

The BLACK BOX

Shown at the Arcade theatre on Wednesdays and Thursdays

SYNOPSIS.

Sanford Quest, master criminologist of the world, finds that in bringing to justice MacDougal, the murderer of Lord Ashleigh's daughter, he has but just entered a life-and-death contest with a mysterious master criminal. Engaged by Professor Ashleigh, Lord Ashleigh's brother, to recover the stolen skeleton of an anthropoid ape, hurried to Mrs. Rheinholdt's reception, where her diamonds have been torn from her throat by a pair of hands without arms or body, a black box later appears from nowhere in his rooms and a note contained in it, signed by the armless hands, sarcastically suggests that the Rheinholdt diamonds and the skeleton may be hidden together. While Laura, Quest's secretary, shadows Craig, the professor's valet, Quest and Lenora, his assistant, find the skeleton in a hut in the professor's garden, and discover there an inhuman creature, half monkey and half man. As the professor explains, the hide is set afire and the monkey-man and skeleton are destroyed in the flames. In Quest's rooms the Rheinholdt diamonds suddenly reappear, enclosed in a second black box with a note signed by the threatening hands.

FOURTH INSTALLMENT

AN OLD GRUDGE.

CHAPTER X.

Sanford Quest was smoking his after-breakfast cigar with a relish somewhat affected by the measure of his perplexities. Early though it was, Lenora was already in her place, bending over her desk, and Laura, who had just arrived, was busy divesting herself of her coat and hat. Quest watched the latter impatiently.

"Well?" he asked.

Laura came forward, straightening her hair with her hands.

"No go," she answered. "I spent the evening in the club, and I talked with two men who knew Craig, but I couldn't get on to anything. From all I could hear of the man, respectability is his middle name."

"That's the professor's own idea," Quest remarked grimly.

"We're fairly up against it, boss," Laura sighed. "The best thing we can do is to get on to another job. The Rheinholdt woman has got her jewels back, or will have at noon today. I bet she won't worry about the thief. Then the professor's moldy old skeleton was returned to him, even if it was burned afterwards. I should take on something fresh."

"Can't be done," Quest replied shortly. "Look here, girls, your average intellects are often apt to hit upon the truth, when a man who sees too far ahead goes wrong. Rule Craig out. Any other possible person occur to you? Speak out, Lenora. You've something on your mind, I can see."

"I'm afraid you'll laugh at me," she began tentatively.

"Won't hurt you if I do," Quest replied.

"I can't help thinking of MacDougal," Lenora continued falteringly. "He has never been recaptured. I don't know whether he's dead or alive. He had a perfect passion for jewels. If he is alive, he would be desperate and would attempt anything."

Quest smoked in silence for a moment.

"I guess the return of the jewels squelched the MacDougal theory," he remarked. "He wouldn't be likely to part with the stuff when he'd once got his hands on it. However, I always meant, when we had a moment's spare time, to look into that fellow's whereabouts. We'll take it on straight away. Can't do any harm."

"I know the section boss on the railway at the spot where he disappeared," Laura announced.

"Then just take the train down to Mountways—that's the nearest spot—and get busy with him," Quest directed. "Try and persuade him to loan us the gang's handcar to go down the line. Lenora and I will come on in the automobile."

"Take you longer," Lenora remarked as she moved off to put on her jacket. "The cars do it in a quarter of an hour."

"Can't help that," Quest replied. "Mrs. Rheinholdt's coming here to identify her jewels at twelve o'clock, and I can't run any risk of there being no train back. You'd better be making good with the section boss. Take plenty of bills with you."

"Sure! That's easy enough," Laura promised him. "I'll be waiting for you."

She hurried off and Quest commenced his own preparations. From his safe he took one of the small black lumps of explosive to which he had once before owed his life, and fitted it carefully in a small case with a coil of wire and an electric lighter. He looked at his revolver and recharged it. Finally he rang the bell for his confidential valet.

"Ross," he asked, "who else is there here today besides you?"

"No one today, sir."

"Just as well, perhaps," Quest observed.

erved. "Listen, Ross, I am going out now for an hour or two, but I shall be back at midday. Remember that. Mrs. Rheinholdt and Inspector French are to be here at twelve o'clock. If by any chance I should be a few minutes late, ask them to wait. And, Ross, a young woman from the Salvation Army will call too. You can give her this check."

Ross Brown, who was Quest's secretary-valet and general factotum, accepted the slip of paper and placed it in an envelope.

"There are no other instructions, sir?" he inquired.

"None," Quest replied. "You'll look out for the wireless, and you had better switch the through cable and telegraph communication on to headquarters. Come on, Lenora."

They left the house, entered the waiting automobile, and drove rapidly towards the confines of the city.

By Quest's directions the automobile was brought to a standstill at a point where it skirted the main railway line, and close to the section house which he had appointed for his rendezvous with Laura. She had apparently seen their approach, and she came out to meet them at once, accompanied by a short, thick-set man whom she introduced as Mr. Horan.

"This is Mr. Horan, the section boss," she explained.

Mr. Horan shook hands.

"Say, I've heard of you, Mr. Quest," he announced. "The young lady tells me you are some interested in that prisoner they lost off the cars near here."

"That's so," Quest admitted. "We'd like to go to the spot if we could."

"That's dead easy," the boss replied. "I'll take you along on the handcar."

The section boss turned round and whistled. From a little side track two men jumped on to a handcar, and brought it around to where they were standing. A few yards away the man who was propelling it—a great, red-headed Irishman—suddenly ceased his efforts. Leaning over his pole, he gazed at Quest. A sudden ferocity darkened his coarse face. He gripped his mate by the arm.

