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# DOUBLOONS

## A Thrilling Novel of Mystery, Tragedy and a Stolen Fortune

### By Eden Phillpotts and Arnold Bennett

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CHAPTER XIX.

Mrs. Appleby as Machiavelli.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Appleby, with an air of simplicity. "Why don't you go after the White Rose?"

This observation will by itself show how far this woman's invincible curiosity and talent for arranging the affairs of other people had carried her in the space of a few hours. She and Mary Pollexfen and Sir Anthony sat together in Sir Anthony's drawing room after the lift boy was amusing himself at varying altitudes of the Devonshire Mansion. Much had passed since the arrival of the two ladies in the morning. Mrs. Appleby, not at all pispleased to become acquainted with a stage celebrity of the first order, had behaved to Mary Pollexfen with marked tact. She had, moreover, been considerably impressed by Mary's clothes and Mary's manner. And Mary, on the other hand, was really thankful to have a Mrs. Appleby present at the interview with the baronet—that baronet whom she had so often and so coluly rebuffed, but of whom she despised nothing but his intolligence.

Mary's narrative of the events of the previous day, given to Sir Anthony and Mrs. Appleby in conclave (Mrs. Appleby had no intention of being kept out of anything), had stimulated the baronet's sluggish imagination. He had passed through the stages of amazement, admiration, envy, and he was now at the stage of emulation. The wonderful romantic things that Mary Pollexfen and Philip Masters had done begot in him a desire to do things equally wonderful himself. That Mary had lived for many days in the Corner House as a man startled him; it startled him indeed more than it startled his sister, who, like most women of irreproachable correctness, was incapable, really, of being shocked; Mrs. Appleby had not pretended even to be startled.

Philip's rash disappearance into Poplar, and his mysterious capture, and the strange message, each contributed to throw new light on existence for Tony. He would have thought such occurrences impossible had he merely read of them; but now, with the bent platter on his mantelpiece, he went to the other extreme and thought them entirely natural and began to fancy that life was made up of similar episodes. Despite protests, he had rushed off with Oxwich in the motor car to Poplar before lunch. But he had discovered naught, the widow Upottery having, of course, contrived not to leave behind her tracks crude enough to be perceived by the Sir Anthony's of this world. He had also run to earth the owner of the White Rose, who had nothing to tell him, saw that the yacht had been chartered by an individual named Smythe, whose address was the General Post Office. He had further communicated with the police, and the police had received him coldly and incredulously, promising without enthusiasm to examine his report in due course. The police being aware that Philip had turned journalist and not having gathered much comfort from his article in the Morning Courier, scarcely disposed to put themselves about because he had vanished, or, as they hinted, pretended to vanish.

"Go after him, eh?" said Sir Anthony, jumping up from the sofa. "That's an idea. Something's certainly got to be done. What's the name of the line that runs to the West Indies. Royal Mail, isn't it? I'll ring for tea." And he rang. Oxwich entered instantly, the man was never far from the door during a crisis. "Oxwich. Telephone to the Royal Mail Line offices and find out when the next steamer goes to the West Indies."

"I have already found out, Sir Anthony," replied Oxwich. "There is a complete list of steamship sailings downstairs. Next Saturday week, sir. A boat left Southampton only the day before yesterday."

"Thank you."

Oxwich withdrew, having added another atom to the coral reef of his reputation.

"That's nearly a fortnight," said Sir Anthony, dashed.

"But you can hire a yacht, dear," said Mrs. Appleby, imperturbably smoothing out the flounces of her striking dress.

"Can I?"

"Why, of course, dearest! And in a yacht you can go where you like."

"How do you hire the yachts?" Tony demanded, his imagination getting a new fillip.

"I—I don't know," said Mrs. Appleby. "You just hire them. I expect it's quite simple—like hiring a salmon river, or a moor or a special train. I dare say you could hire a nice large yacht. One that nobody would be sea-sick on. I don't mean one of those sailing things. I mean a steam yacht, with electric light, and a cow on board."

Sir Anthony sank once more.

"Oxwich," he said, "get me Kelly's Directory from somewhere. I want the names and addresses of some yacht brokers."

"Yes, sir," Oxwich agreed, and then after a majestic pause, "Perhaps one of the yacht-newspapers might be more useful, sir."

"Just so, exactly."

"That man of yours is a pearl," Mrs. Appleby observed.

"He understands me," Tony agreed nonchalantly.

And presently the baronet was reading aloud from The Yachting world:

"Six hundred and fifty ton (about) steel steam yacht, built 189— to Lloyd's highest class. Length W. L., 202 feet; beam, 26 feet; draught, 14 1-2 feet. Every convenience and comfort. Large shade deck, drawing-room, dining-room and smoking-room on main deck, with intercommunication. Eight staterooms, electric light, steam heating, steam steering gear, steamlaunch, speed up to 13 knots, recently passed special survey. Exceptionally well found. Suitable for long voyages. Ample bunker capacity. Ready at once. Lying Tilbury. Price very low—a bargain. Also for charter. Sole agents, Boyds, Malinocurt House, Piccadilly, W. National Telephone 6969 Gerrard."

