

THE BLACK BOX!

BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

At the ELJOU THEATRE

One Episode Each Week

The BLACK BOX

by E. Phillips Oppenheim

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

SYNOPSIS.

Stanford Quest, master criminologist of the world, finds that in bringing to justice Macdonald, the murderer of Lord Ashleigh's daughter, he has 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 human creature, half monkey, half man, destroyed by Mrs. In his room have appeared from nowhere black boxes containing narcotic, threatening notes, signed by a pair of armless hands. Laura and Lenora, his assistants, suspect Quest, the professor's servant, a double murder in uncanny fashion. Quest is trapped by Quest, but escapes to England, where Quest, Lenora and the professor follow him. Lord Ashleigh is murdered by the hands of Lenora is abducted in London and rescued. She is captured and escapes to Port Said.

TENTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XXII

THE SHIP OF HORROR.

Quest leaned a little forward and gazed down the line of steamer chairs. The professor, in a borrowed overcoat and cap, was reclining at full length, studying a book on seagulls which he had found in the library. Laura and Lenora were both dozing tranquilly. Mr. Harris of Scotland Yard was deep in a volume of detective stories.

"As a pleasure cruise," Quest remarked grimly, "this little excursion seems to be a complete success."

Laura opened her eyes at once.

"Trying to get my goat again, eh?" she retorted. "I suppose that's what you're after. Going to tell me, I suppose, that it wasn't Craig I saw aboard this steamer?"

"We are all liable to make mistakes," Quest observed, "and I am inclined to believe that this is one of yours."

Laura's expression was a little dogged.

"If he's too clever for you and Mr. Harris," she said, "I can't help that. I only know that he came on board. My eyes are the one thing in life I do believe."

"If you'll excuse me saying so, Miss Laura," Harris ventured, leaning deferentially towards her, "there isn't a passenger on board this ship, or a servant, or one of the crew, whom we haven't seen. We've been into every stateroom, and we've even searched the hold. We've been over the ship, backwards and forwards. The captain's own steward has been our guide, and we've conducted an extra search on our own account. Personally, I must say I have come to the same conclusion as Mr. Quest. At the present moment there is no such person as the man we are looking for on board this steamer."

"Then he either changed into another one," Laura declared obstinately, "or else he jumped overboard."

"Come on, Harris, you and I promised to report to the captain this morning. I don't suppose he'll be any too pleased with us. Let's get through with it."

The two men walked down the deck together. They found the captain alone in his room, with a chart spread out in front of him and a pair of compasses in his hand. He turned round and greeted them.

"Well!"

"No luck, sir," Quest announced. "Your steward has given us every assistance possible and we have searched the ship thoroughly. Unless he has found a hiding place unknown to your steward, and not apparent to us, the man is not on board."

"The captain frowned slightly.

"You are not suggesting that this is possible, I suppose?"

"Quest did not at once reply. He was thinking of Lenora's obsession.

"Personally," he admitted, "I should not have believed it possible. The young lady of our party, however, who declares that she saw Craig aboard the steamer, is quite immovable."

"Brown," said the captain, turning to the steward, "I understand that you say that you have taken these gentlemen into every corner of the ship, that you have ransacked every possible hiding place, that you have given them every possible opportunity of searching for themselves?"

"That is quite true, sir," the man acknowledged.

"You agree with me that it is impossible for anyone to remain hidden in this ship?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"You hear, gentlemen?" the captain continued. "I really can do no more. What the student are you hanging about Mr. Brown?" he asked, turning to the steward, who was standing by with a carpet-bag in his hand.

"Room wants cleaning out badly, sir."

The captain glanced distastefully at the carpet-sweeper.

"Do it when I am at dinner, then," he ordered, "and take that damned thing away."

The steward obeyed promptly. Quest and Harris followed him down the deck.

thought, when he was showing us round the ship," Quest agreed.

"Mem," Harris murmured, softly, "as the gentleman who wrote the volume of detective stories I am reading puts it, to keep our eye on Brown."

The captain, who was down to dinner unusually early, rose to welcome Quest's little party, and himself arranged the seats.

An elderly lady, dressed in somewhat oppressive black, with a big cameo brooch at her throat and a black satin bag in her hand, was being shown by the steward to a seat by Quest's side. She acknowledged the captain's greeting acidly.

