

The BLACK BOX

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Author of "Mr. Cox of Monte Carlo," "The Vanished Messenger," "The Lighted Way," 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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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 but in Professor Ashleigh's garden he has seen an anthropoid ape skeleton and a living, inhuman creature, half man, half ape, destroyed by fire. In his rooms have appeared from nowhere black boxes containing diamonds that had been torn from the owner's throat by a pair of arms, threatening hands, and savagely threatening notes signed by the inscrutable hands. Laura and Lenora, his assistants, suspect Quest, the professor's valet, of the double murder of Ross Brown, Quest's valet, and a Miss Quigg. Quest traps Craig, but he escapes to England on a tramp steamer. The black boxes continue to appear in unusual fashion. Notified of Craig's capture by Scotland Yard, Quest sends the professor to Hamblin house, Lord Ashleigh's home in England, only to find that Craig has again escaped.

NINTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XX.

LOST IN LONDON.

Quest, notwithstanding the unusual nature of his surroundings, slept that night as only a tired and healthy man can. He was awakened the next morning by the quiet movements of a manservant who had brought back his clothes carefully brushed and pressed. "Breakfast is served at nine o'clock, sir. It is now half-past eight."

"I'll be right there." The man withdrew and Quest made a brisk toilet. The nameless fears of the previous night had altogether disappeared. At the last moment he stretched out his hand to take a handkerchief from his satchel. A sudden exclamation broke from his lips. He stood for a moment as though turned to stone. Before him, on the top of the little pile of white cambric, was a small black box! With a movement of the fingers which was almost mechanical, he removed the lid and drew out the customary little scrap of paper. He smoothed it out before him on the dressing case and read the message.

"You will fail here as you have failed before. Better get back. There is more danger for you in this country than you dream of."

His teeth came fiercely together and his hands were clenched. His thoughts had gone like a flash to Lenora. Was it possible that harm was intended for her? He put the idea away from him almost as soon as conceived. The thing was unimaginable. Craig was here, must be here, in the close vicinity of the house.

The atmosphere of the pleasant breakfast room to which in due course he descended, was cheerful enough. Lady Ashleigh had already taken her place at the head of the table.

She touched an electric bell under her foot and a moment or two later the butler appeared.

"Go up and see how long your master will be?" Lady Ashleigh directed.

"Very good, your ladyship."

The man was backing through the doorway in his usual dignified manner when he was suddenly pushed on one side. The valet who had waited upon Quest, and who was Lord Ashleigh's own servant, rushed into the room. He almost shouted to Lady Ashleigh:

"Your ladyship—the master! Something has happened! He won't move! He—he—"

They all trooped out of the room and up the stairs, the professor leading the way. The professor and Quest stood face to face. The former's expression, however, had lost all its amiable serenity. His face was white and pinched.

"Quest! Quest!" he almost sobbed. "My brother—George, whom I loved like nobody else on earth! Is he really dead?"

"Absolutely!"

The professor gripped the oak pillar of the bedstead. He seemed on the point of collapse.

"The mark of the Hands is upon his throat," Quest pointed out.

"The Hands? Oh, my God!" the professor groaned.

"We must not eat or drink or sleep," Quest declared, fiercely, "until we have brought this matter to an end. Craig must be found. This is the supreme horror of all."

The butler made an apologetic appearance. He spoke in a hushed whisper. "You are wanted downstairs, gentlemen. Middleton, the head keeper, is there."

As though inspired with a common idea, both Quest and the professor hurried out of the room and down the broad stairs. Their inspiration was a true one. The gamekeeper welcomed them with a smile or triumph. By his side, the picture of abject misery, his clothes torn and muddy, was Craig!

"I've imagined this little job, sir," Middleton announced, with a smile of slow triumph.

"How did you get him?" Quest demanded.

"Little idea of my own," the gamekeeper continued. "I guessed pretty well what he'd be up to. He'd tumbled to it that the usual way of the moor was pretty well guarded, and he'd doubled back through the thin line of woods close to the house. I dug one of my poachers' pits, sir, and covered it over with a lot of loose stuff. That got him all right. When I went to look this morning I saw where he'd fallen through, and there he was, walking round and round at the bottom like a caged animal. Your servants have telephoned for the police, Mr. Ashleigh."

