

The BLACK BOX

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Author of "Mr. Grog of Monte Carlo," "The Vanished Messenger," "The Lighted Way," etc.

Novelized from the motion picture drama of the same name produced by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company. Illustrated with photographs from the motion picture production.

(Copyright, 1914, by Otis F. Wood)

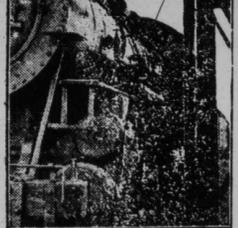
(Continued)

Quest glanced at number ten's collar had given way, his tie was torn, a button and some of the cloth had been wrenched from his coat, his trousers were torn and he was covered with dust.

"I'll tell you about my trouble a little later on," he replied. "Say, can't we keep those girls out?"

"They were too late. Laura and Lenora were already upon the threshold. Quest swung round toward them.

"Girls," he said, "there has been some trouble here. Go and wait upstairs, Lenora, or sit in the hall."



He Set His Teeth and Jumped.

Laura, who had better telephone to the police station and for a doctor. That's right, isn't it, inspector?"

"Yes," the latter assented thoughtfully.

Lenora, white to the lips, staggered a few feet back into the hall. Laura set her teeth and lingered.

"Is that Ross?" she asked.

"It's his body," Quest replied. "He's been murdered here, he and the Salvation Army girl who was to come this morning for her check."

Laura turned away half dazed.

"I'd have trusted Ross with my life," Quest continued, "but he must have been alone in his house when the girl came. Do you suppose it was the usual sort of trouble?"

Inspector French stooped down and picked up the paper-weight. Across it was stamped the name of Sanford Quest.

"This is your quest?"

"Of course it is," Quest answered. "Everything in the room is mine."

"The girl would fight to defend herself," the inspector remarked slowly, "but she could never strike a man such a blow as your valet died from."

French stooped and picked up a small clock. It had stopped at eleven-fifteen. He looked at it thoughtfully.

"Quest," he went on, "I'll have to ask you a question."

"Why not?" Quest replied looking quickly up.

"Where were you at eleven-fifteen?"

"On tower No. 10 of the New York Central, scraping for my life," Quest answered grimly. "I've reason to remember it."

Something in the inspector's steady gaze seemed to inspire the criminologist with a new idea. He came a step forward, a little frown upon his forehead.

"Say, French," he exclaimed, "you don't—don't suspect me of this?"

French was unmoved. He looked Quest in the eyes.

"This morning I decided to make an attempt to clear up the mystery of Macdougall's disappearance. I sent on my secretary, Miss Laura, to make friends with the section boss, and Lenora and I went out by automobile a little later. We instituted a search on a new principle, and before very long we found Macdougall's body. That's one up against you, I think, inspector."

"Very likely," the inspector observed. "Go on, please."

"I left the two young ladies, at Miss Lenora's wish, to superintend the removal of the body. I myself had an engagement to deliver over her jewelry to Mrs. Rheinhold here at midday. I returned to where my automobile was waiting, started for the city and was attacked by two thugs near the section house. I got away from them, ran to the tower house to try and stop the freight, was followed by the thugs, and jumped out on to the last car from the signal arm."

"Where is your automobile?"

"No idea," Quest replied. "I left it in the road. When I jumped from the freight car I took a taxicab to the professor's and called for him, as arranged."

The inspector nodded.

"I shall have to ask you to excuse me for a moment," he said, "while I ring up number ten signal tower. If Mr. Quest's story receives corroboration the matter is at an end."

The inspector left the room almost immediately.

When he returned he was looking graver than ever.

"Quest," he announced, "your alibi is useless—in fact, a little worse than useless. The operator at number ten has been found murdered at the back of the tower!"

Quest started.

"I ought not to have left him to those thugs," he murmured regretfully.

"There is no automobile of yours in the vicinity," the inspector continued, "nor any news of it. I think it will be as well now, Quest, for this matter to take its obvious course. Will you, first of all, hand over her jewelry to Mrs. Rheinhold?"

Quest drew the keys of the safe from his pocket, crossed the room and swung open the safe door. For a moment afterwards he stood transfixed. His arm, half outstretched, remained motionless. Then he turned slowly around.

"The jewels have been stolen," he announced with unnatural calm.

The inspector laid his hand heavily upon Quest's shoulder.

"You will kindly consider yourself under arrest, Quest. Ladies and gentlemen, will you clear the room now, if you please. The ambulance I telephoned for is outside."

