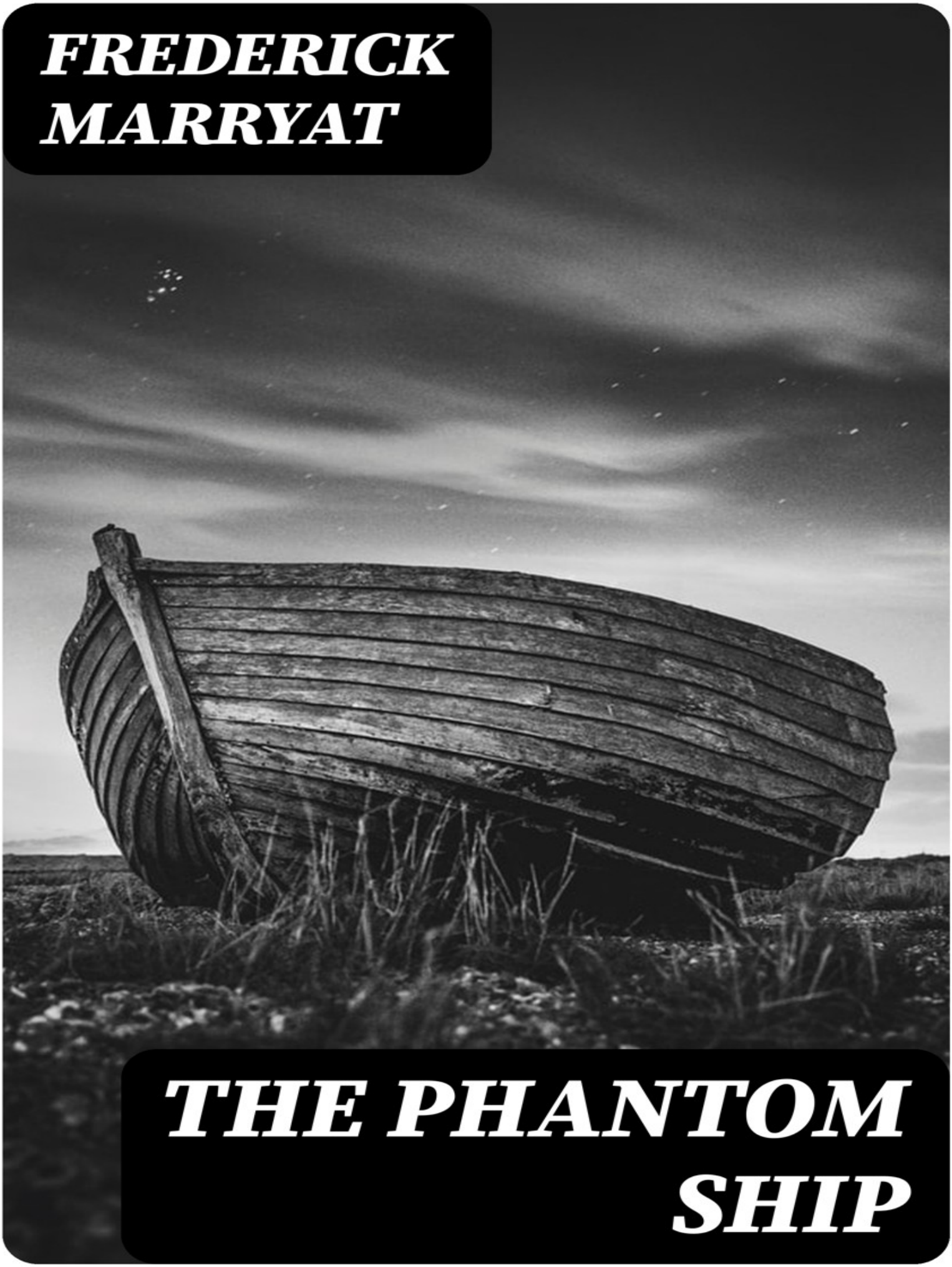
FREDERICK MARRYAT



THE PHANTOM SHIP

Frederick Marryat

The Phantom Ship

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Captain Marryat

"The Phantom Ship"

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Chapter One.

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About the middle of the seventeenth century, in the outskirts of the small but fortified town of Terneuse, situated on the right bank of the Scheldt, and nearly opposite to the island of Walcheren, there was to be seen in advance of a few other even more humble tenements, a small but neat cottage, built according to the prevailing taste of the time. The outside front had, some years back, been painted of a deep orange, the windows and shutters of a vivid green. To about three feet above the surface of the earth, it was faced alternately with blue and white tiles. A small garden, of about two rods of our measure of land, surrounded the edifice; and this little plot was flanked by a low hedge of privet, and encircled by a moat full of water, too wide to be leaped with ease. Over that part of the moat which was in front of the cottage-door was a small and narrow bridge, with ornamented iron handrails, for the security of the passenger. But the colours, originally so bright, with which the cottage had been decorated, had now faded; symptoms of rapid decay were evident in the window-sills, the door-jambs, and other wooden parts of the tenement and many of the white and blue tiles had fallen down and had not been

replaced. That much care had once been bestowed upon this little tenement, was as evident as that latterly it had been equally neglected.

