

The BLACK BOX

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Author of "The Moving Finger," "The Prince of Sinners," "Anna, the Adventurer," 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 MacDougal, the murderer of Lord Ashleigh's daughter, he has 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 ape skeleton and a living creature, half monkey, half man, destroyed by fire. In his rooms have appeared black boxes containing notes, signed by a pair of armless hands. Laura and Lenora, his assistants, suspect Craig, the professor's servant, of a double murder. The black boxes continue to appear in uncanny fashion. Craig, captured, escapes to Fort Said. Quest and his party follow, and beyond into the desert. They are captured by Mongars, escape with Craig as their captive, and turn him over to Inspector French in San Francisco. He escapes in a train wreck, outwits his pursuers, and goes back to New York, where he dies while Quest is attempting to hypnotize him into confession.

FIFTEENTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XXXV.

The first shock was over. Craig's body had been removed, and the girls had taken Mary, half stunned with grief, to their room. French and Quest were left alone.

"That is some disappointment," the former remarked gloomily. "It is a disappointment," Quest said, slowly, "which may clear the way to bigger things."

"What's in your mind now?" French inquired.

Quest shook his head. "A turmoil. First of all, where is the professor?"

"Must have scooted right away home," French suggested. "He was looking pretty sick all the time. Guess it must have been a powerful shock for him, and he isn't so young as he used to be."

"Give me that paper of Craig's again," Quest asked.

The inspector produced the document from his inner pocket, and Quest, stretching it out upon his knee, read it word for word.

"Never to communicate or to have anything to do with anyone of the name of Ashleigh, eh?" he remarked, as he handed it back again. "Rather a queer provision, that, French."

"I've been thinking that myself," the inspector admitted.

Quest glanced at the clock.

"Well," he said, "if you're ready, inspector, we'll be getting along."

The two men drove to the outskirts of the city almost in silence.

The professor's house seemed more than ever deserted as they drew up at the front door. They entered without ringing and crossed the hall towards the library. On the threshold Quest paused and held up his finger.

"Someone is in there," he whispered, stepping quickly forward. "Come!"

He threw open the door. The room was empty, yet both Quest and French were conscious of a curious conviction that it had been occupied within the last few seconds.

"Queer, but it seemed to me I heard someone," French muttered.

"I was sure of it," Quest replied. They stood still for a moment and listened. The silence in the empty house was almost unnatural. Quest turned away with a shrug of the shoulders.

"At any rate," he said, "Craig's dying thoughts must have been truthful. Come."

He led the way to the fireplace, went down on his knees and passed his hands over the bricks. The third one he touched, shook. He tapped it—without a doubt it was hollow. With his penknife he loosened the mortar a little and drew it out easily. The back was open. Inside was the black box.

"Craig's secret at last!" French muttered, hoarsely. "Bring it to the light, quick!"

They were unemotional men, but the moment was supreme. The key to the mystery of these tragical weeks was there in their hands! Their eyes almost devoured those few hastily scrawled words buried with so much care.

See Page 62, January Number, American Medical Journal, 1935.

They looked at one another. They repeated vaguely this most commonplace of messages. As the final result of their strenuous enterprise, these cryptic words seemed pitifully inadequate. Quest's face darkened. He crumpled the paper in his fingers.

"There must be some meaning in this," he muttered. "It can't be altogether a fool's game we're on. Wait."

He moved towards a table which usually stood against the wall, but which had obviously been dragged out recently into the middle of the room. It was covered with bound volumes. Quest glanced at one and exclaimed softly:

"American Medical Journal, 1935! French, there's something in this message, after all."

He turned over the pages rapidly. Then he came to a stop. Page 61 was there; page 62 had been neatly removed with a pair of scissors.

"The professor!" he cried. "The professor's been at work here!"

The two men stood looking at one another across the table. Strange

thoughts were framing themselves in the brains of both of them. Then there came a startling and in its way a dramatic interlude. Through the empty house came the ringing of the electric bell from the front door, shrill and insistent. Without a moment's hesitation, Quest hurried out and French followed him. On the doorstep was another surprise. Lenora and Laura were there, the former carrying a small, black-bound volume.

"Don't be cross," she begged, quickly. "We just had to come. Look! We picked this up underneath the chair where Craig was sitting. It must have slipped from his pocket. You see what is written on it—Diary of John Craig."

Quest took it in his hand. "Say, this ought to be interesting," he remarked. "Come along."

