

The BLACK BOX

by E. Phillips Oppenheim

Novelized from the Photo Play of the Same Name. Produced by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company

SYNOPSIS.

Sanford Quest, master criminologist of the world, finds that in bringing to justice the Macdough, the murderer of Lord Ashleigh's daughter, he has just entered a life-and-death contest with a mysterious master criminal. Equipped by Professor Ashleigh, Lord Ashleigh's brother, to recover the stolen skeleton of an anthropoid ape, hurried to Mrs. Rheinholdt's mansion, where her diamonds have been torn from her throat by a pair of hands without arms or body, a black box later appears from nowhere in his rooms and a note contained in it, signed by the armless hands, sarcastically suggests that the Rheinholdt diamonds and the skeleton may be hidden together. While Laura, Quest's secretary, shadows Craig, the professor's valet, Quest and Lenora, his assistant, find the skeleton in a hut in the professor's garden, and discover there an inhuman creature, half monkey and half man. As the professor explains, the hut is set after and the monkey-man and skeleton are destroyed in the flames. Quest's rooms the Rheinholdt diamonds suddenly reappear, enclosed in a second black box with a note signed by the threatening hands.

FOURTH INSTALLMENT
AN OLD GRUDGE.
CHAPTER X.

Sanford Quest was smoking his after-breakfast cigar with a relish somewhat affected by the measure of his perplexities. Early though it was, Lenora was already in her place, bending over her desk, and Laura, who had just arrived, was busy divesting herself of her coat and hat. Quest watched the latter impatiently.

"Well?" he asked.

Laura came forward, straightening her hair with her hands.

"No go," she answered. "I spent the evening in the club, and I talked with two men who knew Craig, but I couldn't get on to anything. From all I could hear of the man, respectability is his middle name."

"That's the professor's own idea," Quest remarked grimly.

"We're fairly up against it, boss," Laura sighed. "The best thing we can do is to get on to another job. The Rheinholdt woman has got her jewels back, or will have at noon to-day. I bet she won't worry about the thief. Then the professor's moldy old skeleton was returned to him, even if it was burned up afterwards. I should take on something fresh."

"Can't be done," Quest replied shortly. "Look here, girls, your average intellects are often apt to hit upon the truth, when a man who sees too far ahead goes wrong. Rule Craig out. Any other possible person occur to you? Speak out, Lenora. You've something on your mind, I can see."

"I'm afraid you'll laugh at me," she began tentatively.

"Won't hurt you if I do," Quest replied.

"I can't help thinking of Macdoughal," Lenora continued feebly. "He has never been recaptured. I don't know whether he's dead or alive. He had a perfect passion for jewels. If he is alive, he would be desperate and would attempt anything."

Quest smoked in silence for a moment.

"I guess the return of the jewels squelched the Macdoughal theory," he remarked. "He wouldn't be likely to part with the stuff when he'd once got his hands on it. However, I always meant, when we had a moment's spare time, to look into that fellow's whereabouts. We'll take it on straight away. Can't do any harm."

"I know the section boss on the railway at the spot where he disappeared," Laura announced.

"Then just take the train down to Mountview—that's the nearest spot—and get busy with him," Quest directed. "Try and persuade him to loan us the gang's handcar to go down the line. Lenora and I will come on in the automobile."

"Take you longer," Lenora remarked as she moved off to put on her jacket. "The cars do it in a quarter of an hour."

"Can't help that," Quest replied. "Mrs. Rheinholdt's coming here to identify her jewels at twelve o'clock, and I can't run any risk of there being no train back. You'd better be making good with the section boss. Take plenty of bills with you."

"Sure! That's easy enough," Laura promised him. "I'll be waiting for you."

She hurried off and Quest commenced his own preparations. From his safe he took one of the small black lumps of explosive to which he had once before owed his life, and fitted it carefully in a small case with a coil of wire and an electric lighter. He looked at his revolver and recharged it. Finally he rang the bell for his confidential valet.

"Ross," he asked, "who else is there here today besides you?"

