

The BLACK BOX

E. PHILIPS OPPENHEIM

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(Continued)

"What is it?" he demanded. Quest stretched out his hand and picked up from the top of the cigars a small black box. He laid it on the table.

"Unless I am very much mistaken," he said, "it is another communication from our mysterious friend."

"Impossible!" the professor exclaimed hoarsely.

"How can he have been here?" Lenora cried.

Quest removed the lid from the box and drew out a circular card. Around the outside edge was a very clever pen and ink sketch of a lifeboat, and inside the margin were several sentences of clear handwriting. In the middle was the signature—the clearest hands! Quest read the message aloud:

In the great scheme of things, the Supreme Ruler of the universe divided an inheritance amongst his children. To one he gave power, to another strength, to another beauty, but to his favorite he gave cunning. They all looked at one another.

"What does it mean?" Lenora gasped.

"A lifeboat!" the professor murmured.

They both stared at Quest, who remained silent, chewing hard at the end of his cigar.

"Every message," he said, speaking half to himself, "has had some significance. What does this mean—a lifeboat?"

He was silent for a moment. Then he turned suddenly to the professor.

"What did you call those men in the motortruck, professor—river pirates? And a lifeboat? Wait."

He crossed the room towards his desk and returned with a list in his hand. He ran his finger down it, stopped and glanced at the date.

"The Durham," he muttered, "cargo cotton, destination Southampton, sails that high tide on the 16th. Lenora, is that calendar right?"

"It is the 16th, Mr. Quest," she answered.

Quest crossed the room to the telephone.

"I want number one, central," he said. "Thank you! Put me through to Mr. French's office. . . Hello, French! I've got an idea. Can you come round here at once and bring an automobile? I want to get down to the docks—now where the passenger steamers start from—lower down."

"Good! We'll wait."

Quest hung up the receiver.

"See here, professor," he continued, "that fellow wouldn't dare to send this message if he weren't pretty sure of getting off. He's made all his plans beforehand, but it's my belief we shall just get our hands upon him, after all."

Presently he heard the automobile stop outside and French appeared.

"Anything doing?" he asked.

Quest showed him the card and the sailing list.

The inspector glanced at the clock.

"Then we've got to make tracks," he declared, "and pretty quick, too. She'll be starting from somewhere about number twenty-eight dock, a long way down. Come along, gentlemen."

They hurried out to the automobile and started off for the docks. The latter part of the journey was accomplished under difficulties, for the street was packed with drays and heavy vehicles. They reached dock number twenty-eight at last, however, and hurried through the shed on to the wharf. There were no signs of a steamer there.

"Where's the Durham?" Quest asked one of the carters, who was just getting his team together.

The man pointed out to the middle of the river, where a small steamer was lying.

"There she is," he replied. "She'll be off in a few minutes. You'll hear the strains directly when they begin to move down."

Quest led the way quickly to the edge of the wharf. There was a small tug there, the crew of which were just making her fast for the night.

"Fifty dollars if you'll take us out to the Durham and catch her before she sails," Quest shouted to the man who seemed to be the captain.

They clambered down the iron ladder and jumped on to the deck of the tug. The captain seized the wheel. The two men who formed the crew took off their coats and waistcoats.

"Give it to her, Jim," the former ordered. "Now then, here goes! We'll just miss the ferry."

They swung around and commenced their journey. Quest stood with his watch in his hand. They were getting up the anchor of the Durham and from higher up the river came the screech of steamers beginning to move on their outward way.

"We'll make it all right," the captain assured them.

They were within a hundred yards of the Durham when Quest gave a little shout, recognized the man at the helm from his home, brown beard.

"That's one of those fellows who was in the truck," he declared, "and that's Craig in the stern! We've got him this time. Never mind about the fifty dollars. I'll make it a hundred dollars!"

people just domestic servants at ways?"

The professor's face was for a moment troubled. He moved to his desk, rummaged about for a time, and finally produced an ancient volume.

"This really belongs to my brother, Lord Ashleigh," he explained. "He brought it over with him to show me some entries concerning which I was interested. It contains a history of the Hamblin estate since the days of Cromwell, and here in the back, you see, is a list of our farmers, balliffs and domestic servants. There was a Craig who was a tenant of the first Lord Ashleigh and fought with him in the Cromwellian wars as a trooper and since those days, so far as I can see, there has never been a time when there hasn't been a Craig in the service of our family. A fine race they seem to have been, until—"

"Until what?" Quest demanded.