They passed into the library. French lingered behind for a moment and caught them up just as they were opening the book underneath the electric lamp.

"See here what I've found!" he exclaimed. "It was just by the side of the wall there. Where's that magazine?"

He spread out the piece of paper—it fitted exactly into the empty space. They all read together:

Professor Ashleigh, after being bitten by the anthropoloid, rapidly developed hydrophobia of a serious nature. After treatment with a new serum the patient was relieved of the hydrophobic symptoms, but to my horror this mild-mannered, humane man seems possessed at times of all the characteristics of the brutal anthropoid—cunning, thievery, brutality. I do not know what may come of this. I hesitate to put even these words on to paper. I am doubtful as to what course, in the interests of humanity, I ought to take.

(Signed) JAMES MERRILL, M. D.

Editor's Note—Just as we go to press, a cable announces the terrible death of Doctor Merrill, the writer of the above notes. He was attacked by wild animals whilst alone in a South American jungle, and torn to pieces.

There was a queer little silence among the company. No one seemed inclined to speak. They looked at one another in dumb, wondering horror. Then Quest drew a penknife from his pocket and with a turn of his wrist forced the lock of the diary. They all watched him with fascinated eyes. It was something to escape from their thoughts. They leaned over him as he spread the book out before him. Those first two sentences were almost in the nature of a dedication:

For ten years I have protected my master, Prof. Edgar Ashleigh, at the cost of my peace of mind, my happiness, my reputation. This book, even though it be too late to help me, shall clear my reputation.

Quest closed the volume. "French," he decided, "we must find the professor. Will you have your men search the house and grounds immediately?"

The inspector left the room like a dazed man. They could hear him giving orders outside.

"The next page," Lenora begged. "Just one page more!"

Quest hesitated for a moment. Then he turned it over. All three read again:

Ten years of horror, struggling all the while to keep him from that other self, that thing of bestiality, to keep his horrible secret from the world, to cover up his crimes, even though their shadow should rest upon me. Now Sanford Quest has come. Will this mean discovery?

"Another page," Quest said. "Don't you see where it is leading us? We have the truth here. Wait!"

He strode hastily to the door. French and one of the plain-clothes men were descending the stairs.

"Well!" Quest asked, breathlessly. "The professor is not in the house," French reported. "We are going to search the grounds."

Quest returned to the library. Lenora clung to his arm. The diary lay still upon the table.

Quest opened the volume slowly. Again they all read together:

The evil nature is growing stronger every day. He is developing a sort of ferocious cunning to help him in his crimes. He wanders about in the dark, wearing a black velvet suit with holes for his eyes, and leaving only his hands exposed. I have watched him come into a half-darkened room and one can see nothing but the hands and the eyes; sometimes if he closes his eyes, only the hands.

"Mrs. Rheinholdt!" Quest muttered. The door was suddenly opened and French entered.

"Beaten!" he exclaimed, tersely. "You haven't found him?" Quest asked.

French shook his head. "We've searched every room, every cupboard, every scrap of the cellar in the place," he announced. "We've been into every corner of the grounds, searched it all backwards and for-

wards. There's no sign of the professor."

Quest pocketed the diary. "You're perfectly certain that he is not in this house or anywhere upon the premises?"

"Certain sure!" French replied. Quest shrugged his shoulders. "Well, we'd better get back," he said.

They were on the point of starting, the chauffeur with his hand upon the steering wheel of the police car already in his hand. And then the little party seemed suddenly turned to stone. For a few breathless seconds not one of them moved. Out into the clammy night air came the echoes of a hideous, inhuman, blood-curdling scream. Quest was the first to recover himself. He leaped from his seat and rushed back across the empty hall into the study, followed a little way behind by French and the others. An unsuspected panel door which led into the garden stood slightly ajar. The professor, with his hand on the back of a chair, was standing at the fireplace, shaking as though with some horrible ague, his face distorted, his body curiously hunched up. He seemed suddenly to have dropped his humanity, to have fallen back into the world of some strange creature. He heard their footsteps, but he did not turn his head. His hands were stretched out in front of him as though to keep away from his sight some hateful object.

"Stay him!" he cried. "Take him away!" It's Craig—his spirit! He came to me in the garage, he followed me through the grounds, he mocked at me when I hid in the tree. He's there now, kneeling before the fireplace. Why can't I kill him! He is coming! Stop him, someone!

No one spoke or moved; no one, indeed, had the power. Then at last Quest found words.