"No one today, sir."

"Just as well, perhaps," Quest observed. "Listen, Ross, I am going out now for an hour or two, but I shall be back at midday. Remember that Mrs. Rheinholdt and Inspector French are to be here at twelve o'clock. If by any chance I should be a few minutes late, ask them to wait. And, Ross, a young woman from the Salvation Army will call too. You can give her this check."

Ross Brown, who was Quest's secretary-valet and general factotum, accepted the slip of paper and placed it in an envelope.

"There are no other instructions, sir?" he inquired.

"None," Quest replied. "You'll look out for the wireless, and you had better switch the through cable and telegraph communication on to headquarters. Come on, Lenora."

They left the house, entered the waiting automobile, and drove rapidly towards the confines of the city. By Quest's directions the automobile

"Hands up, gunner!"

He stooped down to unfasten the straps which fastened the spare wheel. It was one of his rare lapses, realized a moment too late. Almost in his ears came the hoarse cry:

"Hands up, gunner! Hands up this second or I'll blow you to hell!"

Quest glanced over his shoulder and looked into the face of Red Gallagher, raised a little above the level of the road. A very ugly little revolver was pointed directly at Quest's heart.

"My mate's got you covered on the other side of the road, too. Hands up, both of you, or we'll make a quick job of it."

Quest shrugged his shoulders, threw his revolver into the road and obeyed. As he did so, the other man stole out from behind a bush and sprang for the chauffeur, who under cover of the car was stealing off. There was a brief struggle, then the dull thud of the railway man's rifle falling on the chauffeur's head. He rolled over and lay in the road.

"Pitch him off amongst the bushes," Red Gallagher ordered. "You don't want anyone who comes by to see. Now lend me a hand with this chap."

"What do you propose to do with me?" Quest asked.

"You'll know soon enough," Red Gallagher answered. "A matter of five minutes' talk to start with. You see that handcar house?"

"Perfectly well," Quest assented. "My eyesight is quite normal."

"Get there then. I'm a yard behind you and my revolver's pointing for the middle of your back."

Quest sprang lightly down from the road, crossed the few intervening yards and stepped into the handcar house.

Gallagher and his mate followed close behind. Quest paused on the threshold.

"It's a filthy dirty hole," he remarked. "Can't we have our little chat out here? Is it money you want?"

Gallagher glanced around. Then with an ugly push of the shoulder he sent Quest reeling into the shed. His great form blocked up the doorway.

"No," he cried fiercely. "It's not money I want this time. Quest, you brute, you dirty bloodhound! You sent me to the pen for five years—you



"You Don't—You Don't Suspect Me of This!"

struck him full in the face. Notwithstanding his huge size and strength, Gallagher reeled. The operator who had just begun to realize what was happening flung himself bodily against the two thugs. A shot from the tangled mass of struggling limbs whittled past Quest's head as he sprang to the window which overlooked the track. The freight had already almost passed. Quest steadied himself for a supreme effort, crawled out on the little steel bridge and poised himself for a moment. The last car was just beneath. The gap between it and the previous one was slipping by. He set his teeth and jumped on the smooth top.

Back behind the tower Red Gallagher and his mate bent with horrified faces over the body of the signalman.

"What the hell did you want to plug him for?" the latter muttered. "He ain't in the show at all. You've done us Red, he's cooked!"

Red Gallagher staggered to his feet. Already the horror of the murderer was in his face as he glanced furtively around.

"I never meant to drop him," he muttered. "I got mad at seeing Quest get off. That man's a devil."

"What are we going to do?" the other demanded hoarsely.

"There's the auto," Gallagher shouted. "Come on, old man! I can fix the wheel. If we've got to swing for this job, we'll have something of our own back first."

They crawled to the side of the road. Gallagher's rough, hairy fingers were still trembling, but they knew their job. In a few minutes the wheel was fixed. Clumsily but successfully, the great Irishman turned the car around away from the city.

"She's a hummer," he muttered. "I'll make her go when we get the hang of it. Sit tight!"

