

Le Fanu Joseph Sheridan

The Tenants of Malory.

Volume 1



Joseph Le Fanu

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CHAPTER I

CONCERNING TWO LADIES

WHO SAT IN THE MALORY PEW

There were tenants at last in Malory; and the curiosity of the honest residents of Cardyllian, the small and antique town close by, was at once piqued and mortified by the unaccountable reserve of these people.

For four years, except from one twisted chimney in the far corner of the old house, no smoke had risen from its flues. Tufts of grass had grown up between the paving-stones of the silent stable-yard, grass had crept over the dark avenue, which, making a curve near the gate, is soon lost among the sombre trees that throw a perpetual shadow upon it; the groves of nettles had spread and thickened among their trunks; and in the signs of neglect and decay, the monastic old place grew more than ever *triste*.

The pretty little Welsh town of Cardyllian stands near the shingle of a broad estuary, beyond which tower the noble Cambrian mountains. High and dim, tier above tier, undulating hills, broken by misty glens, and clothed with woods, rise from the opposite shore, and are backed, range behind range, by the dim outlines of Alpine peaks and slopes, and flanked by purple and gold-tinted headlands, rising dome-like from the sea.

Between the town and the gray shingle stretches a strip of bright green sward, the Green of Cardyllian, along which rows of pleasant houses, with little gardens in front, look over the sea to the mountains.

It is a town quaint, old, and quiet. Many of the houses bear date anterior to the great civil wars of England, and on the oak beams of some are carved years of grace during which Shakespeare was still living among his friends, in Stratford-on-Avon.

At the end of long Castle Street rise the battlements and roofless towers of that grand old feudal fortress which helped to hold the conquest of Wales for the English crown in the days of tabards, lances, and the long-bow. Its other chief street strikes off at right angles, and up hill from this, taking its name from the ancient church, which, with its churchyard, stands divided from it by a low wall of red sandstone, surmounted by one of those tall and fanciful iron rails, the knack of designing which seems to be a lost art in these countries.

There are other smaller streets and by-lanes, some dark with a monastic stillness, others thinly built, with little gardens and old plum and pear trees peeping over grass-grown walls, and here and there you light upon a fragment of that ancient town wall from which, in the great troubles which have helped to build up the glory of England, plumed cavaliers once parleyed with steel-capped Puritans. Thus the tints and shadows of a great history rest faintly even upon this out-of-the-way and serene little town.

The permanent residents of Cardyllian for half the year are idle, and for mere occupation are led to inquire into and report one another's sins, vanities, and mishaps. Necessity thus educates them in that mutual interest in one another's affairs, and that taste for narrative, which pusillanimous people call prying and tattle. That the people now residing in Malory, scarcely a mile away, should have so totally defeated them was painful and even irritating.

It was next to impossible to take a walk near Cardyllian without seeing Malory; and thus their failure perpetually stared them in the face.

You can best see Malory from the high grounds which, westward of the town, overlook the estuary. About a mile away you descry a dark and rather wide-spread mass of wood, lying in a gentle hollow, which, I think, deepens its sombre tint. It approaches closely to the long ripple of the sea, and through the foliage are visible some old chimneys and glimpses of gray gables. The refectory of the friary that once stood there, built of gray and reddish stones, half hid in ivy, now does duty as a barn. It is so embowered in trees, that you can scarcely, here and there, gain a peep from without at its tinted walls; and the whole place is overhung by a sadness and silence that well accord with its cloistered traditions. That is Malory.

It was Sunday now. Over the graves and tombstones of those who will hear its sweet music no more, the bell had summoned the townsfolk and visitors to the old church of Cardyllian.

The little town boasts, indeed, a beautiful old church, Gothic, with side-aisles, and an antique stained window, from which gloried saints and martyrs look down, in robes as rich and brilliant as we see now-a-days only upon the kings and queens of our court cards. It has also some fine old monuments of the Verney family. The light is solemn and subdued. There is a very sweet-toned organ, which they say is as old as the reign of Charles I., but I do not know how truly. In the porch are hung in chains two sacrilegious round-shot, which entered the church when Cromwell's general opened his fire, in those days of sorrow when the liberties of England were in the throes of birth. Beside the brilliant stained window, engraven upon a brass plate, is a record of the same "solemn times," relating how certain careful men, to whom we are obliged, had taken down, enclosed in boxes, and buried, in hope of a typical resurrection, the ancient window which had for so long beautified "this church," and thus saved it from the hands of "violent and fanatical men."

When "the season" is still flourishing at Cardyllian, the church is sometimes very full. On the Sunday I speak of it was so. One pew, indeed, was quite relieved from the general pressure. It was the large panelled enclosure which stands near the communion rails, at the right as you look up the aisle toward the glowing window. Its flooring is raised a full foot higher than the surrounding level. This is the seat of the Verney family.

But one person performed his devotions in it, upon the day of which I speak. This was a tall, elegantly slight young man, with the indescribable air of careless fashion; and I am afraid he was much more peeped at and watched than he ought to have been by good Christians during divine service.

Sometimes people saw but the edge of his black whisker, and the waves of his dark hair, and his lavender-gloved hand resting on the edge of the pew. At other times – when, for instance, during the Litany, he leaned over with his arms resting on the edge of the pew – he was very satisfactorily revealed, and elicited a considerable variety of criticism. Most people said he was very handsome, and so, I think, he was – a dark young man, with very large, soft eyes, and very brilliant even teeth. Some people said he was spoiled by an insolent and selfish expression of countenance. Some ladies again said that his figure was perfect, while others alleged that there was a slight curve – not a stoop, but a bend at the shoulder, which they could not quite sanction.

The interest, and even anxiety with which this young gentleman was observed and afterwards discussed, were due to the fact that he was Mr. Cleve Verney, the nephew, not of the present Viscount Verney, but of the man who must very soon be so, and heir presumptive to the title – a position in the town of Cardyllian, hardly inferior to that of Prince of Wales.

