may tell you, however, as a fellow scientist, the great and absolute truth. My claim is incontestable. My skeleton will prove to the world, without a doubt, the absolute truth of Darwin's great theory."

"That so?"

"You must go and see it," the professor insisted. "You shall be permitted a special examination."

"Very kind of you," Quest murmured. "We shall meet again soon, I hope," the professor concluded cordially. "Good-morning, Mr. Quest!"

The two men shook hands, and Quest took his seat by Lenora's side in the automobile. The professor rejoined his brother.

They entered the taxicab and were driven almost in silence to the professor's home—a large, rambling old house, situated in somewhat extensive but ill-kept grounds on the outskirts of New York. The Englishman glanced around him, as they passed up the drive, with an expression of disapproval.

"A more untidy looking place than yours, Edgar, I never saw," he declared. "Your grounds have become a jungle. Don't you keep any gardeners?"

"I keep other things," he said serenely. "There is something in my garden which would terrify your nice Scotch gardeners into fits if they found their way here to do a little tidying up. Come into the library and I'll give you one of my choice cigars. Here's Craig waiting to let us in. Any news, Craig?"

"Nothing has happened, sir," he replied. "The telephone is ringing in the study now, though."

"I will answer it myself," the professor declared, bustling off.

The professor took up the receiver from the telephone. His "Hello!" was mild and inquiring. He had no doubt that the call was from some admiring disciple. The change in his face as he listened, however, was amazing.

"George!" he gasped, "the greatest tragedy in the world has happened! My ape is stolen!"

His brother looked at him blankly.

"Your ape is stolen?" he repeated.

"The skeleton of my anthropoid ape," the professor continued, his voice growing alike in sadness and firmness. "It is the curator of the museum who is speaking. They have just opened the box. It has lain for two days in an anteroom. It is empty!"

Lord Ashleigh muttered something a little vague. The theft of a skeleton scarcely appeared to his

unscientific mind to be a realizable thing. The professor turned back to the telephone.

"Mr. Francis," he said, "I cannot talk to you. I can say nothing. I shall come to you at once. I am on the point of starting. Your news has overwhelmed me."

He laid down the receiver. He looked around him like a man in a nightmare.

"The taxicab is waiting, sir," Craig reminded him.

"That is most fortunate," the professor pronounced. "I remember now that I had no change with which to pay him. I must go back. Look after my brother. And, Craig, telephone at once to Mr. Sanford Quest. Ask him to meet me at the museum in twenty minutes. Tell him that nothing must stand in the way. Do you hear?"

The taxicab man drove off, glad enough to have a return fare. In about half an hour's time the professor strode up the steps of the museum and hurried into the office. There was a little crowd of officials there, whom the curator at once dismissed. He rose slowly to his feet. His manner was grave and bewildered.

"Professor," he said, "we will waste no time in words. Look here!"

He threw open the door of an anteroom behind his office. The apartment was unfurnished except for one or two chairs. In the middle of the uncarpeted floor was a long wooden box from which the lid had just been pried.

"Yesterday, as you know from my note," the curator proceeded, "I was away. I gave orders

stretched down the steps to the curbstone. A long row of automobiles stood waiting. Through the wide-open doors was visible a pleasant impression of flowers and light and luxury. In the nearer of the two large reception rooms Mrs. Reinholdt herself, a woman dark, handsome and in the prime of life, was standing receiving her guests. By her side was her son, whose twenty-first birthday was being celebrated.

"I wonder whether that professor of yours will come?" she remarked, as the stream of incoming guests slackened for a moment.

"He hates receptions," the boy replied, "but he promised he'd come. I never thought, when he used to drill science into us at the lectures, that he was going to be such a tremendous big pot."

Mrs. Reinholdt's plump fingers toyed for a moment complacently with the diamonds which hung from her neck.

"You can never tell, in a world like this," she murmured.

"Here he is, mother!" the young man exclaimed suddenly. "Good old boy! I thought he'd keep his word."