"See that bloke there?" he asked, pointing at Quest.

"The guy with the linen collar?" the other answered. "I see him."

"That's Quest, the detective," the Irishman went on hoarsely. "That's the man who got me five years in the pen, the beast! That's the man I've been looking for. You're my mate, Jim, eh?"

"I guess so," the other grunted. "Are you going to try and do him in?"

"Now then, you fellows," Horan shouted. "What are you hanging about there for, Red Gallagher? Bring the carriage up. You fellows can have a smoke for an hour. I'm going to take her down the line for a bit."

The two men obeyed and disappeared in the direction of the section house. Quest looked after them curiously.

"That's a big fellow," he remarked.

"What did you call him? Red Gallagher? I seem to have seen him before."

"He was the most troublesome fellow on the line once, although he was the biggest worker," the boss replied. "He got five years in the penitentiary and that seems to have taken the spirit out of him."

"I believe I was in the case," Quest observed carelessly.

"That's so! Now then, young ladies," Mr. Horan advised, "hold tight, and here goes!"

They ambled down the line for about half a mile. Then Horan brought them to standstill.

"This is the spot," he declared. "Now, if you want my impressions you are welcome to them. All the search has been made on the right-hand side here and in New York. I've had my eye on that hill for a long time. My impression is that he hid there."

"I'll take your advice," Quest decided. "We'll spread out and take a little exercise in hill climbing."

"Good luck to you!" the boss exclaimed.

They searched carefully and deliberately for more than half an hour. Then Laura suddenly called out. They looked around to find only her head visible. She scrambled up, muddy and with wet leaves clinging to her skirt.

"Say, that guy of a section boss told me to look out for caves. I've been in one, sure enough! Only just saved myself."

They hurried to where she was. Quest peered into the declivity down which she had slipped. Suddenly he gave vent to a little exclamation. At the same time Laura called out. An inch or two of tweed was clearly visible through the strewn leaves. Quest, flat on his stomach, crawled a little way down, took out his electric torch

from his pocket and brushed the stuff away. Then he clambered to his feet.

"Our search is over," he declared gravely, "and your troubles, Lenora. That is MacDougal's body."

Lenora's face sank into her hands for a moment. Quest stood on one side while Laura passed her arm around the other girl's waist.

Quest glanced at his watch.

"I'll have to get," he said, "but I'll send someone along. Cheer up, Lenora," he added kindly. "Look after her, Laura."

Quest hastened along the road to the spot where he had left the car. The chauffeur, who saw him coming, started up and climbed to his seat. Quest took his place.

"Drive to the office," he ordered. The man slipped in his clutch. They were in the act of gliding off when there was a tremendous report. They stopped short. The man jumped down and looked at the back tire.

"Blowout," he remarked laconically. Quest frowned.

"How long will it take?"

"Four minutes," the man replied. "I've got another wheel ready. That's the queerest blowout I ever saw, though."

The two men leaned over the tire. Suddenly Quest's expression changed. His hand stole into his hip pocket.

"Tom," he explained, "that wasn't a blowout at all. Look here!"

He pointed to the small level hole. Almost at once he stood back and the sunshine flashed upon the revolver clutched in his right hand.

"That was a bullet," he continued. "Someone fired at that tire. Tom, there's trouble about."

The man looked nervously around.

"That's a rifle bullet, sure," he muttered.

"Get on the wheel as quick as you can," Quest directed. "Here, I'll give you a hand."

He stooped down to unfasten the straps which fastened the spare wheel. It was one of his rare lapses, realized a moment too late. Almost in his ears came the hoarse cry:

"Hands up, gunvorn! Hands up this second or I'll blow you to hell!"

Quest glanced over his shoulder and looked into the face of Red Gallagher, raised a little above the level of the road. A very ugly little revolver was pointed directly at Quest's heart.

"My mate's got you covered on the other side of the road, too. Hands up, both of you, or we'll make a quick job of it."

Quest shrugged his shoulders, threw his revolver into the road and obeyed. As he did so, the other man stole out from behind a bush and sprang for the chauffeur, who under cover of the car was stealing off. There was a brief struggle, then the dull thud of the railway man's rifle falling on the chauffeur's head. He rolled over and lay in the road.

"Pitch him off amongst the bushes," Red Gallagher ordered. "You don't want anyone who comes by to see. Now lend me a hand with this chap."

"What do you propose to do with me?" Quest asked.

"You'll know soon enough," Red Gallagher answered. "A matter of five minutes' talk, to start with. You see that handcar house?"

"Perfectly well," Quest assented. "My eyesight is quite normal."

"Get there then. I'm a yard behind you and my revolver's pointing for the middle of your back."

Quest sprang lightly down from the road, crossed the few intervening yards and stepped into the handcar house.

Gallagher and his mate followed close behind. Quest paused on the threshold.

"It's a filthy dirty hole," he remarked. "Can't we have our little chat out here? Is it money you want?"

Gallagher glanced around. Then with an ugly push of the shoulder he sent Quest reeling into the shed. His great form blocked up the doorway.

"No," he cried fiercely. "It's not money I want this time. Quest, you brute, you dirty bloodhound! You sent me to the pen for five years—you

with your cursed prying into other people's affairs. Don't you remember me, eh? Red Gallagher?"

"Of course I do," Quest replied coolly. "You garroted and robbed an old man and had the spree of your life. The old man happened to be a friend



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