The inside of the cottage, both on the basement and the floor above, was divided into two larger rooms in front, and two smaller behind; the rooms in front could only be called large in comparison with the other two, as they were little more than twelve feet square, with but one window to each. The upper floor was, as usual, appropriated to the bedrooms; on the lower, the two smaller rooms were now used only as a wash-house and a lumber-room; while one of the larger was fitted up as a kitchen, and furnished with dressers, on which the metal utensils for cookery shone clean and polished as silver. The room itself was scrupulously neat; but the furniture as well as the utensils, were scanty. The boards of the floor were of a pure white, and so clean that you might have laid anything down without fear of soiling it. A strong deal table, two wooden-seated chairs, and a small easy couch, which had been removed from one of the bedrooms upstairs, were all the moveables which this room contained. The other front room had been fitted up as a parlour; but what might be the style of its furniture was now unknown, for no eye had beheld the contents of that room for nearly seventeen years, during which it had been hermetically sealed, even to the inmates of the cottage.

The kitchen, which we have described, was occupied by two persons. One was a woman, apparently about forty years of age, but worn down by pain and suffering. She had evidently once possessed much beauty: there were still the

regular outlines, the noble forehead, and the large dark eye; but there was a tenuity in her features, a wasted appearance, such as to render the flesh transparent; her brow, when she mused, would sink into deep wrinkles, premature though they were; and the occasional flashing of her eyes strongly impressed you with the idea of insanity. There appeared to be some deep-seated, irremoveable, hopeless cause of anguish, never for one moment permitted to be absent from her memory: a chronic oppression, fixed and graven there, only to be removed by death. She was dressed in the widow's coif of the time; but although clean and neat, her garments were faded from long wear. She was seated upon the small couch which we have mentioned, evidently brought down as a relief to her, in her declining state.

On the deal table in the centre of the room sat the other person, a stout, fair-haired, florid youth of nineteen or twenty years old. His features were handsome and bold, and his frame powerful to excess; his eye denoted courage and determination, and as he carelessly swung his legs, and whistled an air in an emphatic manner, it was impossible not to form the idea that he was a daring, adventurous, and reckless character.

"Do not go to sea, Philip; oh, promise me *that*, my dear child," said the female, clasping her hands.

"And why not go to sea, mother?" replied Philip; "what's the use of my staying here to starve?—for, by Heaven! it's little better, I must do something for myself and for you. And what else can I do? My uncle Van Brennen has offered to take me with him, and will give me good wages. Then I

shall live happily on board, and my earnings will be sufficient for your support at home."

"Philip—Philip, hear me. I shall die if you leave me. Whom have I in the world but you? O my child, as you love me, and I know you *do* love me, Philip, don't leave me; but if you will, at all events do not go to sea."

Philip gave no immediate reply; he whistled for a few seconds, while his mother wept.

"Is it," said he at last, "because my father was drowned at sea that you beg so hard, mother?"

"Oh, no—no!" exclaimed the sobbing woman. "Would to God—"

"Would to God what, mother?"

"Nothing—nothing. Be merciful—be merciful, O God!" replied the mother, sliding from her seat on the couch, and kneeling by the side of it, in which attitude she remained for some time in fervent prayer. At last she resumed her seat, and her face wore an aspect of more composure.

Philip, who during this, had remained silent and thoughtful, again addressed his mother.

"Look ye, mother. You ask me to stay on shore with you, and starve,—rather hard conditions:— now hear what I have to say. That room opposite has been shut up ever since I can remember—why, you will never tell me; but once I heard you say, when we were without bread and with no prospect of my uncle's return—you were then half frantic, mother, as you know you sometimes are—"

"Well, Philip, what did you hear me say?" inquired his mother, with tremulous anxiety.

“You said, mother, that there was money in that room which would save us; and then you screamed and raved, and said that you preferred death. Now, mother, what is there in that chamber, and why has it been so long shut up? Either I know that, or I go to sea.”

At the commencement of this address of Philip, his mother appeared to be transfixed, and motionless as a statue; gradually her lips separated, and her eyes glared; she seemed to have lost the power of reply; she put her hand to her right side, as if to compress it, then both her hands, as if to relieve herself from excruciating torture: at last she sank, with her head forward, and the blood poured out of her mouth.

Philip sprang from the table to her assistance, and prevented her from falling on the floor. He laid her on the couch, watching with alarm the continued effusion.

“Oh! mother—mother, what is this?” cried he, at last, in great distress.

