

The BLACK BOX

by E. Phillips Oppenheim

Shown at the Arcade theatre on Wednesdays and Thursdays

FIRST INSTALLMENT

"SANFORD QUEST, CRIMINOLOGIST."

The young man from the West had arrived in New York only that afternoon, and his cousin, town born and bred, had already embarked upon the task of showing him the great city. They occupied a table in a somewhat insignificant corner of one of New York's most famous roof garden restaurants. The place was crowded with diners. There were many notabilities to be pointed out. The town young man was very busy.

"Tell me," the country cousin inquired, "who is the man at a table by himself? The waiters speak to him as though he were a little god. Is he a millionaire, or a judge, or what?"

"You're in luck, Alfred," the New Yorker declared. "That's the most interesting man in New York—one of the most interesting in the world. That's Sanford Quest."

"Who's he?"

"Sanford Quest is the greatest master in criminology the world has ever known. He is a magician, a scientist, the Pierpont Morgan of his profession."

"Say, do you mean that he is a detective?"

"Yes," he said simply, "you can call him that—just in the same way that you could call Napoleon a soldier or Lincoln a statesman. He is a detective, if you like to call him that, the master detective in the world."

When Sanford Quest entered his house an hour later he glanced into two of the rooms on the ground floor, in which telegraph and telephone operators sat at their instruments. Then, by means of a small lift, he ascended to the top story and entered a large apartment wrapped in gloom until, as he crossed the threshold, he touched the switches of the electric lights. One realized then that this was a man of taste. Quest drew up an easy chair to the wide-flung window, touching a bell as he crossed the room. In a few moments the door was opened and closed noiselessly. A young woman entered with a bundle of papers.

The criminologist glanced through the papers quickly. "No further inquiries, Laura?"

She left the room almost noiselessly.

"THE TENEMENT HOUSE MYSTERY."

CHAPTER I.

"This habit of becoming late for breakfast," Lady Ashleigh remarked, as she sat down the coffee pot, "is growing upon your father. Any news, dear?"

Ella glanced up from a pile of correspondence through which she had been looking a little negligently.

"None at all, mother. My correspondence is just the usual sort of rubbish—invitations and gossip. Such a lot of invitations, by the bye."

"At your age," Lady Ashleigh declared, "that is the sort of correspondence which you should find interesting."

"You know I am not like that, mother," she protested. "My music is really the only part of life which absolutely appeals to me. Oh, why doesn't Delaney make up his mind and let father know, as he promised? ... Here comes daddy, mum."

Lady Ashleigh loitered for a moment to raise the covers from the dishes upon a side table. Afterwards she seated herself at the table.

"I heard this morning," he said, "from your friend Delaney, Ella. He went into the matter very fully. The substance of it is that for the first year of your musical training he advises New York."

"I have not finished yet. This cablegram," he went on, drawing a little

slip of blue paper from his pocket, "was brought to me this morning—"

He smoothed it out before him and read:

To Lord Ashleigh, Hamblin House, Dorset, England: I find a magnificent program arranged for at Metropolitan Opera house this year. Have taken box for your daughter, engaged the best professor in the world, and secured an apartment at the Leland, our most select and comfortable residential hotel. Understand your brother is still in South America, returning early spring, but will do our best to make your daughter's year of study as pleasant as possible. Advise her sail on Saturday by Mauretania.

"On Saturday?" Ella almost screamed.

"I shall now," Lord Ashleigh said, "leave you to talk over and discuss this matter for the rest of the day. At dinner time tonight you can tell me your decision, or rather we will discuss it together."

CHAPTER II.

"I am to take it, I believe," Lord Ashleigh began after dinner that evening, "that you have finally decided, Ella, to embrace our friend Delaney's suggestion and to leave us Saturday?"

"If you please," Ella murmured, with glowing eyes.

"You will take your own maid with you, of course," Lord Ashleigh continued. "Lenora is a good girl and I am sure she will look after you quite well, but I have decided to supplement Lenora's surveillance over your comfort by sending with you, also, a sort of courier and general attendant—whom do you think? Well, Macdougall. He has lived in New York for some years, and you will doubtless find this a great advantage, Ella."

Ella glanced over her shoulder at the two servants who were standing discreetly in the background. Her eyes rested upon the pale, expressionless face of the man who during the last few years had enjoyed her father's confidence.

For a moment a queer sense of apprehension troubled her. Was it true, she wondered, that she did not like the man? She banished the thought almost as soon as it was conceived.

"You are spoiling me, daddy," Ella sighed.

"If you think so now," he remarked, "I do not know what you will say to me presently."

He laid upon the table a very familiar morocco case, stamped with a coronet.

"Our diamonds!" Ella exclaimed. "The Ashleigh diamonds!"

The necklace lay exposed to view, the wonderful stones flashing in the subdued light.

