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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 XIV.—(Continued.)

He had therefore to rely solely on the finger-mark itself, and his common-sense or gumption. After various trials, and sundry dyeings and washings of his own fingers, he decided that the finger-mark on the fragment of pipe was that of a right hand first finger, not of a thumb. This fact filled him with hope, for a reason which will presently be seen. He further argued that the hand of the criminal must be short and stumpy, with broad flat finger-tips; and moreover that it was not a hand lately accustomed to hard manual work, for the natural ridges on the skin were indicated with extraordinary clearness, whereas the epidermis of a laborer's hand is either worn to smoothness or wrinkled in artificial furrows.

To establish the criminal's identity he had merely to obtain the impress of the first finger of each man lodging in the Corner House. But to accomplish such a delicate, invidious task without arousing suspicion was a matter which would have offered difficulties to a more impassioned journalist than Philip.

He spent the chief portion of the morning in a series of experiments with paint and paper and varnish, left in the corridors by the professional house painters who had stormed and occupied the house. And after several hours he had prepared two sets of slips of plain green wallpaper, one slightly covered with white paint half dried at a fire, and the other lightly covered with varnish half dried at a fire—the kitchen fire. Lunch was over by the time his slips were ready.

He then, with the privity of Mr. Hilgay, who during his brief appearance seemed ready to allow any one to do anything, removed the doorknobs from the inner front door and the outer front door of the house. Both these doors, of course, opened inward. Secondly, by means of small slips of wood nailed to the floor near the hinges, he fixed both doors permanently ajar in such wise that an aperture of three or four inches was left between each door and door frame. Thirdly, he affixed a perpendicular slip of paper covered with half dry paint to the outer side of the inner door, and a slip covered with half dry varnish to the outer side of the outer door.

And he argued thus:

"Any person leaving the house, the handles of the doors having been thoughtfully removed, must inevitably first of all put the fingers of his right hand on the outer side of the inner door and pull the door toward him in order to go out. He may or may not leave a good impress of his fingers on the paint-colored slip of paper. But paint will certainly adhere to his hand. He may or may not be angry, but he will certainly proceed, and he will repeat his action on the outer side of the outer door, and will thus leave a second set of finger marks in white paint, on the outer door. I shall thus have two sets of marks for each outgoing person. As the doors open inward, incoming persons will have to push open the doors instead of pulling them; they will thus be forced to touch the same pieces of paper, but in the reverse order."

He was exceedingly proud of this device; and, after affixing the first two pairs of slips, he joined one of the boy servants on duty in the little office in a state of mind that amounted almost to glee. His stock of prepared slips lay near him on the table, and the finger-marked fragment of pipe was put out of the reach of the boy servants on the high mantelpiece. His whole heart was in the experiment, so much so that he utterly forgot his promise to Mrs. Upottery to attend the captain's funeral, and merely snorted at a telephone message from Sir Anthony to run down to the Devonshire Mansion and discuss the situation.

He watched eagerly for some one either to go out or come in. The whole world of human beings seemned, however, to have formed a conspiracy neither to enter nor to leave the Corner House. Never had the entrance hall been so quiet. Even the detectives and the journalists had deserted it. A number of Sabbath sightseers were parading to and fro in the street and gazing at the house with mouths open as if to swallow it. But there was no other sign of life. The boy-attendant was reading Percival's "Paris Gossip" in the "Referee," having finished "Mustard and Cross." Then Philip heard some one coming down stairs, and his heart began to flutter as the instant approached for testing the efficacy of the web of the spider. It was a man.

The man wore gloves.

Philip had reckoned without the renowned gentility of the Corner House. He rightly cursed himself for a famous ninny as he removed the smudged slips of paper after the man's exit and substituted fresh slips. But nevertheless he determined to continue his experiment, opining that there would be, after all, in the Corner House far from sufficient gloves to go round. In this assumption the event did not, however, justify his experiment. People entered; people departed. A few wore gloves. The ungloved majority either made undecipherable finger-marks, or made good finger-marks which bore not the slightest resemblance to the finger-mark on the bit of pipe.

So dusk fell, and Philip's stock of paper exhausted itself in futility. He foresaw that he might have to continue the experiment for days.