For some time his mother could make him no reply; she turned further on her side, that she might not be suffocated by the discharge from the ruptured vessel, and the snow-white planks of the floor were soon crimsoned with her blood.

“Speak, dearest mother, if you can,” repeated Philip in agony; “What shall I do?—what shall I give you? God Almighty! what is this?”

“Death, my child, death!” at length replied the poor woman, sinking into a state of unconsciousness.

Philip, now much alarmed, flew out of the cottage, and called the neighbours to his mother’s assistance. Two or

three hastened to the call; and as soon as Philip saw them occupied in restoring his mother, he ran as fast as he could to the house of a medical man, who lived about a mile off;—one Mynheer Poots, a little, miserable, avaricious wretch but known to be very skilful in his profession. Philip found Poots at home, and insisted upon his immediate attendance.

“I will come—yes, most certainly,” replied Poots, who spoke the language but imperfectly; “but, Mynheer Vanderdecken, who will pay me?”

“Pay you! my uncle will, directly that he comes home.”

“Your uncle, de Skipper Vanbrennen: no, he owe me four guilders, and he has owed me for a long time. Besides his ship may sink.”

“He shall pay you the four guilders, and for this attendance also,” replied Philip in a rage; “come directly,—while you are disputing, my mother may be dead.”

“But, Mr Philip, I cannot come, now I recollect. I have to see the child of the Burgomaster at Terneuse,” replied Mynheer Poots.

“Look you, Mynheer Poots,” exclaimed Philip, red with passion; “you have but to choose,—will you go quietly, or must I take you there? You’ll not trifle with me.”

Here Mynheer Poots was under considerable alarm, for the character of Philip Vanderdecken was well known.

“I will come by-and-by, Mynheer Philip, if I can.”

“You’ll come now, you wretched old miser,” exclaimed Philip, seizing hold of the little man by the collar, and pulling him out of his door.

“Murder! murder!” cried Poots, as he lost his legs, and was dragged along by the impetuous young man.

Philip stopped, for he perceived that Poots was black in the face.

“Must I then choke you, to make you go quietly? for, hear me, go you shall, alive or dead.”

“Well, then,” replied Poots, recovering himself, “I will go, but I’ll have you in prison to-night: and, as for your mother, I’ll not—no, that I will not—Mynheer Philip, depend upon it.”

“Mark me, Mynheer Poots,” replied Philip, “as sure as there is a God in heaven, if you do not come with me, I’ll choke you now; and when you arrive, if you do not your best for my poor mother, I’ll murder you there. You know that I always do what I say, so now take my advice, come along quietly, and you shall certainly be paid, and well paid—if I sell my coat.”

This last observation of Philip, perhaps, had more effect than even his threats. Poots was a miserable little atom, and like a child in the powerful grasp of the young man. The doctor’s tenement was isolated, and he could obtain no assistance until within a hundred yards of Vanderdecken’s cottage; so Mynheer Poots decided that he would go—first, because Philip had promised to pay him, and secondly, because he could not help it.

This point being settled, Philip and Mynheer Poots made all haste to the cottage; and on their arrival, they found his mother still in the arms of two of her female neighbours, who were bathing her temples with vinegar. She was in a state of consciousness, but she could not speak; Poots ordered her to be carried up stairs and put to bed, and pouring some acids down her throat, hastened away with Philip to procure the necessary remedies.

“You will give your mother that directly, Mynheer Philip,” said Poots, putting a phial into his hand; “I will now go to the child of the Burgomaster, and will afterwards come back to your cottage.”

“Don’t deceive me,” said Philip, with a threatening look.

“No, no, Mynheer Philip, I would not trust to your uncle Vanbrennen for payment, but you have promised, and I know that you always keep your word. In one hour I will be with your mother; but you yourself must now be quick.”

Philip hastened home. After the potion had been administered, the bleeding was wholly stopped; and in half an hour, his mother could express her wishes in a whisper. When the little doctor arrived, he carefully examined his patient, and then went down stairs with her son into the kitchen.

“Mynheer Philip,” said Poots, “by Allah! I have done my best, but I must tell you that I have little hopes of your mother rising from her bed again. She may live one day or two days, but not more. It is not my fault, Mynheer Philip,” continued Poots, in a deprecating tone.

“No, no; it is the will of Heaven,” replied Philip, mournfully.

“And you will pay me, Mynheer Vanderdecken?” continued the doctor after a short pause.

“Yes,” replied Philip in a voice of thunder, and starting from a reverie. After a moment’s silence, the doctor recommenced:

“Shall I come to-morrow, Mynheer Philip? You know that will be a charge of another guilder: it is of no use to throw away money or time either.”

“Come to-morrow, come every hour, charge what you please; you shall certainly be paid,” replied Philip, curling his lip with contempt.