The professor, who had been looking as though dazed, suddenly intervened.

"Mr. French," he said earnestly, "I am convinced that you are making a great mistake. In arresting and taking away Mr. Quest you are removing from us the one man who is likely to be able to clear up this mystery."

The inspector pushed him gently to one side.

"You will excuse me, professor," he said, "but this is no matter for argument. If Mr. Quest can clear himself, no one will be more glad than I."

Quest shrugged his shoulders.

The inspector will have his little joke," he observed dryly. "It's all right, girls. Keep cool," he went on, as he saw the tears in Lenora's eyes. "Come and see me in the Tombs, one of you."

The ambulance men came and departed with their grim burden, the room on the ground floor was locked and sealed, and the house was soon empty except for the two girls. Toiling away Mr. Quest cleared himself, and returned with a newspaper. She opened it up upon the table and they both pored over it.

"Justice Thorpe has refused to consider ball!" He's a guy, that Justice Thorpe, and so's the idiot who wrote this stuff!" Laura exclaimed, thrusting the paper away from her. "I guess the professor was dead right when he told French he was looking up the one man who could clear up the whole show."

The professor spoke up like a man, she agreed, "but Laura, I want to ask you something. Did you notice his servant—that man Craig?"

"Can't say I did particularly," Laura admitted.

"Well," Lenora continued, "I thought he was going to faint. I tell you he was scared the whole of the time."

"What are you getting at, kid?" Laura demanded.

Little bag she was carrying and gripped something hard. She clenched her teeth for a moment. Then the automatic pistol flashed out through the gloom.

"Craig," she threatened. "If you move I shall shoot you."

It seemed as though the man were a coward. He began to tremble, his lips twitched, his eyes grew larger and rounder.

"What is it?" he faltered. "What do you want?"

"Just this," Lenora said firmly. "I suspect you to be guilty of the crime for which Sanford Quest is in prison. I am going to have you questioned. If you are innocent you have nothing to fear. If you are guilty there will be someone here before long who will extract the truth from you."

The man's face was an epitome of terror. Even his knees shook. Lenora felt herself grow calmer with every moment.

"I am going outside to send a message," she told him. "I shall return presently."

"Don't go," he begged suddenly. "Don't leave me! I am innocent. I have done nothing wrong. If you keep me here, you will do more harm than you can dream of."

"It is for other people to decide about your innocence," Lenora said calmly. "I have nothing to do with that. If you are wise you will stop here quietly."

"Have you said anything to Mr. Ashleigh, miss?" the man asked pitiously.

"Not a word."

An expression of relief shone for a moment upon his face. Lenora pointed to a stool.

"Sit down there and wait quietly," she ordered.

He obeyed without a word. She left the place, locked the door securely, and made her way round to the other side of the garage—the side hidden from the house. Here, at the foot of the stairs, she drew a little wireless from her bag and set it at the window sill. Very slowly she sent her message:

I have Craig here in the professor's garage, locked up. If our plan has succeeded, come at once. I am waiting for you.

There was no reply. She sent the message again and again. Suddenly, during a pause, there was a little flash upon the plate. A message was coming to her. She transcribed it with beating heart:

O. K. Coming.

The guard swung open the wicket in front of Quest's cell.

"Young woman to see you, Quest," he announced. "Ten minutes, and no loud talking, please."

Quest moved to the bars. It was Laura who stood there. She wasted very little time in preliminaries. Having satisfied herself that the guard was out of hearing, she leaned close as she could to Quest.

"Look here," she said, "Lenora's crazy with the idea that Craig has done these jobs—Craig, the professor's servant, you know. We used the phototelesma yesterday afternoon and saw him burn something in the professor's study. Lenora went up straight away and got hold of the ashes."

"Smart girl," Quest murmured, nodding approvingly. "Well?"

"There are distinct fragments," Laura continued, "of embroidered stuff such as the Salvation Army girl might have worn."

"Isn't that evidence?" she demanded. "Let's ring up Inspector French!"

"No, no, no," she advised. "French is a good sort in his way, but he's prejudiced just now against the boss. I'm not sure that this evidence would go far by itself."

"It's evidence enough for us to go to Craig, though! What we have got to do is to get a confession out of him, somehow!"

Laura studied her companion, for a moment, curiously.

"Taking some interest in Mr. Quest, kid, ain't you?"

Lenora looked up. Then her head suddenly sank into her hands. She knew quite well that her secret had escaped her. Laura patted her shoulder.