But the title of Verney, or rather the right claimant of that title, was then, and had been for many years, in an extremely odd position. In more senses than one, a cloud rested upon him. For strong reasons, and great danger, he had vanished more than twenty years ago, and lived, ever since, in a remote part of the world, and in a jealous and eccentric mystery.

While this young gentleman was causing so many reprehensible distractions in the minds of other Christians, he was himself, though not a creature observed it, undergoing a rather wilder aberration of a similar sort himself.

In a small seat at the other side, which seems built for privacy, with a high panelling at the sides and back, sat a young lady, whose beauty riveted and engrossed his attention in a way that seemed to the young gentleman, of many London seasons, almost unaccountable.

There was an old lady with her – a lady-like old woman, he thought her – slight of figure, and rubrically punctual in her up-risings, and down-sittings. The seat holds four with comfort, but no more. The oak casing round it is high. The light visits it through the glorious old eastern window, mellowed and solemnized – and in this chiar'oscuro, the young lady's beauty had a transparent and saddened character which he thought quite peculiar. Altogether he felt it acting upon him with the insidious power of a spell.

The old lady – for the halo of interest of which the girl was the centre, included her – was dressed, he at first thought, in black, but now he was nearly sure it was a purple silk.

Though she wore a grave countenance, suitable to the scene and occasion, it was by no means sombre – a cheerful and engaging countenance on the contrary.

The young lady's dress was one of those rich Welsh linseys, which exhibit a drapery of thick ribbed, dark gray silk, in great measure concealed by a short but ample cloak or coat of black velvet – altogether a costume, the gravity of which struck him as demure and piquant.

Leaning over the side of his pew, Mr. Cleve Verney prayed with a remarkable persistence in the direction of this seat. After the Litany he thought her a great deal more beautiful than he had before it, and by the time the Communion service closed, he was sure he had never seen any one at all so lovely. He could not have fancied, in flesh and blood, so wonderful an embodiment of Guido's portrait of Beatrice Cenci. The exquisite brow, and large hazel eye, so clear and soft, so bold and shy. The face voluptuous, yet pure; *funeste* but innocent. The rich chestnut hair, the pearly whiteness, and scarlet lips, and the strange, wild, melancholy look – and a shadow of fate. Three-quarters, or full face, or momentary profile – in shade, now – in light – the same wonderful likeness still. The phantom of Beatrice was before him.

I can't say whether the young lady or the old observed the irregular worship directed towards their pew. Cleve did not think they did. He had no particular wish that they should. In fact, his interest was growing so strangely absorbing that something of that jealousy of observation which indicates a deeper sentiment than mere admiration, had supervened, and Mr. Cleve conducted his reconnoitring with slyness and caution.

That small pew over the way, he was nearly certain, belonged to Malory. Now Malory is a dower house of the Verneys. His own grandmother, the Venerable Dowager Lady Verney, as much to her annoyance the fashionable morning paper respectfully called her, was at that time the incumbent. But though she held it with the inflexible grip of an old lady whose rights were not to be trifled with, she would not reside, and the place was, as I have said, utterly neglected, and the old house very much out of repair.

Why, then, should the Malory pew be thus tenanted? These ladies, he had no doubt, sat there of right – for if the seat had been opened to the congregation at large, in the then state of pressure, it would have been filled. Could they possibly be of kindred to the Verneys, and sit where they did by virtue of an order from the Dowager?

So Cleve Verney began to count up cousins whom he had never seen, and left off no wiser.

Close by this dark Malory pew, is a small side-door of the church. There is another like it, a little lower down, in the opposite wall, not far from the Verney pew, and through these emerge thin files of worshippers, while the main column shuffles and pushes through the porch. So, when the Rector had pronounced his final blessing, Cleve Verney having improved the little silence that followed to get his hat and cane into his hand, glided from his seat before the mass of the congregation were astir, and emerging on the little gravel walk, stepped lightly down to the stone stile, from whence you command a view of every exit from the churchyard.

He stood with one foot upon it, like a man awaiting a friend, and looking listlessly toward the church. And as he loitered, a friend did turn up whom he very little expected to see. A young man, though hardly so young as Cleve – good-looking, decidedly, with light golden moustache, and a face so kind, frank, and merry, it made one happy to look at it.

"Ah! Sedley! I had not an idea. What brings you here?" said Cleve, smiling, and shaking his hand moderately, but keeping his large eyes steadily on the distant point at which he expected to see the unknown ladies emerge.

"Down here just for a day or two," answered Tom Sedley. "I was above you in the gallery. Did you see that beautiful creature in the Malory seat, right before you? By Jove, she's a stunning girl. There was an old woman with her. I think I never saw so beautiful a being."

"Well, I did see a pretty girl at the other side of the church, I *think*; isn't *that* she?" said Cleve, as he saw the two ladies – the younger with one of those short black veils which nearly obliterate the face of the wearer behind the intricacies of a thick lace pattern.

"By Jove! so it is," said Sedley; "come along – let us see where they go."

They were walking almost solitarily, followed only by an old servant who carried their books, toward the entrance at the further side of the churchyard, a small door opening upon a flight of steps by which you descend into one of the deserted back streets of Cardyllian.

Cleve and Sedley pursued as little conspicuously as possible. The quaint street, into which the stone stairs led them, follows the mouldering shelter of the old town wall.

Looking along the perspective of this street, if such the single row of small old houses confronting the dark ivied wall may be termed, the two young gentlemen saw the figures in pursuit of which they had entered it, proceeding in the direction of Malory.

"We mustn't get *too* near; let us wait a little, and let them go on," suggested Sedley in a whisper, as if the ladies could have overheard them.

Cleve laughed. He was probably the more eager of the two; but some men have no turn for confidences, and Cleve Verney was not in the habit of opening either his plans or his feelings to anyone.

CHAPTER II

ALL THAT THE DRAPER'S WIFE COULD TELL

This street, in a few hundred steps emerging from the little town, changes its character into that of a narrow rural road, overhung by noble timber, and descending with a gentle curve toward the melancholy woods of Malory.