“Well, it is as you please. As soon as she is dead the cottage and the furniture will be yours, and you will sell them of course. Yes, I will come. You will have plenty of money. Mynheer Philip, I would like the first offer of the cottage, if it is to let.”

Philip raised his arm in the air as if to crush Mynheer Poots, who retreated to the corner.

“I did not mean until your mother was buried,” said Poots, in a coaxing tone.

“Go, wretch, go!” said Philip, covering his face with his hands, as he sank down upon the blood-stained couch.

After a short interval, Philip Vanderdecken returned to the bedside of his mother, whom he found much better; and the neighbours, having their own affairs to attend to, left them alone. Exhausted with the loss of blood, the poor woman slumbered for many hours, during which she never let go the hand of Philip, who watched her breathing in mournful meditation.

It was about one o’clock in the morning when the widow awoke. She had in a great degree recovered her voice, and thus she addressed her son:—

“My dear, my impetuous boy, and have I detained you here a prisoner so long?”

“My own inclination detained me, mother. I leave you not to others until you are up and well again.”

“That, Philip, I shall never be. I feel that death claims me; and O my son, were it not for you, how should I quit this

world rejoicing! I have long been dying, Philip,—and long, long have I prayed for death.”

“And why so, mother?” replied Philip, bluntly; “I’ve done my best.”

“You have, my child, you have: and may God bless you for it. Often have I seen you curb your fiery temper—restrain yourself when justified in wrath—to spare a mother’s feelings. ’Tis now some days that even hunger has not persuaded you to disobey your mother. And, Philip, you must have thought me mad or foolish to insist so long, and yet to give no reason. I’ll speak—again—directly.”

The widow turned her head upon the pillow, and remained quiet for some minutes; then, as if revived, she resumed:

“I believe I have been mad at times—have I not, Philip? And God knows I have had a secret in my heart enough to drive a wife to frenzy. It has oppressed me day and night, worn my mind, impaired my reason, and now, at last, thank Heaven! it has overcome this mortal frame: the blow is struck, Philip—I’m sure it is. I wait but to tell you all,—and yet I would not,—’twill turn your brain as it has turned mine, Philip.”

“Mother,” replied Philip, earnestly, “I conjure you, let me hear this killing secret. Be heaven or hell mixed up with it, I fear not. Heaven will not hurt me and Satan I defy.”

“I know thy bold, proud spirit, Philip,—thy strength of mind. If any one could bear the load of such a dreadful tale, thou couldst. My brain, alas! was far too weak for it; and I see it is my duty to tell it to thee.”

The widow paused as her thoughts reverted to that which she had to confide; for a few minutes the tears rained down her hollow cheeks; she then appeared to have summoned resolution, and to have regained strength.

“Philip, it is of your father I would speak. It is supposed—that he was—drowned at sea.”

“And was he not, mother?” replied Philip, with surprise.

“O no!”

“But he has long been dead, mother?”

“No,—yes,—and yet—no,” said the widow, covering her eyes. Her brain wanders, thought Philip, but he spoke again:

“Then where is he, mother?”

The widow raised herself, and a tremor visibly ran through her whole frame, as she replied—

“In *Living Judgment*.”

The poor woman then sank down again upon the pillow, and covered her head with the bedclothes, as if she would have hid herself from her own memory. Philip was so much perplexed and astounded, that he could make no reply. A silence of some minutes ensued when, no longer able to bear the agony of suspense, Philip faintly whispered—

“The secret, mother, the secret; quick, let me hear it.”

“I can now tell all, Philip,” replied his mother, in a solemn tone of voice. “Hear me, my son. Your father’s disposition was but too like your own;—O may his cruel fate be a lesson to you, my dear, dear child! He was a bold, a daring, and, they say, a first-rate seaman. He was not born here, but in Amsterdam; but he would not live there, because he still adhered to the Catholic religion. The Dutch, you know, Philip, are heretics, according to our creed. It is now

seventeen years or more that he sailed for India, in his fine ship the Amsterdammer, with a valuable cargo. It was his third voyage to India, Philip, and it was to have been, if it had so pleased God, his last, for he had purchased that good ship with only part of his earnings, and one more voyage would have made his fortune. O! how often did we talk over what we would do upon his return, and how these plans for the future consoled me at the idea of his absence, for I loved him dearly, Philip,—he was always good and kind to me! and after he had sailed, how I hoped for his return! The lot of a sailor's wife is not to be envied. Alone and solitary for so many months, watching the long wick of the candle and listening to the howling of the wind—foreboding evil and accident—wreck and widowhood. He had been gone about six months, Philip, and there was still a long dreary year to wait before I could expect him back. One night, you, my child, were fast asleep; you were my only solace—my comfort in my loneliness. I had been watching over you in your slumbers: you smiled and half pronounced the name of mother; and at last I kissed your unconscious lips, and I knelt and prayed—prayed for God's blessing on you, my child, and upon him too—little thinking, at the time, that he was so horribly, so fearfully *cursed*."