Mrs. Reinholdt assumed her most encouraging and condescending smile as she held out both hands of the professor.

"It is perfectly sweet of you, professor," Mrs. Reinholdt declared.

Mrs. Reinholdt breathed a sigh of relief as she greeted her new arrivals.

The professor made himself universally agreeable in a mild way, and his presence created even

The professor nodded. His general attitude toward the forthcoming exhibition was merely one of politeness. As the first case opened, however, his manner completely changed. Without taking the slightest further notice of his hostess, he adjusted a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles and commenced to mumble eagerly to himself. Mrs. Reinholdt, who did not understand a word, strolled around the apartment, yawned and finally interrupted a little stream of eulogies, not a word of which she understood, concerning a green beetle with yellow spots.

"I am so glad you are interested, professor," she said. "If you don't mind, I will rejoin my guests. You will find a shorter way back if you keep along the passage straight ahead and come through the conservatory."

"Certainly! With pleasure!" the professor agreed, without glancing up.

Mrs. Reinholdt's reception, notwithstanding the temporary absence of its presiding spirit, was without doubt an unqualified success. In one of the distant rooms the younger people were dancing. Philip Reinholdt, with a pretty young debutante upon his arm, came out from the dancing room and looked around amongst the little knots of people.

"Wonder where mother is?" he remarked. "She told me—"

The young man broke off in the middle of his sentence. He, too, like many others in the room, felt a sudden thrill almost of horror at the sound which rang without warning upon their ears—a woman's cry, a cry of fear and horror. Mrs. Reinholdt, her hands clasping her neck, her splendid composure a thing of the past, a panic-stricken, terrified woman, stumbled into the room. She seemed on the point of collapse. Somehow or other they got her into an easy chair.

"My jewels!" she cried. "My diamonds!"

"What do you mean, mother?" Philip Reinholdt asked quickly. "Have you lost them?"

"Stolen!" Mrs. Reinholdt shrieked. "Stolen there in the conservatory!"

They gazed at her open-mouthed, incredulous.



1—"Stolen!" Mrs. Rheinholdt Shrieked. "Stolen There in the Conservatory." 2—Measuring the Foot-Print. 3—"Come and Tell Us Your Sins."

that your case should be placed here that I myself should enjoy the distinction of opening it. An hour ago I commenced the task. That is what I found."

That professor gazed blankly at the empty box. "Nothing left except the smell," a voice from the open doorway remarked.

They glanced around. Quest was standing there, and behind him Lenora. The professor welcomed them eagerly.

"This is Mr. Quest, the great criminologist," he explained to the curator.

Quest strolled thoughtfully around the room, glancing out of each of the windows in turn. He kept close to the wall, and when he had finished he drew out a magnifying glass from his pocket and made a brief examination of the box. Then he asked a few questions of the curator, pointed out one of the windows to Lenora and whispered a few directions to her. She at once produced what seemed to be a foot rule from the bag which she was carrying, and hurried into the garden.

"A little invention of my own for measuring foot-prints," Quest explained. "Not much use here, I am afraid."

Quest stood over the box for a moment or two and looked once more out of the window. Presently Lenora returned. She carried in her hand a small object, which she brought silently to Quest. He glanced at it in perplexity. The professor peered over his shoulder.

"It is the little finger!" he cried—"the little finger of my ape!"

Quest held it away from him critically.

"From which hand?" he asked.

"The right hand."

Quest examined the fastenings of the window before which he had paused during his previous examination. He turned away with a shrug of the shoulders.

"See you later, Mr. Ashleigh," he concluded laconically.

A newsboy thrust a paper at them. Quest glanced at the headlines. Lenora clutched at his arm. Together they read it in great black type:

ESCAPE OF CONVICTED PRISONER!

Macdougall, on His Way to Prison, Grapples With Sheriff and Jumps From Train! Still at Large, Though Searched for by Posse of Police.

CHAPTER VII.