"Good evening, captain," she said, understood from the second steward that the seat on your right hand would be reserved for me. I am Mrs. Foster Rowe."

The captain received the announcement calmly.

"Very pleased to have you at the table, madam," he replied. "As to the seating, I leave that entirely to the steward. I never interfere myself."

Laura pinched his arm, and Lenora glanced away to hide a smile. Mrs. Foster Rowe studied the menu disapprovingly.

"Hors d'oeuvres," she declared, "I never touch. No one knows how long they've been opened. Bouillon—I will have some bouillon, steward."

"In one moment, madam."

The professor came ambling along towards the table.

"I fear that I am a few moments late," he remarked, as he took the chair next to Mrs. Foster Rowe. I offer you my apologies, captain. I congratulate you upon your library. I have discovered a most interesting book upon the habits of seagulls. It kept me engrossed until the very last moment, and I am hungry."

"Well, you'll have to stay hungry a long time at this table then," Mrs. Foster Rowe snapped. "Seems to me that the service is going to be abominable."

The steward, who had just arrived, presented a cup of bouillon to Quest. The others had all been served. Quest stirred it thoughtfully.

"And as to the custom," Mrs. Foster Rowe continued, "of serving gentlemen before ladies, it is, I suppose, peculiar to this steamer."

Quest hastily laid down his spoon, raised the cup of bouillon and presented it with a little bow to his neighbor.

"Pray allow me, madam," he begged. "The steward was to blame."

Mrs. Foster Rowe did not hesitate for a moment. She broke up some toast in the bouillon and commenced to sip it.

The spoon suddenly went clattering from her fingers. She caught at the sides of the table, there was a strange

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"Doctor," he said, "I happen to have my chemical tubes with me, and some special testing tubes. If you'll allow me, I'd like to examine this cup of bouillon. You might come round, too, if you will."

The captain nodded.

"I'd better stay here for a time," he decided. "I'll follow you presently."

The service of dinner was resumed. Laura, however, sent plate after plate away. The captain watched her anxiously.

"I can't help it," she explained. "I don't know whether you've had any talk with Mr. Quest, but we've been through some queer times lately. I guess this death business is getting on my nerves."

The captain was for a moment connect "You don't for a moment connect Mrs. Foster Rowe's death with the criminal you are in search of?" he exclaimed.

Laura sat quite still for a moment.

"The bouillon was offered first to Mr. Quest," she murmured.

The captain called his steward.

"Where did you get the bouillon from you served—that last cup, especially?" he asked.

"From the pantry just as usual, sir," the man answered. "It was all served out from the same caldron."

"Any chance of anyone getting at it?"

"Quite impossible, sir."

Quest's stateroom the doctor, the professor, Quest and Lenora were gathered around two little tubes, the criminologist was examining an electric torch.

"No reaction at all," the latter muttered. "This isn't an ordinary poison."

"A professor, who had been standing on one side, suddenly gave vent to soft exclamation.

"Wait!" he whispered. "Wait! I have an idea."

"He hurried off to his stateroom. The doctor was poring over a volume of tabulated poisons. Quest was still watching his tubes. Lenora sat upon the couch. Suddenly the professor reappeared. He was carrying a small notebook in his hand, his manner betrayed some excitement. He closed the door carefully behind him.

"I want you all," he begged, "to listen very carefully to me. You will discover the application of what I am going to read when I am finished. Now, if you please."

"This," he began, "is the diary of a tour made by Craig and myself in northern Egypt some fourteen years ago. Here is the first entry of importance."

MONDAY—Twenty-nine miles southwest of Port Said. We have stayed for two days at a little Mongar village. I have today come to the definite conclusion that anthropoid man is at one time denser of this country.

TUESDAY—Both Craig and I have been a little uneasy today. These Mongars into whose encampment we have found our way are one of the most grotesque of the nomad tribes. They are descended, without a doubt, from the ancient Mongolians, who invaded this country some seven hundred years before Christ, but have preserved in a marvelous way their individuality as a race. They have the narrow eyes and the thick nose of the Mongolians, also much of their cunning. One of their special weaknesses seems to be the invention of the most hideous forms of torture, which they apply remorselessly to their enemies.