The widow paused for breath, and then resumed. Philip could not speak. His lips were sundered, and his eyes riveted upon his mother, as he devoured her words.

"I left you and went down stairs into that room, Philip, which since that dreadful night has never been re-opened. I sate me down and read, for the wind was strong, and when the gale blows, a sailor's wife can seldom sleep. It was past

midnight, and the rain poured down. I felt unusual fear,—I knew not why, I rose from the couch and dipped my finger in the blessed water, and I crossed myself. A violent gust of wind roared round the house and alarmed me still more. I had a painful, horrible foreboding; when, of a sudden, the windows and window-shutters were all blown in, the light was extinguished, and I was left in utter darkness. I screamed with fright—but at last I recovered myself, and was proceeding towards the window that I might reclose it, when whom should I behold, slowly entering at the casement, but—your father,—Philip!—Yes, Philip,—it was your father!”

“Merciful God!” muttered Philip, in a low tone almost subdued into a whisper.

“I knew not what to think,—he was in the room; and although the darkness was intense, his form and features were as clear and as defined as if it were noon-day. Fear would have inclined me to recoil from,—his loved presence to fly towards him. I remained on the spot where I was, choked with agonising sensations. When he had entered the room, the windows and shutters closed of themselves, and the candle was relighted—then I thought it was his apparition, and I fainted on the floor.

“When I recovered I found myself on the couch, and perceived that a cold (O how cold!) and dripping hand was clasped in mine. This reassured me, and I forgot the supernatural signs which accompanied his appearance. I imagined that he had been unfortunate, and had returned home. I opened my eyes, and beheld my loved husband and threw myself into his arms. His clothes were saturated with

the rain; I felt as if I had embraced ice—but nothing can check the warmth of woman's love, Philip. He received my caresses but he caressed not again: he spoke not, but looked thoughtful and unhappy. 'William—William,' cried I; 'speak, to your dear Catherine.'

"'I will,' replied he, solemnly, 'for my time is short.'

"'No, no, you must not go to sea again; you have lost your vessel but you are safe. Have I not you again?'

"'Alas! no—be not alarmed, but listen? for my time is short. I have not lost my vessel, Catherine, *but I have lost*!—Make no reply, but listen; I am not dead, nor yet am I alive. I hover between this world and the world of spirits. Mark me.'

"'For nine weeks did I try to force my passage against the elements round the stormy Cape, but without success; and I swore terribly. For nine weeks more did I carry sail against the adverse winds and currents, and yet could gain no ground and then I blasphemed,—ay, terribly blasphemed. Yet still I persevered. The crew, worn out with long fatigue, would have had me return to the Table Bay; but I refused; nay, more, I became a murderer—unintentionally, it is true, but still a murderer. The pilot opposed me, and persuaded the men to bind me, and in the excess of my fury, when he took me by the collar, I struck at him; he reeled; and, with the sudden lurch of the vessel, he fell overboard, and sank. Even this fearful death did not restrain me; and I swore by the fragment of the Holy Cross, preserved in that relic now hanging round your neck, that I would gain my point in defiance of storm and seas, of lightning, of heaven, or of hell, even if I should beat about until the Day of Judgment.'

“‘My oath was registered in thunder, and in streams of sulphurous fire. The hurricane burst upon the ship, the canvass flew away in ribbons; mountains of seas swept over us, and in the centre of a deep o’erhanging cloud, which shrouded all in utter darkness, were written in letters of livid flame, these words—*Until the Day of Judgement*.’

“‘Listen to me, Catherine, my time is short. *One hope* alone remains, and for this am I permitted to come here. Take this letter.’ He put a sealed paper on the table. ‘Read it, Catherine, dear, and try if you can assist me. Read it, and now farewell—my time is come.’

“Again the window and window-shutters burst open—again the light was extinguished, and the form of my husband was, as it were, wafted in the dark expanse. I started up and followed him with outstretched arms and frantic screams as he sailed through the window;—my glaring eyes beheld his form borne away like lightning on the wings of the wild gale, till it was lost as a speck of light, and then it disappeared. Again the windows closed, the light burned, and I was left alone!

“Heaven, have mercy! My brain!—my brain!—Philip!—Philip!” shrieked the poor woman; “don’t leave me—don’t—don’t—pray don’t!”

During these exclamations the frantic widow had raised herself from the bed, and, at the last, had fallen into the arms of her son. She remained there some minutes without motion. After a time Philip felt alarmed at her long quiescence; he laid her gently down upon the bed, and as he did so her head fell back—her eyes were turned—the widow Vanderdecken was no more.

Chapter Two.