"It is precisely what you need, dearest," said Mrs. Appleby, "if only it has a pretty name."

"Miss Polexfen," Tony burst out suddenly, dropping the paper, "you do not say anything."

"I—I—what am I to say?" Mary murmured.

"You see,' Mrs. Appleby added quickly in a manner-of-fact tone, unable any longer to keep her cards off the table, "Horace and I could go with you, to keep you company. The voyage would be such a good thing for Horace. And besides his health, it would be such an education for him, wouldn't it?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Tony, who found himself still receiving shocks.

And Mrs. Apple calmly continued: "Miss Pollexfen m also go, as our guest. I am sure you must be very solicitous, dear Miss Pollexfen, about the fate of this brave young man who is running such risks on your behalf."

Mrs. Appleby's spirit of enterprise was breath-taking. It brought a blush to Mary's cheek, but no words to Mary's tongue.

"And there's another point," proceeded Mrs. Appleby. "If Miss Pollexfen stays in England, her whereabouts are certain to become known, and she would be worried to death by detectives and things."

"Miss Pollexfen," Tony asked her. "What do you say?"

"It is extremely kind of you, Mary managed to reply. "I don't know what to"——

Tony nerved himself. "It depends on you," he said.

"If it depends on me," she answered in a new firm voice, with a decisive gesture, "I will go."

Tony rang the bell.

"Oxwich put me on to 6969 Gerrard."

When he came back from telephoning, Mary Pollexfen was alone in the drawing room, Mrs. Appleby having departed to convey delicious possibilities to her offspring.

"I'm going down to see Boyds at once," said Tony, flushed with his own importance. The potentialities of a fortune of £400,000 had been more fully than ever revealed to the young man that afternoon. A steam yacht. It seemed strange to him that the sublime notion of a steam yacht had never before crossed his mind. He was drunk with the scheme.

Mary stood up. "You are very good," she replied, with deep feeling. And suddenly the atmosphere changed for Tony. The fact that Philip Masters was in actual veritable danger became somehow intensely real to him.

"Not at all. You know Phil is a great pal of mine."

"And supposing you go—we go, what shall you do when you get out there, to Grenada?"

"That will depend. We may have to consult the local police."

"I hope nothing terrible will happen," Mary breathed.

"Why do you imagine such things?"

"Because I have been thinking there may be something in that hidden treasure story of the negro Coco's after all. And if money is concerned—and my uncle"—she stopped.

"Do you know," cried Tony, "that's just what I've been thinking—I mean about the treasure. As for risks. How can there be any risk? Why Phil should be carried off to a place like Grenada, I can't imagine. But we'll find him. I tell you what—it wouldn't be a bad plan to get hold of Marse Coco and hear him talk, eh? He might be useful."

"I should like to very much," Mary answered. "He was my poor father's friend, the only friend he had, I think." The voice almost broke.

And Tony, as he called briskly for his hat and overcoat, had a dim vague sense of the grim quality of the whole adventure. And he perceived Mary as a tragic and remote figure, far above, not for him, in a sphere of emotions utterly different from his. Such simple, vain, goodnatured men have at times such glimpses.

CHAPTER XX.

Travels in London.

After quitting Mary Pollexfen in Kingsway, Philip Masters did not reach Poplar on the Sunday evening without a considerable amount of difficulty. Like many Londoners, he knew not his London. He had probably never in his life been further east than Aldgate; it is doubtful if he ever knew the "Three Nuns." He hailed a hansom just north of St. Clement Danes, and remarked airily to the cabman:

"Cotton street, Poplar, No. 7."

The No. 7 was delicious.

"Not me!" said the cabman.

"What's it worth?" Philip inquired, trying to look generous.

"It ain't worth anything," the cabman replied. "I'm not going to Poplar tonight, guv'nor. I'll drive you to Aldgate, if you like."

Philip accepted. At Aldgate, where he already felt himself in a foreign land, or rather in a hostile country strongly held by an enemy, where he didn't know even the exterior of the churches, where the streets were full of teams instead of crawling cabs, it was with a certain sinking of the heart that he saw his own vehicle vanish. He ought to have been content with a tram, but he lacked skill in the lore of London travel, and loitered about for another hansom. Fortune favored him.

"Cotton street, Poplar," he said to the driver, wisely leaving out the No. 7 on this occasion.

And to his despair and disgust the cabman replied, "Not me, guv'nor."

"It isn't far, is it?" Philip questioned, somewhat wistfully.

"It's further than I'm going this blessed night," said the cabman. "I'll take you to Stepney Station if you like. That's just in the radius."

Once more Philip accepted.