The look of trouble had once more clouded the professor's face. He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Until Craig's father," he admitted. "I am afraid I must admit that we come upon a bad piece of family history here. Sirs Craig engaged the service of my father in 1858, as under gamekeeper. Here we come upon the first black mark against the name. He appears to have lived reputably for some years, and then, after a quarrel with a neighbor about some trivial matter, he deliberately murdered him, a crime for which he was tried and executed in 1867. John Craig, his only son, entered our service in 1880, and when I left England, accompanied me as my valet."

There was a moment's silence.

"Lenora and I are sailing tomorrow," Quest said. "We are taking over the necessary warrants and shall bring Craig back here for trial."

The professor smoked thoughtfully for some moments. Then he rose deliberately to his feet. He had come to a decision. He announced it calmly, but irrevocably.

"I shall come with you," he announced. "I shall be glad to visit England, but apart from that I feel it to be my duty. I owe it to Craig to see that he has a fair chance, and I owe it to the law to have more evidence than mine alone. Accordingly, they left London one afternoon, and I sent a dogcart to the station to meet them. They arrived quite safely and started for here, Craig handcuffed to one of the Scotland Yard men on the back seat of the dogcart, and I in the driver. About half a mile from the south entrance to the park the road runs across a rather desolate strip of country with a lot of low undergrowth on one side. We have had a little trouble with the dogcart, but Craig himself appears to have been unharmed. He stumbled up, took the key of the handcuffs from the pocket of the officer, undid them and slipped off into the undergrowth before either the groom or the other Scotland Yard man had recovered. To be sure, I have a long story short, this was last Thursday, and up till now not a single trace of the fellow has been discovered."

Quest shook his head.

"From what the surgeons tell us," he said, "it will be some weeks before he is able to travel. At the same time, I must tell you that I am glad of your decision, professor."

"It is my duty," the latter declared. "I cannot rest in this state of uncertainty. If Craig is lost to me, the sooner I face the fact the better. At the same time I will be frank with you. Notwithstanding all the accumulated pile of evidence I feel in my heart the urgent necessity of seeing him face to face, of holding him by the shoulders and asking him whether these things are true. We have faced death together, Craig and I. We have done more than that—we have courted it. There is no man in my life I can accept from hearsay. I shall go with you to England, Mr. Quest."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INHERITED SIN.

"Getting kind of used to these court-house shows, aren't you, Lenora?" Quest remarked, as they stepped from the automobile and entered the house in George square.

"Could anyone feel much sympathy, Red Gallagher, as they all called him, is more like a great brutal animal than a human being. I think that even if they had sentenced him to death I should have felt that it was quite the proper thing to have done."

"Too much sentiment about those things," Quest agreed, clipping the end of a cigar. "Men like that are better off the face of the earth. They did their best to send me there."

"Here's the cablegram for you," Lenora exclaimed, bringing it over to him. "Mr. Quest, I wonder if it's from Scotland Yard?"

Quest tore it open. They read it together, Lenora standing on tiptoe to peer over his shoulder.

"Shows an answer in every respect your description of Craig found on Durham. Has been arrested, as desired, and will be taken to Hamblin house for identification by Lord Ashleigh. Reply whether you are coming over, and for details as to charge."

"Send a cable off at once to Scotland Yard," he directed. "Say—Am sailing on Lusitania tomorrow. Hold prisoner. Charge very serious. Have full warrants."

Lenora wrote down the message and went to the telephone to send it off. As soon as she had finished Quest took up his hat again.

"Come on," he invited. "The machine's outside. We'll just go and look in on the professor and tell him the news. Poor old chap, I'm afraid he'll never be the same man again."

They found the professor on his hands and knees upon a dusty floor. Carefully arranged before him were the bones of a skeleton, each laid in some appointed place.

"What about that unhappy man, Craig?" the professor asked, gloomily.

"Isn't the Durham almost due now?" Quest took out the cablegram from his pocket and passed it over. The professor's fingers trembled a little as he read it. He passed it back, however, without immediate comment.

"You see, they have been cleverer over there than we were," Quest remarked.

