

The BLACK BOX

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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.

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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 hut in Professor Ashleigh's garden he has seen an anthropoid ape skeleton and a living inhuman creature, half monkey, half man, destroyed by fire. In his room have been found nowhere black boxes, one containing diamonds torn from a lovely throat by a pair of armless, threatening hands, both with sarcastic, threatening notes signed by the inscrutable hands. On his return from finding the body of Macdougall, who had escaped on his way to prison, he is arrested for the murder of his valet, Ross Brown, and a Miss Quigg, in his rooms. Laura and Lenora, his assistants, suspect Craig the professor's valet, trap Craig and rescue Quest from the Tombs to hypnotize Craig into confessing the Tombs to himself. He finds that Craig and Lenora have both disappeared. He dodges Police Inspector French, who has discovered his escape.

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 where the lights of larger New York flared 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 for Craig. Through him I shall reach you before long. 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 worked 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 doggedly.

"First of all," Quest replied, "I want to know what you have done with my assistant, the girl whom you carried off from the professor's garage."

Craig shook his head. "I know nothing about her."

"She locked you in the garage," Quest continued, "and sent for me. When I arrived I found the garage door open, Lenora gone and you a fugitive."

"Evidently struggled for a moment with blank terror in Craig's expression.

"How do you know that she locked me in the garage?"

Quest smiled, stretched out his right arm and his long fingers played softly with the pocket wireless.



"Mount These Stairs, Craig."

volume. Quest threw open the door and closed it again at once. "The place is on fire," he announced briefly. "Pull yourself together, man. We shall have all we can do to get out of this."

Craig turned to the door, but staggered back almost immediately.

"The stairs are going!" he shrieked. "It is the kitchen that is on fire. We are cut off! We cannot get down!"

Quest was on his hands and knees, fumbling under his trucklebed. He pulled out a crude form of fire escape, a rough sort of contrivance with a rope attached.

"Know how to use this!" he asked Craig quickly. "Here, catch hold. Put your arms inside this strap."

Yard by yard, swinging a little in the air, Craig made his descent. When he arrived in the street there were a

hundred willing hands to release him. Quest drew up the rope quickly, warned by a roar of anxious voices. Then he commenced to descend, letting himself down hand over hand, always with one eye upon that length of rope that swung below. Suddenly, as he reached the second floor a little cry from the crowd warned him of what had happened. Tongues of flame curling out from the blazing building had caught the rope, which was being burned through not a dozen feet away from him. He descended a little farther and paused in mid-air.

A shout from the crowd reached him. "The cables! Try the cables!"

He glanced round. Seven or eight feet away, and almost level with him, was a double row of telegraph wires. Almost as he saw them the rope below him burned through and fell to the ground. He swung a little towards the side of the house, pushed himself vigorously away from it with his feet, and at the farthest point of the outward swing jumped. His hands grasped the telegraph wires safely. Even in that tense moment he heard a little sob of relief from the people below.

Hand over hand he made his way to the nearest pole and slipped easily to the ground. The crowd immediately surged around him.

"Where is the man who came down before me?" he asked a bystander.

"Talking to the police in the car over yonder," was the hoarse reply. "Say, guv'nor, you only just made that!"

Craig pushed his way through the crowd to where Craig was speaking eagerly to French. He stopped short and stooped down. He was near enough to hear the former's words.

"Mr. French, you saw the man come down the ropes and swing on the cables? That was Quest, Sanford Quest, the man who escaped from the Tombs prison. He can't have got away yet."

Quest drew off his coat, turned it inside out and replaced it swiftly. He coolly picked up a hat someone had lost in the crowd and pulled it over his eyes. He passed within a few feet of where Craig and the inspector were talking.

"Say, boys, Sanford Quest is in the crowd somewhere. He's the man who jumped on the cable lines. A hundred dollars for his arrest!"

Quest turned reluctantly away. Men were rushing about in all directions for him.

CHAPTER XV.

The professor swung round in his chair and greeted Quest with some surprise, but also a little disappointment.

"No news of Craig?" he asked.