"There is no one in the room, professor," he said, "except us."

The sound of a human voice seemed to produce a strange effect. The professor straightened himself, shook his head, his hands dropped to his side, ghastly pale, but his smile was once more the smile of the amiable naturalist.

"My friends," he said, "forgive me. I am very old, and the events of these last few hours have unnerved me. Forgive me."

He groped for a moment and sank into a chair. Quest fetched a decanter and a glass from the sideboard, poured out some wine and held it to his lips. The professor drank it eagerly.

"My dear friend," he exclaimed, "you have saved me. I have something to tell you, something I must tell you at once, but not here. I loathe this place. Let me come with you to your rooms."

"As you please," Quest answered, calmly.

He gripped Quest's arm. In silence they passed from the room, in silence they took their places once more in the automobiles, in silence they drove without a pause to Quest's rooms. The professor made his way at once to his favorite easy chair, threw off his overcoat and leaned back.

"Quest," he pronounced, "you are the best friend I have in my life! It is you who have rid me of my great burden. Tell me—help me a little with my story—have you read that page from the Medical Journal which

the latter had kept a yard or so ahead, his eyes fixed upon some possible object of pursuit. There was a sudden change in the professor. They saw him seize his gun by the barrel and whirl it above his head. He seemed suddenly to lose his whole identity. He crouched on his haunches, almost like an animal, and sprang at the other's throat. They could almost hear the snarl from his lips as the two men went down together into the undergrowth. The picture faded away.

"Doctor Merrill!" Lenora faltered. "Then it was not wild beasts which killed him?"

Almost immediately figures again appeared in the mirror. There was a small passage which seemed to lead from the back entrance of a house; the professor, with a black mantle, Craig followed him, pleading, expostulating. They saw the conservatory for a minute, and then blackness. The professor was leaning against a marble basin. There was nothing to be seen of him but his eyes and hands. They saw him listen for a moment or two in cold, unresponsive silence, then stretch out his hand and push Craig away. The picture glowed and faded and glowed again. Then they saw through the gloom the figure of a woman approach, a diamond necklace around her neck. They saw the hands steal out and encircle her throat—and then more darkness, silence, obscurity. The mirror was empty once more.

"Mrs. Rheinholdt's jewels!" Lenora cried. "What next? Oh! my God, what next?"

Their eyes ached with the strain, but there was not one of them who could even glance away from the mirror. It was Quest's study which slowly appeared then. The Salvation Army girl was there, talking to the professor. They saw him leave her, they saw him look back from the door, a strange, evil glance. Then the secretary entered and spoke to her. Once more the door opened. The hands were there, stretching and reaching, a paper-weight gripped in the right-hand fingers. They saw it raised above the secretary's head, they saw the other hand take the girl by the throat and push her towards the table. A wild scream broke from Lenora's lips. Quest wavered for a

moment. The picture faded out. "Oh, stop it!" Lenora begged. "Haven't we seen enough? We know the truth now. Stop it or I shall die!"

The criminologist made no reply. His eyes were still fixed upon the professor, who showed some signs of returning consciousness. He was gripping his collar. He seemed to have difficulty with his breathing. Quest suddenly braced himself. He pushed Lenora back.

"One more," he muttered. "There's something growing in my mind. I can feel it. Wait!"

Again they all turned towards the mirror. They saw the hallway of Ashleigh house, the pictures upon the walls, they could almost feel the quiet silence of night. They saw the professor come stealing down the stairs. He was wearing the black velvet suit with the cowl in his hand. They watched him pause before a certain door, draw on the cowl and disappear. Through the opening they could see Lord Ashleigh asleep in bed, the moonlight streaming through the open window across the counterpane. They saw the professor turn with a strange, horrible look in his face and close the door. Lenora burst into sobs.

"No more!" she shrieked. "No more, or I shall go mad!"

Quest leaned forward and released their victim. The whole atmosphere of the place seemed immediately to change. Lenora drew a long, convulsive breath and sank into a chair. The professor sat up and gazed at them all with the air of a man who has just awakened from a dream.

"Have I, by any chance, slept?" he asked. "Or—"

He never finished his sentence. His eyes fell upon the mirror, the metal band lying by his side. He read the truth in the faces still turned towards him. He rose to his feet. There was another and equally sudden change in his demeanor and tone. He carried himself with the calm dignity of the scientist.

"The end of our struggle, I presume," he said to Quest, pointing to the metal band. "You will at least admit that I have shown you fine sport."