"Perhaps," the professor assented. "They seem, at least, to have arrested the man. Even now I can scarcely believe that it is Craig—my servant Craig—who is lying in an English prison. Do you know that his people have been servants in the Ashleigh family for some hundreds of years?"

Quest was clearly interested. "Say, I'd like to hear about that!" he exclaimed. "You know I'm rather great on heredity, professor. What class did he come from then? Were his

Lord Ashleigh came forward with outstretched hands, the genial smile of the welcoming host upon his lips. In his manner, however, there was a distinct note of anxiety.

"Edgar, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, "I am delighted. Welcome back to your home! Mr. Quest, I am very happy to see you here. You have heard the news, of course?"

"We have heard nothing!" the professor replied.

"You didn't go to Scotland Yard?" Lord Ashleigh asked.

"We haven't been to London at all," Quest explained. "We got on the boat train at Plymouth, and your brother managed to induce one of the directors who he saw on the platform to stop the train for us at Hamblin road. We only left the boat two hours."

"What a splendid stroke with Craig, is there?" Lord Ashleigh motioned them to follow him.

"Please come this way," he invited. He led them across the hall—which, dimly lit and with its stained-glass windows, was almost like the nave of a cathedral—into the library beyond. He closed the door and turned around.

"I have had news for you both," he announced. "Craig has escaped."

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"Dear me!" the professor murmured, sinking into an easy chair. "This is most unexpected."

"We'll get him again," Quest declared quickly. "Can you let us have the particulars of his escape, Lord Ashleigh? The sooner we get the hang of things the better."

"You know, of course," he began, "that Craig was arrested at Liverpool in consequence of communications from the New York police. I understand that it was with great difficulty he was discovered, and it is quite clear that someone on the ship had been heavily bribed. However, he was arrested, brought to London, and then down here for purposes of identification. I would have gone to London myself, and, in fact, offered to do so, but on the other hand, as there are many others on the estate to whom he was well known, I thought that it would be better to have more evidence than mine alone. Accordingly, they left London one afternoon, and I sent a dogcart to the station to meet them. They arrived quite safely and started for here, Craig handcuffed to one of the Scotland Yard men on the back seat of the dogcart, and I in the driver. About half a mile from the south entrance to the park the road runs across a rather desolate strip of country with a lot of low undergrowth on one side. We have had a little trouble with the dogcart, but Craig himself appears to have been unharmed. He stumbled up, took the key of the handcuffs from the pocket of the officer, undid them and slipped off into the undergrowth before either the groom or the other Scotland Yard man had recovered. To be sure, I have a long story short, this was last Thursday, and up till now not a single trace of the fellow has been discovered."

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CHAPTER XIX.

The professor rose from his seat in some excitement as the carriage passed through the great gates of Hamblin park. He acknowledged with a smile the respectful curtsy of the woman who held it open.

"You have now an opportunity, my dear Mr. Quest," he said, "of appreciating one feature of English life, entirely irreproducible in your wonderful country. I mean the home life and surroundings of our aristocracy. You see these oak trees?"

He went on, with a little wave of his hand. "They were planted by my grandfather, the Duke of Devonshire. I have been a student of tree life in South America and in the dense forests of central Africa, but for real character, for splendor of growth and hardiness, there is nothing in the world to touch the Ashleigh oaks."

"They're some trees," the criminologist admitted.

"You notice, perhaps, the small ones, which seem dwarfed. Their tops were cut off by the Lord of Ashleigh on the day that Lady Jane Grey was beheaded. Quest Elizabeth heard of it and threatened to confiscate the estate. Look at the turf, my friend. Ages have gone to the making of that mossy, velvet carpet."

"Where's the house?" Quest inquired.

"A mile farther on yet. The woods part and make a natural avenue past the bend of the river there," the professor pointed out. "Full of trout, that river, Quest. How I used to whip that stream when I was a boy!"

They swept presently round a bend in the avenue. Before them on the hillside arose a row of oaks and with a great walled garden behind, was Hamblin house. Quest gave vent to a little exclamation of wonder as he looked at it.

"This is where you've got to beat, sure," he admitted. "Our country places are like gawdaw palaces compared to this. Makes me kind of sorry," he went on regretfully, "that I didn't bring Lenora along."

The professor shook his head.

"You were very wise," he said. "My brother and Lady Ashleigh have recovered from the shock of poor Lenora's death in a marvelous manner. I believe, but the sight of the girl might have brought it back to them. You have left her with friends, I hope, Mr. Quest?"