"I got Craig, all right," he replied. "He came to the Servants' club, where I was waiting for him. My luck's out, though. The place was burned to the ground last night. I saved his life and then the brute gave me away to the police. I had to make my escape as best I could."

The professor tapped the table peculiarly. "This is inferable," he declared. "I have had no shaving water; my coffee was undrinkable; I can find nothing. It was a most important lecture to prepare and I cannot find any of the notes I made upon the subject."

Quest smoked in silence for a moment.

"Any mail for me, professor?" he asked abruptly.

The professor opened a drawer and handed him a telegram.

"Only this!"

Quest opened it and read it through. It was from the sheriff of a small town in Connecticut:

"The men you inquired for are both here. They have sold an automobile and seem to be spending the proceeds. Shall I arrest?"

Quest studied the message for a moment.

"Say, this is rather interesting, professor," he remarked. "These are the two thugs who set upon me at the section house. They killed the signal man, who could have been my alibi, and swiped my car, in which, as it cannot be found, French supposes that I returned to New York. With their arrest the case against me collapses. I tell you frankly, professor, Quest continued frowning. "I hate to leave the city without having found that girl; but I am not sure that the quickest way to set things right would not be to go down, arrest these men and bring them back here, clear myself, and then go tooth and nail for Craig."

"I agree with you most heartily," the professor declared. "I recommend any course which will insure the return of my man Craig!"

"I cannot promise you that you will ever have Craig here again," Quest observed grimly. "I rather fancy Sing Sing will be his next home."

Quest stepped off the cars at Bethel a little before noon that morning. The sheriff met him at the depot and greeted him cordially but with obvious surprise.

"Say, Mr. Quest," he exclaimed, as they turned away, "I know these men are wanted on your charge, but I thought—you'll excuse me for saying so—that you were in some trouble yourself."

Quest nodded.

"The out of 'hat—came out yesterday. The moment my car is identified and Red Gallagher and his mate arrested every scrap of evidence against me goes."



"Put it Away; You Know You Daren't Use It."

in the road. It's for you to say whether it can be identified."

Quest drew a sigh of relief. "That's mine, right enough," he declared. "Now for the men."

"Say, I want to tell you something," the sheriff began dubiously. "These two are real thugs. They ain't going to take it lying down."

"Where are they?" Quest demanded.

"In the worst saloon here," the sheriff replied. "They've been there pretty well all night, drinking, and they're there again this morning, hard at it. They've got firearms, and though I ain't exactly a nervous man, Mr. Quest—"

"You leave it to me," Quest interrupted. "This is my job and I want to take the men myself."

"You'll never do it," the sheriff declared.

"Look here," Quest explained, "if I let you and your men go in, there will be a free fight, and as likely as not you will kill one, if not both of the men. I want them alive."

"Well, it's your show," the sheriff admitted, stopping before a disreputable looking building. "This is the saloon."

"Well," Quest decided, "I'm going in, and I'm going in unarmed. You can bring your men in later, if I call for help or if you hear any shooting."

"You're asking for trouble," the sheriff warned him.

"I've got to do this my own way," Quest insisted. "Stand by now."

He pushed open the door of the saloon. There were a dozen men drinking around the bar and in the center of them Red Gallagher and his mate. Quest walked right up to the two men.

"Gallagher," he said, "you're my prisoner. Are you coming quietly?"

Gallagher's mate, who was half drunk, swung round and fired a wild shot in Quest's direction. The result was a general stampede. Red Gallagher alone remained motionless. Grim and dangerously silent, he held a pistol within a few inches of Quest's forehead.

"If my number's up," he exclaimed ferociously, "it won't be you to take me."

"I think it will," Quest answered. "Put that away."

Gallagher hesitated. Quest's influence over him was indomitable.

"Put it away," Quest repeated firmly. "You know you daren't use it. Your account's pretty full up, as it is."

Gallagher's hand wavered. From outside came the shouts of the sheriff and his men, struggling to fight their way in through the little crowd who were rushing for safety. Suddenly Quest backed, jerked the pistol up with his right elbow, and with almost the same movement struck Red Gallagher under the jaw. The man went over with a crash. His mate, who had been staggering about, cursing viciously, fired another wild shot at Quest, who swayed and fell forward.