WEDNESDAY—This has been a wonderful day for us, chiefly owing to what I must place on record as an act of great bravery by Craig, my servant. Early this morning, a man-eating lion found his way into the encampment. The Mongars behaved like the gods and goddesses of the Orient. They fled right and left, leaving the chief's little daughter, Feerda, at the brute's mercy. Craig, who is by no means an adept in the use of the rifle, shot the animal as he was making off with the child, and, more by good luck than anything else, managed to wound it mortally. He brought the child back to the encampment just as the chief and the warriors of the tribe returned from a hunting expedition. Our position here is now absolutely secure. We are treated like gods and, appreciating my weakness for all matters of science, the chief has today explained to me many of the secret mysteries of the tribe. Amongst other things, he has shown me a wonderful secret poison, known only to this tribe, which they call Vedemson. It brings almost instant death, and is exceedingly difficult to trace. The addition of sugar causes a curious contortions and resolves it almost to a white paste. The only antidote is a substance which I have named 'The Hands,' which is exactly equivalent to our camphor.

The professor closed his book and promptly rang the bell.

"No sugar," he ordered, turning to the steward.

They waited in absolute silence. The suggestion which the professor's steward had brought to them was stupefying, even Quest's fingers, as a moment or two later he rubbed two knobs of sugar together so that the contents should fall into the tubes of bouillon, shook. The result was magical. The bouillon turned to a strange shade of gray and began slowly to thicken.

"It is Mongar poison!" the professor cried, with breaking voice.

They all looked at one another.

"Craig must be here amongst us," Quest muttered.

"And the bouillon," Laura cried, clapping Quest's arm. "The bouillon was meant for you!"

There seemed to be, somehow, amongst all of them, a curious indisposition to discuss this matter. Suddenly Lenora, who was sitting on the lounge underneath the porthole, put out her hand and picked up a card which was lying by her side. She glanced at it, at first, curiously. Then she shrieked.

"A message!" she cried. "A message from The Hands! Look!"

They crowded around her. In that same familiar handwriting was scrawled across the face of the card these few words:

Ye Stanford Quest:

You have escaped this time by a



"As a Pleasure Cruise," Quest remarked, "this excursion seems to be a success."

chance of fortune, not because your wife are keen, not because of your own awkwardness; simply because Fate willed it. It will not be for long. Underneath was the drawing of the clenched hands.

"There is no longer any doubt," Lenora said calmly. "Craig is on board. He must have been on deck a few minutes ago. It was his hand which placed this card on the porthole."

"Listen! What's that?" There was a scream from the deck. They all recognized Laura's voice, but they were all on the deck within ten seconds. Laura was standing with one hand clasping the rail, her hand fiercely outstretched towards the lower part of the promenade deck. Through the darkness they heard the sound of angry voices.

"What is it, Laura?" Lenora cried. She swung round upon them.

"Craig!" she cried. "Craig! I saw his face as I sat in my chair there, talking to the captain. I saw a man's white face—nothing else. He must have been leaning over the rail. He heard me call out and he disappeared."

The captain came slowly out of the shadows, limping a little, and followed by his steward, who was murmuring profuse apologies.

"Did you see him?" Laura demanded.

"I did not," the captain replied, a little tartly. "I ran into Brown here and we both had a shake-up."

"But he was there—a second ago!" Laura cried out.

"I beg your pardon, miss," Brown ventured, "but the deck's closed at the end, as you can see, with sail-cloth, and I was leaning over the rail myself when you shrieked. There wasn't anyone else near me, and no one can possibly have passed round the deck, as you can see for yourself."

"Very well, then," she said, "you people had better get a strat-walnut coat ready for me. If I didn't see Craig there, I'm going off my head."

Quest had disappeared some seconds ago. He came thoughtfully back, a little later.

"Captain," he asked, "what shall I tell you that I have proof that Craig is on board?"

The captain glanced at Laura and restrained himself.

"I should probably say a great many things which I should regret afterwards," he replied, grimly.

"Sit down and we'll tell you what has happened in my room," Quest continued.

He told the story, calmly and without remark. The captain held his head.

"The ship shall be searched," the captain declared, "once more. We'll look into every crack and every cupboard."

Lenora turned away with a little shiver. It was one of her rare moments of weakness.

"You won't find him! You won't find him!" she murmured. "And I am afraid!"

Lenora grasped the rails of the steamer and glanced downwards at the great barge full of Arab sailors and merchandise. In the near background were the docks of Port Said. It was their first glimpse of eastern atmosphere and color.

"I can't tell you how happy I am," she declared to Quest, "to think that this voyage is over. Every night I have gone to bed terrified."