The cab penetrated further and further into regions Caesar never knew. It followed a thoroughfare wider than anything Philip had seen outside Paris, but, as regards its characteristics, ineffably depressing. And the thoroughfare was eternal. Time after time it had the air of reaching the end of the world, and then it made up its mind to proceed further. Philip had not beheld in thirty years as many sad-eyed, ill-dressed, plain people as passed the windows of the cab in thirty minutes. There were plenty of public houses, all resembling each other so exactly that they might have been bought at some wholesale store of public houses and put down there at regular intervals, signs and everything complete; but there was not a single decent restaurant—using the word "decent" in Philip's sense—nor a single building that met his eye in a friendly manner.

Then the mean lights of Stepney Station appeared, and Philip was obliged to descend again unprotected in the hostile country. He was geographically so lost that he knew not east from west. He had heard of Stepney chiefly as a district owning a bishop; he might have been in Strasburg, Staffa or Stornaway.

"How do I go on from here?" he asked the cabman respectfully.

And the cabman looked down on him from his box. "Any of these trams," said the cabman. "I don't know as they goes to Cotton street, but they goes to Poplar."

"Is it much further?"

"I should say it's a tidy step."

He boarded a tram which he ought to have boarded at Aldgate.

The conductor actually knew Cotton street, and Philip, enheartened, regarded him as a man and a brother. The tram was a leisurely apparatus. The entire population of Stepney and Poplar seemed to get in and out of it about three times. It passed churches and manufactories. It crossed water by means of bridges, and Philip saw the masts of ships dimly against the night sky. He also saw now and then, when the tram stopped, posters on the walls in language of which he could not make out a single character. Then the tram drew up at another large railway station and a couple of hundred yards further on the conductor tipped him a familiar wink.

"'Ere y'are" said the conductor.

And Philip had to descend, had to leave his sole acquaintance in that desolute region. The strange Oriental odor of the tram remained with him.

Just as he had heard of Stepney, so he had heard of Poplar, and he was in it. His own London seemed to be in another hemisphere. Close by was a curious church, and its clock struck 12 just as Philip was hesitating at the corner of East India Dock road and Cotton street.

He remembered that Giralda, too, had been down there, all alone, and he whistled in order to create in himself a feeling of manliness. In less than a minute he stood in front of No. 7. So far as he could judge in the obscurity of the badly lit street it was a house unutterably mean and melancholy. A light was burning in the hall, as a light had been burning in the hall of the Corner House on just such an evening. He went up the two steps and knocked loud and bold.

A rather short, firmly built man opened the door.

"I want to see Mrs. Upottery," Philip said at once. He had no intention of raising the point whether or not Mrs. Upottery lived there, or had lived there.

The man seemed to hesitate.

"Mrs. Upottery?" he murmured in a thick, heavy voice.

"Yes, Mrs. Upottery."

"We don't want any friends of Mrs. Upottery here," said the man in a tone of finality. "A nice time of night to come waking people up."

"I'm not a friend of Mrs. Upottery, mate," Philip protested. "But I've got to speak to her."

"Well, she ain't in."

"When will she be in?"

"She won't be in. At least I hope not. She turned this house upside down. She's made forty times more mess than she's worth. And she ain't paid her bill properly. If my mother had her here she'd claw her blooming eyes out for her, that's what she'd do. And quick!"

The man was furious against Mrs. Upottery. He made as if to close the door but Philip put his foot in it, at the same time holding out half a crown, which glinted in the feeble light.

"See here, mate," said he persuasively. "If that's any use to you it's yours. I'd like to have a bit of a chat with you. I shan't keep you two minutes. But I've got most particular reasons for meeting with Mrs. Upottery, and I'm no more a friend of hers than you are."

The man's hand fidgetted toward the half-crown, and then his fingers closed on it, and he opened the door wider. Without waiting for an invitation, Philip slipped inside the house. A candle burned crookedly in a pewter stick on a deal table. The sides of the passage were shiny with grease, and the floor was of no special color or substance. Philip's eyes interrogated the man's. He wore a cap, and a leather belt showed under his waistcoat. His face was pale. At first he gave the impression of being young, but this impression passed; he might have been almost any age.

"What do you want to know?" he asked gruffly.

"You say Mrs. Upottery's been kicking up a dust here. What about?"

"How do I know what about? I only know as she's going as stewardess, or something, on a yacht. But if you ask me, she's a queer lot. What surprises me is that the police ain't been after her. If she ain't a jailbird, then I never seen one. And I seen a few, too."

"A yacht?"

"Yes. I did hear she was bound for the West Indies—Grenada—Grand Etang—damned if I can rec'lect the names. But the old woman's been jabbering about Grand Etang ever since she came in tonight."

Philip was immensely interested.

"Where is she now?"

She's gone down to the yacht with her bundle."

"Where's the yacht?"

"She's lying off Green's wharf, if she hasn't sailed."

Philip thought a moment.

"Far from here?" he questioned.

"No, not that far."

"If you'll come out and take me there at once," said Philip, feeling in his pocket, "there's five shillings for you."

