

# The BLACK DOX

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(Continued)

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 strangest and fiercest of the nomadic 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 high bridge of the nose of the pure Oriental; also much of the 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 extraordinary bravery by Craig, my servant. Early this morning, a man-carrying lion found his way into the camp. The Mongars behaved like ardent cowards. 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 firearms, chased 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 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 "Veedomoo." It brings about instant death, and is exceedingly difficult to trace. The addition of sugar causes a curious condensation and resolves it almost to a white paste. He used it here, and which is exactly equivalent to our canker.

The professor closed his book. Quest promptly rang the bell.

"Some sugar," he ordered, turning to the steward.

They waited in absolute silence. The suggestion which the professor's disclosure 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 today strange shade of gray and began slowly to thicken.

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

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

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

There seemed to be, somehow, among 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 his 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:

To Sanford Quest:  
You have escaped this time by a chance of fortune, not because your wits are keen, not because of your own shrewdness; 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. Harris all recognized Laura's voice, but they were all on 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 find him?" Laura demanded, eagerly.

"I did not," the captain replied, a little tersely. "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-walk-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 you say if I tell you that I have proof that Craig is on board?"

has happened in my room," Quest continued.

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

"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."

"Coming on shore, any 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!

"Where did you get it?" Quest demanded.

"That's the point—the whole point!" the professor exclaimed excitedly. "He's done us! He's landed! That paper was pushed into my hand by a tall Arab, who mumbled something 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 bedding, on the first barge this morning, before anyone was about."

Quest groaned 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 briskly, 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 camels," the other replied. "I see you agree with me, then, as to Craig's probable destination?"

Quest nodded.

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 now and then so close that they could almost feel 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 chance 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 back 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 snatched 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 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.

"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-strewn 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 slipped 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 Veedomoo!" 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 dragoman who brings 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, lazily, from inside the tent.

The professor made no answer. He was asleep.

### SYNOPSIS.

Quest, master criminologist of the world, finds that in bringing to justice the murderer of Lord Macdonald, he has, but for a hair, been in a life-and-death struggle with a notorious and cunning black box, containing a mysterious, half monkey, half man, destroyed by the living Professor Ashleigh's garden he has been murdered by the hands of his assistants, suspect Craig, the professor's daughter, and Lenora. The black boxes continue to appear in uncanny fashion. Craig is trapped by Quest, and the professor follows him. Lord Macdonald is murdered in London and rescued. The professor, Quest and his party also, and beyond into the desert.

### ELEVENTH INSTALLMENT

#### CHAPTER XXIII. IN THE DESERT.

Quest was the first the next morning to open his eyes, to grope his way through the tent opening and stand for a moment alone, watching the alabaster skies. He turned lazily around, meaning to summon the Arab who had volunteered to take Hassan's place. His arms—he had when in the act of stretching—fell to his sides. He stared at the spot where the camels had been tethered, incredulously. There were no camels, no drivers, no Arabs. There was not a soul nor an object in sight except the stark body of Hassan, which they had dragged half out of sight behind a slight knoll. High up in the sky above were two little black specks, wheeling lower and lower. Quest shivered as he suddenly realized that for the first time in his life he was looking upon the scene of a crime in a desert. Lower and lower they came. He turned away with a shiver.

The professor was still sleeping when Quest re-entered the tent. He woke him up and beckoned him to come outside.

Quest pointed to the little sandy knoll with its sparse covering of grass, deserted—with scarcely a sign, even that it had been the resting place of the little caravan. The professor gave vent to a little exclamation.

The professor hurried off towards the spot where the encampment had been made. Suddenly he stood still and pointed with his finger. In the clearer, almost crystalline light of the coming day, they saw the track of the camels in the sand, an unbroken line stretching away northwards.

He glanced around a little helplessly. Quest took a cigar from his case and lit it.

"No good worrying," Quest sighed. "The question is how best to get out of this mess. What's the next move, anyway?"

The professor glanced towards the sea and took a small compass from his pocket. He pointed across the desert.

"That's exactly our route," he said, "but I reckon we still must be two days from the Mongars, and how we are going to get there ourselves, much more get the women there, without camels, I don't know. There are no wells, and I don't believe those fellows have left us a single tin of water."

Laura put her head out of the tent in which the two women had slept.

"Say, where's breakfast?" she exclaimed. "I can't smell the coffee."

They turned and approached her silently. The two girls, fully dressed, came out of the tent as they approached.

"Young ladies," the professor announced, "I regret to say that a misfortune has befallen us, a misfortune which we shall be able, without doubt, to surmount, but which will mean a day of hardship and much inconvenience."

"Where are the camels?" Lenora asked breathlessly.

"Gone!" Quest replied. "And the Arabs?"

"Gone with them—we are left high and dry," Quest explained.