He smiled grimly.

"Coming on shore, say of you?" Harris inquired.

"We may when the boat moves up," Quest replied. "The professor went off on the first barge. Here he is, coming back."

A little boat had shot out from the docks, manned by a couple of Arabs. They could see the professor seated in the stern. He was poring over a small document which he held in his hand. He waved to them excitedly.

"He's got news!" Quest muttered.

He came straight to Quest and Lenora and gripped the former by the arm.

"Look! he cried. 'Look!'

He held out a card. Quest read it aloud:

There is not one amongst you with the wit of a Mongar child. Good-by! The Hands!

and hurried off across the docks. On the landing stage, mind!"

The captain came and put his head out of the door.

"Mr. Quest," he said, "can you spare me a moment? You can all come, if you like."

They moved up towards him. The captain closed the door of his cabin. He pointed to a carpet-sweeper which lay against the wall.

"Look at that," he invited. They lifted the top. Inside were several sandwiches and a small can of tea.

"What on earth is this?" Quest demanded.

The captain, without a word, led them into his inner room. A huge lounge stood in one corner. He lifted the valance. Underneath were some crumbs.

"You see," he pointed out, "there's room there for a man to have hidden, especially if he could crawl out on deck at night. I couldn't make out why the dickens Brown was always sweeping out my room, and I took up this thing a little time ago and looked at it. This is what I found."

"Where's Brown?" Quest asked, quickly.

"I rang down for the chief steward," the captain continued, "and ordered Brown to be sent up at once. The chief steward came himself instead. It seems Brown went off without his wages, but with a huge parcel of bouillon, before anyone was turned away."

Quest frowned as he turned away.

"Captain," he declared, "I am ashamed. He has been here all the time and we've let him slip through our fingers. Girls," he went on bravely, turning towards Laura, who had just come up, "India's off. We'll catch this barge, if there's time. Our luggage can be put on shore when the boat docks."

The captain walked gloomily with them to the gangway.

"Professor," Quest asked, "how long would it take us to get to this Mongar village you spoke about?"

"Two or three days, if we can get canoes," the other replied. "I see you agree with me, then, as to Craig's probable destination?"

Quest nodded.

"What sort of fellows are they, anyway?" he asked. "Will it be safe for us to push on alone?"

"With me," the professor assured him, "you will be safe anywhere. I speak a little of their language. I have lived with them. They are far more civilized than some of the interior tribes."

They disembarked and were driven to the hotel, still discussing their project. The professor had disappeared for some time, but rejoined them later.

"It is all arranged," he announced. "I found a dragoman whom I knew. We shall have four of the best camels and a small escort ready to start tomorrow morning. Furthermore, I have news. An Englishman, whose description precisely tallies with Craig's, started off only an hour ago in the same direction. This time, at any rate, Craig cannot escape us."

They made their way back to the hotel, dined in a cool, bare room, and sauntered out again into the streets. The professor led the way to a little building, outside which a man was volubly inviting all to enter.

"You shall see one of the sights of Port Said," he promised. "This is a real Egyptian dancing girl."

A girl, who seemed to be dressed in little more than a winding veil, glided on to the stage, swaying and moving slowly to the rhythm of the monotonous music. She danced a measure which none of them except the professor had ever seen before, coming almost feet her hot breath, and Lenora felt somewhat vaguely disturbed by the glitter of her eyes.

Suddenly Laura leaned forward.

"Look at the professor," she whispered.

They all turned their heads. A queer change seemed to have come into the professor's face. His teeth were gleaming between his parted lips, his head was thrust forward a little, his eyes were filled with a strange, hard light. He was a transformed being, unrecognizable, perturbing. Even while they watched, the girl floated close to where he sat and leaned towards him with a queer, mocking smile. His hand suddenly descended upon her foot. She laughed still more. There was a little exclamation from Lenora. The professor's whole frame quivered. He stretched the anklet from the girl's ankle and bent over it.

She leaned towards him, a torrent of words streaming from her lips. The professor answered her in her own language. She listened to him in amazement. The anger passed. She held out both her hands. The professor still argued. She shook her head. Finally he placed some gold in her palms. She patted him on the cheek, laughed into his eyes, pointed behind and resumed her dance. The anklet remained in the professor's hand.

"Say, we'll get out of this," Quest said. "The girls have had enough."