"In New York," Lord Ashleigh continued, "it is the custom to wear jewelry in public more, even, than in this country. Allow me!"

He leaned forward. With long, capable fingers he fastened the necklace around his daughter's neck.

"It is our farewell present to you," Lord Ashleigh declared.

Ella, impelled by some curious impulse which she could not quite understand, glanced quickly around to where the manservant was standing. For once she saw something besides the perfect automaton. His eyes, instead of being fixed at the back of his master's chair, were simply riveted upon the stones. A queer little feeling of uneasiness disturbed Ella for the moment. It passed, however, as in glancing away her attention was once more attracted by the sparkle of the jewels upon her bosom.

CHAPTER III.

The streets of New York were covered with a thin, powdery snow as the very luxurious car of Mrs. Delaney drew up outside the front of the Leland hotel a little after midnight. Ella leaned over and kissed her hostess.

"Thank you, dear, ever so much for your delightful dinner," she ex-

claimed, "and for bringing me home. As for the music, well, I can't talk about it. I am just going upstairs into my room to sit and think."

The car rolled off. Ella, a large umbrella held over her head by the doorkeeper, stepped up the little strip of drugget which led into the softly warmed hall of the Leland. Behind her came her maid, Lenora, and Macdougall, who had been riding on the box with the chauffeur. He paused for a moment to wipe the snow from his clothes as Ella crossed the hall to the left. Lenora turned toward him. He whispered something in her ear. For a moment she shook. Then she turned away and followed her mistress upstairs.

Arrived in her apartment, Ella threw herself with a little sigh of content into a big easy-chair before the fire and gave herself up for a few moments to reverie.

A log stirred upon the fire. She leaned forward lazily to replace it and then stopped short. Exactly opposite to her was a door which opened on to a back hall. It was used only by the servants. Just as she was in the act of leaning forward Ella became conscious of a curious hallucination.

"Lenora, come here at once."

The maid hurried in from the next



"Our Diamonds!" She Exclaimed. "The Ashleigh Diamonds!"

room. Ella pointed to the door.

"Lenora, look outside. See if anyone is on that landing. I fancied that the door opened."

Lenora crossed the room and tried the handle. Then she turned towards her mistress in triumph.

"It is locked, my lady," she reported.

"Go down and ask Macdougall to come up. I am going to have this thing explained."

Something of her mistress' agitation seemed to have become communicated to Lenora.

She walked quickly to the back part of the hotel and ascended to the wing in which the servants' quarters were situated. Here she made her way along a corridor until she reached Macdougall's room. She knocked, and knocked again. There was no answer. She tried the door and found it was locked. Then she returned to the lift and descended once more to the floor upon which her mistress' apartments were situated. She opened the door of the suite without knocking and turned at once to the sitting room.

"I am sorry, my lady," she began. Then she stopped short. The lift boy, who had had a little trouble with his starting apparatus and had not as yet descended, heard the scream which broke from her lips, and a fireman in an adjacent corridor came running up almost at the same moment. Lenora was on her knees by her mistress' side. Ella was still lying in the easy-chair in which she had been seated, but her head was thrown back in an unnatural fashion. There was a red mark just across her throat.

Lenora shrieked. "She's fainted! And the diamonds—the diamonds have gone!"

A doctor, hurriedly summoned, had just completed a hasty examination when a police inspector, followed by a detective, entered.

"This is your affair, gentlemen, not mine," the doctor said gravely. "The young lady is dead. She has been cruelly strangled within the last five or ten minutes."

The inspector made a careful examination of the room.

"Tell me," he inquired, "is this the young lady who owned the wonderful Ashleigh diamonds?"

"They've gone!" Lenora shrieked. "They've been stolen! She was wearing them when I left the room!"

The inspector turned to the telephone.

"Mr. Marsham," he said, "I am afraid this will be a difficult affair. I am going to take the liberty of calling in an expert. That you, exchange? I want number one, New York city—Mr. Sanford Quest."

(To be Continued.)

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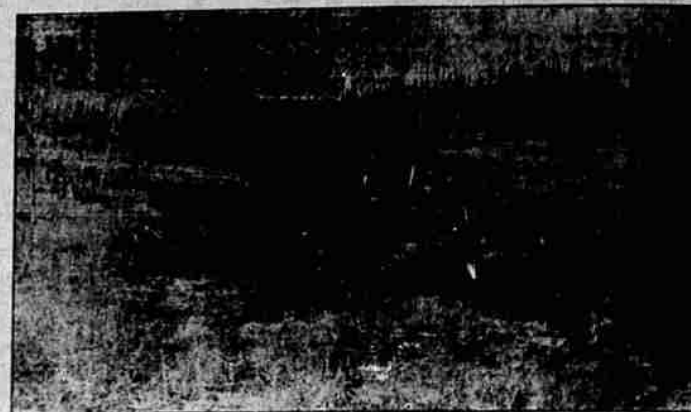
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