He heard a cab stop outside the house, and glanced idly from the window. It was a four-wheeler. Mrs. Upottery emerged from it. She was obviously returning from the funeral. He sympathized with her, but her arrival annoyed him; he had already wasted several slips of paper on women, including two on Mrs. Upottery. She held an argument with the cabman, and then she had a difficulty with her pocket and purse, and seemed to find an awful solemn pleasure in tiring the patience of the cabman while she removed her gloves and sorted her coins. As she came up the steps he hid in a corner so that she should not glimpse him in passing. He did not wish to be accused just then of not having attended the funeral. He was creeping out to change the slips after her passage when a man ran quietly up the steps and rushed in. It was John Meredith whom Philip had not previously seen that day . . . . Why should Philip have trembled with nervous apprehension at the sight of Meredith? Why should a strange fear have seized him? Why should he hesitate, after Meredith had vanished upstairs, to retrieve and examine the slips? Why should he have experienced the sensation of a reprieve when a newspaper boy burst in, pushing and banging both doors, to sell a special Sunday edition of the "Record?"

His hand shook as the newspaper boy having departed, he detached the slips and carried them into the office. The varnished slip from the outer door showed nothing but three sets of smudges, but the other slip, marked faintly in varnish on white paint, displayed three clear sets of finger prints—the man's the highest; then the woman's; then the newspaper boy's. He reached down the fragment of pipe, and laid it close to the paper, and, with a magnifying glass, compared it with the print on the stone. The double whorl situated slightly to the lift was identical in each case.

Without giving himself a moment to think, he went out of the office to find Meredith. And Meredith was descending the downstairs again, pale and hurried, the frightful scar crimson on his blanched face!

"Please come up here," Philip addressed him. His throat was so parched that he could scarcely articulate.

"What is the matter?" Meredith questioned.

"I must speak to you," said Philip.

Meredith obeyed, entering the office, Philip ordered the boy attendant to leave and then carefully shut the door. He had a strange desire to advise Meredith to run away and never be seen in England again, but he conquered it.

"What is it?" Meredith repeated his demand.

"I will tell you," said Philip. "The finger mark on his stone was made by the murderer of Captain Pollexfen, and the finger-mark on this paper was made by you. They are alike. I have laid a trap for the murderer, and it is you that I have caught, Meredith. What have you to say?"

"What?" exclaimed Meredith, staring at the paper. "Which mark?"

"This one."

"Those aren't the marks of my fingers," Meredith said with curious calm after he had comprehended the nature of the trap. It's the marks below that are mine. Look at my hand." His persuasive voice was as wonderous as ever.

Philip seized the hand. It had fine tapering fingers, whereas the topmost marks were noticeably wide and clumsy.

"That is like a woman's hand," said Philip.

Meredith impulsively snatched the hand away, and then sat down on a chair and burst into tears.

"I may as well tell you," said Meredith, "I am a woman. I am Captain Pollexfen's daughter."

"Giralda?"

Meredith nodded, looking up.

CHAPTER XV.

Uncle Walter.

The confession of Meredith's identity had the singular fact of making Philip undeniably and astonishingly happy. He asked himself, indeed, why the fact that Meredith was Giralda in disguise should render him so absurdly joyous. He pretended to himself that there was no logic in the feeling of pleasure. But that was pretence merely. He knew in the depth of his being that his joy was firmly based in the logic of his heart. He perceived now why he had liked Meredith from the moment of their first meeting, and why he had always been conscious of an apparently strange instinct to protect and assist Meredith. The disguise had deceived his brain, but it had not deceived the instinctive, inarticulate part of him.

"So you are Miss Pollexfen?" he questioned, with a smile, the power of whose persuasiveness he did not guess.

"I am Mary Pollexfen," was the half shy reply.

Of course she was a woman! Despite her clothes, she was for Philip, as she faced him there in the little green, confined office with its desk and ledgers, the most intensely feminie woman that the world contained. How came it that his intellectual apparatus had never discerned her sex? How came it—but his mind was full of queries.

"It is very strange," said Philip, "that I did not recognize you as Giralda. Because I had seen your portrait at the Physique Club, and what is more, the portrait had positively haunted me."

"I do not think it is very strange, after all," Mary Pollexfen answered. "You see I am pretty expert at making up. Seven years ago I played nothing but 'principle boy'—on account of my height, I suppose. So I was well used to men's clothes. And then the scar absolutely changes my face."

"But where did you get that awful wound?"

"I paint it each morning," Mary Pollexfen explained, faintly smiling at Philip's astonishment. "It was by accident a long time ago that I found out how a scar across the cheek like that seemed to alter the position of the cheek bone and make all my face different."

"Then you can wash it off at any time?"

"Certainly."

"You relieve me immensely, Miss Pollexfen," Philip sighed.

"Unfortunately," said she, "my hair won't grow quite as easily as I can wash off that scar."

There was a significant pause.

"And now, Miss Pollexfen," said Philip courageously, "don't you think we had better come to business at once."

"Business?" she echoed the word, as if startled.

"Yes," he said, "don't you think you had better tell me why you are here in disguise. I know you must be in great sorrow. I guess you are in great difficulty. And I am just as sure as I am of anything that I can help you."

