

The BLACK BOX

by E. Phillips Oppenheim

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CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. Rheinholdt welcomed the inspector with a beaming smile as he stepped out of his office and approached her automobile.

"How nice of you to be so punctual, Mr. French," she exclaimed, making room for him by her side. "Will you tell the man to drive to Mr. Quest's house in Georgia square?"

The inspector obeyed and took his place in the luxurious limousine.

"How beautifully punctual we are!" she continued, glancing at the clock.

"Inspector, I am so excited at the idea of getting my jewels back. Isn't Mr. Quest a wonderful man?"

"He's a clever chap, all right," the inspector admitted. "All the same, I'm rather sorry he wasn't able to lay hands on the thief."

"That's your point of view, of course," Mrs. Rheinholdt remarked. "I can think of nothing but having my diamonds back. I feel I ought to go and thank the professor for recommending Mr. Quest."

The inspector made no reply. Mrs. Rheinholdt was suddenly aware that she was becoming a little tactless.

"Of course," she sighed, "it is disappointing not to be able to lay your hands upon the thief. That is where I suppose you must find the interference of an amateur like Mr. Quest a little troublesome sometimes. He gets back the property, which is what the private individual wants, but he doesn't secure the thief, which is, of course, the real end of the case from your point of view."

"It's a queer affair about these jewels," the inspector remarked. "Quest hasn't told me the whole story yet. Here we are on the stroke of time!"

The car drew up outside Quest's house. The inspector assisted his companion to alight and rang the bell at the front door. There was a somewhat prolonged pause. He rang again.

"Never knew this to happen before," he remarked. "That sort of secretary-valet of Mr. Quest's—Ross Brown I think he calls him—is always on the spot." They waited for some time, there was still no answer to their summons. The inspector placed his ear to the keyhole. There was not a sound to be heard. He drew back, a little puzzled. At that moment his attention was caught by the fluttering of a little piece of white material caught in the door. He pulled it out. It was a fragment of white embroidery, and on it were several small stains. The inspector looked at them and looked at his fingers. His face grew suddenly grave.

"Seems to me," he muttered, "that there has been some trouble here. I shall have to take a liberty. If you'll excuse me, Mrs. Rheinholdt, I think it would be better if you waited in the car until I send out for you."

"You don't think the jewels have been stolen again?" she gasped.

The inspector made no reply. He had drawn from his pocket a little pass key and was fitting it into the lock. The door swung open. Once more they were both conscious of that peculiar silence, which seemed to have in it some unnamable quality. He moved to the foot of the stairs and shouted:

"Hello! Anyone there?"

There was no reply. He opened the doors of the two rooms on the right-hand side, where Quest, when he was engaged in any widespread affair, kept a stenographer and a telegraph operator. Both rooms were empty. Then he turned towards Quest's study on the left-hand side. French was a man of iron nerve. No power on earth could have kept back the cry which broke from his lips.

A few feet away from the door was stretched the body of the secretary-valet. On the other side of the room, lying as though she had slipped from the sofa, her head fallen on one side in hideous fashion, was the body of Miss Quigg, the Salvation Army young woman. French set his teeth and drew back the curtains. In the clearer light the disorder of the room was fully revealed. There had been a terrible struggle. Between whom? How? There was suddenly a piercing shriek. The inspector turned quickly around. Mrs. Rheinholdt, who had disregarded his advice, was standing on the threshold.

"Inspector!" she cried. "What has happened? Oh, my God!"

She covered her face with her hands. French gripped her by the arm. At that moment there was the sound of an automobile stopping outside.

"Keep quiet for a moment," the inspector whispered in her ear. "Pull yourself together, madam. Go to the other end of the room. Don't look. Stay there for a few moments and then get home as quick as you can."

She obeyed him mutely, pressing

her hands to her eyes, shivering in every limb. French, stood back inside the room. He heard the front door open, he heard Quest's voice outside.

"Where the devil are you, Ross?"

There was no reply.

The door was pushed open. Quest entered, followed by the professor and Craig. The inspector stood watching their faces. Quest came to a standstill before he had passed the threshold. He looked upon the floor and he looked across to the sofa. Then he looked at French.

"My God!" he muttered.

The professor pushed past. He had looked around the room, and gazed at the two bodies with an expression of blank and absolute terror. Then he fell back into Craig's arms.

"The poor girl!" he cried. "Horrible! Horrible! Horrible!"

"Know anything about this?" Quest asked quickly.

"Not a thing," the inspector replied.

"We arrived, Mrs. Rheinholdt and I, at five minutes past twelve. There was no answer to our ring. I used my pass key and entered. This is what I found."

Quest stood over the body of his valet for a moment. The man was obviously dead. The inspector took his handkerchief and covered up the head. A few feet away was a heavy paper-weight.

"Killed by a blow from behind," French remarked grimly, "with that little affair. Look here!"

They glanced down at the girl. Quest's eyebrows came together quickly. There were two blue marks upon her throat where a man's thumbs might have been.

"The hands again," he muttered.

The inspector nodded.

"Can you make anything of it?"

"Not yet," Quest confessed. "I must think."

