

The Eve of St. John

By T. G. Jackson

“He was sitting in his library . . .”

Simple words, which, if one comes upon them in the course of a story call up a pleasing picture of cultured ease, and literary leisure. One may lay down the book on one's knee, and shut one's eyes, and see in a vision the snug room, crimson-curtained; hear the gentle patter on the hearth of the ashes from the glowing fire, the only sound that breaks the silence, save perhaps the rustle of the leaves, as the occupant turns his page. On the walls, dimly seen by the light of the shaded lamp, are the well-stored shelves, volumes rich with the sombre splendour of morocco and gilding, folios in the wider shelves below, quartos and octavos above; the spacious leather covered table, with silver inkstand and ample room for atlas volumes, is drawn in front of the fire; along the walls are comfortable stuffed morocco seats, and by the corner of the table is the master's favourite easy chair, luxuriously padded, leather-clad, and well worn by constant use; before the shining brass fender lies the bearskin rug, beloved by Tim, the fox-terrier, sole sharer with his lord of this temple of study, and comfort, and not infrequently of repose.

It was summer, and the hearth was cold, but otherwise the library in which Cecil Maynard was sitting fully satisfied the conditions of this imaginary picture. It was a lofty and stately apartment with long windows and deep window seats, the fretted plaster ceiling, rich with interlacing ribs and floreated borders bore the arms of the Maynard who had restored and improved the old building three hundred years before, altering it from the *chateau fort* of the middle ages into a habitation suitable to times when private wars had been suppressed, and a better administration of public justice had taken their place. Through the open casements came the soft summer air bringing in the scent of the hay-field, and in the gathering twilight could just be distinguished well-wooded slopes and green pastures falling rapidly to the river that brawled along its rocky bed, with many an eddy and stickle where the fisherman might look to tempt with his fly a lusty trout.

Cecil Maynard had only a short time before come into possession of the estate of Castle Maynard, which he inherited from an uncle who had died a widower and childless. He knew nothing of the history of his new home, and since taking possession, and settling down after the troublesome technicalities of succession, he had amused himself by hunting up information about it in county histories, and by diving into the materials afforded in plenty by family papers in the muniment-room, which had been well kept in orderly arrangement by his predecessors. He had read of Maynards who went to the crusades, selling half their estates to raise a contingent of their followers, and impoverishing their successors for several generations. He read of other Maynards who partly retrieved the family fortune only to lose it again in the Wars of the Roses. Recovering their estates under the Tudors, on whose side by a happy accident they had been engaged, they managed to struggle through the civil wars of Charles and the Parliament without much loss of goods, but some loss of credit, owing to the shifty policy of Sir Everard Maynard who then owned the estate, and who by crafty intrigue, and by judiciously trimming his sails to catch the breeze of prosperity that blew sometimes from one quarter and sometimes from another, managed never to compromise himself with the losing party and to turn up in the nick of time on the side of the winner.

At the moment when we are introduced to his successor, sitting in his library that summer evening, he was in fact reading in the county history the story of his ingenious ancestor, of whom he felt he had no particular reason to be proud. As he read on he began to think that political insincerity was not the worst fault that could be laid to Sir Everard's charge, and that there were passages in his life which bore a dubious, not to say a sinister character. Sir Everard lived to be an old man, and prospered exceedingly, leaving his estates in a more flourishing condition than they had been for a long while before. He died childless, and the estate passed to a distant kinsman.

"Well," said Cecil Maynard, as he closed the weighty folio of his county history, "I am glad at all events that the kinsman from whom I come was only a distant relative; for the less we and ours have of Sir Everard's blood in our veins the better."

The door opened as he spoke, and his young wife came into the room. Mrs. Maynard was a year or two younger than her husband. They had only been married a short time before they came to Castle Maynard, and she knew even less about the place than he did.

"Why, Cecil, whatever did you find to pore over in that dusty old volume?" said she as she seated herself on the elbow of his chair, and put an arm over his shoulder.

"To tell the truth," said he, "I have been reading the life of a very disreputable ancestor of mine. What is told of him for certain is bad enough, but I doubt whether there is not worse behind. There are many hints given of foul play that never came to light."

"A family romance," said she; "how interesting! How are we to find out more about this disreputable ancestor? I confess he interests me more than all the respectable ones. How long ago did he live?"

"Ah! you women," said Cecil, laughing, "you all of you, I believe, love the sinner rather than the saint."

"Now that's too bad of you," said she, as she kissed the top of his head, the spot which from her position was most accessible to caresses. "I don't love him at all, but I should love to find out what he did. Do go on, and learn more about him. I should dearly like to find that Castle Maynard was the scene of a real tragedy like Dunsinane, or the mystery of Udolpho, or the Castle of Otranto. As it is I have been bitterly disappointed that nobody has ever heard of a ghost in the house. It is hardly respectable in an old family to be without one."

"A defect no doubt," said Cecil, "of which we ought to be ashamed, and I don't know how we are to make it good. But listen, Alice, to what 'Baker's Chronicle' tells of our disreputable ancestor. I won't bother you with all his political tricks and dishonest manœuvres to keep in with the winning side. They are bad enough. But listen to this:

"This Sir Everard was much respected during his life on account of his prosperity, and the favour in which he was held by the Court. He much increased the family estates, which had sunk to a low condition. He married twice, but left no issue by either marriage. His first wife was an heiress who died suddenly, and her inheritance passed to Sir Everard under a will executed shortly before her death. None of her family benefited thereby, though she had always professed attachment to them. His second wife was the daughter of Sir James Tiptoft, Knight and Baronet of that name, and was very beautiful. Sir Everard and his wife did not agree, and it is said she threatened to leave him and bestow her lands on another. Certain it is that she disappeared and was never again heard of. Sir Everard seized on her inheritance, and as the lady's family had sided with the Parliament in the late wicked rebellion which ended in the murder of that most Blessed Martyr, King Charles I, Sir Everard was confirmed in possession after the happy restoration of his Sacred Majesty King Charles II. Sir Everard lived to a good old age in much honour, and lies under a handsome monument with his effigy in alabaster in the parish church."

“How horrible,” exclaimed Alice, “what a monster! both his wives!

“You think he murdered them?” said Cecil.

“Why Cecil, of course he did! He was another Bluebeard. No doubt he poisoned the first and made away with the second. It is as plain as a pikestaff, and why couldn’t that stupid musty old Chronicler say so outright instead of going twaddling on about his Blessed Martyr and his Sacred Majesty, as if they had anything to do with it.”

“On the other hand,” said Cecil, “the first wife *may* have died a natural death. People do so. And the next *may* have run away from her disagreeable husband, and lived happily ever afterwards.”

“I don’t believe it, Cecil,” said she, “and I am sure you don’t believe it either.”

“Well,” said he, “I confess there is not much to be said for Sir Everard’s morals. But murder! No! that is a different thing altogether from politics, and I think even Sir Everard might have stuck at that. But what I don’t like is to think we enjoy his ill-gotten wealth, whether your view should be the true one or not. It is a disagreeable reflection.”

“But it’s not our fault,” said Alice; “how can we help it? Whom could we give it back to?”

“To be sure,” said Cecil, “there’s Harry Tiptoft living not ten miles off; but I doubt whether he would make any claim after a couple of centuries. And by the way, I remember now hearing of another shady ancestor who lost most of his fortune in play with Sandwich, and Dashwood, and Wilkes, and the Dilettanti lot, so let us hope Sir Everard’s money went that way. Our present wealth comes from my great grandfather, the famous admiral, and that at all events is clean money, honestly earned in fighting the French.”

“Let us get a candle and go and look at Sir Everard’s portrait in the picture gallery,” said she. “I shall regard him in future with increased interest, for a mystery attaches to him. I wonder what became of that poor second wife. I shall never rest till I find out.”

