

The BLACK BOX

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Author of "The Missing Finger," "The Prince of Sinners," "Anna, the Adventuress," 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.

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THIRD INSTALLMENT

SYNOPSIS.

In her apartment at the Leland Ellis, 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.

THE POCKET WIRELESS.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Sanford Quest sat in his favorite chair, his cigar inclined toward the left-hand corner of his mouth, his attention riveted upon a small instrument which he was supporting upon his knee.

"We've done it this time, young woman," he declared triumphantly. "It's all O. K., working like a little peach."

Lena rose and came toward him. "Is that the pocket wireless?"

"No, he had Morrison out at Harlem all the morning to test it," he told her. "I've sent him at least half a dozen messages from this easy chair, and got the replies. How are you getting on with the code?"

"Not so badly for a stupid person," Lena replied.

Laura, who had been busy with some papers at the farther end of the room, came over and joined them.

"Say, it's a dandy little affair, that, Mr. Quest," she exclaimed. "I had a try with it, a day or so ago. Jim spoke to me from Fifth Avenue."

"We've got it tuned to a shade now," Quest declared. "Equipped with this simple little device, you can speak to me from anywhere up to ten or a dozen miles."

Quest rose to his feet and inhaled restlessly about the room.

"Say, girl, he confessed, 'this is the first time in my life I have been in a fix like this. Two cases on hand and nothing doing with either of them. Criminologist, indeed! Whose box is this?'"

Quest had paused suddenly in front of an oak sideboard which stood against the wall. Occupying a position upon it of some prominence was a small black box, whose presence there seemed to him unfamiliar.

there is any news—of my skeleton." "Not yet, professor, I am sorry to say," Quest replied. "Come in and shut the door."

"There is a young lady here," he said, "who caught me up upon the landing. She, too, I believe, wishes to see you."

He threw open the door and stood on one side. A young woman came a little hesitatingly into the room. Her hair was plainly brushed back, and she wore the severe dress of the Salvation Army.

"What is the thing?" Quest asked. "Well, I want you to see whether you agree with me," French went on. "If you can't come round, I'll come to you."

"No necessity," Quest replied. "We've got over little difficulties of that sort. Laura, just tack on the phototelesma," he added, holding the receiver away for a moment.

"Just outside the professor's back gate," French grunted. "But you're not kidding me—"

"It's a finger from the professor's skeleton you've got there," Quest interrupted.

Quest hung up the receiver. Then he turned toward his two assistants. "Another finger from the professor's skeleton," he announced, "has been found just outside his grounds. What do you suppose that means?"

"Craig," Lena declared confidently. "Craig on your life," Laura echoed. "Say, Mr. Quest, I've got an idea."

"Go right ahead with it," Quest nodded. "Didn't the butler at Mrs. Rheinhold's say that Craig belonged to a server's club up town? I know the place well. Let me go and see if I can't join and pick up a little information about the man. He must have a night out sometimes. Let's find out what he does? How's that?"

"Capital!" Quest agreed. "Get along, Laura. And you, Lenora," he added, "put on your hat. We'll take a ride towards Mayton Avenue."

CHAPTER IX.

The exact spot where the bones of the missing skeleton was discovered, was easily located. It was about twenty yards from a gate which led into the back part of the professor's grounds.

"The discovery of the bones so near the professor's home," he decided, "cannot be coincidence only. We will waste no time out here, Lenora. We will search the grounds. Come on."

It was hard to know which way to turn. Every path was choked with tangled weeds and bushes. They wandered about almost aimlessly for nearly half an hour. Then Quest came to a sudden standstill. Lenora gripped his arm. They had both heard the same sound—a queer, croaking cry, half plaintive, half angry.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. Lenora still clung to his arm. "I hate this place," she whispered. "It terrifies me. What are we looking for, Mr. Quest?"

"Can't say that I know exactly," the letter answered, "but I guess we'll find out where that cry came from. Sounded to me uncommonly like a human effort."

They had made their way up as far as the hedge, which they skirted for a few yards until they found an opening. Then Quest gave vent to a little exclamation. Immediately in front of them was a small hut, built apparently of sticks and bumboos, with a stronger framework behind.

"You need sleep no longer," Quest said. "Wake up and be yourself."

The effect of these words was instantaneous. Almost as he spoke, the creature crouched for a spring. There was wild hatred in its close-set eyes, the snarl of something feline like in its contorted mouth.