"How can you help me?" she stammered timidly, gazing self-consciously at the desk.

"I shall be able to answer that question better when you have talked to me a little. Talk to me. Tell me I would be willing to do a great deal for you, a very great deal. I've no intention of informing you that I would cheerfully sacrifice my life to save your little finger from harm. Because if I began in that strain I should feel an awful ass. Still—" he nodded his head several times quickly as though to emphasize his words—"you may command me." He looked at her steadily.

"Really?"

Her manner of uttering that single word enchanted Philip. In her tone there was something of entreaty, something of an unserious and delicate incredulity, something of a challenge, and something queenlike. He seemed to see in her at length the worshiped beauty of the stage—not at all spoilt by incense and homage, but yet aware of the potency of her charm, and accustomed to the vows of devotees.

"Really!" he insisted.

They exchanged a glance. And that glance established their relations. In the brief instant of its duration each formed a resolve, the one to trust, the other to shield, and the resolve was momentous, definitive and final.

Mary Pollexfen sat down.

"Can we talk here?" she demanded suspiciously, looking at the door.

"Where else can we talk?" Philip asked. "The door is shut. I'll keep an eye on it. Now, will you tell me why you are here in this disguise?"

"I came to look after my father," said Mary. "I came to watch over him. Perhaps you will say it was a childish idea, but"——

"And a disguise was necessary for that?"

"Yes. If my poor father had had the slightest idea that I was meddling in his life he would have left the place."

"You were not quite on good terms, was that it?"

Mary Pollexfen agreed with a gesture.

"We had quarrelled," she said, "we had not spoken to each other for several years. I was very sorry—very sorry to upset him and very sorry that he would not see me—but I could not help it."

"Yes?" Philip encouraged her.

She was now on the opposite side of the desk from Philip, idly and nervously pleating a piece of paper into the form of a fan. Then she leaned her head on one hand.

"It was all about me going on the stage," she proceeded. "I had always wanted to go on the stage. The stage was in my blood. But my father hated the stage. Perhaps he had cause to. He left me at school in Southend and went on a voyage, and when he came back from his voyage I was an actress on tour with a provincial company. Not a No. 1 company, Mr. Masters, but a wretched little company doing fit-up towns. I hadn't written to my father to tell him. I dared not. At least, perhaps I dared; but somehow I could not put the words on the paper. So it was a terrible surprise for him when he did come back and learnt the news. I got a cousin of ours to tell him."

"Your mother was dead?"

"Yes. She died when I was born. Just imagine my position, Mr. Masters. I grew up very quickly. At fifteen I had had enough of school—too much! I could have gone with my father on his ship, perhaps. But though my father and I used to be good friends, and I liked the sea pretty well, I could never have been reconciled to the life on board a tramp steamer. Only my father's wish to be all in all to me could have made him dream of such a thing. I was obliged to live somewhere, then, I could have lived with some cousins, but even at fifteen I had extremely strong likes and dislikes, and the prospect of living with my cousins didn't appeal to me a little bit, though they were perfectly tolerable as acquaintances. What was I to do? Go into a convent? Or begin to earn my living independently?"

"The situation was very awkward, decidedly," said Philip.

"You see that, don't you?" she cried, raising her voice, and, as it were, clutching for his sympathy. "You see that? Well, I wanted to earn my living and I wanted to earn it in my own way, and I wanted to start at once. People such as I don't choose their careers. Their careers are decided when they are born. Mine was. Nothing could have kept me off the stage. I was very sorry for my father's sorrow, and I think I may say I didn't let his anger make me angry. He couldn't understand. How could he be expected to understand? Supposing that I had suggested to him that he should give up his ship and force himself to go on the stage, he would have thought I was mad. But that would have been exactly the same thing as his asking me to give up the stage and voyage with him or live as a lodger with the Sidgwicks—those are my cousins. I tried to explain that to him, but he couldn't see it. He couldn't. He talked about woman's sphere, the dear old thing!"

"Then you fought out the question at an interview?"

Mary Pollexfen gave a little shudder. "Yes," she said. "My company happened to be at Winchester while his ship was taking in cargo at Southampton. He came to see me. I remember I was lodging in a little room in the road up the steep hill out of Winchester—I forget its name. Yes, we fought it out. That was the worst day of my life, except the day after my father's death. And I was only fifteen. I was only fifteen, and he was over fifty. Think of it! Now he is dead, something soft in my heart hints that perhaps I ought to have given way. But no! No! It had to be. There are things stronger than affection. I loved my father. My father loved me. But we parted. He might have used force with me. He very nearly did use force with the manager of the company. I won't tell you what he said when we parted. No one will ever know that except me. Now I think it over I see that I must have had extraordinary individual force, even at that age—call it obstinacy—to withstand him. He returned to his ship. I went on with my business as the least important member on a touring company of no importance at all.