"How beautifully she walks, too! By Jove, she's the loveliest being I ever beheld. She's the most perfectly beautiful girl in England. How I wish some d – d fellow would insult her, that I might smash him, and have an excuse for attending her home."

So spoke enthusiastic Tom Sedley, as they paused to watch the retreat of the ladies, leaning over the dwarf stone wall, and half hidden by the furrowed stem of a gigantic ash tree.

From this point, about a quarter of a mile distant from Malory, they saw them enter the wide iron gate and disappear in the dark avenue that leads up to that sombre place.

"*There!* I *said* it was Malory," exclaimed Sedley, laying his hand briskly on Cleve's arm.

"Well, I hope you're pleased; and tell me, now, what stay do you make at Cardyllian, Tom? Can you come over to Ware – not to-morrow, for I'm not quite sure that I shall be there, but on Tuesday, for a day or two?"

No – Tom Sedley couldn't. He must leave to-morrow, or, at latest, on Tuesday morning; and, for to-day, he had promised to go to afternoon service with the Etherges, and then home to tea with them. He was to meet the party on the Green.

So after a little talk, they turned together toward the town; and they parted near the Verney Arms, where Cleve's dog-cart awaited him. Having given his order in the hall, he walked into the coffee-room, in which, seated demurely, and quite alone, he found stout Mrs. Jones, the draper's wife – suave, sedate, wearing a subdued Sabbath smile upon her broad and somewhat sly countenance.

Her smile expanded as Cleve drew near. She made a great and gracious courtesy, and extended her short fat hand, which Cleve Verney took and shook – for the tradition of homelier, if not kindlier times, still lingered in Cardyllian, and there were friendly personal relations between the great family and the dozen and a half of shop-keepers who constituted its commercial strength.

So Cleve Verney joked and talked with her, leaning on the back of a chair, with one knee on the seat of it. He was pleased to have lighted upon such a gossip, as good Mrs. Jones, the draper, who was waiting for the return of her husband, who was saying a word to Mr. Watkyn Hughes, in the bar, about a loan of his black horse for a funeral next morning.

"So it seems Lady Verney has got a tenant in Malory?" he said at last.

"Yes, *indeed*, sir," she replied, in her most confidential manner; "and I *hope* – I do *indeed* – it may turn out such a thing as she would like."

Mrs. Jones usually spoke in low and significant tones, and with a mystery and caution worthy of deeper things than she often talked about.

"Why, is there anything odd?" asked the young gentleman curiously.

"Well, it is *not*, now, *altogether* what I would *wish* for Lady Verney. I haven't seen any of the Malory family, excepting in church to-day; not one, indeed, sir; they are very strange; they never *come* into the town – not once since ever they came to Malory! but *dear* me! you know, sir, that might *be*, and yet everything as we could wish, mightn't it; yes, sure; still, you know, people *will be talking*; it's a pity we don't mind our own business more, and let others be, isn't it, sir?"

"Great pity; but – but what's the matter?" urged Cleve Verney.

"Well, Master Cleve, you know, Cardyllian, and how we *do talk* here; I don't say *more* than *other* places, but we *do*, and I do not like *repeatin'* everything I hear. There's more mischief than good, *I* think, comes of *repeatin'* stories."

"Oh! come, pray what's the good of a story except to repeat it? I ought to know, perhaps I should tell Lady Verney about it," said Cleve, who was really curious, for nothing could be more quiet than the get up and demeanour of the ladies.

"They haven't been here, you know, very *long*," murmured Mrs. Jones, earnestly.

"No, I *don't* know. I know nothing about it; *how* long?"

"Well, about five weeks – a little more; and we never saw the gentleman once; he's never been down to the town since he came; never indeed, sir, not once."

"He shows his sense; doesn't he?"

"Ah, you were always pleasant, Master Cleve, but you don't think *so*; no, you don't *indeed*; his conduct is *really most singular*, he's never been outside the walls of Malory all that time, in the *daylight*; very odd; he has hired Christmass Owen's boat, and he goes out in it *every night*, unless twice, the wind was too high, and Owen didn't choose to venture his boat. He's a *tall* man, Christmass Owen says, and holds himself straight, like an officer, for people *will* be making *inquiries*, you know; and he has *gray* hair; not *quite* white, you know."

"How *should* I know?"

"Ah, ha, you were always *funny*; yes, indeed, but it *is* gray, gone *quite* gray, Christmass Owen says."

"Well, and what about the ladies?" inquired the young gentleman. "*They're* not gone gray, *all*? though I shouldn't wonder much, in Malory."

"The *ladies*? *Well*. There's *two*, you know; there's Miss Sheckleton, that's the elderly lady, and all the Malory accounts in the town is opened in her name. Anne Sheckleton, very reg'lar she is. I have nothing to say concerning her. They don't spend a great *deal*, you understand, but their money is *sure*."

"Yes, of course; but, you said, didn't you? that there was something not quite right about them."

"Oh dear, no, sir; I did not say quite *that*; nothing *wrong*, no sure, but very odd, sir, and most *unpleasant*, and that is all."

"And that's a good deal; isn't it?" urged Cleve.

"Well, it *is* something; it is *indeed* a great *deal*," Mrs. Jones emphasised oracularly.

"And *what is* it, what do you know of them, or the people here what do they *say*?"

"Well, they say, putting this and that together, and some hints from the servant that comes down to order things up from the town – for servants, you know, will be talking – that the family is *mad*."

"*Mad!*" echoed Cleve.

"That's what they say."

"The whole family are *mad!* and yet continue to manage their affairs as they do! By Jove, it is a comfort to find that people can get on without heads, on emergency."

"They don't say, no, dear me! that *all* that's in the house are mad; *only* the old man and the young lady."

"And what is she mad upon?"

"Well, they don't say. I don't know – melancholy I do suppose."

"And what is the old gentleman's name?"