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Philip Vanderdecken, strong as he was in mental courage, was almost paralysed by the shock when he discovered that his mother’s spirit had fled; and for some time he remained by the side of the bed, with his eyes fixed upon the corpse, and his mind in a state of vacuity. Gradually he recovered himself; he rose, smoothed down the pillow, closed her eyelids, and then clasping his hands, the tears trickled down his manly cheeks. He impressed a solemn kiss upon the pale white forehead of the departed, and drew the curtains round the bed.

“Poor mother!” said he, sorrowfully, as he completed his task, “at length thou hast found rest,—but thou hast left thy son a bitter legacy.”

And as Philip’s thoughts reverted to what had passed, the dreadful narrative whirled in his imagination and scathed his brain. He raised his hands to his temples, compressed them with force, and tried to collect his thoughts, that he might decide upon what measures he should take. He felt that he had no time to indulge his grief. His mother was in peace: but his father—where was he?

He recalled his mother’s words—“One hope alone remained.” Then there was hope. His father had laid a paper on the table—could it be there now? Yes, it must be—his mother had not had the courage to take it up. There was hope in that paper, and it had lain unopened for more than seventeen years.

Philip Vanderdecken resolved that he would examine the fatal chamber—at once he would know the worst. Should he

do it now, or wait till daylight?—but the key, where was it? His eyes rested upon an old japanned cabinet in the room: he had never seen his mother open it in his presence: it was the only likely place of concealment that he was aware of. Prompt in all his decisions, he took up the candle, and proceeded to examine it. It was not locked; the doors swung open, and drawer after drawer was examined, but Philip discovered not the object of his search; again and again did he open the drawers, but they were all empty. It occurred to Philip that there might be secret drawers, and he examined for some time in vain. At last he took out all the drawers, and laid them on the floor, and lifting the cabinet off its stand he shook it. A rattling sound in one corner told him that in all probability the key was there concealed. He renewed his attempts to discover how to gain it, but in vain. Daylight now streamed through the casements, and Philip had not desisted from his attempts: at last, wearied out, he resolved to force the back panel of the cabinet; he descended to the kitchen, and returned with a small chopping-knife and hammer, and was on his knees busily employed forcing out the panel, when a hand was placed upon his shoulder.

Philip started: he had been so occupied with his search and his wild chasing thoughts, that he had not heard the sound of an approaching footstep. He looked up and beheld the Father Seysen, the priest of the little parish, with his eyes sternly fixed upon him. The good man had been informed of the dangerous state of the widow Vanderdecken, and had risen at daylight to visit and afford her spiritual comfort.

“How now, my son,” said the priest: “fearest thou not to disturb thy mother’s rest? and wouldst thou pilfer and purloin even before she is in her grave?”

“I fear not to disturb my mother’s rest, good father,” replied Philip, rising on his feet, “for she now rests with the blessed. Neither do I pilfer or purloin. It is not gold, I seek although if gold there were, that gold would now be mine. I seek but a key, long hidden, I believe, within this secret drawer, the opening of which is a mystery beyond my art.”

“Thy mother is no more, sayest thou, my son? and dead without receiving the rites of our most holy church! Why didst thou not send for me?”

“She died, good father, suddenly, most suddenly, in these arms, about two hours ago. I fear not for her soul, although I can but grieve you were not at her side.”

The priest gently opened the curtains, and looked upon the corpse. He sprinkled holy water on the bed, and for a short time his lips were seen to move in silent prayer. He then turned round to Philip.

“Why do I see thee thus employed? and why so anxious to obtain that key? A mother’s death should call forth filial tears and prayers for her repose. Yet are thine eyes dry, and thou art employed upon an indifferent search while yet the tenement is warm which but now held her spirit. This is not seemly, Philip. What is the key thou seekest?”

“Father, I have no time for tears—no time to spare for grief or lamentation. I have much to do, and more to think of than thought can well embrace. That I loved my mother, you know well.”

“But the key thou seekest, Philip?”

“Father, it is the key of a chamber which has not been unlocked for years, which I must—will open; even if—”

“If what, my son?”

“I was about to say what I should not have said. Forgive me, Father; I meant that I must search that chamber.”

“I have long heard of that same chamber being closed: and that thy mother would not explain wherefore, I know well for I have asked her, and have been denied. Nay, when, as in duty bound, I pressed the question, I found her reason was disordered by my importunity, and, therefore, I abandoned the attempt. Some heavy weight was on thy mother’s mind, my son, yet would she never confess or trust it with me. Tell me, before she died, hadst thou this secret from her?”

“I had, most holy father.”

