

# 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 Whelgh's daughter, he has but just begun a life-and-death struggle with a mysterious master criminal. In a hidden hut Professor Ashleigh's garden he has an anthropoid ape skeleton and a living inhuman creature, half monkey, half man, destroyed by fire. In his room have appeared from nowhere black boxes, one containing diamonds torn from a lovely throat by a pair of armless, threatening hands, both with sarcastic, threatening smiles signed by the inscrutable hands. He is arrested for the murder of his valet, Joe Brown, and a Miss Quigg, in his room. Laura and Lenora, his assistants, suspect Craig, the professor's valet. Laura is abducted by the threatening hands, but is rescued. Quest clears him of the murder charge, but fails to appear in the rided safe and, returning the diamonds a second time, the accompanying note tells him he has no chance against the inherited cunning of the

### SEVENTH INSTALLMENT

#### THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

Something in the nature of a conference was proceeding in Quest's study. The professor was there, seated in the most comfortable easy-chair, smoking without relish one of his host's best cigars, watching with nervous impatience the closed door. Laura and Lenora were seated at the table, dressed for the street. They had the air of being prepared for some excursion. Quest, realizing the professor's highly strung state, had left him alone for a few moments and was studying a map of New York. The latter, however, was too ill at ease to keep silent for long.

"Our friend French," he remarked, "gave you no clue, I suppose, as to the direction in which his investigations are leading him?"

Quest glanced up from the map. "None at all. I know, however, that the house in which Lenora here was confined is being watched closely."

The professor glanced across toward the table before which Lenora was seated.

"It seems strange," he continued, "that the young lady should have so little to tell us about her incarceration."

Lenora shivered for a moment. "What could there be to tell," she asked, "except that it was all horrible, and that I felt things—felt dangers—which I couldn't describe."

The professor gave vent to an impatient little exclamation. "I am not speaking for fancies," he persisted. "You had food brought to you, for instance. Could you never see the hand which placed it inside your room? Could you hear nothing of the footsteps of the person who brought it? Could you not even surmise whether it were a man or a woman?"

Lenora answered him with an evasive effort. She had barely, as yet, recovered from the shock of those awful hours.

"The person who brought me the food," she said, "came at night—never by the daytime. I never heard anything. The most I ever saw was once—I happened to be looking toward the door and I saw a pair of hands—nothing more—setting down a tray. I shrieked and called out. I think that I almost fainted. When I found courage enough to look, there was nothing there but the tray upon the floor."

The professor sighed as he turned away. "It is evident, I am afraid," he said, "that Miss Lenora's evidence will help no one. As an expert in these affairs, Mr. Quest, does it not seem to you that her imprisonment was just a little purposeless? There seems to have been no attempt to harm her in any way."

"Whoever took the risk of abducting her," Quest pointed out grimly, "did it for a purpose. That purpose would probably have been developed in course of time. However we look at it, Mr. Ashleigh, there was only one man who must have been anxious to get her out of the way, and that man was Craig. Here comes our friend French. I have an idea that he has something to tell us."

They glanced expectantly towards the door as French entered. The inspector, who was looking very spruce and well brushed, wished them a general good-morning. His eyes rested last and longest upon Laura, who seemed, however, unconscious of his presence.

"Now, then, French," Quest began, as he returned his greeting, "take a cigar, make yourself comfortable in that chair and let us have your news. As you see, we have obeyed orders. We are all ready to follow you anywhere."

"It won't be to the end of the world, anyway," the inspector remarked, as he lit his cigar. "I am going to pro-

pose a little excursion down Gayson avenue way."

"Back to that house?" Lenora exclaimed with a grimace.

The inspector nodded. "We have had those boys at the station," he went on, "and we have questioned them carefully. It seems that after they had picked up the ball, a man came out of the side entrance of the house, saw them reading Miss Lenora's message, and shouted after them. The boys had sense enough to scoot. The man ran after them, but had to give it up. Here is their description of him."

The inspector took a piece of paper from his pocket. They all waited breathlessly.

"Had to drag this out of the boys, bit by bit," the inspector proceeded, "but boiled down and put into reasonable language, this is what it comes to: A man of medium height, rather thin, pale, and after running a short distance he put his hand to his heart, as though out of breath. One of the boys thought his nose was a little hooked, and they both remarked upon the fact that although he shouted after them, he used no swear words, but simply tried to induce them to stop. This description suggests anything to you, gentlemen?"