"We don't *know*, the *servants* don't know, they say; they were hired by Miss Sheckleton, in Chester, and never saw the old gentleman, nor the young lady, till after they were two or three days in Malory; and one night comes a carriage, with a madhouse gentleman, they do say, a doctor, in

charge of the old gentleman, and the young lady, poor thing! and so they were handed over by him, to Miss Sheckleton."

"And what sort of lunacies do they commit? They're not pulling down the house among them, I hope?"

"Very gentle – very. I'm told, quite, as you may say, *manageable*. It's a very sad thing, sir, but *what* a world it is! yes, indeed. Isn't it?"

"Ay, so it is. – I've heard that, I think, before."

"You may have heard it from *me*, sir, and it's long been my feeling and opinion, dear me! The longer I live the more melancholy sights I see!"

"How long is Malory let for?"

"Can't say, indeed, sir. That is they may give it up every three months, but has the right to keep it two whole years, that is if they *like*, you understand."

"Well, it is rather odd. It was they who sat in the Malory seat to-day?"

"That was Miss Sheckleton, was the old lady; and the young one, didn't you think her very pretty, sir?"

"Yes – she's pretty," he answered carelessly. "But I really could not see very well."

"I was very near as she turned to leave – before she took down her veil – and I thought what a really *beautiful* creature she was!"

"And what do they call her?"

"Miss Margaret, sir."

"Margaret! a pretty name – rather. Oh! here's Mr. Jones;" and Mr. Jones was greeted – and talked a little – somewhat more distantly and formally than his goodwife had done – and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, with a dutiful farewell, set off upon their Sunday's ramble.

CHAPTER III

HOME TO WARE

"Mad!" thought Cleve. "What an awful pity if she is. She doesn't *look* mad – melancholy she may. She does not look a *bit* mad. By Jove, I don't *believe* a word of it. It's utterly out of the question that the quiet old lady there could bring a mad girl to church with her. And thus resolved, Cleve walked out of the coffee-room, and awaiting his conveyance, stood on the steps of the Verney Arms, from whence he saw Wynne Williams, the portly solicitor of Cardyllian, and of a wide circle of comfortable clients round it. Wynne Williams is omniscient. Nothing ever happens in Cardyllian that he does not know with precision.

"Wynne," Cleve called up the quiet little street, and the attorney, looking over his fat shoulder, arrested his deliberate walk, and marched swiftly back, smiling.

So there was another greeting; and some more questions ensued, and answers, and then said Cleve —

"So Malory's let, I hear."

"Yes," said the attorney, with a slight shrug.

"You don't like the bargain, I see," said Cleve.

"It's a mismanaged place, you know. Lady Verney won't spend a shilling on it, and we must only take what we can get. We haven't had a tenant for five years till now."

"And who has taken it?"

"The Reverend Isaac Dixie."

"The devil he has. Why old Dixie's not mad, is he?"

"No, he's no fool. More like the other thing – rather. Drove a hard bargain – but *I* wouldn't take it myself at the money."

"Doesn't he live there?"

"No. There's an old gentleman and two ladies; one of them an old woman."

"And what's the old gentleman's *name*, and the young lady's?"

"Don't know, indeed; and what does it matter?" The attorney was curious, and had taken some little trouble to find out. "The Reverend Isaac Dixie's the tenant, and Miss Sheckleton manages the family business; and devil a letter ever comes by post here, except to Miss Sheckleton or the servants."

"Old Mother Jones, the draper's wife, over the way, says the girl and the old fellow are mad."

"Don't believe it. More likely he's in a fix, and wants to keep out of sight and hearing just now, and Malory's the very place to hide a fellow in. It's just *possible*, you know, there may be a screw loose in the upper works; but I don't believe it, and don't for the world hint it to the old lady. She's half mad herself about mad people, and if she took that in her head, by Jove, she'd never forgive me," and the attorney laughed uneasily.

"You do think they're mad. By Jove, you *do*. I *know* you think they're mad."

"I *don't* think they're mad. I don't know anything about them," said the good-humoured attorney, with Dundreary whiskers, leaning on the wooden pillar of the Verney Arms, and smiling provokingly in the young man's face.

"Come now, Wynne, I'll not tell the old lady, upon my honour. You may as well tell me all you know. And you *do* know; of *course*, you do; you *always* know. And these people living not a mile away! You *must* know."

"I see how it is. She's a pretty girl, and you want to pick up all about her, by way of inquiring after the old gentleman."

Verney laughed, and said —

"Perhaps you're right, though, I assure you, I didn't know it myself. But *is* the old fellow mad, or is there any madness among them?"

"I do assure you, I know no more than you do," laughed Mr. Wynne Williams. "He may be as sober as Solomon, or as mad as a hatter, for anything *I* know. It's nothing to me. He's only a visitor there, and the young lady, too, for that matter; and our tenant is the Reverend Isaac Dixie."

"Where is Dixie living now?"

"The old shop."

"I know. I wonder he has not wriggled on and up a bit. I always looked on Dixie as the bud of a dignitary; he has had time to burst into a Bishop since I saw him. Dixie and I have had some queer scenes together," and he laughed quietly over his recollections. "He and I spent three months once together in Malory – do you remember? I dare say *he* does. He was tutor and I pupil. Charming time. We used to read in the gun-room. That was the year they had the bricklayers and painters at Ware. Do you remember the day you came in exactly as I shied the ink-bottle at his head? I dare say the mark's on the wall still. By Jove, I'd have killed him, I suppose, if I'd had the luck to hit him. You must come over and see me before I go. I'm quite alone; but I can give you a mutton chop and some claret, and I want to show you the rifle I told you of. You'll be delighted with it."

And so this young man, with large dark eyes, smiled and waved his farewell, and, with a groom behind him, drove at a rapid pace down the street, and away toward Ware.

"He'll do that seven miles in five-and-thirty minutes," thought the attorney, looking after him drowsily; and his speculation taking another turn, he thought mistily of his political possibilities, for he had been three years in the House, and was looked upon as a clever young man, and one who, having many advantages, might yet be – who could tell where? and have power to make the fortunes of many deserving attorneys.