"I've done him!" the man shouted. "Get up, Red! I've done him, all right! Finish your drink. We'll get out of this!"

He bent unsteadily over Quest. Suddenly the latter sprang up, seized him by the leg and sent him sprawling. The gun fell from his hand. Quest picked it up and held it firmly out, covering both men. Gallagher was on his knees, groping for his own weapon.

"Get the handcuffs on them," Quest directed the sheriff, who with his men had at last succeeded in forcing his way into the saloon.

Crouching in her chair, her pale, terror-stricken face supported between her hands, Lenora, her eyes filled with hopeless misery, gazed at the dumb instrument upon the table. Her last gleam of hope seemed to be passing. Her little friend was silent. Once more her weary fingers spelled out a final, despairing message.

"What has happened to you? I am waiting to hear all the time. He told you where I am? I am afraid!"

There was still no reply. Her head sank a little lower on her folded arms. Even the luxury of tears seemed denied her. Fear, the fear which dwelt with her day and night, had her in its grip. Suddenly she leaped, screaming, from her place. Splinters of glass fell all around her. Her first wild thought was of release; she gazed upwards at the broken pane. Then very faintly from the street below she heard the shout of a boy's angry voice:

The thoughts formed themselves mechanically in her mind. Her eyes sought the ball which had come crashing into the room. There was life once more in her pulses. She found a scrap of paper and a pencil in her pocket. With trembling fingers she wrote a few words:

"Police headquarters. I am Sanford Quest's assistant, abducted and imprisoned here in the room where the ball has fallen. Help! I am going mad!"

She twisted the paper, looked around the room vainly for string, and finally tore a thin piece of ribbon from her bosom. She tied the message round the ball, set her teeth and threw it at the empty skylight. The first time she was not successful and the ball came back. The second time it passed through the center of the opening. She heard it strike the sound rumble down the roof. A few seconds of breathless silence! Her heart almost stopped beating. Had it rested in some ledge or fallen into the street below? Then she heard the boy's voice:

"Gee! Here's the ball come back again!"

A new light shone into the room. She seemed to be breathing a different atmosphere—the atmosphere of hope. She listened no longer with horror for a creaking upon the stairs. She walked backwards and forwards until she was exhausted. . . . Curiously enough, when the end came she was asleep, crouched upon the bed and dreaming wildly. She sprang up to find Inspector French, with a policeman behind him, standing upon the threshold.

"Inspector!" she cried, rushing towards him. "Mr. French! Oh, thank God!"

Her feelings carried her away. She threw herself at his feet. She was laughing and crying and talking incoherently, all at the same time. The inspector assisted her to a chair.

"Say, what's all this mean?" he demanded.

She told him her story, incoherently, in broken phrases. French listened with puzzled frown.

Then he realized that she was on the point of a nervous breakdown and in no condition for interrogations.

"That'll do," he said. "I'll take care of you for a time, young lady, and I'll ask you a few questions later on. My men are searching the house. You and I will be getting on, if you can tear yourself away."

The plain-clothes man, who was lounging in Quest's most comfortable easy chair and smoking one of his best cigars, suddenly laid down his paper. He moved to the window. A large, empty automobile stood in the street outside, from which the occupants had presumably just descended. He hastened towards the door, which was opened, however, before he was halfway across the room. The cigar slipped from his fingers. It was Sanford Quest, who stood there, followed by the sheriff of Bethel, two country policemen and Red Gallagher and his mate, heavily handcuffed.

"Say, aren't you wanted down yonder, Mr. Quest?" the man inquired.

"That's all right now," Quest told him. "I'm ringing up Inspector French myself. You'd better stand by the other fellows there and keep your eye on Red Gallagher and his mate."

"I guess Mr. Quest is all right," the sheriff intervened. "We're ringing up headquarters ourselves, anyway."

The plain-clothes man did as he was told. Quest took up the receiver from his telephone instrument and arranged the phototelesma.