“Wouldst thou not feel comfort if thou didst confide to me, my son? I might advise, assist—”

“Father, I would indeed—I could confide it to thee, and ask for thy assistance—I know ’tis not from curious feeling thou wouldst have it, but from a better motive. But of that which has been told it is not yet manifest whether it is as my poor mother says, or but the phantom of a heated brain. Should it indeed be true, fain would I share the burthen with you—yet little you might thank me for the heavy load. But no—at least not now—it must not, cannot be revealed. I must do my work—enter that hated room alone.”

“Fearest thou not?”

“Father, I fear nothing. I have a duty to perform—a dreadful one, I grant; but, I pray thee, ask no more; for like

my poor mother, I feel as if the probing of the wound would half unseat my reason."

"I will not press thee further, Philip. The time may come when I may prove of service. Farewell, my child; but I pray thee to discontinue thy unseemly labour, for I must send in the neighbours to perform the duties to thy departed mother, whose soul I trust is with its God."

The priest looked at Philip; he perceived that his thoughts were elsewhere; there was a vacancy and appearance of mental stupefaction, and as he turned away, the good man shook his head.

"He is right," thought Philip, when once more alone; and he took up the cabinet, and placed it upon the stand. "A few hours more can make no difference: I will lay me down, for my head is giddy."

Philip went into the adjoining room, threw himself upon his bed, and in a few minutes was in a sleep as sound as that permitted to the wretch a few hours previous to his execution.

During his slumbers the neighbours had come in, and had prepared everything for the widow's interment. They had been careful not to wake the son, for they held as sacred the sleep of those who must wake up to sorrow. Among others, soon after the hour of noon, arrived Mynheer Poots; he had been informed of the death of the widow, but having a spare hour, he thought he might as well call, as it would raise his charges by another guilder. He first went into the room where the body lay, and from thence he proceeded to the chamber of Philip, and shook him by the shoulder.

Philip awoke, and, sitting up, perceived the doctor standing by him.

“Well, Mynheer Vanderdecken,” commenced the unfeeling little man, “so it’s all over. I knew it would be so; and recollect you owe me now another guilder, and you promised faithfully to pay me; altogether, with the potion, it will be three guilders and a half—that is, provided you return my phial.”

Philip, who at first waking was confused, gradually recovered his senses during this address.

“You shall have your three guilders and a half, and your phial to boot, Mr Poots,” replied he, as he rose from off the bed.

“Yes, yes; I know you mean to pay me—if you can. But look you, Mynheer Philip, it may be some time before you sell the cottage. You may not find a customer. Now, I never wish to be hard upon people who have no money, and I’ll tell you what I’ll do. There is a something on your mother’s neck. It is of no value—none at all, but to a good Catholic. To help you in your strait I will take that thing, and then we shall be quits. You will have paid me, and there will be an end of it.”

Philip listened calmly: he knew to what the little miser had referred,—the relic on his mother’s neck; that very relic upon which his father swore the fatal oath. He felt that millions of guilders would not have induced him to part with it.

“Leave the house,” answered he, abruptly. “Leave it immediately. Your money shall be paid.”

Now Mynheer Poots, in the first place, knew that the setting of the relic, which was in a square frame of pure gold, was worth much more than the sum due to him: he also knew that a large price had been paid for the relic itself, and, as at that time such a relic was considered very valuable, he had no doubt but that it would again fetch a considerable sum. Tempted by the sight of it when he entered the chamber of death, he had taken it from the neck of the corpse, and it was then actually concealed in his bosom, so he replied,—“My offer is a good one, Mynheer Philip, and you had better take it. Of what use is such trash?”

“I tell you no,” cried Philip, in a rage.

“Well, then, you will let me have it in my possession till I am paid, Mynheer Vanderdecken—that is but fair. I must not lose my money. When you bring me my three guilders and a half and the phial, I will return it to you.”

Philip’s indignation was now without bounds. He seized Mynheer Poots by the collar, and threw him out of the door. “Away immediately,” cried he, “or by—”

There was no occasion for Philip to finish the imprecation. The doctor had hastened away with such alarm, that he fell down half the steps of the staircase, and was limping away across the bridge. He almost wished that the relic had not been in his possession; but his sudden retreat had prevented him, even if so inclined, from replacing it on the corpse.

The result of this conversation naturally turned Philip’s thoughts to the relic, and he went into his mother’s room to take possession of it. He opened the curtains—the corpse

was laid out—he put forth his hand to untie the black ribbon. It was not there. “Gone!” exclaimed Philip. “They hardly would have removed it—never would. It must be that villain Poots—wretch! but I will have it, even if he has swallowed it, though I tear him limb from limb!”