Arm linked in arm they mounted the grand staircase and reached a long gallery at the top of the house where pictures of deceased Maynards hung in a long series, some by famous artists, some by indifferent hands of little merit. Sir Everard’s picture was among the best works of Sir Peter Lely, who, though he generally devoted his art to what Walpole calls “the Court of Paphos,” occasionally painted a man, in a style both graceful and masculine. The countenance riveted their attention. It was handsome and refined, and at first sight attractive; but the longer you looked at it the less you liked it. Behind its superficial beauty there seemed to be a certain craftiness, a slyness in the eye, a satiric curl in the mouth. The figure was draped in a rich coat of crimson velvet, with ruffles and lace cravat, and in the background was a rough perfunctory likeness of Castle Maynard.

“Well,” said Cecil, “what do you think of him?”

“I think,” said she, “he looks like a cruel man, and I could believe anything of him.”

“Poor Sir Everard,” said Cecil. “He won’t get any favour from you. But it is very late and time we went to bed. So say good-bye to him and let us go.”

Cecil resolved to search among the family papers on the morrow for more information about this uncomfortable member of his family; and it was agreed that they should go to the church and have a good look at the alabaster effigy which preserved the likeness of that shifty politician.

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The Church of Castle Maynard stood a little way from the house just outside the park gate and at the end of the village street. Long and low its walls of flint and stone, hoary with age,

embosomed amid immemorial yews and shady elms, it was a typical example of an English village church. There are no such village churches in other countries as those of rural England; modest and yet comely, simple and yet refined, gems of homely art and beautiful restraint, rich in interest both historical and artistic, no two of them really alike, and each, unless it has been spoilt by later bad taste, generally possessing some special charm that distinguishes it from any other.

Cecil's ancestors were buried in an aisle or chapel belonging to the family. There were brasses inlaid in the floor with inscriptions in black letter; tablets on the walls, of more recent date, recording merits and virtues not perhaps remarkable during life, but discovered after the death of the person whom they commemorated; altar tombs with recumbent effigies, and knightly armour hanging above; and lastly Sir Everard's monument, the most sumptuous of them all, a Jacobean structure of marble, black, red, and white, against the wall, where under an arch Sir Everard in alabaster, painted and gilt, lay on his side raising himself on one elbow, and with a dog at his feet. A fullsome epitaph recorded his virtues with an unblushing assurance that made one think Sir Everard must have written it himself to forestall what his successor might perhaps say of him; and indeed it was said that the tomb was constructed in his lifetime, which accounted for its being in an earlier style than the date of his death warranted.

The morning sun was shining brightly through the window traceries, and flickering lights and shadows played over wall and monument, as the wind gently tossed the boughs of the trees and the trailing sprays of ivy that clung to the wall outside, when Cecil and his wife stood before the monument of the redoubtable Sir Everard. The old sexton and vergier was with them listening as Cecil translated the cumbrous Latin for the benefit of his wife.

"Law, sir," said he, "do'ee reelly say arl that 'bout Sir Everard? I alms heer tell as he was a bad 'un, beggin' your parding, sir, you bein' a relation."

"Yes, Walter," said Cecil, "it does say all that. Whatever he may have been in life, you see that is what he would like us to think of him after he was gone.

"Then Mr. Maynard, sir, I suppose many of these 'ere writings is no better than so many lies?"

"So it is, I fear," said Cecil. "But tell me, is there any monument to either of Sir Everard's wives? I know he was married twice."

"The first wife, sir, lies buried among her own people at Chaldicote. They took her away, I've heard tell, to spite Sir Everard."

"And the second wife, where does she lie?"

Old Walter looked uncomfortable, and shifted from one leg to the other and scratched his head before replying.

"That I can't tell 'ee, sir," said he. "They do say, but—well—I don't know nothing about it."

"But what do they say, Walter?" said Mrs. Maynard. "I am interested in that poor lady, and want to know all about her."

"Well, mum, when Squire arst me where she lie, I says I don't know. No more I don't, and wot's more, no more don't anybody know. But they do say," and here old Walter lowered his voice, "they do say she don't lie nowhere, and that she walks."

"And have you seen her, Walter?"

"No, no, mum, I never see her," he replied hastily. "Oh, no ! I never see her. But beggin' your parding, it's time for me to ring the bell and I must go. Oh, no! I never see 'er."

And so saying the old man shuffled off, as if to avoid any more questions on the subject.

"So you see, Cecil," said his wife, "we *have* a ghost in the family after all. Isn't it delicious?"

He laughed, and led her out into the sunshine. They wandered a little among the tombs, reading an inscription here and there. Many of the gravestones went back to the seventeenth century, and “if the dead who lie here could speak,” said they, “we might learn a good deal about Sir Everard, for they must have known him.”

“But look there,” said Alice, pointing to a headstone covered with hoary lichen that almost obliterated the inscription, “is not that word, Everard?”

“So it is,” said Cecil, and he stooped down to read the epitaph. With some trouble he made it out as follows:

HERE LYETH
ROGER TRUMBALL GENT.
SOMETIME STEWARD TO THE
NOBLE KNIGHT SIR EVERARD
MAYNARD. JUNE 24. 1662
THERE IS NO DEVICE IN THE
GRAVE WHITHER THOU GOEST
ECCL. IX 10.

“Here is one, at all events, who knew him well,” said Cecil, “but what a strange text to put on a man’s grave! One would think it was chosen by some one who owed him a grudge, and was glad to get him buried.”

“Sir Everard again no doubt,” said Mrs. Maynard, “the words ‘the noble knight,’ betray him. It is just his style.”

“Poor Sir Everard,” said Cecil, “you believe he murdered his two wives, and now I suppose you will have it that he murdered his steward, Roger Trumball, gent., and put up the tombstone to show his malice.”

“Well, I shouldn’t wonder if it were so, said she.

Cecil burst out laughing, and said though Sir Everard was a trimmer and a time-server, and a grabber of inheritances, it was going a long way further to make him a three-folk murderer as well, and so they both laughed and strolled back towards the castle.

“I fancy we are getting Sir Everard on the brain,” said Cecil as they wandered slowly over the pleasant green-sward. “Let us forget all about him; he is really not worth remembering, for though he may not be the blood-stained villain you would make him out, he was a mean trickster, and an unscrupulous and treacherous politician. Let us leave him there.”

“Why no, my dear,” said she. “I don’t think we know the worst about him. That poor second wife dwells on my mind. I wish we could find out what became of her.”

“That seems hopeless,” said he. “I wonder by the way, whether the Tiptofts could tell you anything about her. Harry Tiptoft is an old college friend of mine. We were at Merton together. Suppose we ask him over to come and stay a day or two. He can bring his fly-rod and try for a trout, and there are lots of rabbits on the hill that want shooting.”

The invitation was sent and accepted for the following week. Sir Henry Tiptoft, of Tiptoft Manor, Baronet and Justice of the Peace, was the Maynard’s nearest neighbour and a young man a couple of years Cecil’s senior, though they had been at Oxford together for more than a year. Any differences between the families arising from the unhappy marriage of the heiress of one branch of the Tiptofts with Sir Everard, and her mysterious fate, had long been forgotten and the Maynards and Tiptofts had for some generations been intimate friends. But as Cecil stood in his library with Harry Tiptoft’s letter in his hand, and the memory of their morning walk and visit to

the church fresh in his mind, he could not help recalling the ugly story of his crafty ancestor's marriage with poor Hilda Tiptoft, and of its mysterious sequel. From old Walter's hints he gathered that it had passed into the legendary stage among the villagers, and that a superstitious fear prevented their talking of it. But it all happened nearly three hundred years ago, and what, thought he, could they know about it? The truth must have come out long since, had there been anything in the story more than an ordinary parting of an uncongenial couple. And if she was never heard of again it might only be that she hid herself, so that her husband should never find her. And yet it was a queer story.