"Why!" said Philip, "it was tragedy!"

"That's just what it was," said Mary, "and it often happens that in a real tragedy nobody is to blame—and every one suffers."

"Didn't you see him again?"

"I made two attempts for peace. The first when I was eighteen and the second when I was twenty-one. I saw him once. I insisted on seeing him. It was useless, absolutely useless! Captains live very solitary lives, I think, and that influences them. My poor father's prejudices against the stage and me only increased as he grew older. Our last direct interview, four years ago, ended everything between us. We drifted apart, as they say—utterly. I found it impossible even to keep in touch with his movements. In fact, I lost him. I didn't know the name of his new ship. I didn't even know if he was alive. That shows how relatives may get separated, mentally and physically. I never spoke of him. I fancy most of my friends took me for an orphan. Of course if I am to be perfectly honest I must admit that I was wrapped up in my own career. And habit is so strong. During the first years of my estrangement I used to send my father the prettiest cards I could buy on his birthday and at Christmas. Then I didn't know where to send them to—And—and—don't you now think it's very sad, Mr. Masters, such a thing as I am telling you?" The change in her lovely voice was swift and dramatic.

Philip felt the lump in his throat. He could not speak. He nodded.

"These cousins of yours," he managed to say at length. "They could do nothing to get the captain to alter his views?"

"Nothing. They were nice, quiet, ordinary people. But they would as soon have dared to come between my father and me as go into—into a den of lions. They were afraid of both of us. They still live at Southend, or rather just out of Southend. I doubt if they have heard of this affair even yet."

"And you have no other relatives?"

"Yes," said Mary Pollexfen, in a low tone, drawing her hand nervously along the table. "There was my father's brother, my uncle—Walter Pollexfen. But"——

"But what?"

Mary's eyes moistened. "It is Uncle Walter who"—— She stopped short with a sort of nervous spasm, and sat up straight, evidently collecting her forces. "I must explain to you about that man," she recommenced. "Although I have never seen him—at any rate I am not sure that I have ever seen him—I seem to know him intimately."

"How so?"

"From my father's descriptions. And, later, from what he Sidgwicks used to tell me. Walter Pollexfen was ten years younger than my father. He was very precocious indeed as a child. I must have taken atfer him, as regards being precocious—certainly I didn't take after my father. I think the children of elderly parents are often very precocious. And he was very clever, too. And extremely violent. He was one of those boys who become men all at once. At ten years of age, my father used to say, no one could manage him. No one could do anything with him at all. He was expelled from three schools at Southend before he was twelve. He would listen to nobody. He once locked another boy up in a wooden shed and set fire to it, because the boy wouldn't give him half an apple. And it was a mere chance that the boy wasn't burnt to death. He would have been if he hadn't pushed a penknife and everything he had in his pockets under the door of the shed as a ransom. That was the sort of youth my uncle was. He had no mercy on animals at all. And yet my father said that he could be charming when he wanted to. At sixteen he married a woman very nearly old enough to be his mother—ran away with her. He had a thick mustache at fourteen."

"An interesting young man!" Philip commented.

"Do you think so?" said Mary. "The stage was his passion, as it's mine. I took after him in that. And it was because of my Uncle's connection with the stage that my father hated it so. Only Uncle got tired of the stage pretty soon, and I expect that I shall, too. At nineteen he was playing old men's parts at the Britannia at Hoxton. He was famous in the East End, and people said he might have been one of the most successful actors in London. He was very well known in the profession. The profession thought even more highly of him than the public did, I believe. There are actors like that, you know. He stabbed another actor on the stage of the Britannia one night. It was supposed to be an accident. But according to what people say, it wasn't an accident at all. Then he went to America."

"And what became of his wife?"

"He deserted her when he was eighteen. But just before he went to America he found her again and he made her go with him—I suppose because she had come into some money. And then she died, in Cleveland."

"Died!"

"It is supposed that he killed her. I say 'it is supposed'—no one except my uncle can be sure. Anyhow there was a great outcry. Father used to have cuttings of the articles that appeared in the New York and other newspapers about the affair. Uncle had to disappear, at least he did disappear. After that he must have travelled all over the world. He was in a revolution in Uruguay. He had a circus in Yokohama. But my father only heard rumors of him at long intervals. On the other hand he seemed always to know exactly where my father was. And from time to time he would write and demand money."

"And did he get it?"

"Yes, he got it. It would, of course, have been better if he had not got it. But father could never refuse him altogether. I firmly believe that until just before the very last my father had a kind of liking for him. You see, he was so much cleverer than father, and father must have been a little afraid of him as well."

"This was the same brother who has been mentioned at the—the inquest?"

