

A Raid on a Gambling Hell

Blackmailers I Have Foiled

by John Macey Dixon, 1875-1932

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I HAVE had to deal with all classes of society, high and low, rich and poor, and number amongst clients several millionaires, crooks, peers and peeresses, and servant girls. It is my boast that nothing surprises me, yet I must confess feeling a mild tinge of excitement at receiving, on the letter-head of the Ministry of the Interior, a request that I would call at eleven o'clock upon Mr. George Tresham, the Minister in question.

The Right Honourable George Tresham was a name to conjure with on the day I received that summons. A comparatively young man who had won his way to the foremost Cabinet rank by sheer ability and courage, he had as solid a following as any Minister in the House.

„I have sent for you, Dixon,“ he said, „on a very delicate private matter. A matter,“ he went on, „which affects my personal honour—indeed, affects my whole future career.“

Motioning me to a chair, he began the narrative which is set down below. Of course, I am not giving the real names of persons and places.

George Tresham, in addition to being a popular statesman, was something of a man about town. He had a host of friends, mostly younger than himself, and his interest in the theatre had extended to the writing of a four-act drama, which had been produced with moderate success in the West End. It was during his brief incursion into the realms of dramatic authorship that he made the acquaintance of Bart Philipson—the Honourable Bartholomew Philipson—who, at the time this narrative was told me, had succeeded to his father’s very small and very heavily encumbered estate as Lord Colesun.

Bart Philipson, as he was then, had an interest in the theatre wherein Mr. Tresham’s play was produced.

The two became fast friends, for George Tresham was a large-hearted, lovable soul, who was attracted rather than repelled by the other’s cynicism and worldliness. Tresham was, of course, enormously wealthy.

The two friends were talking at their club one night, and the conversation drifted round to gambling hells. Bart gave a very vivid word-picture of one he had visited in London, and Tresham expressed his surprise that such places existed, and also asked his friend to take him to see one some night.

About a month later, on a Thursday evening, when Tresham had finished his solitary dinner, the telephone bell rang, and his butler told him that Lord Colesun was on the telephone.

„I say,“ said Bart’s voice, „are you still keen on seeing one of those places we were speaking about the other night?“

„Rather!“ said Tresham, who was bored, and welcomed any diversion.

„Well, there’s a new place opened in Montacute Square,“ said Bart’s voice. „I don’t know very much about it, except that I’ve got the password and the right of entrée for a friend. I am told it is unique in many respects.“

„All right. I’ll come along.“

Tresham ordered his car, picked up Bart, and dismissed the car at the corner of Montacute Square. The two walked on. It was a foggy night, but Bart knew the way.

„Here we are,“ he said, and, ascending a short flight of broad steps, he knocked in a peculiar manner on the door.

It was opened by a servant in quiet livery, and after a glance at Bart the two were passed into a hall which was dimly lighted and escorted up a stairway to a landing above. A pair of folding doors confronted them. On this the servant knocked. The door opened a few inches, and a keen eye scrutinised the pair.

„All right; come in, gentlemen,“ said the owner of the eye, and they were admitted into a large saloon, blazing with light and richly furnished.

But it was not the appointments which made Tresham stare. It was not even the green table in the centre of the room, around which a dozen men were playing. It was the other questionable occupants. Men and women, the latter in wildly extravagant costumes, were sitting at little tables, taking no notice of the players. They all had the appearance of being under the influence of drink, and very far under at that.

„How perfectly beastly!“ Tresham said. „A perfect saturnalia! Let us get out of this, Bart.“

„I quite agree,“ said the phlegmatic Lord Colesun. He was turning to the door, when it burst open, and a wild-eyed servant dashed in.

„The police! The police!“ he gasped, and had hardly got the words out of his mouth when two or three policemen burst into the room after an inspector, and were followed by a dozen men in plain clothes. Immediately began a stampede, a kicking over of tables, a screaming of women, a shouting of men. Somebody cried, „Put out the lights.“ One man attempted to unshutter the window, and was pulled back by a constable, and in the end the inspector made his voice heard.