"Craig," Lenora said firmly.

"It is a very accurate description of Craig," Sanford Quest agreed.

The professor looked troubled, also a little perplexed. He said nothing, however.

"Under these circumstances," the inspector continued, "I have had the house watched, and I propose that we now search it systematically. It is very possible that something may transpire to help us. Of course, my men went through it roughly when we brought Miss Lenora away, but that wasn't anything of a search to count, if the place really has become a haunt of criminals."

"What about the ownership of the house?" Quest asked, as he took up his hat.

The inspector nodded approvingly. "I am making a few inquiries in that direction," he announced. "I expect to have something to report very shortly."

The professor stood drawing on his gloves. The vague look of trouble still lingered in his face.

"Tell me again," he begged, "the name of the avenue in which this residence is situated?"

"Gayson avenue," the inspector replied. "It's a bit out of the way, but it's not a bad neighborhood."

The professor repeated the address to himself softly. For a moment he stood quite still. His manner showed signs of growing anxiety. He seemed to be trying to remember something.

"The name," he admitted finally, as they moved towards the door, "suggests to me, I must confess—we are going to see the house inspector?"

"We are on our way there now, sir—that is if the young ladies are willing," he added, glancing at Laura.

"We've been waiting here with our hats on for the last half hour," Laura

replied promptly. "You've stretched your ten minutes out some, Mr. French."

The inspector maneuvered to let the

others pass on, and descended the stairs by Laura's side.

"Couldn't help it," he confided, lowering his tone a little. "Had some information in about that house I couldn't quite size up. You're looking well this morning, Miss Laura."

"Say, who are you guying!" she replied.

"I mean it," the inspector persisted. "That hat seems to suit you."

Laura laughed at the top of her voice. "Say, kid," she exclaimed to Lenora, "the inspector here's setting up as a judge-of-millinery!"

Lenora turned and looked at them both with an air of blank astonishment. The inspector was a little embarrassed.

"No need to give me away like that," he muttered, as they reached the hall. "Now then, ladies and gentlemen, if you are ready."

They took their places in the automobile and drove off. As they neared the vicinity of Gayson avenue the professor began to show signs of renewed uneasiness. When they drew up at last outside the house he gave a little exclamation. His face was grave, almost haggard.

"Mr. Quest," he said, "Inspector French, I deeply regret that I have a statement to make."

They both turned quickly toward him. The inspector smiled in a confidential manner at Laura. It was obvious that he knew what was coming.

"Some years ago," the professor continued, "I bought this house and made a present of it to—"

"To whom?" Quest asked quickly. "To my servant Craig," the professor admitted with a groan.

Lenora gave a little cry. She turned triumphantly towards the inspector. "All recollection as to its locality had escaped me," the professor continued sorrowfully. "I remember that it was on the anniversary of his having been with me for some fifteen years that I decided to show him some substantial mark of my appreciation. I knew that he was looking for a domicile for his father and mother, who are since both dead, and I requested a house agent to send me in a list of suitable residences. This, alas! was the one I purchased."

Quest glanced around the place. "I think," he said, "that the professor's statement now removes any doubt as to Craig's guilt. You are sure the house has been closely watched, inspector?"

"Since I received certain information," French replied, "I have had half a dozen of my best men in the vicinity. I can assure you that no one has entered or left it during the last twenty-four hours."

They made their way to the piazza steps and entered by the front door. The house was an ordinary framework one of moderate size, in poor repair, and showing signs of great neglect. The rooms were barely furnished and their first cursory search revealed no traces of habitation. There was still the broken skylight in the room which Lenora had occupied, and the bed upon which she had slept was still crumpled. French, who had been tapping the walls downstairs, called to them. They trooped down into the hall. The inspector was standing before what appeared to be an ordinary panel.

"Look here," he said, glancing out of the corner of his eye to be sure that Laura was there, "let me show you what I have just discovered."

He felt with his thumb for a spring. In a moment or two a portion of the wall, about two feet in extent, slowly revolved, disclosing a small cupboard fitted with a telephone instrument.

"A telephone," the inspector remarked, pointing to it, "in an unoccupied house and a concealed cupboard. What do you think of that?"