"I'll do it," said the man promptly. "Come on."

They went outside instantly and the man banged the door. He led the way down Cotton street. Philip following. They crossed Poplar High street, and soon Philip found himself floundering over lines of railway amid little groups of loaded wagons with a red signal here and there in the distance. The man walked fast and never looked behind. The route lay over uneven ground; all was strange, exotic and full of sinister romance. Then some sheds loomed up, and a warehouse. The man passed along an entry lighted by an oil lamp.

"Look out," he said at last.

Philip saw lights. He stood on a wharf. The vast and heaving Thames lay astonishingly before him with the shipping of the world on its broad bosom. Two steamers were alongside, and into one of them a steam crane, with an incredible thunderous rattle and screech was pouring bulky packages. Men cried to one another between the ship and the wharf. Philip's guide walked up the wharf to a long, sloping gangway that gave access to the other steamer. Philip observed the name "White Rose" on a dirty gray life buoy. A thin smoke was oozing from the funnel. A solitary lantern showed from the mast. The guide crossed the gangplank, Philip at his heels. And as Philip gained the deck of the mysterious steamer he paused a moment to take in the scene, with its wide water, its tarry, oily odor of ships, its gliding, spectral lights, and its weird sounds. The very air smelt of the sea. This was London. This was the city of Piccadilly Circus, and the Alcazar, and the Devonshire Mansion.

"Down here," the man called, indicating a companion ladder, but he remembered nothing else for quite a long time.

CHAPTER XXI.

Uncle Walter Manages Better.

When his senses became once more available for the uses of his existence he was at first aware of nothing except a feeling of fatigue and petulance. It seemed to him that he was like a cross and sickly child who had a comprehensive quarrel with the universe. Then he began to notice other interesting things, as that he was lying on his back on some soft substance, and that there was a small circle of faint radiance in front of him to his right. He tried lazily to move his arms, and he could not; then his legs, and he could not. Then he renewed the attempt with increased force, still without result. This made him angry. He struggled hard, was conscious of pain in his ankles and wrists, and muttered.

"I'm tied down."

Thenceforward his memory recovered very rapidly. He recalled all that had passed up to the moment of descending the companion. He put two and two ingeniously together, despite a wandering pain in his head. The thought flashed through his brain like a scientific discovery that classifies and explains a whole series of differing facts:

"Uncle Pollexfen's at the bottom of this."

And shortly afterwards he said aloud.

"Well, I'm dashed!"

His eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom, and he gradualiy perceived that he was in a cabin, and that the circle of faint light was a porthole. He thought of Mary Pollexfen, far off in London, with intense and violent longing. And he thought of the Courier and Lord Nasing, expecting the wonderful "copy" which he was to provide.

From time to time he made efforts to free his limbs, in vain.

He heard a key turn in a lock. The door of the cabin opened. A lighted match came into the cabin, followed by a man. Philip's eyes blinked. The man approached a hanging lamp, carefully and deliberately lit it, blew out the match, dropped it on the floor and turned to examine the prisoner. It was the man of No. 7 Cotton street, the man who had led him, who had lured him, on board the yacht!

Philip made no sign, though his brain was working at a high rate of speed. His temperamental calm always served him well in a crisis. He had fully grasped the futility of any kind of protest, and he was determined to wait. The man, with an air of cheerful bland interest, bent over the bunk on which Philip lay.

"Hm!" he murmured, rather in the style of a doctor.

Then he picked up a black bonnet which was lying near, put it on, gave a twist to his mouth and winked. The sudden resemblance to Mrs. Upottery was too remarkable to leave any doubt in Philip's mind. He was bound and helpless in the presence of Walter Pollexfen, that protean being who, hitherto unrecognized in his proper person, dominated the extraordinary drama of the Corner House.

"Thanks for the three half-crowns. I managed it somewhat better this time," said the man softly.

"What?" Philip curtly asked. It struck him that the man had changed completely. He now spoke with a highly cultivated accent in a tone that was even more than pleasant. If indeed he was Mary's uncle, Mary's lovely voice was not the first of its sort in her family.

"The insensibility business," answered the man. "A few days ago I thought my hand had lost its cunning. It needs a blow of just sufficient strength, neither too strong nor too feeble, in just the right place."

"Are you Walter Pollexfen?" Philip asked, ignoring these observations.

"Mr. Masters," said the man, "I have come to satisfy your legitimate curiosity. I am Walter Pollexfen. We have had the pleasure of meeting several times already."

He smiled vaguely."

"I wish you'd unfasten these ropes," Philip said. "You've not been quite nice to me, you know."

Mr. Pollexfen responded: "There is a French proverb about the indiscretion of putting one's finger between the tree and its bark. You committed that indiscretion. It is ridiculous to gird against the consequences of having flown in the face of a proverb, my dear sir. However, I am willing to release you. First let me direct your attention to this revolver, and this knife." He drew Philip's revolver and Philip's penknife from his own pockets. "I will release your legs first, then your left arm and then your right. Having done that, I shall retreat rapidly to the opposite corner of the cabin, and if you move off the bunk you will be translated direct to Heaven. I mention this because I have an objection to your jiu jitsu tricks. It was a lamentable fault in my programme that while I was in Yokohama I neglected to study jiu jitsu myself. Do you understand what I have said?"