"Yes, there was only one."

"Then he is in London now, of course?"

"I'm afraid so."

"But you've never seen him?"

"No, but I've heard from him."

"When?"

"About three weeks ago I got a strange letter from him. It was addressed to the theatre. That letter was the cause of my coming here. I will show it to you. Then you can judge for yourself."

She paused, and slowly drew a letter from the pocket of her coat and handed it to Philip, who opened it and read:

"Dear Mary.

"This is from your old Uncle Walter, whom I daresay you have heard of. Your father is a fool, and you had better bring him to reason, or it will be the worse for him. He's getting obstinate in his old age. He's retired from the captaincy of business and he's got hold of the greatest money-making scheme that I've heard of for a pretty long while. He can't manage it himself. I'm just the man to help him, but he won't let me. I told him I was starving, and he gave me twenty pounds. It isn't a question of twenty pounds. It is a question of twenty thousand, and lots more. I only want half the profits, and that's fair, as I should do all the work. The old fool would simply make a hash of the business. But he won't see it. I never knew him so obstinate. Now he's just got to give in. If you know anything about me, you know that candor is my most sublime quality, and I'm candid now. I'm nothing if not candid. You've quarrelled with your father, I'm given to understand. Or rather he's quarrelled with you. You'd better go home and make it up with him, and warn him that I mean business. When I'm desperate I'm very desperate. He seems to have forgotten that. Tell him from me that if he doesn't let me in on the ground floor, I'll take good care that he's put out of the way of making a single penny of profit for himself. Tell him that. Your affectionate uncle,

"WALTER POLLEXFEN."

"P. S. Your father is or will shortly be at the Corner House, Strange street, Kingsway."

Philip folded up the letter, and gave it back to Mary Pollexfen in the midst of an extraordinary silence.

"Of course," said he, "knowing what you did of your uncle's character you naturally took that for a serious threat?"

"I did—most certainly. I thought I would go and see my father. Then I decided to write, and I wrote. I didn't send him Uncle's letter. I thought that might do more harm than good."

"And then?"

"Then I received an envelope from my father, and the envelope contained my own letter unopened, but torn across. After that I received a telegram from Uncle, which I have lost, but it was something like this: 'Better hurry up. Father now at Corner House.' Then it was that I suddenly made up my mind to go to the Corner House myself—in this disguise. I had notions about telling the police, but I saw that would be absurd. There wasn't enough to go on. So you behold me coming to the Corner House and, in a way, settling down there for a short time. My father had not the slightest suspicion of my identity. I found him very much changed and very much older. I had no plan. Often at night it appeared to me that I was behaving in a very queer way. But what would you have? What else could I do? I doubt if a woman was ever placed in such a position before. Well, I had to content myself with keeping watch over my father's movements. This I did as well as I could. And I waited for something to turn up, some unfortunate chance. And when something did turn up—it was—it was"——

She hid her face.

"I know, I know," Philip murmured. "Good heavens! You may well say that no woman was ever placed in such a situation before!"

"You can imagine the shock to me when I learnt on Wednesday morning that my father had been murmured and his body buried in the trench! I had to keep my wits about me then. I dared not give way. I had to pretend that I was merely casually interested in the tragedy. I couldn't keep away from the inquest. And it was the most horrible experience of my life."

"And you had no theory as to the manner of your father's death?"

"None. That was the worst of it. There I had been waiting ready to protect him when necessity arose—at the first moment that I noticed anything suspicious—and he was gone before I could move a hand! If I had made myself known to my father he would, no doubt, simply have left the house. And I could not make myself known to Uncle Walter, because I hadn't the faintest idea where he was."

"And you have gone through this agony while I have been here!" Philip said. "And I never guessed! It is inconceivable! How unsympathetic you must have thought me the night I besieged you in your room!"

"On the contrary," said Mary, with a melancholy smile, "I thought you extremely sympathetic. It was inexplicable to me that you should be so sympathetic."

"Why did you not leave this awful place at once?" Philip questioned.

"What!" she said, "And have detectives following me everywhere? That would have been the very worst thing I could have done."

"True," Philip agreed. "By the way, did you notice much of the courtship between your poor father and Mrs. Upottery?"

"I had no idea of it. And nothing at the inquest surprised me more than Mrs. Upottery's evidence."

"Because," said Philip quietly. "Mrs. Upottery is undoubtedly connected with the murder. As the finger prints at the top of this paper are not yours, they must be hers. And they constitute absolutely conclusive evidence to my mind. She is an astounding woman. Yesterday she stole two hundred-pound notes out of my pocketbook and substituted two others, while pretending to faint and be ill. And I had not the least suspicion of her guilt until you showed me that these finger prints were not yours. It flashed across me then. It is amazing."