"Her disappearance," said Cecil to himself, seems to have caused some excitement at the time. Sir Everard's successors must have troubled themselves a good deal about it. I wonder whether there is anything among the papers in the muniment-room to throw light upon it. I'll go and have a hunt."

The muniment-room was a small chamber in an angle turret secured with iron doors. Within, the deeds and parchments were arranged on shelves in tin boxes carefully labelled; and in pigeon holes and drawers, numbered and dated, were papers of all kinds, old letters, old accounts, various documents of more or less interest bearing on the family history. Cecil was by this time becoming pretty well acquainted with the collection, and readily put his hand on the papers relating to the latter part of the seventeenth century. There were farming accounts, notes of lawsuits in which Sir Everard apparently dabbled a good deal, for he seemed to have disagreed with most of his neighbours. There were letters, some of them written by him to his parents when a little boy at Westminster, full of innocent, school-boy prattle, and generally ending with a petition for money. Dr. Busby, that great man who had flogged Sir Roger de Coverley's grandfather, figured in them sometimes as an awful being, too great to be criticised. It was pathetic, in view of the writer's after career, to read these simple childish epistles, full of happy, youthful spirits and warm home affections. Cecil put them back with something like a sigh. Among the letters was a lock of fair curly hair tied with a faded blue ribbon, and wrapped in a paper on which was written in a woman's hand: "my dear boy's hair on his first going away to school."

It would have been better for poor Sir Everard, thought Cecil, had he died young, an innocent, warm-hearted school boy.

As he replaced the parcel of letters, he dislodged from a corner where it seemed to have been purposely concealed with some care, a small packet of papers in a sealed wrapper, endorsed in a clerkly hand on the outside. Roger Trumball, 1662.

"Oh!" said Cecil to himself, "Roger Trumball! That is the man whose tombstone had that queer text from Ecclesiastes upon it. If I remember, he is described as Sir Everard's steward. I dare say these are only bills, or accounts of rents, or sales of stock, of no particular interest." He was just going to put the parcel back where he found it, but on second thoughts he broke the seal and glanced at the contents. Something that caught his eye made him pause, and after a moment's reflection he locked up the muniment-room, and took Roger Trumball's packet with him back to the library.

The packet consisted only of about a dozen loose sheets of paper, written evidently at different times, and in a hand sometimes beautifully clear in the fine calligraphy of that age, and sometimes merely scribbled as if in haste or fear. On the inside of the wrapper were these words:

"I, Roger Trumball, being in deadly fear for my lyfe, put these papers where perchance they will be found and ye truth known. Lord, how long shall y^e wicked, how long shall y^e wicked triumph."

This portends something serious, thought Cecil, as he drew his chair to the table, and spread the manuscripts before him. They were all dated, and he arranged and read them in order. The first one was imperfect, beginning in the middle of a sentence.

“ comyng home of my ladye. Would God thyngs were better ordered for her. I cannot but grieve.”

The next paper was dated 1661, and seemed to be written after an interval.

“Sept. 15, 1661.—Strange things have happened to-day. My duty calls me to continue this record for my dear ladye’s sake. To-day my master called me to the small parlour. There was a table set and my Ladye Hulda sat thereat, with a parchment before her and pen and ink. She looked pale, poore sowle. My master was walking up and downe the room seeminglie much distraught. ‘Now, Hilda,’ he said speaking as it were mildly, ‘here is Roger come to witness your signature.’ ‘Roger,’ he said to me, ‘you will sign here as witness after my ladye.’ But my ladye made no movement and sat with her pretty hands in her lap. ‘Come, Hilda,’ said he, ‘we are waiting, what is wrong with you?’ ‘I will not sign this,’ said she at last, speaking low. ‘What,’ said he in his softest manner, ‘and why not, my dear?’ My ladye cast on him a look of contempt, mistrusting his gentleness. ‘You know why,’ at last she said, ‘you know my condition.’ ‘What, and let half your land go to your beggerly Roundhead Tiptoft cousins! By heaven! No!’ said he. ‘The land is mine,’ said my ladye, ‘and I love my cousins.’ My master stamped on the floor. The evil look I know so well came into his face. ‘By God!’ he said furiously, ‘sign it you shall; alive or dead, I’ll have all the land from you.’ ‘You will never get it by frightening me,’ said my dear ladye, who has a fine bold way with her when she is misspoken. My master, in a passion snatched ye parchment up. ‘Go,’ said he to me, and I left the room much concerned for my poore ladye, and doubting some mischance.”

There was an interval of nearly two months between this paper and the following one, which was written less carefully.

“Nov. 5, 1661.—Truly I am grieved to the heart for my poore ladye. My master treateth her unkindly, for though he speak softly, his tongue deviseth mischief s like a sharp razor, working deceitfully, as saith the Psalmist. This day I had occasion to speak with him on the matter of Bullfinch Acre, and I found him on the terrace with my ladye. As I came near I heard him say: ‘To give your lands to those Tiptofts is but a kind of treason. They are Roundheads and enemies to the throne now so happily restored.’ ‘And so were you a Roundhead as you call them,’ said my ladye, ‘when Oliver ruled the roost. At all events my poor cousins have not ratted from a falling house.’ ‘Oh, my dear,’ said he, ‘I now know better. I have learned on which side the right lies.’ ‘I think,’ said my ladye firing up, ‘you are a better judge upon which side the might lies.’ This roused my master’s choler, and turning on his heel, he saw me. ‘What, eavesdropping, Roger? I have a good mind—’ said he, raising his cane as if to strike me. But I looked him in the face and he saw I was not one to take a beating quietly. ‘What brings you here, listening to what concerns you not.’ I told him my business, and he said I was to take it to him on the morrow, and I left them. Truly, my dear ladye hath a high spirit, and can give a shrewd answer, but what says the Proverb: ‘A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.’

“Nov. 12.—My master being away in London on some affairs, and my ladye biding at home alone, she sent the maid Madelon who waiteth on her, to say she would fain speak with me. This girl is not to my liking, for things are told of her and my master that are not seemly. So she said, smirking, and looking out of the corner of her eyes as is her way with mankind:

“ ‘Master Roger, my ladye will have you to meet her on the terrace anon.’

“ ‘Well, Madelon,’ said I, ‘I will do my ladye’s bidding at once,’ and I turned to go, for I liked not her company.

“ ‘But why so hasty,’ Master Roger, said she playing with her ribbons, ‘May we not have a pleasant word together? we have not met for a long while. And what do you think my ladye wants you I or?’

“ ‘Nay, I know not,’ said I, ‘she will tell me herself and then I shall know.’

“ ‘She looked for a minute or so for a further answer, and as none came, she said:

“ ‘Well then, go for a churl as you are. I am sorry I wasted words on you,’ and so she went. She is a comely lass enough, but a bold one, and I mistrust her. Doth not the wise man, say ‘As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion?’

“ ‘I found my dear ladye walking alone on the terrace. She was pale and the tears were in her eyes.

“ ‘Roger, come here,’ said she, ‘I want a word with you. I think you are true and that I may trust you.’

“ ‘Indeed you may, madam, I would serve you to the death,’ said I, for I was sorely grieved to see how sad she was.

“ ‘I believe you,’ said she, ‘and I will tell you what you can do for me. You have seen and heard enough, Roger, to know how things go with me.’

“ ‘Alack! madam,’ I said, ‘and sore grieved I am that matters should be so between you and my master.’

“ ‘You know, Roger, my people have fought on the losing side, and now they will be made to suffer for it, and I dare say are already in danger.’

“ ‘Aye, madam, Sir Charles Tiptoft and your cousins fought for the good cause—I mean for Parliament,’ said I correcting myself, for times are changed, and it is not prudent to speak well of the Commonwealth.