"Perfectly," said Philip. "Go ahead."

"Your manners please me," Pollexfen remarked as he cut the cord.

"I can't return the compliment," said Philip.

In another moment he was free, while Pollexfen stood at the opposite end of the cabin, the revolver in one hand and the penknife in the other. He wondered whether it would be better to make a dash at the scoundrel instantly, or to await events. Having reflected upon Pollexfen's previous exploits, and upon the kind of person that the hero of them must necessarily be, he decided that in all the circumstances it would be better to await events.

"Perhaps," he ventured, stretching and twisting his legs and rubbing his wrists, "you'll explain what's the meaning of this foolery with me. It looks to me as much like a theatrical display as anything."

"Certainly I will tell you," replied Pollexfen. "Have I not said that I am here to satisfy your legitimate curiosity. As for the present scene, it is in fact rather like a theatrical display. You see I'm a theatrical person—kindly lie down on that bunk—and I've had no one to talk to intimately for a long, long time. I feel the need of talking to some one, the need of boasting, if you will. It's in my nature. It's in the nature of most great men. And I suppose you'll not deny, seeing how much you yourself have discovered about me, that I am a great man. Besides, you deserve that your audacious curiosity should be appeased. I might have killed you at once——"

"It surprises me that you didn't," Philip put in. "A murder or so more or less, especially when one has murdered one's own brother——"

"I'm bound to tell you," said Pollexfen, "that I didn't, morally, murder my brother. I only meant to stun him. Unhappily, I hit too hard—and there the old chap was, dead at my feet."

"What did you hit him with?"

"This," said Pollexfen, putting penknife and cord in his pocket and drawing there from a small, pear-shaped bag inclosed in a long, narrow net. "It contains a mixture of the smallest shot and silver sand. Shot alone would be too heavy, and sand wouldn't be heavy enough in such a small quantity. It's an instrument of attack affected by the hooligans of Lima, where I met with it—on the back of my neck. I daresay you feel a slight soreness at the back of your neck."

"I do."

"Just so. I can assure you I was very awkwardly placed with my brother's corpse. No doubt every one thought the affair a miracle of prearrangement. It wasn't. But if I am not equal to emergencies I am nothing. I never embark on any difficult enterprise without a ladder of silk rope. I changed into male attire. Then I descended by means of that ladder from my brother's room into Girdlers Alley, and I reconnoitered. The watchman was my first annoyance. I chatted with him and found out all about his domestic affairs. I then went up into Holborn, discovered a naughty boy at a coffee stall in Theobald's Road and persuaded him that there was an excellent practical joke to be played on that watchman. The joke worked to perfection, except that you came along and spoiled the desired effect. However, you went to sleep. Then I wanted a spade. There was a spade propped up against your cabin. I adopted it. I dug a neat thing in graves. Then I climbed back to my brother's room, and lowered him gently to the ground and followed after. As soon as he was buried I put the spade back, and revisited the trench just as that idiot of a policeman came up. I was back in the house in no time. The affair seemed to me rather distinguished both in conception and in execution. What do you think?"

The man spoke in such easy unaffected tones that Philip, do what he could, could not retain the ordinary human attitude towards what could only be called, if English words were to retain their common meaning, a dastardly crime.

"I thing you succeeded by mere chance," he said coldly and nonchalantly. Sweat broke out on his brow and he knew it not.

"You do not express yourself accurately," Pollexfen protested. "You mean, or you ought to mean, that I succeeded by masterly use of chance."

"It's all very well to say that the affair was an accident," said Philip. "I have my own ideas about that."

"You doubt me, my dear sir?" Pollexfen seemed surprised and hurt.

"If it was an accident how came you to drug young Meredith on the night that the accident occurred?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Pollexfen, "I see what you are running your head against. That was quite another matter. I did not understand young Meredith, as you call that charming person. But I had my suspicions. Young Meredith had behaved for several days in a way that I did not at all care for. So I determined to investigate the case of young Meredith, and for that purpose I caused a drug to be employed. However, I was so fully occupied during the night that I had no opportunity to profit by the effect of the drug till morning, and even then I was hurried. Still, I accomplished enough."

"You accomplished too much," Philip replied.

"How so?"

"You lifted the blind of Meredith's room at a moment when I was watching from the street. It was just that that started me in my investigation."

"Then I certainly accomplished too much—for your ultimate welfare, Mr. Masters." He appeared to reflect. "Nevertheless the fact remains both interesting and instructive. I ought not to have given way to my curiosity so far as to lift that blind. Did I lift it in a peculiar manner?"