Cleve meanwhile was driving at a great pace toward Ware. I don't suppose a town life – a life of vice, a life of any sort, has power to kill the divine spark of romance in a young man born with imagination.

Malory had always had a strange and powerful interest for him. A dower house now, it had once been the principal mansion of his family. Over it, to his eye, hung, like the sombre and glowing phantasms of a cloudy sunset, the story of the romance, and the follies and the crimes of generations of the Verneys of Malory. The lordly old timber that rises about its chimneys and gables, seemed to him the mute and melancholy witnesses of bygone tragedies and glories.

There, too, in the Steward's House, a veritable relic of the ancient Friary, lived dreamy old Rebecca Mervyn; he wondered how he had forgotten to ask whether she was still there. She had seemed to his boyish fancy one of those delightful German ambiguities – half human, half ghost; her silent presents of toffy, and faint wintry smile and wandering gaze, used to thrill him with "a pleasing terror." He liked her, and yet he would have been afraid to sit alone in her latticed room with that silent lady, after twilight. Poor old Rebecca! It was eight years since he had last seen her tall, sad, silent form – silent, except when she thought herself alone, and used to whisper and babble as she looked with a wild and careworn gaze over the sea, toward the mighty mountains that built it round, line over line, till swell and peak are lost in misty distance. He used to think of the Lady of Branksome Tower, and half believe that old Rebecca was whispering with the spirits of the woods and cataracts, and lonely headlands, over the water.

"Is old Rebecca Mervyn there still?" he wondered on. "Unless she's dead, poor thing, she *is* – for my grandmother would never think of disturbing her, and she shall be my excuse for going up to Malory. I ought to see her."

The door of her quaint tenement stood by the court-yard, its carved stone chimney top rose by the roof of the dower-house, with which, indeed, it was connected. "It won't be like crossing their windows or knocking at their hall door. I shan't so much as enter the court-yard, and I really ought to see the poor old thing."

The duty would not have been so urgent had the face that appeared in church that day been less lovely.

He had never troubled himself for eight years about the existence of old Rebecca. And now that the image, after that long interval, suddenly returned, he for the first time asked himself why old Rebecca Mervyn was ever there? He had always accepted her presence as he did that of the trees, and urns, and old lead statues in the yew walk, as one of the properties of Malory. She was a sort of friend or client of his grandmother's – not an old servant plainly, not even a house-keeper. There was an unconscious refinement, and an air of ladyhood in this old woman. His grandmother used to call her Mrs. Mervyn, and treated her with a sort of distinction and distance that had in it both sympathy and reserve.

"I dare say Wynne Williams knows all about her, and I'll go and see her, at all events." So he thought as his swift trotter flew under the noble trees of Ware, along the picturesque road which commands the seaward view of that unrivalled estuary flanked by towering headlands, and old Pendillion, whose distant outline shews like a gigantic sphinx crouching lazily at the brink of the sea. Across the water now he sees the old town of Cardyllian, the church tower and the ruined Castle, and, further down, sad and sequestered, the dark wood and something of the gray front of Malory blurred in distance, but now glowing with a sort of charm that was fast deepening into interest.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE GREEN OF CARDYLLIAN

Ware is a great house, with a palatial front of cut stone. The Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney seldom sees it. He stands next to the title, and that large residue of the estates which go with it. The title has got for the present into an odd difficulty, and cannot assert itself; and those estates are, pending the abeyance, compulsorily at nurse, where they have thriven, quite thrown off their ailments and incumbrances, and grown plethorically robust.

Still the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney is not, as the lawyers say, in perception of one shilling of their revenues. He feels indeed that he has grown in importance – that people seemed more pleased to see him, that he is listened to much better, that his jokes are taken and laughed at, and that a sceptical world seems to have come at last to give him credit for the intellect and virtues of which he is conscious. All this, however, is but the shadow of the substance which seems so near, and yet is intangible.

No wonder he is a little peevish. His nephew and heir presumptive – Cleve – runs down now and then for shooting and yachting; but his uncle does not care to visit Ware, and live in a corner of the house. I think he liked the people of Cardyllian and of the region round about, to suffer and resent with him. So they see his face but seldom.

Cleve Verney sat, after dinner, at an open window of Ware, with one foot on the broad window-stone, smoking his cigar and gazing across the dark blue sheet of water, whose ripples glimmered by this time in the moonlight, toward the misty wood of Malory.

Cleve Verney is a young man of accomplishment, and of talents, and of a desultory and tumultuous ambition, which sometimes engrosses him wholly, and sometimes sickens and loses its appetite. He is conceited – affecting indifference, he loves admiration. The object for the time being seizes his whole soul. The excitement of even a momentary pursuit absorbs him. He is reserved, capricious, and impetuous – knows not what self-mortification is, and has a pretty taste for dissimulation.

He is, I think, extremely handsome. I have heard ladies pronounce him fascinating. Of course, in measuring his fascinations, his proximity to a title and great estates was not forgotten; and he is as amiable as a man can be who possesses all the qualities I have described, and is selfish beside.

Now Cleve Verney was haunted, or rather possessed, for the present, by the beautiful phantom – sane or mad, saint or sinner – who had for so long, in that solemn quietude and monotony so favourable for the reception of fanciful impressions, stood or sat, Nun-like, book in hand, before him that day. So far from resisting, he encouraged this little delirium. It helped him through his solitary evening.

When his cigar was out, he still looked out toward Malory. He was cultivating his little romance. He liked the mystery of it. "Margaret – Margaret," he repeated softly. He fancied that he saw a light for a moment in the window of Malory, like a star. He could not be sure; it might be the light of a boat. Still it was an omen – the emblem of life – an answer of hope.