Quest suddenly whispered to the professor. Then he turned to the keeper. "Bring him upstairs, Middleton, for a moment," he directed. "Follow us, please."

They passed into the bedchamber. Quest signed to the keeper to bring Craig to the side of the four-poster. Then he drew down the sheet.

"Is that your work?" he asked, sternly.

Craig, up till then, had spoken no word. He had shambled to the bedside, a broken, yet, in a sense, a stolid figure. The light of the desk lamp, however, seemed to galvanize him into sudden and awful vitality. He threw up his arms. His eyes were horrible as they glared at those small black marks. His lips moved backward and forward, helplessly at first. Then at last he spoke.

"Strangled!" he cried. "One more!"

"That is your work," the criminologist said, firmly.

Craig collapsed. He would have fallen bodily to the ground if Middleton's grip had not kept him up. Quest bent over him. It was clear that he had fainted. They led him from the room.

"We'd better lock him up until the police arrive," Quest suggested. "I suppose there is a safe place somewhere?"

The professor awoke from his stupor.

"Let me show you," he begged. "I know the way. We're a subterranean hiding place which no criminal on this earth could escape from."

They led him down to the back part of the house into a dry cellar which had the appearance of a prison cell.

"This place has been used before now, in the old days, for malefactors," the professor remarked. "He'll be safe there. Craig," he added, his voice trembling, "Craig—I can't speak to you. How could you!"

There was no answer. Craig's face was buried in his hands. They left him there and turned the key.

CHAPTER XXI.

Quest stood, frowning, upon the pavement, gazing at the obviously empty house. He looked once more at the slip of paper which Lenora had given him. There was no possibility of any mistake.

Mr. Willet, 157 Elmers Road, Hampstead.

This was 157 and the house was empty. After a moment's hesitation he rang the bell at the adjoining door. A woman, who had been watching him from the front room, answered the summons at once.

"Can you tell me," he inquired, "what has become of the lady who used to live at 157—Mrs. Willet?"

"She's moved," was the uncompromising reply.

"Do you know where to?" Quest asked, eagerly.

"West Kensington—No. 17 Princess Court road. There was a young lady here yesterday afternoon inquiring for her."

Quest raised his hat. It was a relief, at any rate, to have news of Lenora. "I am very much obliged to you, madam."

"You're welcome!" was the terse reply.

Quest gave a new address to the taxi driver and was scarcely able to restrain his impatience during the long drive. They pulled up at last before a somewhat dingy-looking house. He rang the bell, which was answered by a grim-looking little maidservant.

"Is Mrs. Willet in?" he inquired.

The maidservant stood on one side to let him pass. Almost at the same moment the door of the front room opened and a pleasant-looking elderly lady appeared.

"I am Mrs. Willet," she announced. "I am Mr. Quest," the criminologist told her quickly. "You may have heard your niece, Lenora, speak of me."

"Then perhaps you can tell me what has become of her?" Mrs. Willet observed.

"Isn't she here?" Mrs. Willet shook her head.

"I had a telegram from her from Plymouth to say that she was coming, but I've seen nothing of her as yet."

"You've changed your address, you know," Quest reminded her, after a moment's reflection.

"I wrote and told her," Mrs. Willet began. "After all, though, she went on thoughtfully, 'I am not sure whether she could have had the letter. But if she went up to Hampstead, anyone would tell her where I had moved to. There's no secret about me.'"

"Lenora did go up to 157 Elmers Road yesterday," Quest told her. "They gave her your address here, as they have just given it to me."

"Then what's become of the child?" Mrs. Willet demanded.

Quest, whose brain was working quickly, scribbled upon one of his cards the address of the hotel where he had taken rooms and passed it over.