"You lifted as a man who has killed his own brother might have been expected to lift it," Philip answered coldly. And he thought: "My ultimate welfare! What the deuce does he mean?"

"Excellent young man," said Pollexfen, waving the revolver with a didactic gesture. "As a philosopher you have already attained to no mean proficiency. But you have something to learn. The absurd conventional emphasis which you put on the phrase 'own brother' convinces me that you have something to learn. One does not choose one's relatives. Forgive this platitude. But one does not. One owes nothing to one's brother. One's brother is a mere hazard of life—of no logical consequence whatever. My brother was one man. I was another. Hence fratricide is no worse and no better (save in exceptional instances) than ordinary homicide. In truth, just as there is no Allah but Allah, so there is no homicide but homicide. In the peculiar example of homicide now before us, I did a kindness to my brother. I claim no virtue for that—it was an accident. My brother was old, feeble, embittered. He had no friends. He had quarreled with even his daughter. He was about to voyage in an enterprise in which he would assuredly have failed. He would have lost all his money in it. His last day would have been unspeakably sad. An accident—my clumsiness—saved him all that. And you would like to see me hanged for what I did! You astound me. You shock me. Let me tell you——"

Pollexfen broke off suddenly. A throb went through the vessel. It was the beat of the engines.

"What in the name of Lucifer!" he burst out, evidently startled.

Keeping the muzzle of the revolver in Philip's direction, he moved cautiously but quickly to the door and opened it.

"Don't try any games," he warned the prisoner, with a menacing accent, and went out and shut and locked the door. The beat of the engines ceased.

Philip leaped from the bunk, making straight for the port hole. With difficulty he unscrewed its fastening and opened it and looked forth. The loading of the other steamer was now finished and not a soul was on the wharf. He called in a low voice; he dared not make much noise; there was no answer. Below him lay a broad, flat-bottomed pair-oar. It was moored to the wharf and it was swaying to and fro; its painter alternately fell into the water and rose dripping; and the sound of hundreds of drops pattering on the black surface of the river each time the painter rose was strangely clear and uncanny in the night.

A notion came to Philip.

He examined his pockets. They had been emptied. He searched the cabin for suitable material, and found nothing but a salver that was reared up on the top of the mahogany erection by the bunk. He opened the mahogany erection, which in a space of three cubic feet contained with its drawers and apertures and taps and basins and books the conveniences of an entire house. He cursed, as philosophers will in their moments of frustration. And then, while staring at the interior of an empty drawer (lined with newspapers) he perceived that the screw of the brass knob projected through the front of the drawer and was secured on the inside by a nut. He detached the knob, and with the sharp screw-end of it began to scratch a message on the salver. He was interrupted by a knock at the door.

He rushed again to the port hole and tried to put the salver through it. But as its circumference was greater than the circumfenence of the port hole, immutable Euclid was against him. In a frenzy of rage he bent the salver across his knee. It would just slip through the hole. He let it fall into the boat, and it descended softly on to the neatly coiled tiller ropes.

The knock was repeated.

Making no answer Philip rapidly fastened the porthole.

"I say!" The voice was Pollexfen's. "Are you lying on the bunk?"

"No, I'm not."

"Well, kindly lie down on the bunk. I'm coming in."

Philip obeyed. By stretching out his hand he could screw the knob home in its drawer.

"I'm on the bunk," said he.

"Well, on the whole I shan't trust you."

There was silence. Then Philip heard the boring of an instrument in the door, and presently an inch-wide gouge came through at the height of a man's eye and was withdrawn. An eye took the place of the gouge, and roved over the cabin.

"When I say I'm on the bunk I'm on the bunk," Philip observed.

"So I see," answered Polexfen. "But I preferred to see."

He re-entered, making prominent the revolver.

"To resume," he said.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Compact.

"What are you leading up to?" Philip asked. "That's what I want to know."

"To resume," said Pollexfen, ignoring this definite question. "I got the information that I required out of the late captain's pockets. It was quite as good as I expected, and it quite confirmed my view that he could not have used it successfully himself. I now had various matters to attend to all at once. I had to pretend to be ill, for reasons of discretion. And your unfortunate discovery made of that tooth out of my comb made it neccessary for me to appear at the inquest. I think my appearance at the inquest was rather masterly, don't you, Mr. Masters? In the pleasure it gave me it rivalled my finest triumphs at the Britannia, Hoxton and Ford's Opera House in Denver. It was, not to exaggerate, immense. You may be interested to know that the captain knew who I was before he died. I had an interview with him in his room, stormy, in fact, pugilistic. The comb must have got broken then. I had meant simply to steal the few trifling documents that I needed, but I failed in that. The captain was too suspicious; hence the ultimate altercation. Of course, it ended badly for the captain. Then, besides, having to pretend to be ill and go to the inquest and to superintend his funeral, I had my marine arrangements to perfect and complete. And then, to worry me still further, I began to have my doubts about myself; I found out the identity of the youth Meredith—the chit resembles her uncle in certain points of character; and to cap it all I was compelled to waste precious time in dealing with Mr. Varcoe."