“ ‘Yet you were right, Roger, to call it the good cause, for so I hold it myself. And now my uncle and cousins will be in trouble and lose their lands, if not their lives, and I want to save half of my estate to bestow on them in their need when it will be safe to do so. But Sir Everard prevents me and will have it all.’

“ ‘I told her that was what I understood from what I had witnessed; and further that I had heard the sequestrators were already at Tiptoft Manor taking a valuation of the estate.

‘I know nothing of it, Roger, and what I want you to do is to ride over and find out what has happened, and bring me word. They keep everything from me. My own waiting-maid, I believe is a spy upon me, for everything I do or say is reported to Sir Everard.’

“ ‘I told her on no account to trust Madelon, who I was sure would betray and ruin her if she could. My mistress was much startled at this, and thanked me for my warning. I promised to ride over to Tiptoft which is but 10 or 12 miles away, the next morning, and so left her—

“Nov. 14, 1661.—This morning, my master being still away, my ladye sent for me to meet her as before on the terrace. I had been to Tiptoft Manor, and I knew she was expecting me. As I appeared, she came anxiously to meet me, and asked what news I brought.

“ ‘Alas! madam,’ said I, ‘I would I had better news for you, for I bring sad tidings. The Manor is in the hands of the sequestrators, and your uncle and cousins are not there.’

“ ‘I did not tell her that her uncle was in jail, as a supporter of the late Rebellion, and that her cousins were in London trying to get together interest among their friends to save his life, and also, if possible, his estate. She told me she was now at a loss what to do. That she hoped, if her family had been there to have escaped to them, for that her life here was not to be borne any longer. That she had hoped for my help, and that she was so watched and guarded that without aid, her escape was impossible.

“ ‘But now,’ said she, ‘that hope is gone, and I am a wretched woman. I sometimes think he wishes me dead, and then he would have his way with my estate, for my uncle and cousins are in no case to resist him. There is nowhere now for me to fly to. But promise me one thing, Roger,’ said she.

“ ‘I said I would faithfully promise to do all she asked me, even at the peril of my life if needs be.

“ ‘Then promise me, Roger,’ she said, ‘that if anything should befall me, you will seek out my cousins and tell them all you know.’

“ ‘And what but good should befall such a virtuous and obedient wife?’ said a gentle voice behind us, and there stood my master with his evil smile that means mischief. He had come in time to hear my ladye’s last words. I trust he did not hear what passed between us before.

“ ‘I see, Madam,’ he continued, ‘you have chosen a confidant, and that you are enlisting my servant against me.’

“ ‘You leave me no choice,’ she said, ‘when do you ever let me see a friend.’

“ ‘That you may enlist him also I suppose,’ said he, ‘No, Hilda, I cannot have another enemy within my borders,’ and then, turning sharply to me, ‘and you, Master Steward, must be taught to know your place, and not to meddle with what concerns you not.’

“I had it in my mind to answer him, yet it might have made matters worse. For what saith the Psalmist?: ‘I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me.’ He gave me an ugly look, and led my ladye away into y^e house. I much fear evil is intended against her, and what can I do to help her, poor sowle?

“Well, upon my word,” said Cecil to himself, laying down Roger’s manuscript, and leaning back in his chair when he had read thus far. “My disreputable ancestor seems to have been a domestic tyrant of the worst kind. I wonder what comes next. I think I must call Alice, for the plot thickens, and she is interested in that ‘poor sowle,’ as Roger calls her. Roger, by the way, seems to have been an honest fellow, and I hope he stood by his ‘dear ladye’ to some purpose. I’ll go and call Alice to hear the rest of the story.”

Mrs. Maynard, however, saved him the trouble, by entering the room at that moment. She had her garden hat on.

“What are you doing, Cecil?” said she. “I want you to come out and see the roses. They are lovely.”

“All right,” said he, “we’ll go by and by. I’ve something here that will interest you more. You remember that tombstone of Roger Trumball, steward to the noble knight, and so on, that we saw in the churchyard. I’ve found a sort of diary of his all about that poor second wife of his noble knight, whose fate interests you so much. You had better run your eye over the pages I have read, and then we will go on. There is more to come.”

“Why, what a tyrant!” said she, when she had finished reading. “He is every bit as bad as I thought him. You won’t defend him now, Cecil?”

“Well, we have not come to a murder yet,” said Cecil, “and, according to you, he has three standing to his account.”

“Three! I should not wonder if there were half a dozen,” said she. “I think your Sir Everard was capable of anything. But do let us go on. I am dying to know what happened, and it makes it so real to have it all from the mouth of an actual eyewitness that it is almost as horrible as if it were happening now.”

Cecil took up the manuscript again and cast his eye over the next page to that where he left off.

“By heavens!” said he, “we seem coming to a crisis.

“March 5, 1662.—I, Roger Trumball, take up my pen after many months, being in some concern for my safety, but more for that of my dear ladye. For how shall I say it? She is gone, and I know not whither. It is a month now since she disappeared. My master hath made search for her, but he seemeth not to care to find her. Her own people at Tiptoft Manor are away, and I know not where to seek for them in order to discharge my promise to my dear ladye. The idle jade Madelon flaunteth in ribbons and gay attire and plays the mistress. She says forsooth she is housekeeper. I know not what to think.

“Mar. 10.—To-day happening to be in y stone gallery, I picked up a glove. ‘ ’Tis my ladye’s,’ said I. ‘What is that?’ said my master, who was near by; ‘give it to me’; and he turned it over and

threw it on the fire. 'Maybe,' said I, 'she dropped it as she went away.' My master changed colour and looked hard at me without speaking. 'Went away,' said he. 'Perchance you know whither she went and where she is.'

" 'No, sir,' said I, 'an I knew I would tell you, and if she were in trouble do my best to h'~lp her.'

" 'I doubt you will never find her,' said he, looking sourly at me.

" 'Maybe, sir,' said I, 'you have a better clue than I.'

"I know not what made me say that; but it had a queer effect. My master turned pale, looked hard at me for the space of a minute, and walked away without a word. I marvelled at his manner.

"Mar. 11.—I write this from my bed in y^c steward's room, being hurt, though not badly. Last night, coming back to the Castle through the woods, I heard a shot, and felt a blow on my leg which brought me to the ground, where I lay till Giles the keeper came in sight, to whom I called for help. 'Why, Master Roger,' quoth he, as he lifted me up, 'what's wrong with you? Why, you bleed like a pig,' and, whipping off his handkerchief, he bound up my wound as well as he could, and then, leaning on his shoulder, I managed to get home and to bed, where good Mistress Margery, the still-room maid, tended me, and sent for the leech. I saw no man in the wood, and know not of any that beareth me an ill-will. My wound is only slight, but I shall be lame for a while. There is great talk of it among the servants.

"April 30.—This day I was summoned to the Hall, where sat my master and with him was Denis Cowley, the farmer of Hay-hill.

" 'Roger,' said my master, speaking quite smooth and gently, 'I have been asking Denis for his quarter's rent, and he says he paid it to you.'

" 'That is so, ain't it, Master Roger,' said Denis, 'and here is the receipt and your name to it.'

" 'Quite right,' said I, 'and you will mind, sir, how I handed it on to you the next day.'

Indeed,' said he, 'I do not mind it; 'but if so you will have my note of it in your book.'

I will go this moment and fetch it,' said I, and I went to my room. My master was speaking so mildly and gently that I doubted he had some mischief in hand, for he is never so dangerous as when he is in that vein. However, I brought him the book and put it in his hand.

" 'Well, Roger,' said he, turning over page after page, 'I don't find the note you speak of. You know you always take a note from me to show I have had the money.'