How very capricious all this was. Here was a young man, before whom yearly the new blown beauties of each London season passed in review – who fancied he had but to choose among them all – who had never experienced a serious passion, hardly even a passing sentiment – now strangely moved and interested by a person whom he had never spoken to – only seen – who had seemed unaffectedly unconscious of his presence; who possibly had not even seen him; of whose kindred and history he knew nothing, and between whom and himself there might stand some impassable gulf.

Cleve was in the mood to write verses, but that relief, like others, won't always answer the invocation of the sufferer. The muse is as coy as death. So instead, he wrote a line to the Rev. Isaac Dixie, of Clay Rectory, in which he said —

"My dear Dixie, — You remember when I used to call you '*Mr. Dixie*' and '*Sir*.' I conjure you by the memory of those happy days of innocence and Greek grammar, to take pity on my loneliness, and come here to Ware, where you will find me pining in solitude. Come just for a day. I know your heart is in your parish, and I shan't ask you to stay longer. The *Wave*, my cutter, is here; you used to like a sail (he knew that the Rev. Isaac Dixie suffered unutterably at sea, and loathed all nautical enjoyments), or you can stay in the house, and tumble over the books in the library. I will make you as comfortable as I can; only do come, and oblige
"Your old pupil,
"CLEVE VERNEY.

"P.S. — I shall be leaving this *immediately*, so pray answer in person, by return. You'll get this at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, at Clay. If you take the 11·40 train to Llwynan — you see I have my "*Bradshaw*" by me — you will be there at four, and a fly will run you across to Cardyllian in little more than an hour, and there you will find me, expecting, at the Chancery; you know Wynne Williams's old house in Castle Street. I assure you, I really do want to see you, *particularly*, and you must not fail me. I shan't detain you a moment longer than your parish business will allow. Heavens, what a yarn have I post-scribbled!"

He walked down to the pretty little village of Ware, which consists of about a dozen and a-half of quaint little houses, and a small venerable church, situated by the road that winds through a wooded glen, and round the base of the hill by the shore of the moonlighted waters.

It was a romantic ramble. It was pleasanter, because it commanded, across the dark blue expanse, with its glimmering eddies, a misty view, now hardly distinguishable, of Malory, and pleasanter still, because his errand was connected with those tenants of old Lady Verney's of whom he was so anxious to learn *anything*.

When Tom Sedley, with the light whiskers, merry face, and kind blue eyes, had parted company that afternoon, he walked down to the green of Cardyllian. In the middle of September there is a sort of second season there; you may then see a pretty gathering of muslins of all patterns, and silks of every hue, floating and rustling over the green, with due admixture of with all proper varieties of bonnet and hat — pork-pie, wide-awake, Jerry, and Jim-Crow. There are nautical gentlemen, and gentlemen in Knickerbockers; fat commercial "*gents*" in large white waistcoats, and starched buff cravats; touring curates in spectacles and "*chokers*," with that smile proper to the juvenile cleric, curiously meek and pert; all sorts of persons, in short, making brief holiday, and dropping in and out of Cardyllian, some just for a day and off again in a fuss, and others dawdling away a week, or perhaps a month or two, serenely.

"White waistcoats and black,
Blue waistcoats and gray,"

Its heyday of fashion has long been past and over; but though the "*fast*" people have gone elsewhere, it is still creditably frequented. Tom Sedley was fond of the old town. I don't think he would have reviewed the year at its close, with a comfortable conscience, if he had not visited Cardyllian, "*slow*" as it certainly was, some time in its course.

It was a sunny Sunday afternoon, the green looked bright, and the shingle glittered lazily beyond it, with the estuary rippling here and there into gleams of gold, away to the bases of the

glorious Welsh mountains, which rise up from the deepest purple to the thinnest gray, and with many a dim rift and crag, and wooded glen, and slope, varying their gigantic contour.

Tom Sedley, among others, showed his reverence for the Sabbath, by mounting a well brushed chimney-pot. No one, it is well established, can pray into a Jerry. The musical bell from the gray church tower hummed sweetly over the quaint old town, and the woods and hollows round about; and on a sudden, quite near him, Tom Sedley saw the friends of whom he had been in search!

The Etherage girls, as the ancient members of the family still called them, were two in number. Old Vane Etherage of Hazelden, a very pretty place, about twenty minutes' walk from the green of Cardyllian, has been twice married. The result is, that the two girls belong to very different periods. Miss Charity is forty-five by the parish register, and Miss Agnes of the blue eyes and golden hair, is just nineteen and four months.

Both smiling after their different fashions, advanced upon Tom, who strode up to them, also smiling, with his chimney-pot in his hand.

Miss Charity of the long waist, and long thin brown face, and somewhat goggle eyes, was first up, and asked him very volubly, at least eleven kind questions, before she had done shaking his hand, all which he answered laughing, and at last, said he —

"Little Agnes, are you going to cut me? How well you look! Certainly there's no place on earth like Cardyllian, for pretty complexions, is there?"

He turned for confirmation to the curiously brown thin countenance of Miss Charity, which smiled and nodded acquiescence. "You're going to-morrow, you say; that's a great pity; everything looking so beautiful."

"*Everything*," acquiesced Tom Sedley, with an arch glance at Agnes, who blushed and said merrily —

"You're just the same old fool you always were; and we don't mind one word you say."

"Aggie, my dear!" said her sister, who carried down the practice of reproof from the nursery; and it was well, I suppose, that Miss Aggie had that arbitress of proprieties always beside her.

"I suppose you have no end of news to tell me. Is anyone going to be married? Is anyone dying, or anyone christened? I'll hear it all by-and-by. And who are your neighbours at Malory?"

"Oh, quite charming!" exclaimed Miss Agnes eagerly. "The most mysterious people that ever came to a haunted house. You know Malory has a ghost."

"Nonsense, child. Don't mind her, Mr. Sedley," said Miss Charity. "I *wonder* how you can talk so foolishly."

"Oh, that's nothing new. Malory's been haunted as long as *I* can remember," said Tom.

"Well, I did not think Mr. Sedley could have talked like that!" exclaimed Miss Charity.