„Ladies and gentlemen,“ he said, „you will all consider yourselves under arrest. I shall take you to Bow Street Police Station.“

„My God! What shall I do?“ said Tresham. „It is ruin, Bart.“

„Keep quiet,“ said Bart in a low voice. „I’ll see what I can do.“

He went across to the inspector, and at first the officer would have nothing to say to him. Then Bart said something in a low voice, and the two men stepped aside into a corner of the room, and for a few moments conversed together. Presently Bart strode back to Tresham.

„A policeman will take us out of the door,“ he said. „I’ve squared him.“

A constable approached and the two men were pushed unceremoniously on to the hall landing and escorted down the stairs.

„All right,“ said Bart to the constable and slipped something into his hand.

„Hold hard, sir,“ said the policeman, „I seem to know that gentleman’s face.“

„Never mind what you know,“ said Bart.

„It’s all right, sir. I hope there’s no offence,“ said the policeman, „but if that isn’t Mr. Tresham, I’m a Dutchman.“

Tresham looked at the man, but could not see his face. He noted, however, that one of his front teeth was broken. In a few moments they were out in the street, Bart cursing himself for having led his friend into such a mess. Tresham stopped him.

„Don’t be a fool, Bart,“ he said, „it was my own stupid curiosity which is entirely responsible. What did you say to the inspector fellow?“

„I said a thousand pounds,“ said Bart briefly, „It was the only argument I could think of.“

„Of course I’ll pay that,“ said Tresham. „In fact, it’s cheap at the price. What about that infernal policeman? Do you think he’ll talk?“

„I’ll have to go back and see him,“ said Bart. „Otherwise, I don’t think there’s anybody there who recognised you, not even the inspector.“

George Tresham got home at 11.30, spent a restless night, and when, passing along Whitehall the next afternoon, he saw on the newspaper placards the announcement of a gambling raid, his heart beat faster. Fortunately it was scrappy, merely mentioning the fact that a raid had been made on a house in Montacute Square, that a certain number of people had been arrested, the proprietor had been fined and imprisoned, and that two servants who assisted in the conduct of the house had also been sent to prison. There was no mention of the unpleasant things he had seen; and that afternoon, when Bart came by appointment, the reason was explained.

„I saw the inspector again this morning,“ he said, „and I asked him to keep that part of it quiet, in case it ever came out that I was there. But I’m afraid we’re going to have trouble with the policeman,“ he went on, shaking his head. „He’s a man named Bowker, a shrewd and unscrupulous fellow, who has been in trouble before, and apparently has already announced his intention of resigning from the force to live upon a private income.“

„What does he mean by that?“

„He means you are the private income, I am afraid.“ said Bart grimly.

„Blackmail?“ demanded Tresham.

„That’s what it amounts to,“ said Bart.

„This is dreadful,“ said Tresham with a despairing gesture. „Have you seen this policeman?“

„I’ve just come from him,“ said Bart. „I’ve found his address—he lives in Bayswater—and made a call. As I feared, he intends making us pay.“

„Did he mention a figure?“

„He did,“ said Bart. „He asked for fifty thousand pounds!“

„Fifty thousand pounds!“ Even Tresham was startled.

„Seventy really,“ said Bart. „Fifty from you and twenty from me. Heaven knows where I’m going to get my twenty from.“

Tresham thought for a while.

„When does he want his answer?“ he demanded.

„Tomorrow evening at the latest,“ said Lord Colesun. „I have an appointment to meet him on Hammersmith Broadway.“

It was after his friend’s departure that Mr. Tresham sat down and wrote the letter that brought me to his study.

I listened in silence and sympathy to the narrative.

„Have you told Lord Colesun that you have sent for me?“ I asked.

He shook his head.

„No,“ he replied; „but, of course, I shall tell him.“

„I would rather you didn’t,“ said I. „I prefer working under one pair of eyes and with only one set of theories to combat.“

„Namely, mine?“ he smiled faintly.

„Namely, yours, sir,“ I said. „You can afford to pay fifty thousand pounds, although I don’t suppose anybody can afford to part with such an enormous sum. But Lord Colesun—is it humanly possible that he can pay?“

The Minister shook his head.

„Did he give you the address of the policeman?“ I asked.