" 'That is true, sir,' said I. 'Denis's rent is the last entry in the book, and there you will find it. I mind well your writing it in the small parlour, and you putting the money away.'

"He looked, at me queerly for a minute, and then said, 'Take your book, then, and find it for yourself.'

"But, when I looked, the page was gone.

" 'Have you found it?' he asked.

" 'Sir, I know not who hath done it, but the page is gone.'

" 'Indeed,' said he, 'that's odd, but I think it would have been still odder had you found it, for I don't believe it ever was there.'

"I was so taken aback that I could find no words for a moment.

" 'It is not the first time, Roger, I have had my suspicion of you. And now here is honest Master Cowley to prove you had the money, and your book to show you never paid it to me.'

" 'Sir,' said I, 'you know you had the money. But this seems a plot to ruin me. I'll make the money good if you wish, but I'll never submit to be called a thief.'

" 'Denis,' said my master, 'you hear him. He admits he took it and will make it good. But,' said he, turning to me, 'that won't clear you. You are a thief, and by God it's a hanging matter if I give you up. If I spare you for a while you will owe it to my mercy. Now go.'

"I went slowly to my room, for my lameness still troubled me, and sat down to think it over. I examined the book, and saw how the page had been cut out with a sharp knife. There has been some foul treachery here. 'Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man, and preserve me from the wicked man.' Truly David had his trouble from traitors when he wrote that. As I sat on my bed I thought of all that had befallen me of late: first the wound in my leg, and now this plot for my ruin. My life and my honour were both in danger, but who was my enemy, and who would be the better for my destruction? I knew my master disliked me for my confidence with his ladye, and then there came into my mind his strange behaviour when I found the glove and spoke with him of

my ladye's loss. It was the very night after that that I was shot, and thoughts came into my mind that there might be some link between the two things. But I dare write no more of this. My master hath me in his power, for who will take my word against his as to this matter of the money?

"June 10.—Great to-do among the servants about Madelon, who is to go to her home. It seems the master has misused her, and she would have none of it, and so she is to leave. I fear I have misjudged the girl, and that she is better than I thought her. This day I happened on her coming out of my room. I was surprised, for she had no call to be there. She had been crying, and I spoke to her kindly.

" 'Why, mistress Madelon,' said I, 'I hear you are going, but that should not grieve you; you will be well out of this house.'

" 'Indeed I shall, Master Roger. I would I had never entered it. I have been made to do things I am ashamed of, and am sorry for now. And for some of them I cannot now make amends; it is too late.'

" 'Why so, Madelon?

" 'Nay, you know very well,' said she. 'I mean my mistress.'

" 'I know,' said I, 'you were set to spy on her by my master.'

" 'I was,' she said; 'he made me, and I am sorry I did it.'

" 'And do you know where she is,' said I, 'and what has happened to her?'

"Madelon looked round and waited to know if any one were within hearing before she answered in a whisper:

" 'Nay; I know not, though I can make guess, and I think he suspects me. I hate him, Roger, and will do him a mischief if I can, for he has treated me vilely.' Here we heard steps approaching, and the girl said in haste:

" 'I know you love me not, Master Roger, but I have been a better friend to you than you wot of,' and with that she ran away.

"My master has said nothing more to me about the money, but I can see he views me with an evil eye. My leg troubles me sorely, and I doubt I am lamed for life, though I can ride, and get about with a stick well enough. I have no news yet of Sir Charles or his sons, and it vexes me that I cannot perform what I promised my dear ladye; but I have sworn on the Holy Bible that I will perform it, and that, alive or dead, I will make known unto them what she suffered before we lost her, and what has since befallen her should I find out."

"I wonder," said Alice, as Cecil laid down the manuscript for a minute, "whether poor Roger ever did find the Tiptofts and redeem his promise."

"We shall have Harry Tiptoft here in a day or two," said Cecil, "and he may be able to tell us something about it. But I fancy they know as little over there of the story of poor Hilda as I did till I happened on this account in the 'County History' which set us all on this quest."

"Well, go on," said she. "I hope poor Roger came to no harm from that murderous master of his."

Cecil resumed the reading:

"June 15.—A strange thing happened to-day. I was receiving rents from two or three tenants for their farms, and giving them receipts. It was the first time this had happened since the affair of Master Denis Cowley, and this time I resolved there should be no handle for my master's malice, and that in future the book in which he noted that I paid him the money should be kept in a more secure place under lock and key. So I put the money in a bag, and took down my notebook, and opened it, and a piece of paper flew out upon the floor. When I picked it up I saw it was the missing leaf, with my master's receipt on it. I was so taken aback that I sat down again to think it over, for I was fairly overcome. Then I bethought me of Madelon, and how I surprised her coming out of my room, and of her words at parting. and it was borne in upon me that she had cut the page out at her master's bidding, and had kept it for future service if needs should be, and had put it back when her master had offended her. I blessed the girl in my heart and forgave her for what she first did, and I rejoiced to feel that my master had no longer that hold over me. I saw plainly it had

been a plot to get me into his power, so that I should not be able to stir hand or foot against him for fear of the gallows. But what had I against him? I bethought me of that I said to him about my ladye's loss when I found the glove, which might have made him think I suspected him of something wrong. But he had no reason, for I knew nothing then, and I know nothing now about my poore ladye's fate. And then it was borne in upon me that perhaps he knew more about it than he would have me suspect. I begin to fear that there has been some foul play, and I then remembered Madelon's last words. I must see her again."

"However, after a while I recovered myself and, taking my notebook and the money, I sought my master in the great library, where it was his pleasure to sit. I told him I had brought the rents and I laid them on the table that he might count them, and I spread the note-book open before him that he might enter his receipt. When he had signed his name, he said:

" 'This time you are right, Roger. Last time you made a little mistake, if I remember.'

" 'Sir Everard,' said I, 'I know not what you mean. If there were a mistake 'twas not I that made it.'

" 'A little mistake,' said he, smiling, 'that brought you within danger of the gallows, eh, Master Roger.'

" 'Nay, sir,' I replied, quite coolly, ' 'twas not I that was in danger of the gallows. I mind me there is a law to punish those that plot to ruin their fellows by false charges.'

"He turned furiously on me. I wonder I had the courage to threaten him as I did. But I was mad with anger.

Plot and punishment,' cried he. 'You dare to accuse and threaten me, gallows-bird; to jail you shall go this day and stay there till the hangman is ready for you.'

" 'You charge me with stealing the money, though you had it fairly from me, and gave me your receipt,' said I.

" 'Show me the receipt, then,' cried he savagely. 'You know you have not got one.'

"I took from my pocket the loose leaf I found in my book and held it before him.

" 'Give it me,' he cried.

" 'Nay,' said I, 'it shall not leave me again.'

"He sank back in his seat. The blood rushed to his face, and he sat staring at me with his mouth open for the space of a minute. At last he began to stammer out a word or two of excuse, but he could hardly speak for shame and mortification. I gathered up my books and papers, but as I turned to go I heard him mutter to himself, 'the jade—played me false.'

"I fear I have angered my master beyond sufferance, and that he may take some vengeance upon me, for he is one that never forgives, though he smooths his anger over with fair pretence. I bethink me of that shot in the wood, and doubt I am in some danger of my life. I pray God I may live to find my ladye, and to fulfil the promise to which I have sworn. 'Deliver me from mine enemies, O God, defend me from them that rise up against me.'

"June 23.—This morning I found on my writing-desk a note written in a hand that I knew not, and none of the servants could say how it came there. It was written in a crabbed style by one who was no scribe.

*'To Master Roger Trumball,
'these.*

'Look to yourself; there is mischief determined against you. Where you found the glove you may find more. Sir Charles is home.—M.'

"I take it this comes from Madelon. It is a kind lass and I thank her. I must be careful.