"I have been following Mrs. Upottery about for two days," said Mary Pollexfen quietly. "Shall I tell you my notion about her?"

"By all means."

"My notion about her is that she is Uncle Walter himself."

"Impossible!"

"Not impossible! I went to poor father's funeral this afternoon. Mrs. Upottery was there. Mrs. Upottery and I were the only two people present from this house. It was a dreadful business. And Mrs. Upottery appeared to me to be acting grief, with tremendous gusts. Then when the creature walked from the grave I seemed to detect in her gait a sort of resemblance to my father's.

"You know your uncle by sight?"

"I have never seen him, unless he is Mrs. Upottery, and I am certain that he is Mrs. Upottery. I feel it in my bones that he is Mrs. Upottery." She stood up excited. "No one but Uncle Walter could have planned and worked that crime as it must have been planned and worked. And all his evidence at the inquest was pure invention. It would be exactly like him to enjoy disguising himself as a woman, and then to pretend that he was engaged to be married to the man he had murdered, and to embroider the story with details about mysterious foreigners and Russian secret societies. What do you think?"

"If what you say is true," Philip answered her, "your family contains in Mr. Walter Pollexfen a criminal of genius. But we will soon find out."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going up to Mrs. Upottery's room. She—or he—came in just before you did."

CHAPTER XVI.

Friendship.

"You are not to come with me," said Philip, with some new, strange touch of the Kaiser in his tone. His hand was on the office door. He had wrapped that invaluable and unique piece of evidence, and put it in his pocket.

"Why not?" demanded Mary Pollexfen, rather wistfully, and not at all resenting his little air of authority. There was an appeal in her voice, and her voice was irresistible—or would have been irresistible if he had not considered her personal safety to be involved in the question.

"It will be better not," Philip replied firmly.

Had he known her on the stage, surrounded by the adulation which even some of the most conceited men in London had not disdained to offer her, he would never have dared to adopt that attitude of the big, wise, autocratic brother. But he had not known her on the stage, and as a fact his audacity pleased her enormously; she bowed to it with a feeling of immense relief.

Certainly she pouted, but the pout was naught save a charming affectation.

"I suppose I can go upstairs to my own room and listen on the landing?" she said.

He agreed that she could; he could find no argument against that.

There were several people in the hall—a policeman, a journalist, pencil in hand—talking to one of the lodgers. Philip, in the pride of his great discovery, ignored their curiosity and passed quickly upstairs, Mary being at his side but slightly behind him. And as they went upstairs it was no more the pride of his great discovery that animated him and flushed his cheek and quickened his heart. It was the mere existence of Mary Pollexton that did these things. She was so close to him; he had a desire to laugh with sheer joy because she was close to him. The most curious thing that had ever happened to him was that his nearness to a woman—a woman depending upon him and trusting him—should have such an extraordinary and revolutioary effect on him. He was no longer the same man. He felt as though he had been inhaling oxygen. The whole world seemed beautiful. Adrian Hilgay's singular lodging house seemed beautiful. There was no sorrow on earth, nothing but love and the pure ardor of life. His one regret was that all the previous part of his existence had been simple waste. He cared for nothing that he had ever cared for. His old ambitions appeared hollow, puerile and specious. He loved now for the first time. The death of the captain was, of course, tragic to the last degree, and Mary's grief was his grief, and he ought to be grave, sad and apprehensive. But—but—well, there she was on the landing with him, breathing somewhat quickly, and gazing at him, in expectation. Delicious and adorable vision, with the painted scar and those absurd clothes! He wondered what strange quality it was in her that differentiated her from all the other women on earth, what quality beyond her beauty and her grace and her charm—a quality shining mysteriously from the secret depth of her soul. He wondered and rejoiced that some masterful, imperial male had not carried her off long since and married her, and forced her to love him. The thought that if luck had not been on his side she might have been married ere he met her made him feel cold in the small of his back, like the sudden sense of a supreme disaster escaped.

"I will come and report afterward," he whispered, stopping at her door.

"But what are you going to do?" she asked.

"How do I know?" he said "It will depend on circumstances. I am going to have an interview with Mrs. Upottery, and I shall be guided by what Mrs. Upottery does. Happily there is a policeman downstairs. I can promise you one thing, Mrs. Upottery shan't get away."

"Have you got a revolver?"

"A revolver? What for?"

"In case"——

"No. I've got these." He raised his broad and muscular hands.

"I should like you to take my revolver," she breathed.

He was about to smile superiorly, but a look in her face stopped him. He perceived that jocularity would be misplaced. Tears were in the woman's eyes.

"I shall be very glad to," he said seriously.

She disappeared into her room, and came out again with the revolver, which she gave to him as if it had been an animal alive. "It's loaded," she said.