"Police station No. 1, central," he said—"through to Mr. French's office, if you please. Mr. Quest wants to speak to him. Yea, Sanford Quest. No need to get excited! . . . All right I'm through, am I? Hello, inspector?"

A rare expression of joy suddenly transfigured Quest's face. He was leaning downward into the little mirror.

"You've found Lenora, then, inspector?" he exclaimed. "Bully for you! . . . What do I mean? What I say! You forget that I am a scientific man, French. No end of appliances here you haven't had time to look at. I can see you sitting there, and Lenora and Laura looking as though you had them on the rack. You can drop that, French. I've got Red Gallagher and his mate, got them here with the sheriff of Bethel. They went off with my auto and sold it. We've got that. Also, in less than five minutes my chauffeur will be here. He's been lying in a farmhouse

unconscious, since that scrap. He can tell you what time he saw me last. Bring the girls along, French—and hurry!"

Quest hung up the receiver.

Inspector French was as good, even better than his word. In a surprisingly short time he entered the room, followed by Laura and Lenora. Quest gave them a hand each, but it was into Lenora's eyes that he looked.

"I mustn't stop to hear your story, Lenora," Quest said. "You're safe—that's the great thing."

"Found her in an empty house," French reported, "out Grayson avenue way. Now, Mr. Quest, I don't want to come the official over you too much, but if you'll kindly remember you're an escaped prisoner—"

There was a knock at the door. A young man entered in chauffeur's livery, with his head still bandaged. Quest motioned him to come in.

"I'll just repeat my story of that morning, Mr. French," Quest said. "We went out to find Macdougall, and succeeded, as you know. Just as I was starting for home those two thugs set upon me. You know how I made my escape. They went off in my automobile and sold it in Bethel. I arrested them there myself this morning. Here's the sheriff who will bear out what I say, also that they arrived at the place in my automobile."

Inspector French held out his hand. "Mr. Quest," he said, "I reckon we'll have to withdraw the case against you. No hard feelings, I hope?"

"None at all," Quest replied promptly, taking his hand.

Quest stood upon the threshold watching the sheriff and his prisoners leave the house. The former turned round to wave his adieu.

"There's an elderly guy out here," he shouted, "seems to want to come in."

Quest leaned forward and saw the professor.

"My dear Quest," he exclaimed, as he wrung his hand, "my heartfelt congratulations! As you know, I always believed your innocence. I am delighted that it has been proved."

The professor sank wearily into an easy chair.

"I will take a little whisky and one of your excellent cigars, Quest," he said. "I must ask you to bear with me if I seem upset. After more than twenty years' service from one whom I have always treated as a friend this sudden separation, to a man of my



"Inspector!" She Cried, Rushing Towards Him.

age, is somewhat trying. I do not allude, as you perceive, Mr. Quest, to the horrible suspicion you seem to have formed of Craig."

"All the same," the inspector remarked thoughtfully, "someone who is still at large committed those murders and stole those jewels. What is your theory about the jewels, Mr. Quest?"

"I haven't had time to frame one yet," the criminologist replied. "You've been keeping me too busy looking after myself. However," he added, "it's time something was done."

He took a magnifying glass from his pocket and examined very closely the whole of the front of the safe.

"No sign of finger prints," he muttered. "The person who opened it probably wore gloves."

He fitted the combination and swung open the door. He stood there for a moment speechless. Something in his attitude attracted the inspector's attention.

"What is it, Mr. Quest?" he asked eagerly.

Quest drew a little breath. Exactly facing him, in the spot where the jewels had been, was a small black box. He brought it to the table and removed the lid. Inside was a sheet of paper, which he quickly unfolded. They all three read the few lines together:

"Fitted against the inherited cunning of the ages, you have no chance. I will take compassion upon you. Look in the right-hand drawer of your desk."

Underneath appeared the signature of the "Hands." Quest moved like one in a dream to his cabinet and pulled open the right-hand drawer. He turned around and faced the other two men. In his hand was Mrs. Rheinold's necklace!

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Be
Sure
To
See
The
"Black
Box"
Today
At
The
Bijou
This is
one of
the
greatest
Serial
Pictures
ever
shown