"To-day I had occasion to speak with my master on business. Since the matter of the receipt note he hath avoided me, though when we meet he treateth me civilly. I found him to-day in the stone gallery. There were two masons there, and work going on. Some furniture had been moved, and I saw a hole in the wall, which was being built up. I had never noticed it before, and indeed a cabinet had stood in front, and I was curious to see what it was. My master seemed anxious to prevent me, and stood in my way. It was dark within, and I thought I saw a door some way back,

but my master called me away with him to the other part of the room, and, as the cabinet that had been moved out stood across, I could see no more what was behind it. My master said he had long been troubled with a draught from that empty cupboard, and was having it walled up. When I had discharged my business I said to him:

“ ‘Sir, they say Sir Charles Tiptoft hath made terms with the government, and is now at home. Would you that I ride and tell him of my ladye? I doubt he knows not of her loss, for he has been in jail till now.’

“ ‘No!’ said he, ‘let him find it out by himself. I will have no dealings with malcontents and Roundheads.’

“This put me out, for I had hoped to have seen my ladye’s family and to have discharged my trust. So I went about my business as usual till after noon. In the evening my master sent for me. I found him walking up and down the library, and he seemed in a good humour.

“ ‘Roger,’ he said, ‘I think you were right this morning and I was wrong about Sir Charles. It is true we were on different sides in politics, and during the war, enemies, but that is all happily over, and we must now live in good fellowship as neighbours. He ought to know about my poore wyfe, which will grieve him as it grieves me, and you shall ride over to-morrow and tell him of her sad and strange departure, and of our failure to find out whither she has gone.’

“I was much surprised to hear him talk in this way, for he had never shown much love for my dear ladye while she was with him.

“ ‘What time will you start?’ asked he.

“I said I would start about ten o’clock next morning.

“ ‘And which way will you go?’

“I said the nighest way would be by Langford and Chaldicote.

“ ‘Aye, aye,’ said he, ‘that will take you through the woods, and be pleasant riding this summer weather. it is hot, and tomorrow you know is Midsummer Day. I would not ride fast if I were you, but take it slowly through the forest.’

“I said I took it kindly of him to think of me so, and that I was sure Sir Charles would be much grieved by my news.

“ ‘Truly, I think so,’ said he. ‘You start, then, at ten o’clock to-morrow morning. Do not be later. And you go through Langford and Chaldicote, by way of the forest? I wish you a pleasant ride. Be sure and see me when you come back.’ So I took my leave, marvelling much at his pleasant humour, and yet somehow mistrusting him, for I knew him to be treacherous. As I reached the door, I turned and saw him looking at me with a strange smile on his face that I did not like.

“So to-morrow I shall tell all I know to my ladye’s kin, as I have sworne, and yet it cometh not to much, though I suspect a good deal. Alive or dead, I have sworne, and I know I shall keep my oath. Yet I like not my master’s manner. Why so nice about my road and about the hour? The wood was where I was shot. I will be wary, and go armed. And as I shall be away it will be safer if I hide these records of my dealings with my master and my ladye in some place where they may not be found, should ought befall me, till this tyranny be overpast.

“To-morrow is Midsummer Day. Today is what the Papists called St. John’s Eve, when all enchantments come undone, and the truth appears. Would that it might reveal the truth of what befell my deare Ladye.”

Here Cecil stopped.

“Well, go on,” said his wife. “We can’t stop here. I wonder how he fared on his ride.”

“That’s all,” said Cecil. “There is no more.”

They looked at one another.

“Do you remember,” said Cecil, “the date on poor Roger’s tombstone?”

“Yes,” said she, “I do. I remember it was June 24, 1662. I particularly remember noticing that it was Midsummer Day.”

“And this last entry was written on Midsummer Eve,” said Cecil, “so poor Roger never got to Tiptoft Manor, and has never yet been able to keep his promise.

* * *

Flaming June was more than half spent when Sir Henry Tiptoft drove up to Castle Maynard, and was welcomed in the hall by his host and hostess. The luncheon bell was ringing, and as soon as the visitor had been shown his room, and washed off the dust of travel, they sat down in the cool oak-panelled dining-room, overlooking the old-fashioned garden. It was the last addition to the house, built in the time of George II., with tall panels reaching up to the ceiling, and a wide marble chimneypiece placed cornerwise across one angle. A room stately and yet homely, not unlike a Common-room at Oxford.

The talk was such as was natural between old friends—Oxford memories, local gossip, speculations concerning the harvest and hay-crop—and after luncheon they adjourned to the garden, and had coffee on the terrace, with a lovely view of park and river, a real English landscape, green and lush. The old house, too, was typically English, and could have been in no other land, a mixture of splendour and homeliness, state and comfort. The main part was Jacobean, of red brick, mellowed by time, with many gables, mullioned windows and projecting bays. But at the end was a considerable part of the old castle of Plantagenet times, finished at the river brink with a huge round tower that rose above the highest roof, and was the most conspicuous feature in the structure. As the ground fell steeply towards the river, the tower descended some twenty feet below the ground floor level and the terrace in front of the rest of the house. The old part was built of flint and wrought stone, with windows enlarged to comfortable dimensions from the original arrow-slits.

Henry Tiptoft was as yet a bachelor, but was to be married shortly. He had passed through Oxford with distinction, and was already making his mark in the county as an able magistrate, and it was thought he meant to contest the seat in Parliament. His tastes, however, were rather literary and scientific than such as make the ardent politician. While an undergraduate at Merton, he had published at his own expense a small volume of poems, of which he was now heartily ashamed, and since then had made some more successful efforts in prose. He was a bit of an antiquary and a student of history. His poetical vein had not been dried up by his early failure; his imagination was strong and active, and not a little touched with sentiment. Castle Maynard appealed to him strongly and roused him to enthusiasm.

“I had not realised,” said he, “what a wonderful old home you have. My old house is not bad, about the date of your Jacobean part, but your remains of the old *chateau fort* is beyond anything at Tiptoft.”

“Yes; it’s not a bad old place, is it,” said Cecil. “I’m very fond of it, and have been amusing myself since I came here with trying to learn all about its history.”

“That’s well,” said his friend; “it shows you deserve to own it. I can’t understand how any man of intelligence can live in an old historical place without hunting up all that can be known about it. I’ve been doing a bit in that way at Tiptoft, but you have more ample material here and a longer history.”

“We have only just discovered that we have a ghost,” said Mrs. Maynard. “For a long time I thought there wasn’t one, and I was quite disappointed.”

“Really! And have you seen it? And, pray, whose ghost is it?”

“Why, it’s rather funny, Sir Henry, that you should ask me that question, for the ghost is one of your own family.”

“Indeed! You interest me greatly. I am a profound believer in ghosts, and never miss a meeting of the *Psychical Society*,” said he, laughing. “But, tell me, who of my family is it that favours you with a visit, Mrs. Maynard?”

“Did you ever hear of a Hilda Tiptoft in the time of Charles II., who was married to Sir Everard Maynard?”

“Why, I think I have, now you mention it. Was there not some tragedy about it?”

Quite right,” said Cecil. “She was lost, or ran away, or at all events she disappeared, and my wife will have it her husband murdered her.”

“Why, Cecil, you know he did,” said she. “I confess things look rather black against him,” said Cecil. “But we haven’t quite got to the bottom of that story. However, at all events, we have convicted him of murdering another person. I have evidence enough to hang my respectable ancestor if I had him here.”

“Well, every family has its black sheep,” said Sir Henry. “I dare say we Tiptofts have not always been angels. But where did you get all this story from? You speak as if you had made a discovery.”

“So we have, Sir Henry,” said Mrs. Maynard. “You must get Cecil to show you the papers we have found, written by an eyewitness of all Sir Everard’s atrocities.”