"Thanks," he murmured, slipping it into his pocket. "Now for it."

He walked up the transverse corridor as far as Mrs. Upottery's door, and knocked discreetly. There was no answer.

He knocked again, and yet again, now loudly, and there was still no answer.

Mary Pollexfen was watching him from the corner near her own door. The corridors were otherwise deserted.

"She won't open," Philip called in a whisper. "But I'm going in, all the same."

He was growing bolder every instant. He now knocked very loudly and imperatively. And after a slight pause he shook the handle of the door. The door yielded at once. He pushed it open, and by the light from the corridor he could see the interior of the cubicle, and the cubicle was empty. He entered the little room, found the switch and turned on the electric light. There was a sound behind him, and he jumped around. Mary stood at the door, her face pale.

"Be careful," she enjoined him.

"Yes," he said. "I know I'm trespassing. But you see if Mrs. Upottery arrives and makes a fuss I can always ask the lady for her finger print, that will quiet her."

"I didn't mean that," Mary Pollexfen breathed. And she, too, entered the room stealthily. Her first act was to lift the valance and look under the bed. She found nothing there, and laughed deprecatingly in response to Philip's masculine smile.

"We'll make a thorough search of this room, eh?" Philip suggested. "Suppose I lock the door?"

And he closed and locked the door.

"She must have gone out again," he remarked gayly, apparently unaware that he was stating the obvious. "And we didn't see her go."

"It is to be hoped she—he—didn't notice us together in the office," said Mary.

"And if he did—what then?"

"Who knows?" Mary answered reflectively.

The room was in perfect order. On the bed lay a night-dress case, placed in the mathematical centre of the pillow. Behind the door, on hooks, hung two skirts and a petticoat turned inside out.

"I wonder what the waist measurement is," said Mary, and she took down the petticoat, and doubling and stretching tight the waistband, put it against her own form. Doubled, it nearly encircled her.

"It's thirtyseven if it's an inch," said she, hanging it up again.

"But are there women with thirty-seven inch waists?" Philip demanded naively.

"Yes, and forty-seven," said Mary. "There is no limit."

"Then that proves nothing."

And they both felt guilty—nay, criminal—as they investigated the severe orderliness of the room. Several pairs of boots lay at the foot of the bed. But they were smaller than Philip's boots, and the young man's foot was by no means extensive. In the cupboard were a hat, a pair of rather large gloves, some pieces of ribbon, several veils (all these things black), a pincushion, a Bible, a hymn book, a copy of "John Halifax, Gentleman," and a lot of other articles.

"Here," said Philip, "perhaps you wouldn't mind looking into this cupboard?"

Mary obeyed, while Philip unfastened a small trunk, which proved to be empty. After some moments Mary found a collection of stockings.

"This feels heavy," said Mary holding up a pair of stockings tightly rolled.

They examined it together. In the centre of the woolen ball was a sum of three pounds five shillings and sevenpence halfpenny. Silently they replaced the money. Then they looked at each other.

"Mrs. Upottery may come back at any moment," said Mary.

"Yes," Philip agreed, daunted.

"Hadn't we better leave?"

"Perhaps it will be as well."

Philip took careful precaution to leave no trace of an inexcusable visit; he extinguished the light, and they found themselves out in the corridor again. Their search had been entirely futile.

"You still think that Mrs. Upottery is your uncle?"

"I do," said Mary obstinately.

"Will you put your hat on and come outside of the house at once?"

"What for?" the girl questioned.

"I want to talk to you; we cannot talk here."

In two minutes they were walking together down Kingsway, which was almost empty of traffic. Philip was very nervous, and his companion evidently waited for him to speak. At length he blurted out:

"You'll excuse me, Miss Pollexfen, but this cannot go on like this. Really, you know!"

"What cannot go on like what?" she asked softly, looking ingenuously at him.

"Your disguise," he explained. "It can do no further good. You may rely on me to do whatever can be done. And I should venture to advise you to—to—to be—er—a woman again." He wished to add: "I hate to see you as you are. It hurts me."

"I see," she said reflectively. "But if I become Giralda again all London will get excited. We shall have the police worrying us, and there will be no end to the bother."

"I do not think the disguise is suitable," he persisted stubbornly. He was surprised to find how stubborn he was. "You need not become Giralda. You can become simply a woman."

"I can't go back to my flat without causing a sensation."

"You could take a room somewhere—a quiet room, or two rooms."

"And where am I to get my clothes from—especially on Sunday?" She hesitated. "I might go to Harry Starkey. I could trust him. He is almost the only person I could trust."

"Harry Starkey?"

"Yes. The costumer. Surely you have heard of Harry Starkey. Everybody knows Harry Starkey."