"She has an aunt in Hampstead," the latter explained. "I should have liked to see her safely there myself, but we should have had to wait an hour or two later down here, and I tell you, she went on, his voice gathering a note almost of ferocity, "that I didn't bring Lenora along."

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reached the hall, "Moreton here will show you your room and look after you. Please let me know if you will take an aperitif. I can recommend my sherry. We dine at eight o'clock. Edgar, you know your way. The blue room, of course. I am coming up with you myself. Her ladyship back yet, Moreton?"

"Not yet, my lord."

"Lady Ashleigh," her husband explained, "has gone to the other side of the county to open a bazaar. She is looking forward to the pleasure of welcoming you at dinner time."

Dinner, served out of compliment to their transatlantic visitor, in the great banquetting hall, was to Quest, especially a most impressive meal. They sat at a small round table lit by shaded lights, in the center of an apartment which was large in reality, and which seemed vast by reason of the shadows which hovered around the unlit spaces. From the walls frowned down a long succession of family portraits—Ashleighs in the queer Tudor costume of Henry VII; Ashleighs in chain armor, sword in hand, a charger waiting, regardless of perspective, in the near distance; Ashleighs befrilled and bewigged; Ashleighs in the court dress of the Georges—judges, sailors, statesmen and soldiers. A collection of armor which would have gladdened the eye of many an antiquarian, was ranged along the black-paneled walls.

Everything was in harmony, even the grave precision of the solemn-faced butler and the powdered hair of the footmen. Quest, perhaps for the first time in his life, felt almost lost, hopelessly out of touch with his surroundings, and a struggling figure.

Nevertheless, he entertained the little party with many stories. He struggled all the time against that queer sense of anachronism which now and then became almost oppressive.

The professor's pleasure at finding himself once more amongst these familiar surroundings was obvious and intense. The conversation between him and his brother never flagged. There were tenants and neighbors to be asked after, matters concerning the estate on which he demanded information. Even the very servants' names he remembered.

"It was a queer turn of fate, George," he declared, as he held out before him a wonderfully chased glass filled with amber wine, "which sent you into the world a few seconds before me and made you Lord of Ashleigh and me a struggling scientific man."

"The world has benefited by it," Lord Ashleigh remarked, "with more than fraternal courtesy. We hear great things of you over here, Edgar. We hear that you have been on the point of proving most unpleasant things regarding our old world."

"Oh, there is no doubt about that," the professor observed. "Where we came from and where we are going are questions which no longer afford room for the slightest doubt to the really scientific mind. What sometimes does elude us is the nature of the tendencies while we are here on earth."

There was a brief silence. The port had been placed upon the table and coffee served. The servants, according to the custom of the house, had departed. The great apartment was empty. Even Quest was impressed by some peculiar significance in the long-drawn-out silence. He looked around him uneasily. The growing roar of that long line of painted warriors seemed somehow to be full of menace. There was something grim, too, in the sight of those empty suits of armor.

"I may be superstitious," Lord Ashleigh said, "but there are times, especially just lately, when I seem to find a new and hateful quality in silence. What is it, I wonder? I ask you, but I think I know. It is the conviction that there is some alien presence, something disturbing, lurking close at hand."

He suddenly rose to his feet, pushed his chair back and walked to the window, which opened level with the ground. He threw it up and listened. The other came over and stood in the doorway. There was nothing to be heard but the distant hooting of an owl, and farther away the barking of some farmhouse dog. Lord Ashleigh stood there with straining eyes, gazing out across the park.

"There was something here," he muttered; "something which has gone. What's that? Quest, your eyes are younger than mine. Can you see anything underneath that tree?"

Quest peered out into the gray darkness.

"I fancied I saw something moving in the shadow of that oak," he muttered. "Wait."

He crossed the terrace, swung down on to the path, across the lawn, over a wire fence and into the park itself. All the time he kept his eyes fixed on a certain spot. When at last he reached the tree there was nothing there. He looked all around him. He stood and listened for several moments. A more utterly peaceful night or more utter peace it would be hard to imagine. Slowly he made his way back to the house.

"I imagine we are all a little nervous tonight," he remarked. "There's nothing doing out there."