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

far as the hedge, which they skirted for a few yards until they found an opening. Then Quest gave vent to a little exclamation. Immediately in front of them was a small hut, built apparently of sticks and bumboos, with a stronger framework behind.

"There was a rude-looking door, but Quest, on trying it, found it locked. They walked around the place, but found no other opening. All the time from inside they could hear queer scuffling sounds. Lenora's cheeks grew paler."

"Must we stay?" she murmured. "I don't think I want to see what's inside. Mr. Quest!"

She clung to his arm. They were opposite the little aperture which served as a window, and at that moment it suddenly framed the face of a creature, human in features, diabolical in expression.

"Say, that's some face!" he remarked. "I'd hate to spoil it!"

Even as he spoke it disappeared. "We've got to get inside there, Lenora," he announced, stepping forward.

She followed him silently. A few turns of the wrist and the door yielded. Keeping Lenora a little behind him, Quest gazed around eagerly. Exactly in front of him, clad only in a loin cloth, with hunched-up shoulders, a necklace around its neck, with blazing eyes and ugly, gleaming teeth, crouched some unrecognizable creature, human, yet inhuman, a monkey, and yet a man.

"We found the skeleton, professor," Quest replied, "within a hundred yards of this house."

The professor's mouth was wide open. He looked like a bewildered child. It was several seconds before he spoke.

"Within a hundred yards of this house? Then it wasn't stolen by one of my rivals?"

"I should say not," Quest admitted. "Where exactly did you find it?" the professor inquired.

"I found it in a hut," Quest said, "hidden in a piano box. I found there, also, a creature—a human being, I must call him—in a state of captivity."

"Hidden in a piano box?" the professor repeated wonderingly. "Why, you mean in Hartoo's sleeping box, then?"

"If Mr. Hartoo is the gentleman who tried to club me, you are right," Quest admitted. "Mr. Ashleigh, before we go any further I must ask you for an explanation as to the presence of that person in your grounds?"

Craig sprang in, no longer the self-contained, perfect man-servant, but with the face of some wild creature. His shout was one almost of agony.

"The hut, professor! The hut is on fire!" he cried.

His appearance on the threshold was like a flash. They heard his flying feet down the hall, and without a moment's hesitation they all followed.

The professor led the way down a narrow and concealed path, but when they reached the little clearing in which the hut was situated, they were unable to approach any nearer.

The professor bade them farewell, an hour later, on the steps of the house. He seemed suddenly to have aged.

"You have done your best, Mr. Quest," he said, "but fate has been too strong. Remember this, though. It is quite true that the cunning of Hartoo may have made it possible for him to have stolen the skeleton and to have brought it back to its hiding-place, but it was jealousy—cruel, brutal, foul jealousy which smeared the walls of that hut with kerosene and set light to it."

He turned slowly away from them and re-entered the house. Quest and Lenora made their way down the avenue and entered the automobile which was waiting for them, almost in silence.

"Say, this has been a bit tough for you," he remarked. "I'd have to call somewhere and get you a glass of wine."

She tried to smile but her strength was almost gone. They drove to a restaurant and sat there for some little time. Lenora soon recovered her color. She even had courage to speak of the events of the afternoon when they re-entered the automobile.

"Mr. Quest," Lenora murmured, "who do you suppose burned the hut down?"

"I don't say Craig, I suppose you will," he remarked. "I wonder whether Laura's had any luck."

They were greeted, as they entered Quest's room, by a familiar little ticking. Quest smiled with pleasure.

"It's the pocket wireless," he declared. "Let me take down the message."

He spelled it out to Lenora, who stood by his side.

Have joined Servants' Club disgraced as your butler. Craig frequent visitor here ten years ago, comes now occasionally, Thursday evenings most likely time. Shall wait here on chance of seeing him.

"Good girl, that," Quest remarked. "She's a rare sticker, too."

He turned away from the instrument and was crossing the room toward his cigar cabinet. Suddenly he stopped. He looked intently towards the sideboard.

"What is it?" Lenora asked. He did not answer. She followed the direction of his gaze. Exactly in this same spot as before reposed another but somewhat larger black box, of the same shape and material as the previous one.

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It Was Mrs. Rheinhold's Necklace. Other but somewhat larger black box, of the same shape and material as the previous one.