The inspector glanced at him curiously.

"Where on earth have you been to?" he demanded.

"Been to?" Quest repeated.

"Look in the mirror!" French suggested.

Quest glanced at himself. His collar had given way, his tie was torn, a button and some of the cloth had been wrenched from his coat, his trousers were torn and he was covered with dust.

"I'll tell you about my trouble a little later on," he replied. "Say, can't we keep those girls out?"

They were too late. Laura and Lenora were already upon the threshold. Quest swung round toward them.

"Girls," he said, "there has been some trouble here. Go and wait upstairs, Lenora, or sit in the hall."



He Set His Teeth and Jumped.

Laura, you had better telephone to the police station and for a doctor. That's right, isn't it, inspector?"

"Yes!" the latter assented thoughtfully.

Lenora, white to the lips, staggered a few feet back into the hall. Laura set her teeth and lingered.

"Is that Ross?" she asked.

"It's his body," Quest replied. "He's been murdered here, and the Salvation Army girl who was to come this morning for her check."

Laura turned away half dazed.

"I'd have trusted Ross with my life," Quest continued, "but he must have been alone in the house when the girl

came. Do you suppose it was the usual sort of trouble?"

Inspector French stooped down and picked up the paper-weight. Across it was stamped the name of Sanford Quest.

"This yours, Quest?"

"Of course it is," Quest answered. "Everything in the room is mine."

"The girl would fight to defend herself," the inspector remarked slowly, "but she could never strike a man such a blow as your valet died from."

French stooped and picked up a small clock. It had stopped at eleven-fifteen. He looked at it thoughtfully.

"Quest," he went on, "I'll have to ask you a question."

"Why not?" Quest replied looking quickly up.

"Where were you at eleven-fifteen?"

"On tower No. 10 of the New York Central, scrapping for my life," Quest answered grimly. "I've reason to remember it."

Something in the inspector's steady gaze seemed to inspire the criminologist with a new idea. He came a step forward, a little frown upon his forehead.

"Say, French," he exclaimed, "you don't—you don't suspect me of this?"

French was unmoved. He looked Quest in the eyes.

"I don't know," he said.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY

Washington, Apr. 21.—"Help! Help! We're sinking!" On a cold blizzard Christmas eve several winters ago the U. S. revenue cutter Gresham lying in Boston harbor picked up this wireless call of distress and put out to sea to find the storm's victim's. A hard night's work failed to reveal trace of the ship that had sent the call and the exhausted crew of the government vessels returned disheartened to the harbor.

By process of elimination then it was learned that the cry for help had been sent by two Harvard students operating an amateur wireless station. It was their idea of humor.

An that is a more or less general conception held by the public of amateur wireless operators are doing or are likely to do. However, the conception does the amateur an injustice, aside from the fact that government regulations now hedge amateur about so well that they scarcely dare attempt foolish pranks with instruments so fraught with possibility of disaster, the amateurs themselves have come to have too high a regard for the wireless service to use it for such silly entertainment. Government agents of Radio Service, Bureau of Navigation report that abuses of their privileges on the part of amateur operators now are exceedingly rare.

Which is interesting when you set down a number of such operators in the United States—2796, by the last official tabulation. That is more than twice as many as there are of other operators combined. All told there are just 3934 stations licensed under U. S. laws and of these, the government has 408, land and ship combined; commercial companies have 730, including those on ships; and the amateurs have the other 2796, as told.

The district having its headquarters in San Francisco leads the list in numbers, with 562 amateur stations; the Baltimore district is second, with 543; New York district third, 503; Cleveland district fourth, 456; Boston district, fifth, 374; Chicago district sixth, 172; Seattle district seventh, 114; and Savannah and New Orleans districts winding up the list with 36 each.

Stations so licensed, of course, are sending stations. The number of receiving instruments is indefinite, since the size that a receiving outfit may be has constantly reduced until now they are made small enough to carry in one's pocket. It is figured, of course, that the damage one may do is in sending stations. These, that are capable of harm are large enough to be seen or, rather, too large to be concealed since the distance that the radiogram may be sent depends on the size of the sending outfit. An amateur could make himself a sender out of the two iron posts of his bed but he would not send messages far enough to be picked up by any regular station; the enormous plant at Sayville, N. Y., sends its messages clear across the Atlantic ocean.

Each licensed station has its registered call signal as for example, it is that of the Aerogram Club of Newport R. I., the "1" representing the number of the district, and 7ab, that of Alfred S. Anderson, of Astoria, Ore.

The International Radio telegraphic Convention has distributed the letters for use among the nations of the world, the United States receiving for its exclusive use N and W and KDA to KZZ. All call signals must be of three letters, thus the first in the N series would be NAA and the last in that series would be NZZ, the variations lying between the two making a large total. From KAA to KZZ, all call signals are Germany's, KDA (property of the U. S.) being next after KZZ. Germany also has all of A and all of D. Great Britain has all of B, all of G, all of M, and VXA to VZZ.

Above is mentioned one of the reasons why wireless foolishness has abated. Set out in more particularity, it is as follows:

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