“Not quite that,” said Cecil, laughing. “A man can hardly be summoned as an eyewitness of his own murder. And we are not quite sure yet that Sir Everard really murdered anyone else.”

“I was in hope,” said Mrs. Maynard, “that Sir Henry would have been able to help us to clear the matter up. But I fear he knows nothing about it.”

“No! I am sorry to say that, beyond a vague idea that there was a mystery about poor Hilda Tiptoft, I know nothing more. But I should like, of all things, to see the papers you have found if I may be allowed to do so.”

“By all means, my dear Henry,” said Cecil. “In fact we have been looking forward to your doing so, in hope you may throw some light on the mystery. To speak seriously, it is really a gruesome story, and, told as it is at first hand, I confess it made an unpleasant impression on me, although it all happened so long ago. But you shall see the papers and judge for yourself.”

They had tea under the trees by the river at the foot of the great tower, at which Tiptoft looked with interest.

“What is there in the lower part of this great tower?” said he. “It is a whole storey below the rest of the house.”

“Nothing at all, so far as I know,” said Cecil.

“That’s disappointing,” said Sir Henry. “I thought at least some crusading Maynard had a dungeon there where he kept captive Jews like *Front-de-Boeuf*, and drew their teeth in order to extract their gold.”

“No. I fancy it is solid,” said Cecil. “At all events, if there is anything inside there’s no way of getting into it.”

After tea some neighbours dropped in, and there was tennis, and then they dined, and after dinner they sat on the terrace, and the men smoked and talked till far into the pleasant summer night before they went to bed.

The next few days were spent in the way usual at a country house. There was fishing and a little rabbit shooting, and a villagers’ cricket match, where under the captaincy of the blacksmith, Maynard and Tiptoft helped Castle Maynard to beat a rival eleven from Chaldicote. And it was not till the day before midsummer that Henry Tiptoft recollected the papers, of which he had been promised a view. It was a rainy morning, and he thought he could not spend the time more

agreeably than in reading them. They were produced from the muniment-room and spread out in order on the table in the library, and Cecil, who had business to attend to, left his friend to amuse himself till the evening. Scarcely, however, had he settled himself comfortably at the table with the prospect of an interesting historical research, exactly to his taste, before Mrs. Maynard made demands on his company, and then alter luncheon they went for a ride, and it was not till after tea that he at last sat down quietly to enjoy Roger Trumball's diary.

Cecil Maynard did not get back till just before dinner, and had only time to dress and join his wife and his friend in the great hall before they were marshalled by the butler into the dining-room. During dinner Henry was rather silent and abstracted, and left his host and hostess to carry on most of the conversation. Cecil had been at quarter sessions, and was full of stories and episodes of the proceedings, and Mrs. Maynard had much to say of village matters and local politics, and so they hardly noticed the change in their guest's manner. It was not till Mrs. Maynard had retired, leaving them on the terrace smoking, that Cecil was struck by Sir Henry's silence, and could not help asking him whether anything was amiss.

"I'm glad you asked me," said Tiptoft. "I've been longing to tell you, but I could not speak of it while Mrs. Maynard was here, for fear of frightening her."

"Why, what has happened?" said Cecil in some alarm.

"I've been reading those papers you showed me," said he. "They leave off abruptly, and there cannot be much doubt that he was in danger on that ride of his. Do you know anything further about it?"

"I do, indeed. You may have noticed that the last page was dated June 23, 1662, the date of his ride to your house. In our churchyard here we found Roger Trumball's tombstone with the date of his death, June 24, 1662, the day following."

"I see. You mean that he was murdered on his way. The ride was a plot of his master to get rid of him?"

"Just so. And the tombstone must have been put up by his murderer. He suspected Roger of scheming to expose him, and so sent him to his death and wrote on his tombstone '*There is no device in the grave whither thou goest.*' Can you conceive a more ghastly piece of Satanic humour?"

"Devilish, indeed. But do you remember why Roger wanted to go to Tiptoft?"

Yes," said Cecil. "it was to tell your people how his poor mistress had been treated, and had disappeared, and no doubt to hint at some foul play so as to put an inquiry on foot."

"He says he had promised his dear lady he would do this, living or dead, and that he had sworn it on the Holy Bible, if you remember."

"I remember," said Cecil. "But, poor fellow, he did not live to fulfil his promise."

"He says living or dead," replied Tiptoft.

"What do you mean?" said Cecil, looking at him after a pause.

"He has fulfilled it," said Henry.

There was silence for some minutes. At last, recovering his composure which had been much disturbed, Henry continued:

"I'll tell you exactly what happened. You know I was in the library? Well, as I read poor Roger Trumball's story I became more and more absorbed. It seemed to fascinate me in a way I never had experienced before. It was as if the scene were before me; as if it were being enacted now, and by living men and women, instead of having happened nearly three hundred years ago by those who are now dust and ashes. It laid hold of me in such a way that I seemed to lose my own identity, and to be a mere visionary spectator of a horrible drama; of scenes in which, though I

was present, I was powerless to act. A sense of something supernatural overcame me, unseen influences seemed around me, and as I finished the last page I sat a few minutes trying in vain to collect my faculties. At last I rose from my chair, and, leaving the manuscript open upon the table, I walked to the fireplace. I looked round the room. This was the place, I said to myself, where the scene took place between Roger and his master, when he confounded him by producing the missing receipt. This was the room, too, where the last scene in the story was enacted, and I seemed to see Sir Everard with his devilish hypocritical bonhomie laying the trap for his victim's death, and poor Roger, loyal to his mistress, falling into the trap, not without some misgivings, but resolved at all hazards to fulfil his promise to tell all he knew to the Tiptofts. He had sworn he would do it, living or dead. I found myself saying aloud almost unconsciously, 'living or dead; living or dead.'

"At that moment I happened to turn my eye towards the place where I had been sitting. That part of the room was in shadow, and the evening was beginning to set in, but I saw at the table a figure standing and seeming to look at the papers that lay there. Thinking it was a servant come to arrange the room, for I did not see him very distinctly, I said, 'Please do not disturb those papers; I will attend to them.' As he took no notice, I repeated what I said. The figure slowly turned and looked at me. Something seemed to seize me by the throat and stop my speech, and I could only look at him in silence. The face was grave, and the expression good and kindly. He seemed a man of middle age, strongly built, dressed in sober brown or grey, but I did not much notice his dress, for his face fascinated me. He took up the last page of the diary and put his finger on the bottom line, and then laid it down. A noise at the other end of the room startled me, and I looked round. When I turned my head again he was gone. I looked at the line to which he pointed. These were the words: '*Alive or dead, I have sworn, and I know I shall keep my oath.*' And then I knew he had kept it to-night."

The two men sat silent for a while, and then Cecil said:

"A strange story. You, I know, are a believer in psychical phenomena. I am not. Forgive my asking, but are you quite sure it was not a dream? It is exactly what one might dream after having been excited as you were by this gruesome story. I felt something like you myself as I read it, and had to keep thinking and saying to myself this is all ancient history, the actors are gone and turned to dust, and the sinners have paid the penalty of their misdeeds, long long ago."

"I don't wonder at your doubt, my dear Cecil. In your place I might doubt too. But believe me, it was no dream, for there was no awaking. I remember walking out of the library to my bedroom quite distinctly, and I can recall all that passed till we met at dinner. No. Roger swore to take his message to a Tiptoft, and he has, I firmly believe, fulfilled his promise."

"Well, there are more things in heaven and earth—you know the rest," said Cecil. "And now, I see, you are shaken and want a good night's rest, so let us go."