They drove clumsily off, gathering speed at every yard. Behind, in the shadow of the tower, the signalman lay dead. Quest, half way to New York, stretched flat on his stomach, was struggling for life with knees and hands and feet.

"Hello! Anyone there?"

There was no reply. He opened the doors of the two rooms on the right-hand side, where Quest, when he was engaged in any widespread affair, kept a stenographer and a telegraph operator. Both rooms were empty. Then he turned towards Quest's study on the left-hand side. French was a man of iron nerve. No power on earth could have kept back the cry which broke from his lips.

A few feet away from the door was stretched the body of the secretary-valet. On the other side of the room, lying as though she had slipped from the sofa, her head fallen on one side in hideous fashion, was the body of Miss Quigg, the Salvation Army young woman. French set his teeth and drew back the curtains. In the clear light the disorder of the room was fully revealed. There had been a terrible struggle. Between whom? How? There was suddenly a piercing shriek. The inspector turned quickly around. Mrs. Rheinholdt, who had disregarded his advice, was standing on the threshold.

"Inspector!" she cried. "What has happened? Oh, my God!"

She covered her face with her hands. French gripped her by the arm. At that moment there was the sound of an automobile stopping outside.

"Keep quiet for a moment," the inspector whispered in her ear. "Pull yourself together, madam. Go to the other end of the room. Don't look. Stay there for a few moments and then get home as quick as you can."

She obeyed him mutely, pressing her hands to her eyes, shivering in every limb. French, stood back inside the room. He heard the front door open, he heard Quest's voice outside.

"Where the devil are you, Ross?"

There was no reply.

The door was pushed open. Quest entered, followed by the professor and Craig. The inspector stood watching their faces. Quest came to a standstill before he had passed the threshold. He looked upon the floor and he looked across to the sofa. Then he looked at French.

"My God!" he muttered.

The professor pushed past. He had looked around the room, and gazed at the two bodies with an expression of blank and absolute terror. Then he fell back into Craig's arms.

"The poor girl!" he cried. "Horrible! Horrible! Horrible!"

"Know anything about this?" Quest asked quickly.

"Not a thing," the inspector replied. "We arrived, Mrs. Rheinholdt and I, at five minutes past twelve. There was no answer to our ring. I used my pass key and entered. This is what I found."

Quest stood over the body of his valet for a moment. The man was obviously dead. The inspector took his handkerchief and covered up the head. A few feet away was a heavy paperweight.

"Killed by a blow from behind," French remarked grimly, "with that little affair. Look here!"

They glanced down at the girl. Quest's eyebrows came together quickly. There were two blue marks upon her throat where a man's thumbs might have been.

"The hands again," he muttered.

The inspector nodded.

"Can you make anything of it?"

"Not yet," Quest confessed. "I must think."

The inspector glanced at him curiously.

"Where on earth have you been to?" he demanded.

"Been to!" Quest repeated.

"Look in the mirror!" French suggested.

Quest glanced at himself. His 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. Laura, you 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, 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 the 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 yours, 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. 19 of the New York Central, scrapping 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—you don't suspect me of this?"

French was unmoved. He looked Quest in the eyes.

"I don't know," he said.

"Come round 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. Toward three o'clock Lenora went out and returned with a newspaper. She opened it out upon the table and they both pored over it.

"Justice Thorpe has refused to consider bail!" 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 locking up the one man who could clear up the whole show."

Lenora nodded thoughtfully.

"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.

"Twice," 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.

"At Craig, if I can," Lenora replied, moving toward the telephone. "Please give me the phototelegram. I am going to talk to the professor."

Laura adjusted the mirror to the instrument and Lenora rang up. The professor himself answered the call.

"Have you seen the three o'clock edition, professor," Lenora asked.

"I never read newspapers, young lady," the professor replied.

"Let me tell you what they say about Mr. Quest!"