"Why Lenora didn't come on to you here I can't imagine," he said. "However, I'll go back to the hotel where she was to spend the night after she arrived. She may have gone back there. That's my address, Mrs. Willet. If you hear anything I wish you'd let me know. Lenora's quite a particular friend of mine and I am a little anxious."

Quest had already opened the front door for himself and passed out. He sprang into the taxi, which he had kept waiting.

"Clifford's hotel in Payne street," he told the man.

He lit a cigar and smoked furiously all the way, throwing it on to the pavement as he hurried into the quiet private hotel which a fellow passenger on the steamer had recommended as being suitable for Lenora's one night alone in town.

"Can you tell me if Miss Lenora Macdougall is staying here?" he asked at the office.

The woman shook her head.

"Miss Macdougall stayed here the night before last," she said, "and her luggage is waiting for orders. She left here yesterday afternoon to go to her aunt's, and promised to send for her things later on during the day. There they stand, all ready for her."

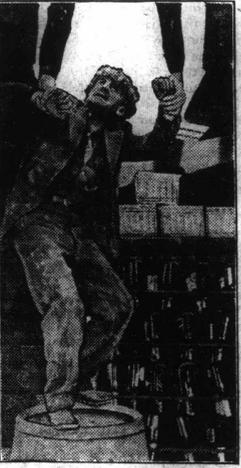
"What time did she go?"

"Directly after an early lunch. It must have been about two o'clock."

Quest hurried away. So after all there was some foundation for this queer sense of depression which had been hovering about him for the last few days!

"Scotland Yard," he told the taxi driver.

He thrust another cigar between his teeth, but forgot to light it. He was



Craig Escapes From the Cellar.

amazed at his own sensations, conscious of fears and emotions of which he would never have believed himself capable. He gave in his card, and after a few moments' delay he was shown into the presence of one of the chiefs of the detective department, who greeted him warmly.

"My name is Hardaway," the latter announced.

"My assistant, a young lady, Miss Lenora Macdougall, has disappeared! She and I and Professor Ashleigh left the steamer at Plymouth and traveled up in the boat train. It was stopped at Hamblin road for the professor and myself, and Miss Macdougall came on to London. She was staying at Clifford's hotel in Payne street for the night, and then going on to the aunt. Well, I've found that aunt. She was expecting the girl, but the girl never appeared."

"Where did this aunt live?" Hardaway inquired.

"No. 17, Princess Court road, West Kensington," Quest replied. "She had just moved there from Elmers road, Hampstead. I went first to Hampstead. Lenora had been there and learned her aunt's correct address in West Kensington. I followed on to West Kensington and found that the aunt was still awaiting her."



"I'll Give a Ten-Pound Note to Anyone Who Gets Me Out to the Barton Before She Sails."

A new interest seemed suddenly to have crept into Hardaway's manner.

"Let me see," he said, "if she left Clifford's hotel about two, she would have been at Hampstead about half past two. She would have a few minutes in making inquiries, then she probably left Hampstead for West Kensington, say, at a quarter to three. Give me at once a description of the young lady," he demanded.

Quest drew a photograph from his pocket and passed it silently over.

"Mr. Quest," he said, "it is just possible that your visit here has been an exceedingly opportune one."

"Come along with me," he continued. "We'll talk as we go."

They entered a taxi and drove off westwards.

"Mr. Quest," he went on, "for two months we have been on the track of a man and a woman whom we strongly suspect of having deceived half a dozen perfectly respectable young women, and shipped them out to South America."

"The white slave traffic!" Quest gasped.

"Something of the sort," Hardaway admitted. "Well, we've been closing the net around this interesting couple, and last night I had information brought to me upon which we are acting this afternoon. We've had them described to us exactly with the woman sitting in a taxicab about three o'clock yesterday afternoon when a young woman entered who was obviously a stranger to London. You see, the time fits in exactly, if your assistant decided to stop her way to Kensington and get some tea. She asked the woman at the desk the best means of getting to West Kensington without taking a taxicab. Her description tallies exactly with the photograph you have shown me. The woman whom my men were watching addressed her and offered to show her the way. They left the place together. My men followed them. The house has been watched ever since and we are raiding it this afternoon. You and I will just be in time."