"And what is worse," the professor added, "with a groan, "they have taken with them our stores, our rifles and our water."

"How far are we from the Mongar camp?" Lenora asked.

"About a day's tramp," Quest replied quickly. "We may reach there by nightfall."

"Then let's start walking at once, before it gets any hotter," Lenora suggested.

Quest patted her on the back. They made a close search of the tent, but found that the Arabs had taken everything in the way of food and drink, except a single half-filled tin of drinking water.

They started bravely enough, but by midday their little stock of water was gone, their feet were sorely blistered. No one complained, however, and the professor did his best to revive their spirits.

"We have come farther than I had dared to hope, in the time, he announced. "Fortunately, I know the exact direction we must take. Keep up your spirits, young ladies. At any time we may see signs of our destination."

They struggled on once more. Night came and brought with it a half-soothing, half-torturing coolness. That rained a strain of the eyes upon the horizon at any rate was spared to them. They slept in a fashion, but soon after dawn they were on their feet again. Suddenly Quest, who had gone a little out of his way to mount a low range and hills, waved his arm furiously. He was holding his field-glasses to his eyes. It was wonderful how that ray of hope transformed them. They hurried to where

he was. He passed the glasses to the professor.

"A caravan!" he exclaimed. "I can see the camels, and horses!"

The professor almost snatched the glasses.

"It is quite true," he agreed. "It is a caravan crossing at right angles to our direction. Come! They will see us before long."

Presently three or four horsemen detached themselves from the main body and came galloping towards them. The eyes of the little party glittered as they saw that the foremost had a water-bottle slung around his neck. He came dashing up, waving his arms.

"You lost people!" he asked. "Want water?"

They almost snatched the bottle from him. It was like pouring life into their veins. They all, at the professor's instigation, drank sparingly. Quest, with a great sigh of relief, lit a cigar.

"Some adventure, this!" he declared.

The professor, who had been talking to the men in their own language, turned back towards the two girls.

"It is a caravan," he explained, "of peaceful merchants on their way to Jaffa. They are halting for us, and we shall be able, without a doubt, to arrange for water and food and a camel or two horses. The man here asks if the ladies will take the horses and ride?"

They started off gaily to where the caravan had come to a standstill. They had scarcely traversed a hundred yards, however, before the Arab who was leading Lenora's horse came to a sudden standstill. He pointed with his arm and commenced to talk in an excited fashion to his two companions. From across the desert, facing them, came a little company of horsemen, galloping fast and with the sunlight flashing upon their rifles.

"The Mongars!" the Arab cried, pointing wildly. "They attack the caravan!"

The three Arabs talked together for a moment in an excited fashion. Then, without excuse or warning, they swung the two women to the ground, leaping



"If You Value Your Lives, You Will Do as You Are Bidden."

on their horses, and, turning northward, galloped away.

The professor looked on anxiously. "I am not at all sure," he said in an undertone to Quest, "about our position with the Mongars. Craig has a peculiar hold upon them, but as a rule they hate white men, and their blood will be up. See! The sight is all over. Those fellows were no match for the Mongars. Most of them have fled and left the caravan."

The fight was indeed over. Four of the Mongars had galloped away in pursuit of the Arabs who had been the temporary escort of Quest and his companions. They passed about a hundred yards away, waving their arms and shouting furiously. One of them even fired a shot, which missed Quest by only a few inches.

"The professor muttered, 'Who's this? It's the chief and—'

"Our search is over, at any rate," Quest interrupted. "It's Craig!"

They came galloping up, Craig in white linen clothes and an Arab's cloak; the chief by his side—a fine, upright man with long, gray beard; behind, three Mongars, their rifles already to their shoulders. The chief wheeled up his horse as he came within twenty paces of the little party.

"White! English!" he shouted. "Why do you seek death here?"

He waited for no reply, but turned to his men. Three of them dashed forward, their rifles, which were fitted with an odd sort of bayonet, drawn back for the lounge. Suddenly Craig, who had been a little in the rear, galloped, shouting, into the line of fire.

"Stop!" he ordered. "Chief, these people are my friends. Chief, the word!"

The chief raised his arm promptly. The men lowered their rifles. Craig galloped back to his host's side. The chief listened to him and nodded gravely. Presently he rode up to the little party. He saluted the professor gravely and talked to him in his own language. The professor turned to the others.

"The chief apologizes for not recognizing me," he announced. "It seems that Craig had told him that he had come to the desert for shelter, and he imagined at once, when he gave the order for the attack upon us, that we were his enemies. He says that we are welcome to go with him to his encampment."

Craig turned slowly towards them. It was a strange meeting.

