The Black Box

SHOWN IN THE LEADING MOTION PICTURE THEATRES OF GREATER NEW YORK.

THE GREAT MYSTERY STORY PRODUCED BY THE UNIVERSAL FILM MANUFACTURING CO.

BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

[illegible]

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CHAPTER XXII.

(Continued.)

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 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," Lenora cried, clasping Quest's arm, "the bouillon was meant for you!" • • •

There seemed to be something amongst all of them, a surprise in disposition to dismiss 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 the side. She scanned it [illegible] and then [illegible] the silence.

"A message, she cried. "A message from the Hands. Look."

They crowded around her. In the same [illegible] 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. They all recognized Laura's voice. Harris was out of the stateroom first, but they were all on deck within ten seconds. Laura was standing with one hand clasping the rail, her hand fiercely outstretched toward 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 sailcloth, 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."

Laura stood quite still.

"What doors are there on the side?" she asked.

"The doors on my room only," the captain replied, a little shortly. "It was Brown you saw, of course. He was standing exactly where you thought you saw Craig."

Laura walked to the end of the deck and back.

"Very well, then," she said, "you people had better get a strait-waistcoat 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?"

The captain glanced at Laura and restrained himself.

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

"Put down and write down what has happened in my room," Quest continued.

He took the story down and without remark. The captain read it [illegible] hand.

"Of course, I'[illegible] that I am a sane man, but [illegible] a Mongar [illegible] charge [illegible] anything [illegible] you people [illegible] "Yes, I'm [illegible] you say if I tell you that I have proof that Craig is on board?"

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"We are in deadly earnest," the professor [illegible]

[illegible] down to the pantry [illegible] "The [illegible] have been [illegible] for a year. It was that [illegible] of [illegible] Hands. [illegible] Quest [illegible] [illegible] Quest [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]