Philip gave a start before he could control himself.

"I see I am beginning to excite you now," Pollexfen observed with an agreeable and ironic smile. "Admit it."

Masters was conscious of a feeling hardly to be differentiated from terror. And yet Pollexfen talked so easily, so naturally, with such an undeniable charm of manner, that his listener could scarcely comprehend his own mental disturbance.

"Where is Varcoe?" he demanded, in a nervous voice.

"Let me see," Polexfen said reflectively. "Today is Monday. This makes the third day. Yes. . . . All London will know tonight where Varcoe is. Mr. Varcoe is a very able man—conceited, over-confident, but able. He made all his preparations, and he meant to strike with a single blow, like Kitchener at Omdurman. He was guilty of only one mistake. He thought I didn't suspect him. Whereas the contrary was the case. So that when he entered my room for the battle of Omdurman I was waiting behind the door with my little instrument, and the battle occurred differently. You asked me where he is. Well, on the day of my arrival at the Corner House I was obliged to find a hiding place for male attire and other details, and I took up the floor, loosening the nails under the bed. Nothing is simpler to a man who has been in all trades, from navvying to treasure seeking, including naturally that of a carpenter, to arrange nail-heads where nails have been in a way to escape detection even under a close scrutiny. I could lift and replace the planks of the floor in a moment. I had quite a wardrobe down there. Behold the reason why you and your little friend found nothing when you feloniously searched my chamber that night. Don't deny it—don't attempt to deny it—I saw at once you had been on the prowl." He laughed quietly.

"I am not denying it," Philip put in.

"Good! I should have put the captain under the floor and left London on the morning after his death; but he was unhappily too fat. And moreover his weight might have sent him through the ceiling of the room below, which would have been awkward! These objections did not apply to the rising detective, Mr. Varcoe, who was slight and thin. He lies in repose under the floor of that room, wedged in between two rafters. His rest will be interrupted . . . . the laws of the decomposition of animal matter . . . you see?"

"It's astounding!" Philip burst out utterly revolted by the detailed confession to which he was obliged to listen, and which indeed fascinated him, though, as a snake is said to fascinate a bird.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Pollexfen with gentle enthusiasm. "It is astounding. When I think of the skill, the presence of mind, the sheer nerve, which were required for the whole operation, even I am amazed. I have a certain regret in bringing Mr. Varcoe's career to a close. But it was a purely sentimental regret, caused by his talents, and somewhat unworthy of me. Of course, when a man becomes a detective, to be killed is part of his trade. The risks, if not as great as the risks run by a miner or a hunter, or a President of the United States, are considerable. Detectives know that quite well. It's fair. In this particular instance Mr. Varcoe wanted to get a person named Billington to put me to a violent death, accompanied by every circumstance of shame. I objected, and the inevitable outcome of my objection was Mr. Varcoe's own decease. I——"

"You may talk till you're black in the face," Philip interrupted the doctor. "You know what I think. You've simply no regard for human life at all."

Pollexfen gazed at him, and there was just perceptible lowering of the corner of the lips.

"You exaggerate, my young friend," said Pollexfen. "I have some regard for human life, though it was not unlimited. For example, I have much more regard for human life than a cabinet of ministers who meet before lunch and decide on a war. The last cabinet that did so killed probably about ten thousand people per head. But does it interfere with their sleep? Not in the least. What is the matter with you, Mr. Masters, if I may say so, is that you have never thought; you have never honestly tried to look at things as they are. Unfortunately it is now too late."

Philip said nothing.

"In the entire complicated affair, after my original clumsiness in making the Captain unconscious permanently instead of temporarily, I only made an error. You may guess what that was?"

Philip shook his head.

"I bruised my wrist against the window sash in lowering our poor captain from the window to the alley. That was an accident that might have happened to any one. But I ought to have washed and bandaged my wrist at once. And I did not. I merely licked it. Knowing the danger of finger marks I merely licked it. I was perhaps somewhat nervous and hurried and I could not bring myself to stop in order to wash and bandage my hand. I did not observe till my job was almost accomplished that the wound had been bleeding slightly. A pity, a pity! Nevertheless that was my error. And instead of being lost in admiration of my courage, my originality, my skill, my inventiveness, my imagination, you can find nothing to say except in dispraise. Why, you cannot examine a single minute detail of my actions since I first determined to have a hand in this business of the late captain's without being struck by my genius. Thus I went back to the Obelisk Hotel as Pollexfen after I had taken a room at the Corner House as Mrs. Upottery, so that there should be circumstantial evidence that Mrs. Upottery and Mr. Pollexfen existed separately at the same time and could not therefore be the same person. And look how I deceived you. Consider how perfectly, with what admirable sangfroid, I took you in at Castle street! And in surreptitiously exchanging two of my hundred pound notes for two of yours, and did I not invent an entirely new method of disposing at full price of bank notes that the police have put on the Index Expurgatorious? Answer me."