The professor made no objection.

"Congratulations," he said. "I have been a collector of Egyptian gold ornaments all my life. This is the one anklet I needed to complete my collection. It has the double mark of the Pharaohs. I recognized it at once. There are a thousand like it, you would think, in the bazaars there. In reality there may be, perhaps, a dozen more in all Egypt which are genuine."

They all looked at one another. Their relief had grown too poignant for words.

"Early start tomorrow," Quest reminded them.

Lenora, a few nights later, looked down from the star-grown sky which seemed suddenly to have dropped so much nearer to them, to the shadows thrown across the desert by the dancing flames of their fire.

Laura rose to her feet.

"Say, I'm going to get a drink," she announced.

The dragoman who had been hovering around, bowed gravely and pointed towards the water bottles.

She took the horn cup from the dragoman.

"Have some yourself, if you want to, Hassan," she invited.

Hassan bowed gravely, filled a cup and drank it off. He stood for a moment perfectly still as though something were coming over him which he failed to understand. Then his lips parted, his eyes for a moment seemed to shoot from out of his dusky skin. He threw up his arms and fell over on his side. Laura, who had only stopped her cup, threw it from her. She, too, reeled for a moment. The professor and Quest came running up, attracted by Lenora's shriek.

"They're poisoned!" she cried. "The Vedemson!" Quest shouted.

"My God! Pull yourself together, Laura. Hold up for a minute."

He dashed back to their little encampment and reappeared almost immediately. He threw Laura's head back and forced some liquid down her throat.

"It's camphor!" he cried. "You'll be all right, Laura. Hold on to yourself!"

He swung round to where the dragoman was lying, forced his mouth open but it was too late—the man was dead. He returned to Laura. She stumbled to her feet. She was pale, and drops of perspiration were standing on her forehead. She was able to rise to her feet, however, without assistance.

"I am all right now," she declared. Quest felt her pulse and her forehead. They moved back to the fire.

"We are within a dozen miles or so of the Mongar village," Quest said grimly. "Do you suppose that fellow could have been watching?"

They all talked together for a time in low voices. The professor was inclined to scout the theory of Craig having approached them.

"You must remember," he pointed out, "that the Mongars hate these fellows. It was part of my arrangement with Hassan that they should leave us when we got in sight of the Mongar encampment. It may have been meant for Hassan. The Mongars hate the dragomen who bring tourists in this direction at all."

They talked a little while longer and finally stole away to their tents to sleep. Outside, the camel drivers talked still, chattering away, walking now and then around Hassan's body in solemn procession. Finally, one of them who seemed to have taken the lead, broke into an impassioned stream of words. Soon they stole away—a long, ghostly procession—into the night.

"Those fellows seem to have left off their infernal chattering all of a sudden," Quest remarked, lastly, from inside the tent.

The professor made no answer. He was asleep.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Under and by virtue of the power of sale contained in a certain mortgage deed executed to W. F. Hockaday by Henton Norden and wife, Marjanda Norden, which mortgage deed is recorded in Book No. 119 on page 307, records of Harnett county, default having been made in the payment of the debt thereby secured, the undersigned will sell to the highest bidder for cash at the courthouse door in Lillington, N. C. on Monday the 13th day of March, 1916, at 12 o'clock, M. the following described lands:

1st tract: Being a part of lot No. 5 in the division of the estate of Wm. Hockaday as will more fully appear in the record of said division as recorded in Book No. 176, Page 94 office of Registrar of Deeds of Harnett county;

2nd tract: Being a stake, the south-east corner of a large tract sold to A. A. Beasley by W. F. Hockaday and runs thence as the Ned Matthews line S. 14 N. 27.80 chains to a stake and black jack pointers in a hedge row, Ned Matthews' corner; thence N. 88 W. 21.16 chains to a stake and pointer at the head of a branch in Alex Hockaday's line; thence as his line N. 2 1/2 chains to a stake in Alex Norcum's line; thence S. 2 1/2 W. 3.10 chains to the southwest corner of the 5-acre tract sold to A. A. Beasley; thence as the line of the said tract S. 30 E. 10 chains to the beginning containing of 1.2 acres.

3rd tract: Known as lot No. 6 in the Wm. Hockaday division above referred to and bounded as follows, beginning at a corner of the W. F. Hockaday house tract at the head of a small branch Alex Hockaday's line and runs as said line S. 2 W