"That's all right, child," she said soothingly. "We'll see him through this, somehow or other."

"Laura," exclaimed Lenora, "we will save Mr. Quest and we will get hold of Craig! I have a plan. Listen!"

"That's all right," Quest replied, "but how am I to get hold of him?"

Laura glanced once more carelessly around to where the guard stood.

"Lenora's gone up to the professor's again this afternoon. She is going to try and get hold of Craig and lock him in the garage. If she succeeds, she will send a message by wireless at three o'clock. It is half-past two now."

"Well!" Quest exclaimed. "Well?"

"You can't work this guard, if you want to," Lenora went on. "I have seen you tackle worse cases. He seems dead easy. Then let me in the cell, take my clothes and leave me here."

Quest followed the scheme in his mind quickly.

"It's all right," he decided, "but I am not at all sure that they can really hold me on the evidence they have got. If they can't, I shall be doing myself more harm than good in this way."

"It's no use unless you can get hold of Craig quickly," Laura said. "He is getting the scales, as it is."

"I'll do it," Quest decided. "Call the guard, Laura."

"Then perhaps you will tell me."

"She obeyed. The man came cautiously toward them.

Quest looked at him steadfastly through the bars.

"I want you to come inside for a moment," Quest repeated softly. "Unlock the door, please, take the key off your bunch and come inside."

The man hesitated, but all the time his fingers were fumbling with the keys. Quest's lips continued to move.

The warden opened the door and entered. A few minutes later Quest passed the key through the window to Laura, who was standing on guard.

Without a word, and with marvelous rapidity, the change was effected. Laura produced from her handbag a wig, which she pinned inside her hat and passed over to Quest. Then she flung herself on to the bed and drew the blanket up to her chin.

"How long will he stay like that?" she whispered, pointing to the warden, who was sitting on the floor with his arms folded and his eyes closed.

"Half an hour or so," Quest answered. "Don't bother about him. I shall drop the key back through the window."

Quest reached Georgia square at five minutes to three. A glance up and down assured him that the house was unwatched. He left himself in with his own key, threw Laura's clothes off, and after a few moments' hesitation, selected from the wardrobe a rough tweed suit with a thick lining and lapels. Just as he was tying his tie, the little wireless which he had laid on the table at his side began to record a message. He glanced at the clock. It was exactly three.

Quest's eyes shone for a moment with satisfaction. Then he sent off his answering message, put on a dust-ster and slouch hat, and left the house by the side entrance. In a few moments he was in Broadway, and a quarter of an hour later a taxicab deposited him at the entrance to the professor's house. He walked swiftly up the drive and turned toward the garage, hoping every moment to see something of Lenora.

Quest, for the third or fourth time moved cautiously toward the window. His expression suddenly changed. He glanced suddenly downward, frowned slightly.

"They're after me!" he exclaimed. "Sit still, professor."

He started into his room and reappeared almost immediately. The professor gave a gasp of astonishment at his altered appearance. His tweed suit seemed to have been turned inside out. There were no lapels now, and it was buttoned up to his neck. He wore a long white apron; a peaked cap and a chipmunk of astonishing naturalness had transformed him into the semblance of a Dutch grocer's boy.

"Im off, professor," Quest whispered. "You shall hear from me soon. I have not been here, remember!"

He ran lightly down the steps and into the kitchen, picked up a basket filled with haphazard vegetables and threw a cloth over the top. Then he made his way to the front door, peered out for a moment, swung through it on to the step, and turning round, commenced to labor it with his fist.

Two plain-clothes men stood at the end of the street. A police automobile drew up outside the gate. Inspector French, attended by a policeman, stepped out. The former looked searchingly at Quest.

"Well, my boy, what are you doing here?" he asked.

"I cannot answer yet," Quest replied, in broken English. "Ten minutes already have I wasted. I have knocked at all the doors."

French smiled.

"You run along home," he said, "and tell your master that he had better leave off delivering goods here for the present."

Quest went off, grumbling. French opened the door with a master key and secured it carefully, leaving one of his men to guard it. He searched the rooms on the ground floor and finally ascended to Quest's study. The professor was still enjoying his cigar.

"Say, where's Quest?" the inspector asked promptly.

"Have you let him out already?" the professor replied, in a tone of mild surprise. "I thought he was in the Tombs prison."

The inspector pressed on without answering. Every room in the house was ransacked. Presently he came back to the room where the professor

was still sitting. His usually good-humored face was a little clouded.