"Oh, by Jove, I *know* it. *Everyone* knows it that ever lived here. Malory's *full* of ghosts. None but very queer people could think of living there; and, Miss Agnes, you were going to say —"

"Yes, they are *awfully* mysterious. There's an old man who stalks about at night, like the ghost in "Hamlet," and never speaks, and there's a beautiful young lady, and a gray old woman who calls herself Anne Sheckleton. They shut themselves up so closely — you can't imagine. Some people think the old man is a maniac or a terrible culprit."

"Highly probable," said Tom; "and the old woman a witch, and the young lady a vampire."

"Well, hardly that," laughed Miss Agnes, "for they came to church to-day."

"How you *can* both talk such folly," interposed Miss Charity.

"But you know they would not let Mr. Pritchard up to the house," pleaded Miss Agnes. "Mr. Pritchard, the curate, you know" — this was to Tom Sedley — "he's a funny little man — he preached to-day — very good and zealous, and all that — and he wanted to push his way up to the house, and the cross old man they have put to keep the gate, took him by the collar, and was going to beat him. Old Captain Shrapnell says he *did* beat him with a child's cricket-bat; but *he hates* Mr. Pritchard, so I'm not sure; but, at all events, he was turned out in disgrace, and blushes and looks

dignified ever since whenever Malory is mentioned. Now, everyone here knows what a good little man poor Mr. Pritchard is, so it must have been sheer hatred of religion that led to his being turned out in that way."

"But the ladies were in church, my dear Aggie; we *saw* them, Mr. Sedley, *to-day*; they were in the Malory pew."

"Oh, indeed?" said Tom Sedley, artfully; "and you saw them pretty distinctly, I dare say."

"The young lady is quite beautiful, *we* thought. I'm so sorry you were not in our seat; though, indeed, people ought not to be staring about them in church; but you would have admired her immensely."

"Oh, I saw them. They were the people nearly opposite to the Verneys' seat, in the small pew? Yes, they *were*— that is, the young lady, I mean, was perfectly lovely," said little Tom, who could not with any comfort practise a reserve.

"See, the people are beginning to hurry off to church; it must be time to go," said Charity.

So the little party walked up by the court-house into Castle Street, and turned into quaint old Church Street, walking demurely, and talking very quietly to the solemn note of the old bell.

CHAPTER V

A VISIT TO HAZELDEN

They all looked toward the Malory seat on taking their places in their own; but that retreat was deserted now, and remained so, as Tom Sedley at very brief intervals ascertained, throughout the afternoon service; after which, with a secret sense of disappointment, honest Sedley escorted the Etherage "girls" up the steep road that leads through the wooded glen of Hazelden to the hospitable house of old Vane Etherage.

Everyone in that part of the world knows that generous, pompous, and boisterous old gentleman. You could no more visit Cardyllian without seeing Vane Etherage, than you could visit Naples without seeing Vesuvius. He is a fine portly bust, but little more. In his waking hours he lives alternately in his Bath chair and in the great leathern easy chair in his study. He manages to shuffle very slowly, leaning upon his servant on one side, and propped on his crutch at the other, across the hall of the Cardyllian Club, which boasts about six-and-thirty members, besides visitors, and into the billiard-room, where he takes possession of the chair by the fire, and enjoys the agreeable conversation of Captain Shrapnell, hears all about the new arrivals, who they are, what screws are loose, and where, and generally all the gossip and scandal of the little commonwealth of Cardyllian.

Vane Etherage had served in the navy, and, I believe, reached the rank of captain. In Cardyllian he was humorously styled "the Admiral," when people spoke *of* him, not *to* him; for old Etherage was fiery and consequential, and a practical joke which commenced in a note from an imaginary secretary, announcing that "The Badger Hunt" would meet at Hazelden House on a certain day, and inducing hospitable preparations, for the entertainment of those nebulous sportsmen, was like to have had a sanguinary ending. It was well remembered that when young Sniggers of Sligh Farm apologised on that occasion, old Etherage had arranged with Captain Shrapnell, who was to have been his second, that the Admiral was to fight in his Bath chair – an evidence of resource and resolution which was not lost upon his numerous friends.

"How do you do, Sedley? Very glad to see you, Tom – very glad indeed, sir. You'll come to-morrow and dine; you must, indeed – and next day. You know our Welsh mutton – you do – you know it well; it's better here than in any other place in the world – in the whole world, sir – the Hazelden mutton, and, egad, you'll come here – you shall, sir – and dine here with us to-morrow; mind, you shall."

The Admiral wore a fez, from beneath which his gray hair bushed out rather wildly, and he was smoking through an enormous pipe as Tom Sedley entered his study, accompanied by the ladies.

"He says he's to go away to-morrow," said Miss Charity, with an upbraiding look at Sedley.

"Pooh – nonsense – not *he* – not *you*, Tom – not a bit, sir. We won't let you. Girls, we won't *allow* him to go. Eh? – No – no – you dine here to-morrow, *and* next day."

"You're very kind, sir; but I promised, if I am still in Cardyllian to-morrow, to run over to Ware, and dine with Verney."

"*What* Verney?"

"Cleve Verney."

"D – him."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Miss Charity, grimly.

"Boh! – I *hate* him – I hate *all* the Verneys," bawled old Vane Etherage, as if hating were a duty and a generosity.

"Oh – no, papa – you *know* you don't – that would be *extremely wicked*," said Miss Charity, with that severe superiority with which she governed the Admiral.

"Begad, you're always telling me I'm wicked – and we know where the *wicked* go – that's catechism, I believe – so I'd like to know where's the difference between that and d – ing a fellow?" exclaimed the portly bust, and blew off his wrath with a testy laugh.

"I think we had better put off our bonnets and coats? – The language is becoming rather strong – and the tobacco," said Miss Charity, with dry dignity, to her sister, leaving the study as she did so.