The windows of Mrs. Rheinholdt's town house were ablaze with light. A crimson druggist

more than the sensation which Mrs. Rheinholdt had hoped for. In her desire to show him ample honor she seldom left his side.

"I am going to take you into my husband's study," she suggested, later on in the evening. "He has some specimens of beetles."

"Beetles," the professor declared, with some excitement, "occupied precisely two months of my time while abroad. By all means, Mrs. Rheinholdt!"

"We shall have to go quite to the back of the house," she explained, as she led him along the darkened passage.

The professor smiled acquiescently. His eyes rested for a moment upon her necklace.

"You must really permit me, Mrs. Rheinholdt," he exclaimed, "to admire your wonderful stones! I am a judge of diamonds, and those three or four in the center are, I should judge, unique."

She held them out to him. The professor laid the end of the necklace gently in the palm of his hand and examined them through a horn-rimmed eyeglass.

"They are wonderful," he murmured, "wonderful! Why?"

He turned away a little abruptly. They had reached the back of the house and a door from outside had just been opened. A man had crossed the threshold with a coat over his arm and was standing now looking at them.

"How extraordinary!" the professor remarked. "Is that you, Craig?"

"Yes, sir!" he replied. "There is a rain storm, so I ventured to bring your mackintosh."

"Very thoughtful," the professor murmured approvingly. "I have a weakness," he went on, turning to his hostess, "for always walking home after an evening like this. In the daytime I am content to ride. At night I have the fancy always to walk."

"We don't walk half enough," Mrs. Rheinholdt sighed, glancing down at her somewhat portly figure. "Dixon," she added, turning to the footman who had admitted Craig, "take Professor Ashleigh's servant into the kitchen and see that he has something before he leaves for home. Now, professor, if you will come this way."

They reached a little room in the far corner of the house. Mrs. Rheinholdt apologized as she switched on the electric lights.

"It is a queer little place to bring you to," she said, "but my husband used to spend many hours here, and he would never allow anything to be moved. You see, the specimens are in these cases."

Then a still, quiet voice from the outside of the little circle intervened.

"Instruct your servants, Mr. Rheinholdt, to lock and bar all the doors of the house," the professor suggested. "No one must leave it until we have heard your mother's story."

"I had just taken the professor into the little room my husband used to call the museum," Mrs. Rheinholdt explained, her voice still shaking with agitation. "I left him there to examine some specimens of beetles. I thought that I would come back through the conservatory, which is the quickest way. I was about half way across it when suddenly I heard the switch go behind me and all the electric lights were turned out. I couldn't imagine what had happened. While I hesitated I saw—"

She broke down again. There was no doubt about the genuineness of her terror.

"I saw a pair of hands—just hands—no arms—nothing but hands—come out of the darkness! They gripped me by the throat, I suppose it was just for a second. I think—I lost consciousness for a moment, although I was still standing up. The next thing I remember is that I found myself shrieking and running here—and the jewels are gone!"

"You saw no one?" her son asked incredulously.

"I heard no footsteps, I saw no one," Mrs. Rheinholdt repeated. The professor turned away.

"If you will allow me," he begged, "I am going to telephone to my friend, Mr. Sanford Quest, the criminologist. An affair so unusual as this might attract him. You will excuse me."

The professor met the great criminologist and his assistant in the hall upon their arrival. He took the former at once by the arm.

"Mr. Quest," he began, "in a sense I must apologize for my peremptory message. I am well aware that an ordinary jewel robbery does not interest you, but in this case the circumstances are extraordinary. I ventured, therefore, to summon your aid."

Sanford Quest nodded shortly. "As a rule," he said, "I do not care to take up one affair until I have a clean slate. There's your skeleton still bothering me, professor. However, where's the lady who was robbed?"

"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 en-

tered 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."

"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."

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 are up against something big. There's a new hand at work somewhere."

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. Suddenly he paused. 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 about 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 toward 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 this wail from the rain-swamped 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.)