The professor shook his head. "Don't ask me," he groaned.

French took the receiver from its rest and called up the exchange.

"Inspector French speaking," he announced. "Kindly tell me what is the number of the telephone from which I am speaking, and who is the subscriber?"

He listened to the reply and asked another question. "Can you tell me when this instrument was last used? . . . When? . . . Thank you!"

The inspector hung up the receiver. "The subscriber's name," he told them dryly, "is Brown. The number is not entered in the book, by request. The telephone was used an hour ago from a call office and connection was established. That is to say, that someone spoke from this telephone."

"Then if your men have maintained their search properly, that someone," Quest said slowly, "must be in the house at the present moment."

"Without a doubt," the inspector agreed.

"I am going to search the front room on the first floor before we do anything else," said Quest. "I think that if you wait here I may be able to show you something directly."

Quest ascended the stairs and entered a wholly unfurnished room on the left-hand side. He looked for a minute contemplatively at a large but rather shallow cupboard, the door of which stood open, and tapped lightly with his forefinger upon the back part of it. Then he withdrew a few feet and, drawing out his revolver, deliberately fired into the floor, a few inches inside. There was a half-stifed cry. The false back suddenly swung open and a man rushed out.

(Continued on Page 6.)

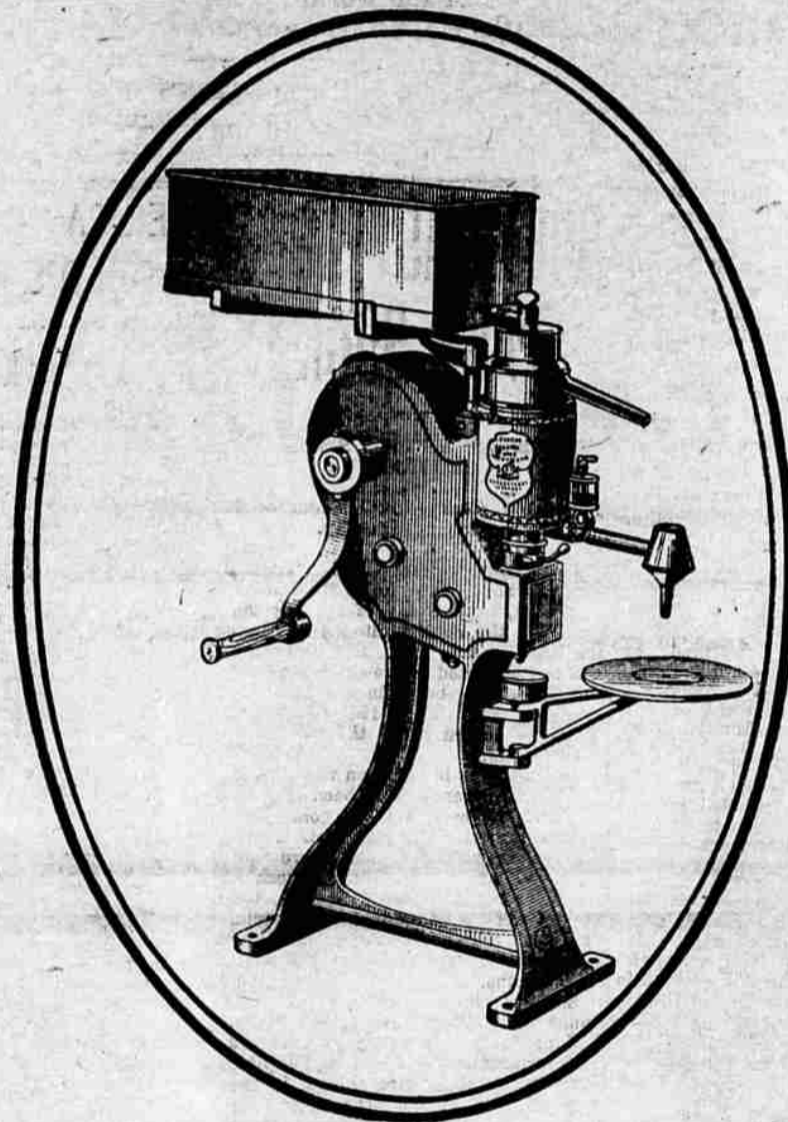
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