No one answered him. Even Quest had barely yet recovered himself. The professor shrugged his shoulders.

"I recognize, of course," he said, gravely, "that this is the end. A person in extremis has privileges. Will you allow me to write just a matter of twenty lines at your desk?"

Silently Quest assented. The professor seated himself in the swing chair, drew a sheet of paper towards him, dipped the pen in the ink and began to write. Then he turned around and reached for his own small black bag which lay upon the table. Quest caught him by the wrist.

"What do you want out of that, professor?" he inquired.

"Merely my own pen and ink," the professor expostulated. "If there is anything I detest in the world, it is violet ink. And your pen, too, is execrable. As they are to be the last words I shall leave to a sorrowing world, I should like to write them in my own fashion. Open the bag for yourself, if you will. You can pass me the things out."

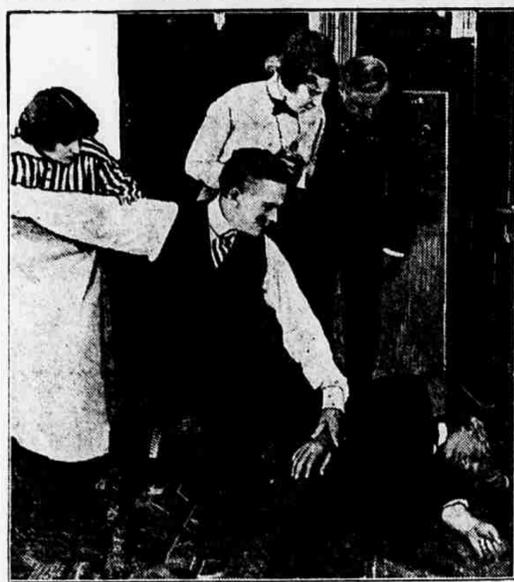
Quest opened the bag, took out a pen and a small glass bottle of ink. He handed them to the professor, who started at once more to write. Quest watched him for a moment and then turned away to French. The professor looked over his shoulder and suddenly bared his wrist. Lenora seized her employer by the arm.

"Look!" she cried. "What is he going to do?"

Quest swung around, but he was too late. The professor had dug the pen into his arm. He sat in his chair and laughed as they all hurried towards him. Then suddenly he sprang to his feet. Again the change came into his face which they had seen in the mirror. French dashed forward towards him. The professor snarled, seemed about to spring, then suddenly once more stretched out his hands to show that he was helpless and handed to Quest the paper upon which he had been writing.

"You have nothing to fear from me," he exclaimed. "Here is my last message to you, Sanford Quest. Read it aloud. Always remember that this was not your triumph, but mine."

THE END.



"He is Dead!" Quest Declared.

its coils and levers. The professor watched her. Slowly his face changed. The benevolence faded away, his teeth for a moment showed in something which was almost a snarl.

"You believe me?" he cried, turning to Quest. "You are not going to try that horrible thing on me—Professor Lord Ashleigh? I am all broken up. I am not fit for it. Look at my hands, how they shake."

"Professor," Quest said, sternly, "we are surrounded by the shadow of some terrible deeds for which as yet there is no explanation. I do not say that we mistrust you, but I ask you to submit to this test."

"I refuse!" the professor replied, harshly.

"And I insist," Quest muttered. The professor drew a little breath. He sat back in his chair. His face became still, his lips were drawn closely together. Lenora wheeled up to the machine and with deft fingers adjusted the fittings on one side. Quest himself connected it up on the other. The professor sat there like a figure of stone. The silence in the room was so intense that the ticking of the small clock upon the mantel piece was clearly audible. The very atmosphere seemed charged with the thrill and wonder of it. Never before had Quest met with resistance so complete and immovable. Sternly he concentrated the whole of his will power upon his task. Almost at once there was a change. The professor fell back in the chair. The tense self-control had passed from his features, his lips twitched. Simultaneously, the mirror for a moment was clouded—then slowly a picture upon it gathered outline and substance. There was a jungle, strange, tall trees, and brushwood so thick that it reached to the waists of the two men who were slowly making their way through it. One was the professor, clearly recognizable under his white sun helmet; the other a stranger to all of them. Suddenly they stopped. The latter had crept a yard or so ahead, his eyes fixed upon some possible object of pursuit. There was a sudden change in the professor. They saw him seize his gun by the barrel and whirl it above his head. He seemed suddenly to lose his whole identity. He crouched on his haunches, almost like an animal, and sprang at the other's throat. They could almost hear the snarl from his lips as the two men went down together into the undergrowth. The picture faded away.