They strolled about for a hour or more, looking into different rooms, showing their guest the finest pictures, even taking him down into the wonderful cellars. They parted early, but Quest stood for a few moments before retiring, gazing about him with an air almost of awe. His great room, as large as an Italian palace, was lit by a dozen wax candles in silver candlesticks. His four-poster was supported by pillars of black oak, carved into strange forms, and surmounted by the Ashleigh coronet and coat-of-arms. He threw his windows open wide and stood for a moment looking out across the park, more clearly visible now by the light of the slowly rising moon. There was scarcely a breeze stirring, scarcely a sound even from the animal world. Nevertheless, Quest, too, as reluctantly he made his preparations for retiring for the night, was conscious of that queer sensation of unimagined and impalpable danger.

CHAPTER XX.

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Potato Growers Attention!

The shortage in the potato crop last year, throughout America, was due largely to Late Blight. This disease was more general than usual, on account of the wet season. The possible potato crop for 1915 in New Brunswick was reduced approximately 25% or 3,000,000 bushels owing to these conditions, and unless potato growers practise thorough spraying, a still greater loss is likely to occur during 1916 if the present heavy rainfall continues. Undoubtedly the heavy rains of June will also encourage the disease, even though fine weather should prevail from now on.

Late Blight is an infectious disease, caused by a fungus which attacks and destroys the foliage, and also causes a very destructive rot of the tubers. The spread and development of this organism may be held in check by spraying with Bordeaux mixture, five or six times during the growing season.

Last season, demonstration spraying experiments were conducted on farms in different sections of the Province, which showed that the yield could be more than doubled, by spraying to prevent foliage diseases.

Now is the time to adopt preventive measures if the best results are to be obtained; indeed, if the potato crop is to be benefited to any great extent, growers should start spraying immediately, or when the plants are from six to eight inches high. Good results can be obtained by spraying later, but "the early bird gets the worm."

Spraying should be continued at intervals of ten days or two weeks, until five or six applications have been made.

Several strengths of the solution have been recommended, but either of the following have given good results:

(A)—4 lbs. of Copper Sulphate, 4 lbs. of Lime, (freshly slaked), 40 gallons water.

(B)—The same formula, using six pounds of Copper Sulphate, has been recommended by some experimenters.

Separate stock solutions of the lime and copper sulphate will keep indefinitely and may be made up at the beginning of the season, but the Bordeaux resulting from the mixture of the Lime and Copper Sulphate, will not keep and should be made up only as needed.

Stock solutions:

(A)—Dissolve considerable Copper Sulphate, (sufficient for the season) at the rate of one pound in a gallon of water.

(B)—Slake the lime, and add water to make a milk of lime, equal water to one pound in a gallon of water.

To make the required mixture, dilute four gallons of the Copper Sulphate solution up to twenty gallons, and four gallons of the milk of lime (after stirring up) to twenty gallons and mix these diluted solutions in the spray tank. Apply at the rate of one to two barrels per acre, depending on the fineness of the spray and the size of the tops.

More detailed information may be obtained by writing to G. C. Cunningham, Dominion Plant Pathological Laboratory, Fredericton, or by writing to the Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, for Circular No. 10, "Late Blight and Rot of Potatoes."

Why Conscription?

(Contributed)

In order to make it fair and equitable to young men of right age and physically fit. Instead of the way it is under the voluntary system, where by one young man is coerced into going and his neighbor slips into the god job vacant by the willing recruit, and stays at home to tea, theatres, nickles, etc., while the voluntary recruit is ordered to Europe to tramp through mud and wet, endure all kinds of hardships as much for the benefit of the boy left at home as for the dependents of the voluntary fighter.

Looked at from a financial standpoint the situation is fast reaching the stage whereby the cost to Canada must be considered, as it is already estimated at over twenty million dollars per month, and steadily increasing.

If the young and single men were lined up in place of the married men with families, see how they could make themselves doubly valuable.

If a single man offers he saves Canada \$20.00 per month, in separation money, to begin with.

He saves Canada from \$5.00 to \$25.00 per month additional, in Patriotic money.

If he is called on to give up his life he saves Canada from the Pension Fund, which from appearance is likely to grow to a very large additional sum.

From the above it is apparent that the young men would have a chance to show to Canada:

That they realize all that Canada has been to them and this would be the opportunity for them to show what they can be to Canada, if given a fair square deal from coast to coast and all be treated alike, by the Government of the country.

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