"You did," said Philip obediently.

"It is a pity about that finger mark," Pollexfen mused aloud. "A pity!"

"Why? You have succeeded."

"I say it is a pity because I like you. I don't know why I like you, but I do. You are the sort of simple, straight Englishman that appeals to a complex person like myself, who owns no nationality, and who always sees two sides to a question. If I had not marked that bit of stone, if you had not found it, and put it in your bag, if your bag had not been lost, if Varcoe had not by accident rediscovered it at the bottom of the area steps, if you had not regained it and become infected with a passion for dactylography—why, then I should not have before me at the present instant a rather unpleasant prospect."

Philip thought he noticed a tremor in Pollexfen's voice. He sat up straight on the bunk.

"What on earth do you want to kill me for?" he inquired with splendid amazement. "You've succeeded. You've got clear off. Are you possessed by a lust for blood?"

"I hate blood," said Pollexfen. "Besides, there wont be any. And I don't want to kill you. I should much prefer not to. But where is the alternative? I can't keep you in captivity. And the moment I let you go I am a lost man—or if not lost, a man in a highly dangerous predicament. The ports of the world would be closed against this yacht inside half a dozen hours. And such is the respect in England for those two Occidental fetishes, the sanctity of property and the sancity of the higher forms of animal life, that the British Government would be capable of sending out a torpedo boat destroyer to look for me with a few twelve-pounders. No! It is said that the devil employs the energies of the idle; and he has certainly employed yours. He has ruined your earthly career, and I repeat, I regret it."

"You can kill me if you like," said Philip quietly. "But you're a scoundrel. And I give myself the pleasure of telling you so. "Yes, sir," he added, moving forward and becoming a little excited. "A scoundrel; Not to say a coward!"

"Your previous position, horizontally on the bunk, will be better, I think," responded Pollexfen. "You are coming too close, do you hear?" He advanced his revolver an inch or two.

And the muzzle of the revolver, in the confined space of the cabin, was indeed so near to Philip that almost involuntarily Philip slipped back again on the bunk.

"I did not begin to relate to you my share in the affair," Pollexfen resumed placidly, until I had definitely resolved what your fate was to be. I thought it would interest you to hear certain details known only to me, and it appears that I was not mistaken. I also, as I told you at the beginning of our interview, felt the need of talking frankly to some one. A man such as I is apt to lead a somewhat solitary life."

"I can believe it," said Philip succinctly.

Pollexfen smilled. "And mental solitude is apt to get on one's nerves. Our little chat has really done me a great deal of good. To return, however, to yourself. Now, just as I performed a service to Captain Pollexfen, so I shall be performing a service to you. You are alone in the world. You've nobody depending upon you. Your sole fortune consists of two hundred-pound notes which you can't possibly negotiate. You have no profession. You have no career. You are not the sort of man who succeeds in England. Either you ought to have been born a millionaire and become a M. P. H. in some remote county, or you ought to have emigrated to Canada. Your life would be decidedly a failure. You would gradually lose your illusions and your hair, and grow into a dissatisfied person. In another thirty years you would have developed into one of those tedious, aged frequenters of clubs who go about grumbling that things are not what they once were and that the end of the world is at hand. And your acquaintances would be waiting with suppressed expectant joy for news of your funeral. A nice prospect, truly! Upon my soul I was regretting your immediate decease a few moments ago. I regret it no longer. Only your enemies could wish you to live."

"And how do you mean to kill me?" Philip asked.

"I will not tell you," said Pollexfen. "If I told you, I should not be 'quite nice' to you, to use your own phrase. But you will suffer the minimum of inconvenience."

"Look here," Philip fronted him, leaning on one elbow. "You've played a goodish few comedies this last week. Are you playing one now?"

"I am not." said Pollexfen simply.

(To be continued.)

## FREDERICTON ELIGIBLE, BUT ST. JOHN ISN'T

Ottawa, Oct. 26—(Special)—Particulars and conditions of the competition for the trophy offered by the governor general to Canadian amateur musical and dramatic societies are now issued. It is open to each provincial capital to send an entry, and every other dominion city with a population of 50,000, as well as St. John's (Newfoundland).

### Presentation to Mrs. Dieuaide.

At Hampton, on Thursday, the Woman's Auxiliary gave a tea at the home of Mrs. W. B. Hammond, the president, in honor of Mrs. P. L. Dieuaide, a valued member of the auxiliary. The ladies presented to her a handsome quilt, and united in wishing her happiness and health in the years to come. On Monday Mrs. Dieuaide is to leave for New York, where she will reside with her son, T. M. Dieuaide, of the Evening Sun editorial staff. Many friends in St. John will regret Mrs. Dieuaide's removal and will be glad to welcome her when she revisits the city where she has lived so long and been so useful a member of the community.

The Pennsylvania Company has awarded contracts for the construction of 12,400 freight cars to cost $15,000,000.