„No; it is somewhere in Bayswater, but he is meeting him tonight at Hammersmith. You will have to work with Lord Colesun, because he knows the man, and will be able to introduce you if necessary,“ he said.

„What do you want me to do?“ I asked.

The Minister hesitated.

„Well, I hardly know, except that I should like you to see the fellow and beat his price down. Maybe you could scare him?“

I shook my head.

„That kind of man isn’t easily scared,“ said I. „He is evidently a thoroughly bad lot, and, being a policeman or an ex-policeman, as he will be in a day or two, he knows the law just as well as I, and he would be a difficult man to bluff.“

Now, if you'll be advised by me, Mr. Tresham, you will not say a word to Lord Colesun as to having seen or employed me."

"But what can you do?" he asked. "You do not even know the policeman's address."

"I'll make a few inquiries which will help me to clear up the mystery of the drunken people."

"Mystery?" he said. "There was no mystery about it; they were there."

"Exactly," said I with a smile: "but that is the mystery. Don't you realise, Mr. Tresham, that in gaming houses drunkenness is as rare as at a revival meeting?"

I thereupon left him and pursued my investigation.

Scotland Yard very kindly gave me a few particulars, and the Home Office the necessary permission to see the proprietor of the raided gambling-house. He was in Wandsworth Gaol, and to Wandsworth I drove, handed in my order, and was taken to where a stout, elderly man sat on the edge of his seat.

"I want to talk to you about this raid of yours," said I. "How did they come to catch you?"

"How? Why, I was given away," he said vehemently, "and what's more, I know the man that gave me away."

"Who was it?" I asked.

"You find out," he snapped. "I name no names; I keep my opinions to myself. I was running one of the quietest, best-conducted little joints in London, and it's a shame they couldn't leave me alone."

"I like your idea of well-conducted little joints," said I, and in a few brief words I gave him my own opinion of the class of establishment he kept.

"That's a lie," he said. "If there were a lot of lushers lying about don't you think the police would have brought it out?"

"Anyway, I'm glad they raided me when they did, if they were going to raid at all," he went on. "If they'd come a couple of hours later we should have been in full swing. As it was, they caught a few. The police messed it, as they mess everything. Fancy raiding a gaming house at half-past nine at night!" he said contemptuously. "You're a split, aren't you?"

"I am a sort of detective," I admitted.

"Well, don't think I've got anything against the police, because I haven't," he said. "Inspector Ericson was decent to me, and I don't suppose he'd have raided me, if that swine hadn't given me away. I'll *Bart* him when I come out."

"What name was that?" I said quickly.

"Never mind," he replied evasively, and try as I did, he could not be induced to say any more.

Now, Inspector Ericson is one of the straightest men in London. No Robespierre was more incorruptible. He was certainly not the kind of man who would accept a thousand pounds to allow a detected gambler to go scot free.

Ericson was not at the station when I called, and I took the liberty of driving over to his house, and found him preparing to go on night duty.

"I wanted to see you, inspector, about the raid you made the other night."

"Oh, did you?" he said, with his hard little smile.

"When you made the raid why did you choose half-past nine?"

„Well, the raid was made in accordance with instructions we received from headquarters. The gentleman who gave the house away told us that at half-past nine it was crowded, and, what’s more, he had arranged with the doorkeeper to let us in at that hour.“

„Another question, Ericson. When you made the raid, did anybody offer you a thousand pounds to let them out?“

„I think not. Otherwise it would have been as good as paying me to put them in!“ he said.

„I happen to know,“ said I, „that the gentleman who gave you the information which led to the raid was Lord Colesun.“

„You do, do you?“ said he. „Ah, well, you know a lot!“

„Well, I won’t ask you whether it was he or somebody else,“ said I. „But tell me this—was your informant present when the raid was made?“

„I can answer you very emphatically that he was not,“ replied Ericson.