But Tiptoft could not rest when he got to his bedroom. His nerves were shaken and still in a flutter. If it had really been a vision, and not, as Maynard supposed, a dream, what did it mean? What was to follow? It could hardly have been allowed without a purpose, and the matter could not end here. He walked to the window and leaned out. The moon was high in the clear summer sky, and touched the landscape with magic light. The old crusading tower shone out white and brilliantly against the dark trees beyond the river, of which the gentle murmur as it broke over its rocky bed, was the only sound audible. Henry thought of all those ancient walls had witnessed, of good and evil, joy and sorrow, of crime and mystery, of Sir Everard and poor Roger Trumball, and of the pitiful lady whose fate was unknown, and whose blood ran in his veins. A strange fancy possessed him that Roger had bequeathed the quest to him, and that it was his part to solve

the mystery of Hilda Tiptoft. In vain did he pooh! pooh! the idea, and say with Cecil, that it was all ancient history, that the actors, both sinners and victims had long been dissolved into their native earth.

The narrative he had read made it all alive again. How was the matter to be brought to light? And then there came into his mind Roger's words about Midsummer Eve, and the Popish superstition that all enchantments were dissolved and truth revealed on St. John's Eve. And, by heavens, it was Midsummer Day to-morrow, and this was St. John's Eve, the anniversary of poor Roger's last entry in his diary before he went to his death. How strange the coincidence. Could it be that to-night was to solve the mystery of the past three hundred years? A desire seized him to read the words again. The manuscript, he knew, was still lying on the library table; it was near midnight and everybody would be asleep, and he could get what he wanted without disturbing the house.

As he turned to leave the window his eye fell on the old Crusaders' tower, and in the lower part he saw a light glimmering from a narrow slit where Cecil had said there was no room, but only solid masonry. This surprised him, as he remembered afterwards, but at the time his thoughts were elsewhere. The queer sense of a supernatural presence that had weighed upon him in the afternoon was upon him again. Unseen influences seemed again to surround him and he was almost in a trance when he reached the library door and laid his hand on the latch. He did not enter, for something moving a little way down the corridor caught his eye. It was in the shadow now, but beyond was a patch of moonlight from a window, and whatever it was, it was bound to cross it. Surprise and alarm recalled some of his scattered wits, when he saw distinctly the figure of a man creeping stealthily with silent footfall along the wall. He seemed dressed in black and had something in his hand that for a moment caught the moonlight and glittered. There were some ancient weapons hanging on the walls, and Henry instinctively grasped an old pistol from among them, the first thing his hand fell upon, and then followed as quietly as he could. The man led him through several passages to an old part of the castle, where he had never been before. The moonlight that entered here and there only made the rest of the way darker by contrast, but Henry was able to keep the man in view. They were now in a long gallery, imperfectly lit, for it did not face the moon, and the man suddenly disappeared. Putting out his hand and feeling along the wall he found an opening, a doorway it seemed, low and narrow, and looking down he saw a faint light below and a narrow stairway descending. The man was before him, moving strangely quietly, for his footsteps were inaudible. Henry was drawn on by an irresistible impulse to follow. The man never looked round and was apparently quite unaware he was being followed. The stair ended in a room, round, low and vaulted. There was a table and a lamp on it, shedding a feeble light, and at the table, with her head on her hand and her face towards him, sat a beautiful woman. The man was hidden in the passage and she did not see him, but Henry could look clearly over his shoulder. They remained thus some minutes, and then the woman rose, fell on her knees at the table, her head sank on her clasped hands and she seemed in prayer. Her back was towards them. And now the man stole softly forward towards her and in his hand was the long dagger that had glittered in the moonlight. In another moment he would be upon her, his hand was raised, when some spell seemed to break. Henry found his tongue and cried aloud. The man turned and looked at him for a moment and Henry saw his face distinctly. It was not the face of a living man, but of a malevolent demon. The man said nothing, but advanced upon him with the dagger raised. Henry snapped the pistol at him, but of course in vain, for it was unloaded, a fact that in his dreamy state had not occurred to him. He flung the empty pistol at his assailant without effect, for he still came on; there was a chair close by, and hurling that in his enemy's

path, Henry fled up the stair. He was pursued, but reaching the top found a door, which he slammed to behind him, and ran breathless till he reached the main staircase, on which he fell with a cry and remembered no more.

The cry brought out Cecil, who found his friend in a faint. Assistance was called, and Henry was put to bed. He was not in a condition to answer any questions, and indeed, seemed in such a state of terror that he could not be left alone. That diabolical face haunted him; he could not get it out of his mind; he raved in a semi-delirious state for some hours, while Cecil stood by him, wondering much what disaster had overtaken him, and when at last sleep came to him, he still seemed to find terror in his dreams.

* * *

It was a week after this that the two friends were sitting in the garden, Henry Tiptoft, still somewhat pale and out of sorts, for he had suffered a severe shock. Mrs. Maynard was sitting with them, and Henry Tiptoft had for the first time found courage to tell his experience of that fateful night. They had listened with amazement and some incredulity.

“But, my dear Harry,” said Cecil, “you must have dreamt it, for there is no place in the castle in the least like what you describe.”

“Perhaps not now,” said Tiptoft, “but there may have been. What I saw, remember, was an image of what took place nearly three hundred years ago. That at least, is how I understand it. It was borne in upon me, to use the expression poor Roger Trumball was so fond of, that I was destined to discover the fate of his poor lady, and that he came for that purpose to pass the quest on to my shoulders. I believe what I saw was what really happened: that the lady was imprisoned in some vault in the castle, and murdered there by her husband, in order to get possession of the whole of her estate it would seem.”

“You saw the man’s face, you say. Should you know it again?”

“Know it! I shall never forget it.”

“Well then, you shall come to the picture gallery and see whether you can pick out Sir Everard from the rest, and identify him with your vision. That would be very interesting.”

“Yes, but I see you are still incredulous and think I dreamed it all. The only thing to convince you will be to find the stair and the vault.”

“Do you remember,” said Mrs. Maynard, “Roger says he found Sir Everard with workmen engaged in walling up a doorway?”

“By Jove, Alice,” said Cecil, “so he did. That seems to afford a clue. But he said it was in the stone gallery, and there is no place in the house known by that name, or answering to it.”

“It comes back to me,” said Henry, “that I saw a light glimmering from a slit in the lower part of the old tower which you said was solid with nothing inside. Now I think I can see something like an arrow slit there behind the ivy.”

Some ivy was pulled down, and a narrow window was exposed and Cecil was obliged to confess that so far, at all events, he was wrong. There might be a vault then, if Sir Henry’s vision was to be depended upon, in the old tower, of which the existence had been forgotten.

“The stone gallery must be that passage which leads to my boudoir on the ground floor of the old tower, and if there is a vault, my boudoir must be over it,” said Mrs. Maynard, and she guided them to it. The boudoir was a round room with a lovely view, but Mrs. Maynard said if it was over any horror she should never like it again. The problem now, was to find the doorway which Roger saw being blocked. Workmen were sent for, and after careful examination a piece

of walling was detected as an insertion, by the experienced eye of the clerk of works. Behind was found a doorway and a stair. Lights were brought and the two men descended. Henry went first. At the foot of the stair he uttered an exclamation:

“Don’t let Mrs. Maynard come down, Cecil,” said he, “I don’t want her to see it.”

In the vault, among cobwebs and dust beside an old table, lay a heap of something indefinite, some remains of drapery and linen, yellow with age; and among them, all that was left of poor Hulda Tiptoft.

She was found at last.

It may be added in conclusion, that Sir Henry Tiptoft was taken to the gallery and unhesitatingly picked out the portrait of Sir Everard, though some might say he had the costume of the seventeenth century to help him.

“But the curious thing about it,” said Maynard, “is that I picked up an old pistol in the vault just like one that hangs in the hall.”

“Then,” said Sir Henry, “perhaps now you will believe that my vision was not a dream.”

But Cecil said, “I must first go and see if there is one missing from the hall.”