Lenora commenced a rambling account of what she had read in the newspaper. All the time the eyes of the two girls were fixed upon the mirror. They could see the professor seated in his chair with two huge volumes by his side, a pile of manuscript, and a pen in his hand. They could even catch the look of sympathy on his face as he listened attentively. Suddenly Lenora almost broke off. She gripped Laura by the arm. The door of the study had been opened slowly, and Craig, carrying a bundle, passed for a moment on the threshold. He glanced nervously toward the professor, who seemed unaware of his entrance. Then he moved stealthily toward the fireplace, stooped down and committed something to the flames. The relief on his face, as he stood up, was obvious.

"All I can do for Mr. Quest, young lady, I will," the professor promised. He laid the receiver down and the



"Hands Up, Gunner!"

CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. Rheinholdt welcomed the inspector with a beaming smile as he stepped out of his office and approached her automobile.

"How nice of you to be so punctual, Mr. French," she exclaimed, making room for him by her side. "Will you tell the man to drive to Mr. Quest's house in Georgia square?"

The inspector obeyed and took his place in the luxurious limousine.

"How beautifully punctual we are!" she continued, glancing at the clock.

"Inspector, I am so excited at the idea of getting my jewels back. Isn't Mr. Quest a wonderful man?"

"He's a clever chap, all right," the inspector admitted. "All the same, I'm rather sorry he wasn't able to lay hands on the thief."

"That's your point of view, of course," Mrs. Rheinholdt remarked. "I can think of nothing but having my diamonds back. I feel I ought to go and thank the professor for recommending Mr. Quest."

The inspector made no reply. Mrs. Rheinholdt was suddenly aware that she was becoming a little tactless.

"Of course," she sighed, "it is disappointing not to be able to lay your hands upon the thief. That is where I suppose you must find the interference of an amateur like Mr. Quest a little troublesome sometimes. He gets back the property, which is what the private individual wants, but he doesn't secure the thief, which is, of course, the real end of the case from your point of view."

"It's a queer affair about these jewels," the inspector remarked. "Quest hasn't told me the whole story yet. Here we are on the stroke of time!"

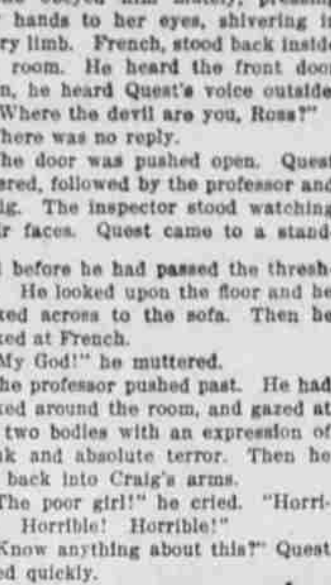
The car drew up outside Quest's house. The inspector assisted his companion to alight and rang the bell at the front door. There was a somewhat prolonged pause. He rang again.

"Never knew this to happen before," he remarked. "That sort of secretary-valet of Mr. Quest—Ross Brown I think he calls him—is always on the spot." They waited for some time, there was still no answer to their summons. The inspector placed his ear to the keyhole. There was not a sound to be heard. He drew back, a little puzzled. At that moment his attention was caught by the fluttering of a little piece of white material caught in the door. He pulled it out. It was a fragment of white embroidery, and on it were several small stains. The inspector looked at them and looked at his fingers. His face grew suddenly grave.

"Seems to me," he muttered, "that there has been some trouble here. I shall have to take a liberty. If you'll excuse me, Mrs. Rheinholdt, I think it would be better if you waited in the car until I send for you."

"You don't think the jewels have been stolen again?" she gasped.

The inspector made no reply. He had drawn from his pocket a little pass key and was fitting it into the lock. The door swung open. Once more they were both conscious of that peculiar silence, which seemed to have in it some unnamable quality. He moved to the foot of the stairs and shouted:



He Set His Teeth and Jumped.



"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 afterward 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.

"I am going the other way, back to Georgia square," she explained. "No, please don't ring. I can find my own way out."

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 branching 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 secreted it in her dress and quietly left the house.

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

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

(Continued on page 8.)