He stopped the cab and they got out. A man who seemed to be strolling aimlessly along reading a newspaper suddenly joined them.

"Well, Dixon?" his chief exclaimed. The man glanced around.

"I've got three men round at the back of Mr. Hardaway," he said. "It's impossible for anyone to leave the place."

Hardaway paused to consider a moment.

"Look here," Quest suggested, "they know all of you, of course, and they'll never let you in until they're forced to. I'm a stranger. Let me go. I'll get in all right."

"All right," he assented. "We shall follow you up pretty closely, though."

Quest stepped back into the taxi and gave the driver a direction. When he emerged in front of the handsome gray stone house he seemed to have become completely transformed. There was a fatuous smile upon his lips. He crossed the pavement with difficulty, stumbling up the steps, and held on to the knocker with one hand while he consulted a slip of paper. He had scarcely rung the bell before a slightly parted curtain in the front room fell together and a moment later the door was opened by a man in the livery of a butler, but with the face and physique of a prize-fighter.

"Lady of the house," Quest demanded. "Want to see the lady of the house?"

"Almost immediately he was conscious of a woman standing in the hall before him.

"You had better come in," she invited. "Please do not stand in the doorway."

Quest, however, who had heard the footsteps of the others behind him, loitered there for a moment.

"You're the lady whose name is on this piece of paper," he demanded.

"This place is all right, eh?"

"I really do not know what you mean," the woman replied coldly, "but if you will come inside I will talk with you in the drawing room."

Quest, as though stumbling against the front door, had it now wide open, and in a moment the hall seemed full

The woman shrieked. The butler suddenly sprang upon the man to enter and sent him spinning down the steps. Almost at that instant there was a scream from upstairs. Quest took a running jump and went up the stairs four at a time. The butler, who had so far defied arrest, suddenly snatched the revolver from Hardaway's hand and fired blindly in front of him, missing Quest only by an inch or two.

"Don't be a fool, Karl!" the woman called out. "The game's up. Take it quietly."

Once more the shriek rang through the house. Quest rushed to the door of the room from whence it came, tried the handle, and found it locked. He ran back a little way and charged it. From inside he could hear a turmoil of voices. White with rage and passion, he pushed and kicked madly. There was a shot from inside, a bullet came through the door within an inch of his head, then the crash of broken crockery and a man's groan. With a final effort Quest dashed the door in and staggered into the room. Lenora was standing in the far corner, the front of her dress torn and blood upon her lips. She held a revolver in her hand, and was covering a man whose head and hands were bleeding. Around him were the debris of a broken jug.

"Mr. Quest!" she screamed. "Don't go near him—I've got him covered. I'm all right!"

Quest drew a long breath. The man who stood glaring at him was well dressed and still young. He was unarmed, however, and Quest secured him in a moment.

"The girl's mad!" he said sullenly. "No one wanted to do her any harm."

Hardaway and his men came trooping up the stairs. Quest relinquished his prisoner and went over to Lenora.

"I've been so frightened," she sobbed. "They got me in here—they told me that this was the street in which my aunt lived—and they wouldn't let me go. The woman was horrible. And this afternoon this man came. The brute!"

"Quest turned to Hardaway.

"I'll take the young lady away," he said. "You know where to find us."

Lenora had almost recovered when they reached the hotel. Walking up and down they found the professor.

"My friend!" he exclaimed—"Mr. Quest! It is the devil incarnate against whom we fight!"

"What do you mean?" Quest demanded.

The professor wrung his hands.

"I put him in our James II prison," he declared. "Why should I think of the secret passage? No one has used it for a hundred years. He found it, learned the trick—"

"You mean," Quest cried—"He has escaped!" the professor broke in. "Craig has escaped again! They are searching for him high and low, but he has gone!"

Quest's arm tightened for a moment in Lenora's. It was curious how he seemed to have lost at that moment all sense of proportion. Lenora was safe—the relief of that one thought overshadowed everything else in the world.

"The fellow can't get far," he muttered.

"Who knows?" the professor replied, dolefully.