"It is necessary," he told them, "that you should pretend to be my friends. The chief has ordered two of his men to dismount. Their ponies are for the young ladies. There will be horses for you among the captured ones from the caravan yonder."

who remained a little on the outskirts of the circle. The professor raised his hat and spoke a few words in the Mongar language, then he turned to the others.

"I have accepted the invitation of the chief," he announced. "We had better start."

"This may not be Delmonico's," Laura remarked, a few hours later, with a little sigh of contentment. "But believe me that goat-stew and sherbet tasted better than any chicken and champagne I ever tasted."

Lenora leaned forward to where a little group of Mongars were talking together.

"I wish that beautiful girl would come and let us see her again," she murmured.

"She?" the professor explained, "is the chief's daughter, Feerda, whose life Craig saved."

"And from the way she looks at him," Laura observed, "I should say she hadn't forgotten it, either."

The professor held up a warning finger. "The girl herself had glided to their side out of the shadows. She faced the professor. The rest of the party she seemed to ignore. She spoke slowly and in halting English.

"My father wishes to know that you are satisfied," she said. "You have no further wants?"

"None," the professor assured her. "We are very grateful for his hospitality, Feerda."

"Won't you talk to us for a little time?" Lenora begged, leaning forward.

The girl turned suddenly to the professor and spoke to him in her own language. She pointed to the signs upon the tent, drew her finger along one of the sentences, flashed a fierce glance at them all and disappeared.

"Seems to me that we are not exactly popular with the young lady," Quest remarked. "What was she saying, professor?"

"She suspects us," the professor said slowly, "of wishing to bring evil to Craig. She pointed to a sentence upon the tent. Roughly it means 'Gratitude is the debt of hospitality.'—I am very much afraid that the young lady must have been listening to our conversation."

The professor suddenly leaned forward. There was a queer change in his face. From somewhere on the other side of that soft bank of violet darkness came what seemed to be the clear, low cry of some animal.

"It is the Mongar cry of warning," he said hoarsely. "Something is going to happen."

The whole encampment was suddenly in a state of activity. The Mongars ran hither and thither, getting together their horses. The chief, with Craig by his side, was standing on the outskirts of the camp.

"Seems to me there's a move on," Quest muttered, as they rose to their feet. "I wonder if we are in it."

A moment or two later Craig approached them.

"Word has been brought to the chief," he announced, "that the Arab who escaped from the caravan has fallen in with an outpost of British soldiers. They have already started in pursuit of us. The Mongars will take refuge in the jungle, where they have prepared hiding-places. We start at once."

"What about us?" the professor inquired.

"I endeavored," Craig continued, "to persuade the chief to allow you to remain here, when the care of you would devolve upon the English soldiers. He and Feerda, however, have absolutely refused my request. Feerda has overheard some of your conversation, and the chief believes that you will betray us. You will have to come, too."

They all rose at once to their feet, and a few moments later horses were brought.

The little procession was already being formed in line. Craig approached them once more.

"You will mount now and ride in the middle of our caravan," he directed. "The chief does not trust you. If you value your lives, you will do as you are bidden."

"You can call this fairland, if you want," Laura remarked, gazing around her. "I get it a nasty, damp, oozy spot."

Quest motioned them to sit a little nearer.

"I had a moment's talk with Craig this morning, and from what he says I fancy they mean to make a move a little farther in before long. It'll be all the more difficult to escape them."

"You think we could get away?" Lenora whispered, eagerly.

Quest glanced cautiously around. They were surrounded by thick vegetation, but they were only a very short distance from the camp.

"Seems to me," he continued, "we shall have to try it some day or other and I'm all for trying it soon. Even if they caught us, I don't believe they'd dare to kill us, with the English soldiers so close behind. I am going to get hold of two or three rifles and some ammunition. That's easy, because they leave them about all the time. And what you girls want to do is to hide some food and get a bottle of water."

"What about Craig?" the professor asked.

"We are going to take him along," Quest declared, grimly. "He's had the devil's own luck so far but it can't last forever. I'll see to that part of the business, if you others get ready and wait for me to give the signal."

They dispersed in various directions. It was not until late in the evening, when the Mongars had withdrawn a little to indulge in their customary

of growing bushes, that they were absolutely alone. Quest looked out of the tent in which they had been sitting and came back again.

"Well!" Laura lifted her skirt and showed an unusual projection underneath.

"Lenora and I have pinned up our petticoats," she announced. "We've got plenty of food and a bottle of water."

Quest threw open the white Arab cloak which he had been wearing. He had three rifles strapped around him.

"The professor's got the ammunition," he said, "and we've five horses tethered in the strand paces along the track we came by, just behind the second tree turning to the left. I want you all to get there now at once and take the rifles. There isn't a soul in the camp and you can carry them wrapped in this cloak. I'll join you in ten minutes."

"What about Craig?" the professor inquired.</