"I fancy I have seen his name on theatre bills," said Philip.

Giralda smiled. "Why, after the King and General Booth he considers himself the best known man in England."

"Where is his place?"

"In Wellington street."

A cab loitered past. Philip hailed it.

"Please get in," said he. "And go to this Harry Starkey at once, if you can trust him as you say, and I will meet you in an hour at the corner of Wellington street—Bow street, I mean—and Long Acre. He held open the door.

Mary Pollexfen was clearly astonished at such swiftness and authority of decision. She gave him a puzzled glance, then smiled.

"Since you wish it," she said calmly.

They were heavenly words to him. The adorable creature was actually obeying him, actually ceding to his masculine wisdom and his masculine will.

Starkey's, Wellington street," she directed the cabman and got into the vehicle. The cabman nodded.

"He'll be in—your Starkey?" Philip asked her through the window.

"Yes, Sunday is his only day at home. He'll probably be asleep."

"Good! In an hour then. It is six-fifteen."

She drove off. As Philip watched the receding cab he felt as if he was floating on clouds of purest happiness. She did his bidding! She trusted him! She had not even inquired what was to happen when they meet again at seven-fifteen. Her confidence in him was so touching that he detected a moisture in his eyes. The circumstances were miraculous, overwhelming. Less than two hours ago she had been to him John Meredith, simply that! And now she was the rarest among women, and he was more to her than any other man in London! At least he hoped so.

(To be continued.)

IDENTITY OF HUMAN SKELETON FOUND NEAR MONCTON A MYSTERY

Coroner's Jury Finds it a Puzzle--Theory That the Body Was That of Donahue or McNeill Improbable.

Moncton, N. B., Oct. 19.—The identity of the skeleton of the aged man found in the woods at Cherryfield two weeks ago remains a mystery. The coroner's inquiry was conducted today but the jury's verdict said they were unable to obtain any light on the matter.

Ald. W. H. Edgett was the only witness called today. He testified to visiting the spot where the skeleton was found, viewing the clothing for the purpose of ascertaining whether the body was that of his relative, Captain Abel Edgett, who has been missing since last July, but he was unable to identify it or give any information clearing up the mystery.

The jury decided it was useless to hold the inquiry open longer and returned the following verdict:

"After hearing the evidence at this inquiry we are unable to ascertain who the man was, how he came to be there or what caused his death."

The coroner gave the clothes found on the skeleton to Chief Chappell to hold in his possession in the hope that the identity of the man might be discovered thereby in the future. It appears from the information that the body is not that of either Donahue or McNeill, as at first supposed. The bones have been interred in the rural cemetery.

BRUTAL ASSAULT ON NOVA SCOTIA GIRL

Amherst, N. S., Oct. 19—A young girl about fourteen years of age, daughter of the late John G. Trenholm, of Fort Lawrence, was brutally assaulted near her home on Tuesday last. The facts of the case were only made public today, when two arrests were made of parties suspected. The first man was held in suspicion, but tonight another man who has been identified by a man named Miner, from Mount Whatley, who in answer to the girl's screams, ran to her assistance and caught the brute in the act.

It seems the girl was walking home from school, when a man drove up behind her and asked her to drive home. Upon reaching the entrance, which is some distance from the road to her mother's home, instead of letting her out, he forcibly detained her and drove to a secluded spot near the marsh, where he criminally assaulted her.

Miner, who was working on the marsh, heard her screams and rushed to the spot, but her assailant, who is a strong man drove him away and he found himself powerless to prevent the scoundrel accomplishing his fiendish act. Afterwards the man left, driving towards New Brunswick, and the girl was found in an exhausted condition and taken to her home, where she now lies in a precarious condition.

The Amherst police were informed and Deputy Officers Seaman and McIver arrested a man by the name of Albert Sonier. Miner, who witnessed the affair, is confident that he is the man and he has been lodged in jail awaiting an examination. The victim of the brutal assault is somewhat weak-minded which, of course, makes the case much more serious. The accused is a married man, working in town. He was under the influence of liquor at the time. The accused bears a bad reputation having served a term in the common jail for chicken stealing, and also four months for stealing a commercial traveller's valise off an I. C. R. car. The victim belongs to a most respectable family.

STR. CARTHAGENIAN OF ALLAN LINE GROUNDS IN DELAWARE BAY

Philadelphia, Oct. 19.—Steamship pilots arriving here today report the British steamer Carthaginian of the Allan line, from Liverpool, October 2, via St. John's, (Nfld.), for Philadelphia, aground in Delaware Bay, about 70 miles below this city. The steamer went aground last night and was unable to float on the subsequent high tide. The weather is thick, but the pilots report that the steamer is in no danger.

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