They had been standing together in a little recess of the hall. Suddenly Lenora, whose face was turned toward the entrance doors, gave a little cry. She took a quick step forward.

"Laura!" she exclaimed, wonderingly. "Why, it's Laura!"

They all turned around. A young woman had just entered the hotel, followed by a porter carrying some luggage. Her arm was in a sling and there was a bandage around her forehead. She walked, too, with the help of a stick. She recognized them at once and waved it gayly.

"Hallo, you people!" she cried. "Soon run you to earth, eh?"

They were for a moment dumfounded. Lenora was the first to find words. "But when did you start, Laura?"

"I thought you were too ill to move for weeks."

The girl smiled contemptuously.

"I left three days after you, on the Kaiser Frederic," she replied. "There was some trouble at Plymouth, and

we came into Southampton early this morning, and here I am. Say, before we go any further, tell me about Craig."

"We've had him," Quest confessed, "and lost him again. He escaped last night."

"Where from?" Laura asked. "Hamblin house."

"Say, is that anywhere near the south coast?" the girl demanded excitedly.

"It's not far away," Quest replied, quickly. "Why?"

"I'll tell you why," Laura explained. "I was as sure of it as anyone could be. Craig passed me in Southampton water this morning, being rowed out to a steamer. Not only that, but he recognized me. I saw him draw back and hide his face, but somehow I couldn't believe that it was really he. I was just coming down the gangway and I nearly fell into the sea, I was so surprised."

Quest was already turning over the pages of the timetable.

"What was the steamer?" he demanded.

"I found out," Laura told him. "I tell you, I was so sure of it being Craig that I made no end of inquiries. It was the Barton, bound for India, first stop Port Said."

"When does she sail?" Quest asked. "Tonight—somewhere about seven," Laura replied.

Quest glanced at the clock and threw down the timetable. He turned toward the door. They all followed him.

"I'm for Southampton," he announced. "I'm going to try to get on board that steamer before she sails. Lenora, you'd better go upstairs and lie down. They'll give you a room here. Don't you stir out till I come back. Professor, what about you?"

"I shall accompany you," the professor declared.

"And nothing," Lenora declared, firmly, as she caught at Quest's arm, "would keep me away."

"I'll telephone to Scotland Yard, in case they care to send a man down," Quest decided.

They caught a train to Southampton, where they were joined by a man from Scotland Yard. The little party drove as quickly as possible to the docks.

"Where does the Barton start from?" Quest asked the piermaster.

"The man pointed out a little way down the water."

"She's not in dock, sir," he said. "She's lying out yonder. You'll barely catch her, I'm afraid," he added, glancing at the clock.

They hurried to the edge of the quay.

"Look here," Quest cried, raising his voice. "I'll give a ten-pound note to anyone who gets me out to the Barton before she sails."

The little party were almost thrown into a tug, and in a few minutes they were skimming across the smooth water. Just as they reached the steamer, however, she began to move.

"Run up alongside," Quest ordered. The captain came down from the bridge, where he had been conferring with the pilot.

"Keep away from the side there," he shouted. "Who are you?"

"We are in search of a desperate criminal whom we believe to be on board your steamer."

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AIR WARFARE IS ONLY THING LEFT

Alexander Graham Bell Sees Revolution in Methods

ZEPPELIN PROVES A FAILURE

The Heavier-than-air Machine Has Proven Its Ability to Cope With the Great Gas-filled Craft—Sea-Power Will Become Secondary to Supremacy in the Air.

It is obvious that we are on the eve of a revolution in methods of conducting warfare and that the novel features introduced by the European war are all the product of scientific research; hence we may anticipate that the scientific man will be an important factor in future developments," says Dr. Alexander Graham Bell, the Canadian inventor, in a recent interview.

"I regard the progress of aviation as the most significant feature that war has brought about," he said.

"I am for Southampton," he announced. "I'm going to try to get on board that steamer before she sails. Lenora, you'd better go upstairs and lie down. They'll give you a room here. Don't you stir out till I come back. Professor, what about you?"

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