"Professor," he began—"What's the matter, Miles?"

A plain-clothes man from the street had come hurrying into the room.

"Say, Mr. French," he reported, "our fellows have got hold of a newswoman in the street, who was coming along 'way round the back and saw two men enter this house by the side entrance, half an hour ago. One he described exactly as the professor here. The other, without a doubt, was Quest."

French turned swiftly toward the

professor. "You hear what this man says?" he exclaimed. Mr. Ashleigh, you're fooling me! You entered this house with Sanford Quest. You will have to tell us where he is hiding."

"The professor knocked the ash from his cigar and replaced it in his mouth. His clasped hands rested in front of him. There was a twinkle of something like mirth in his eyes as he glanced up at the inspector.

"Mr. French," he said, "Mr. Sanford Quest is my friend. I am here in charge of his house. Believing as I do that his arrest was an egregious blunder, I shall say or do nothing likely to afford you any information."

French turned impatiently away. Suddenly a light broke in upon him; he rushed toward the door.

"That d—d Dutchie!" he exclaimed. The professor smiled benignly.

SYNOPSIS.

Sanford Quest, master criminologist of the world, finds that in bringing to justice Macdougall, the murderer of Lord Ashleigh's daughter, he has but just begun a life-and-death struggle with a mysterious master criminal. In a hidden but in Professor Ashleigh's garden he has seen an anthropoid ape skeleton and a living human creature, half monkey, half man, destroyed by fire. In his rooms at intervals have appeared from nowhere two black boxes with sarcastic and threatening notes signed with a pair of armless, threatening hands, representing those which have already figured in a diamond robbery. With his secretary, Laura, and his assistant, Lenora, he follows the trail of Macdougall, who escaped on his way to prison, and finds Macdougall's dead body in a cave on a lonely hillside. After a thrilling escape from two thugs who try to kill him he returns to his rooms to find his valet, Ross Brown, and a Miss Quigg murdered, and Police Inspector French investigating. French, puzzled, half suspects Quest of the crime.

SIXTH INSTALLMENT

THE UNSEEN TERROR.

CHAPTER XIV.

With a little gesture of despair Quest turned away from the instrument which seemed suddenly to have become so terribly unresponsive, and looked across the vista of square roofs and tangled masses of telephone wires to where the lights of larger New York flashed up against the sky. From his attic chamber the roar of the city a few blocks away was always in his ears. He had forgotten in those hours of frenzied solitude to fear for his own safety. He thought only of Lenora. He paused once more before the little instrument.

"Lenora, where are you?" he signaled. "I have taken a lodging in the Servants' club. I am still in hiding, hoping that Craig may come here. I am very anxious about you."

Still no reply! Quest drew a chair up to the window and sat there with folded arms looking down into the street. Suddenly he sprang to his feet. The instrument quivered—there was a message at last! He took it down with a little choke of relief.

"I don't know where I am. I am terrified. I was outside the garage when I was seized from behind. The 'Hands' held me. I was unconscious until I found myself here. I am now in an attic room with no window except the skylight, which I cannot reach. I can see nothing—hear nothing. No one has hurt me, no one comes near me. Food is pushed through a door, which is locked again immediately. The house seems empty, yet I fancy that I am being watched all the time. I am terrified!"

Quest drew the instrument towards him.

"I have your message," he signaled. "Be brave! I am watching you before long. I shall reach you before long. I will send me a message every now and then."

Quest again took up his vigil in front of the window. Once more his eyes swept the narrow street with its constant stream of passers-by. Then suddenly he found himself gripping the window sill in a momentary thrill of rare excitement. His vigil was rewarded at last. The man for whom he was waiting was there! Quest watched him cross the street, glance furtively to the right and to the left, then enter the club. He turned back to the little wireless and his fingers quivered as though inspired.

"I am on Craig's track," he signaled. "Be brave."

He waited for no reply, but opened the door, and stealing softly out of the room, suddenly confronted Craig in the deserted hallway. Before he could utter a cry Quest's left hand was over his mouth and the cold muzzle of an automatic pistol was pressed to his ribs.

"Turn round and mount those stairs, Craig," Quest ordered.

Craig turned slowly round and obeyed. He mounted the steps with reluctant footsteps, followed by Quest.

"Through the door to your right," the latter directed. "That's right! Now sit down in that chair facing me."

Quest closed the door carefully. Craig sat where he had been ordered, his fingers gripping the arms of the chair. In his eyes shone the furtive, terrified light of the trapped criminal.