„Just one more question, Inspector. Do you know whether there are any other gambling houses in Montacute Square?“

„I can tell you that there are not,“ said the inspector, „it is funny you should ask that. It was the same question asked by one of my detective-sergeants who was watching the place we raided. He reported that a lot of people had gone in to No. 27. The house we raided was No.43, farther along. He went over to make an inquiry, but found there was a fancy-dress ball on or something. In fact, he mistook a dressed-up policeman, as he thought, who was going into the house as a real one.“

„Thank you, that’s all I want to know,“ said I, and went back to the office to get the report of my assistants, who had spent that afternoon making inquiries in knowledgeable circles in the city.

Their reports were very satisfactory from my point of view, and I was in the midst of reading them when Mr. Tresham rang through and asked me to come and see him.

„I hope I haven’t annoyed you, Mr. Dixon, but I have had to tell Lord Colesun. I thought it was hardly fair to him. Will you come over?“

„Is he with you?“ I asked.

„He is with me now.“

I gathered up the reports and read the last two on my way to Whitehall. Lord Colesun I had not met before.

He shook hands with me warmly on my introduction.

„Glad to meet you, Mr. Dixon. I have heard about you, and I am extremely glad that my friend Mr. Tresham has called you in. I was a little ratty when I heard in the first place, but since then I agree that it was wise to take professional advice. Mr. Tresham and I have been talking the matter over, and we have decided that the best thing to do is to pay this infernal policeman and let the matter rest.“

„I think it is the best thing to do,“ broke in Mr. Tresham. „I did have a wild idea that it would be better if you met the policeman, but on consideration I have decided that Bart—Lord Colesun—should carry the thing through himself.“

„I never expected to meet this policeman,“ said I. „At least, not in his role as a policeman. You said, Mr. Tresham, that although you did not see the policeman’s face you noticed that he had one of his front teeth broken.“

Mr. Tresham nodded. I turned to Lord Colesun.

„May I ask you,“ I said, „if you know any person who has a front tooth broken?“

„I probably know several. I don't notice the teeth of policemen, however.“

„I am not talking about policemen,“ I insisted. „Do you know any other person with a broken front tooth?“

I had seen the young man's face change, and now he picked up his hat from a settee and walked towards the door.

„I'd like you to excuse me for a little while; I'm not feeling very well,“ he said in a low voice.

„Wait!“ said I, „I have to finish my story.“

„Then you'll finish it alone,“ snarled the man at the door, and went out, slamming it behind him.

The Minister looked at me in bewilderment.

„What does it all mean.“

„It means this,“ said I. „Your friend Lord Colesun has for months been on the verge of bankruptcy. Moreover, he has been taking funds from a company with which he is connected, which must be made good by tomorrow morning.“

„Good God! You don't suggest—“ he began.

„I suggest that the gambling hell and the supposed police raid were got up for your special benefit. The gamblers and the police were members of a provincial touring company, who were brought to London to play their part by Lord Colesun, who told them that he was having a joke on one of his friends. The house was hired furnished—“

„But why the drunkenness?“ asked Mr. Tresham.

„That was intended to make you all the more disgusted and all the more anxious to keep your name out of the case. To make the deception seem more real, your friend arranged for a gaming club, which undoubtedly existed in Montacute Square, to be raided the same night—as a matter of fact, an hour and a half before the sham raid was made. The policeman with the broken tooth was Lord Colesun's valet.“

„Then you suggest,“ said Mr. Tresham in a low voice, „that Bart was blackmailing me, and that the fifty thousand pounds was for himself?“

„I not only suggest that, but I advance it as a fact,“ said I. „The valet is a man who has been hand-in-glove with his Lordship in every dirty piece of business in which he has been engaged. Your friend arranged for a raid on a genuine gaming club in order that you should be able to read something in the next day's paper. The sham police who *raided* were in one of the rooms downstairs waiting until you were safely inside the saloon.“

The Minister sat at his desk, his head on his hands. At last he rose.

„Well, Mr. Dixon,“ he said with a smile, „you have saved me fifty thousand pounds, but you have cost me a very dear illusion.“

„You will not prosecute, of course?“ said I.

He shook his head.

„If there is any of his father's spirit in the man, there will be no necessity for a prosecution,“ he said quietly.

Tresham was right as it happened, for the first announcement I read when I opened my paper the following morning was that Lord Colesun had shot himself.