Philip darted down the stairs, rushed out of the house, cleared the moat at one bound and, without coat or hat, flew away in the direction of the doctor’s lonely residence. The neighbours saw him as he passed them like the wind; they wondered, and they shook their heads. Mynheer Poots was not more than half way to his home for he had hurt his ankle. Apprehensive of what might possibly take place, should his theft be discovered, he occasionally looked behind him; at length, to his horror, he beheld Philip Vanderdecken at a distance, bounding on in pursuit of him. Frightened almost out of his senses, the wretched pilferer hardly knew how to act; to stop and surrender up the stolen property was his first thought, but fear of Vanderdecken’s violence prevented him; so he decided on taking to his heels, thus hoping to gain his house, and barricade himself in, by which means he would be in a condition to keep possession of what he had stolen, or at least to make some terms ere he restored it.

Mynheer Poots had need to run fast, and so he did, his thin legs bearing his shrivelled form rapidly over the ground; but Philip, who, when he witnessed the doctor’s attempt to escape, was fully convinced that he was the culprit, redoubled his exertions, and rapidly came up with the chase. When within a hundred yards of his own door, Mynheer Poots heard the bounding steps of Philip gain upon

him, and he sprang and leaped in his agony. Nearer and nearer still the step, until at last he heard the very breathing of his pursuer; and Poots shrieked in his fear, like the hare in the jaws of the greyhound. Philip was not a yard from him; his arm was outstretched when the miscreant dropped down paralysed with terror; and the impetus of Vanderdecken was so great, that he passed over his body, tripped and after trying in vain to recover his equilibrium, he fell and rolled over and over. This saved the little doctor; it was like the double of a hare. In a second he was again on his legs, and before Philip could rise and again exert his speed, Poots had entered his door and bolted it within. Philip was, however, determined to repossess the important treasure; and as he panted, he cast his eyes around to see if any means offered for his forcing his entrance into the house. But as the habitation of the doctor was lonely, every precaution had been taken by him to render it secure against robbery; the windows below were well barricaded and secured, and those on the upper story were too high for any one to obtain admittance by them.

We must here observe, that although Mynheer Poots was, —from his known abilities, in good practice, his reputation as a hard-hearted, unfeeling miser was well established. No one was ever permitted to enter his threshold, nor, indeed, did any one feel inclined. He was as isolated from his fellow-creatures as was his tenement, and was only to be seen in the chamber of disease and death. What his establishment consisted of no one knew. When he first settled in the neighbourhood, an old decrepit woman occasionally answered the knocks given at the door by those who

required the doctor’s services; but she had been buried some time, and ever since all calls at the door had been answered by Mynheer Poots in person, if he were at home, and if not, there was no reply to the most importunate summons. It was then surmised that the old man lived entirely by himself, being too niggardly to pay for any assistance. This Philip also imagined; and as soon as he had recovered his breath, he began to devise some scheme by which he would be enabled not only to recover the stolen property, but also to wreak a dire revenge.

The door was strong and not to be forced by any means which presented themselves to the eye of Vanderdecken. For a few minutes he paused to consider, and as he reflected, so did his anger cool down, and he decided that it would be sufficient to recover his relic without having recourse to violence. So he called out in a loud voice—

“Mynheer Poots, I know that you can hear me. Give me back what you have taken, and I will do you no hurt; but if you will not, you must take the consequence, for your life shall pay the forfeit before I leave this spot.”

This speech was indeed very plainly heard by Mynheer Poots; but the little miser had recovered from his fright, and, thinking himself secure, could not make up his mind to surrender the relic without a struggle; so the doctor answered not, hoping that the patience of Philip would be exhausted, and that by some arrangement, such as the sacrifice of a few guilders, no small matter to one so needy as Philip, he would be able to secure what he was satisfied would sell at a high price.

Vanderdecken, finding that no answer was returned, indulged in strong invective, and then decided upon measures certainly in themselves by no means undecided.

There was part of a small stack of dry fodder standing not far from the house, and under the wall a pile of wood for firing. With these Vanderdecken resolved upon setting fire to the house, and thus, if he did not gain his relic, he would at least obtain ample revenge, he brought several armfuls of fodder and laid them at the door of the house, and upon that he piled the faggots and logs of wood, until the door was quite concealed by them. He then procured a light from the steel, flint, and tinder which every Dutchman carries in his pocket, and very soon he had fanned the pile into a flame. The smoke ascended in columns up to the rafters of the roof, while the fire raged below. The door was ignited, and was adding to the fury of the flames, and Philip shouted with joy at the success of his attempt.

“Now, miserable despoiler of the dead—now, wretched thief, now you shall feel my vengeance,” cried Philip, with a loud voice. “If you remain within, you perish in the flames; if you attempt to come out, you shall die by my hands. Do you hear, Mynheer Poots—do you hear?”

Hardly had Philip concluded this address, when the window of the upper floor furthest from the burning door was thrown open.

“Ay,—you come now to beg and to entreat;—but no—no,” cried Philip—who stopped as he beheld at the window what seemed to be an apparition, for instead of the wretched little miser, he beheld one of the loveliest forms Nature ever deigned to mould—an angelic creature, of about sixteen or