"What do you want with me?" Craig asked dolefully.

(To be continued)

Save your Hair! Get a 25 cent bottle of Danderine right now—Also stops itching scalp.

This, brittle, colorless and scraggy hair is mute evidence of a neglected scalp; of dandruff—that awful scurf. There is nothing so destructive to the hair as dandruff. It robs the hair of its lustre, its strength and its very life; eventually producing a feverishness and itching of the scalp, which if not remedied causes the hair roots to shrink, loosen and die—then the hair falls out fast. A little Danderine tonight—now—any time—will surely save your hair.

Get a 25 cent bottle of Knowlton's Danderine from any drug store. You surely can have beautiful hair and lots of it if you will just try a little Danderine. Save your hair! Try it!

With Marvelous Rapidity, the Change Was Effected.

His usually good-humored face was a little clouded.

"Professor," he began—"What's the matter, Miles?"

A plain-clothes man from the street had come hurrying into the room.

"Say, Mr. French," he reported, "our fellows have got hold of a newswoman in the street, who was coming along 'way round the back and saw two men enter this house by the side entrance, half an hour ago. One he described exactly as the professor here. The other, without a doubt, was Quest."

French turned swiftly toward the

FIFTH INSTALLMENT

ON THE RACK.

CHAPTER XII.

For the moment a new element had been introduced into the horror of the little tableau. All eyes were fixed upon Quest, who listened to the inspector's subtle words with a supercilious smile upon his lips.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "you would like to ask me a few questions?"

"Perhaps I may feel it my duty to do so," the inspector replied gravely. "In the first place, then, Mr. Quest, will you kindly explain the condition of your clothes?"

Quest shrugged his shoulders.

"Where are you, then?" he replied.

"The Jewels Have Been Stolen!"

reflection on the mirror faded away. Lenora started up and hastily put on her coat and hat, which were still lying on the chair.

"I am going right down to the professor's," she announced.

"What do you think you can do there?" Laura asked.

"I am going to see if I can find out what that man burned," she replied. "I will be back in an hour."

Laura walked with her as far as the street car, and very soon afterwards Lenora found herself knocking at the professor's front door. Craig admitted her almost at once. For a moment he seemed to shiver as he recognized her.

"Well, young lady," the professor said, "have you thought of something I can do?"

She took no notice of the chair to which he pointed, and rested her hand upon his shoulder.

"Professor," she begged, "go and see Mr. Quest. He is in the Tombs prison. It would be the kindest thing anyone could possibly do."

The professor glanced regretfully at his manuscript, but he did not hesitate. He rose promptly to his feet.

"If you think he would appreciate it, I will go at once," he decided.

"Her face shone with gratitude.

"That is really kind of you, professor," she declared.

"I will send for my coat and we will go together, if you like," he suggested.

She hurried from the room. Outside in the hall she paused for a moment, listening with beating heart. By the side wall was a hat rack with brushing pegs, from which several coats were hanging. She slipped quietly behind their shelter.

A moment or two later she heard the professor leave the house. Very cautiously she stole out from her hiding place. The hall was empty. She crossed it with noiseless footsteps, slipped into the study and moved stealthily to the fireplace. There was a little heap of ashes in one distinct spot. She gathered them up in her handkerchief and hurried it in her dress and quietly left the house.

At Georgia square she found Laura waiting for her, and a few minutes afterwards the two girls were examining the ashes with the aid of Quest's microscope. Among the little pile was one fragment of a hair, which the girls both exclaimed. It was distinctly a shred of charred muslin embroidery. Laura pointed toward it triumphantly.

"Isn't that evidence?" she demanded. "Let's ring up Inspector French!"

"No, no, no," she advised. "French is a good sort in his way, but he's prejudiced just now against the boss. I'm not sure that this evidence would go far by itself."

"It's evidence enough for us to go to Craig, though! What we have got to do is to get a confession out of him, somehow!"

Laura studied her companion, for a moment, curiously.

"Taking some interest in Mr. Quest, kid, ain't you?"

Lenora looked up. Then her head suddenly sank into her hands. She knew quite well that her secret had escaped her. Laura patted her shoulder.

"That's all right, child," she said soothingly. "We'll see him through this, somehow or other."

"Laura," exclaimed Lenora, "we will save Mr. Quest and we will get hold of Craig! I have a plan. Listen!"

"That's all right," Quest replied, "but how am I to get hold of him?"