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Snake in Peculiar Trap

Reptile Firmly Caught in Biscuit Can While in the Act of Chasing Mouse.

A naturalist tells us of an odd kind of snake trap that caught its victim securely, the Washington Star observes. It was a biscuit can, and in the bottom of it were some macaroons.

A cobra spied the can, but a mouse was ahead of the cobra. The little thief was having a good time regaling

himself on the macaroons, all unconscious that a snake was preparing to regale itself on mouse. Into the can went the head of the snake, but the head that went in was destined to come out less easily. The rough edge of the can irritated the cobra, and involuntarily it dilated its hood. That made it a prisoner. With the hood drawn, and the cobra remained in its prison until morning, when it was easily captured and killed.

Stradling, who knows the natives of

India as well as he knows the snakes of that land, tells of an interesting theory held by these people. They are firmly convinced that for every human being a snake bites it loses one joint. When the number of deaths the snake has caused equals the number of its joints the venomous head alone remains. The snake has now reached the height of its wicked desires, and at this point it develops wings and triumphantly disappears.

An exception to this rule is found on the other side of the world, in the

case of the rattlesnake, for the natives of many parts of this country are said to believe that this snake gains a thimble for every man it kills. By counting these some people pretend to have an ability to calculate with precision how many persons a particular rattlesnake has bitten. But this, of course, is as great a superstition as that held by the Hindus.

When to Propose. The proper time for a man to declare himself is when he sees, by

signs that can't be mistaken, that his asking won't be in vain.

The time may be too soon or late in the course of courtship, but it will mark beyond a chance of mistake, the moment when he may venture to ask the important question certain of winning.

When her eyes began to wander in search of him, if he does not at once seek her side; when she stops talking to other people to listen to his most trivial utterances; when she lingers in his society and shows him she

thinks his remarks full of wisdom and his baldest jokes the embodiment of humor—that is the moment for him to come boldly forward with his proposal, for the time for it is ripe.—New York Weekly.

Admiration. "I lost hours of sleep going over this speech."

"Marvelous will power!" exclaimed the man who yawns. "I don't see how you managed to stay awake through the first reading."

Get the Habit of Drinking Hot Water Before Breakfast

Says we can't look or feel right with the system full of poisons.

Millions of folks bathe internally now instead of loading their system with drugs. "What's an inside bath?" you say. Well, it is guaranteed to perform miracles if you could believe these hot water enthusiasts.

There are vast numbers of men and women who, immediately upon arising in the morning, drink a glass of real hot water with a teaspoonful of limestone phosphate in it. This is a very excellent health measure. It is intended to flush the stomach, liver, kidneys and the thirty feet of intestines of the previous day's waste, sour bile and indigestible material left over in the body which, if not eliminated every day, become food for the millions of bacteria which infest the bowels, the quick result is poisons and toxins which are then absorbed into the blood causing headache, bilious attacks, foul breath, bad taste, colds, stomach trouble, kidney misery, sleeplessness, impure blood and all sorts of ailments.

People who feel good one day and badly the next, but who simply can not get feeling right are urged to obtain a quarter pound of limestone phosphate from any druggist or storekeeper. This will cost very little but is sufficient to make anyone a real crank on the subject of internal sanitation.

Just as soap and hot water act on the skin, cleansing, sweetening and freshening, so limestone phosphate and hot water act on the stomach, liver, kidneys and bowels. It is vastly more important to bathe on the inside than on the outside, because the skin pores do not absorb impurities into the blood, while the bowel pores do.—Adv.

The older an actress is the more enthusiastically she makes up for lost time.

Dr. Pierce's Pellets are best for liver, bowels and stomach. One little Pellet for a laxative—three for a cathartic.—Adv.

Perilous Waters. "She is very shallow."

"That may be; but more than one man has gone beyond his depth chasing her."

Extremes Meet. "The brightest man in my class at college is now motorman on a street car."

"And how about the stupidest man?" He's president of the road, I presume?"

"No, he's the conductor."

They Sure Do. "Oh, yes, the professor is a very learned man. His specialty is international law. His thesis on that subject won him his doctor's degree."

"Well, goodness knows the international laws need a lot of doctoring."

Zepplin Bombs. Basing his calculation upon the data which were proc