"I thought it might be that *Kiffyn* Verney – the uncle fellow – Honourable Kiffyn Verney – *dis-honourable*, I call him – that old dog, sir, he's no better than a cheat – and I'd be glad of an opportunity to tell him so to his face, sir – you have no *idea*, sir, how he has behaved to me!"

"He has the character of being a very honourable, sir – I'm sorry you think so differently," said honest Tom Sedley, who always stood up for his friends, and their kindred – "and Cleve, I've known from my childhood, and I assure you, sir, a franker or more generous fellow I don't suppose there is on earth."

"I know nothing about the jackanape, except that he's nephew of his roguish uncle," said the florid old gentleman with the short high nose and double chin. "He wants to take up Llanderis, and he *shan't have* it. He's under covenant to renew the lease, and the devil of it is, that between me and Wynne Williams we have put the lease astray – and I can't find it – nor *he* either – but it will turn up – I don't care two-pence about it – but no one shall humbug me – I won't be gammoned, sir, by all the Verneys in England. *Stuff*– sir!"

Then the conversation took a happier turn. The weather was sometimes a little squally with the Admiral – but not often – genial and boisterous – on the whole sunny and tolerably serene – and though he sometimes threatened high and swore at his servants, they knew it did not mean a great deal, and liked him.

People who lived all the year round in Cardyllian, which from November to May, every year, is a solitude, fall into those odd ways and little self-indulgences which gradually metamorphose men of the world into humorists and grotesques. Given a sparse population, and difficult intercommunication, which in effect constitute solitude, and you have the conditions of barbarism. Thus it was that Vane Etherage had grown uncouth to a degree that excited the amazement of old contemporaries who happened, from time to time, to look in upon his invalided retirement at Cardyllian.

The ladies and Tom Sedley, in the drawing-room, talked very merrily at tea, while old Vane Etherage, in his study, with the door between the rooms wide open, amused himself with a nautical volume and his terrestrial globe.

"So," said Miss Agnes, "you admired the Malory young lady – Margaret, our maid says, she is called – very much to-day?"

"I did, by Jove. Didn't you?" said Tom, well pleased to return to the subject.

"Yes," said Agnes, looking down at her spoon – "Yes, I admired her; that is, her features are very regular; she's what I call extremely handsome; but there are prettier girls."

"*Here* do you mean?"

"Yes – here."

"And who are they?"

"Well, I don't say here *now*; but I do think those Miss Dartmores, for instance, who were here last year, and who used to wear those blue dresses, were decidedly prettier. The heroine of Malory, whom you have fallen in love with, seems to me to want animation."

"Why, she couldn't show a great deal of animation over the Litany," said Tom.

"I did not see her then; I happened to be praying myself during the Litany," said Miss Agnes, recollecting herself.

"It's more than *I* was," said Tom.

"You ought not to talk that way, Mr. Sedley. It isn't *nice*. I wonder you can," said Miss Charity.

"I would not say it, of course, to strangers," said Tom. "But then, I'm so intimate here – and it's really true, that is, I mean, it was to-day."

"I wonder what you go to church for," said Miss Charity.

"Well, of course, you know, it's to pray; but I look at the bonnets a little, also; every fellow does. By Jove, if they'd only say truth, I'm certain the clergymen peep – I often saw them. There's that little fellow, the Rev. Richard Pritchard, the curate, you know – I'd swear I've seen that fellow watching you, Agnes, through the chink in the reading-desk door, while the sermon was going on; and I venture to say he did not hear a word of it."

"You ought to tell the rector, if you really saw that," said Miss Charity, severely.

"Pray do no such thing," entreated Agnes; "a pleasant situation for me!"

"Certainly, if Mr. Pritchard behaves himself as you describe," said Miss Charity; "but I've been for hours shut up in the same room with him – sometimes here, and sometimes at the school – about the children, and the widows' fund, and the parish charities, and I never observed the slightest levity; but you are joking, I'm sure."

"I'm *not*, upon my honour. I don't say it's the least harm. I don't see how he can help it; I know if *I* were up in the air – in a reading-desk, with a good chink in the door, where I thought no one could see me, and old Doctor Splayfoot preaching his pet sermon over my head —*wouldn't* I peep? – that's all."

"Well, I really think, if he makes a habit of it, I *ought* to speak to Doctor Splayfoot. I think it's my *duty*," said Miss Charity, sitting up very stiffly, as she did when she spoke of duty; and when once the notion of a special duty got into her head, her inflexibility, as Tom Sedley and her sister Agnes knew, was terrifying.

"For mercy's sake, my dear Charry, do think of *me*! If you tell Doctor Splayfoot he'll be certain to tell it all to Wynne Williams and Doctor Lyster, and Price Apjohn, and every creature in Cardyllian will know everything about it, and a great deal more, before two hours; and once for all, if that ridiculous story is set afloat, into the church door I'll never set my foot again."

Miss Agnes' pretty face had flushed crimson, and her lip quivered with distress.

"How *can* you be such a fool, Aggie! I'll only say it was at *our seat* – and no one can possibly tell which it was at – you or me; and I'll certainly tell Dr. Splayfoot that Mr. Sedley saw it."

"And I'll tell the Doctor," said Sedley, who enjoyed the debate immensely, "that I neither saw nor said any such thing."

"I don't think, Thomas Sedley, you'd do anything so excessively wicked!" exclaimed Miss Charity, a little fiercely.

"Try me," said Tom, with an exulting little laugh.

"Every *gentleman* tells the truth," thrust she.

"Except where it makes mischief," parried Tom, with doubtful morality and another mischievous laugh.

"Well, I suppose I had better say nothing of *Christianity*. But what *you* do is your own affair! *my* duty I'll perform. I shall think it over; and I shan't be ruffled by any folly intended to annoy me." Miss Charity's thin brown cheeks had flushed to a sort of madder crimson. Excepting these flashes of irritability, I can't charge her with many human weaknesses. "I'll not say *who* he looked at – I've promised that; but unless I change my present opinion, Dr. Splayfoot shall hear the whole thing to-morrow. I think in a clergyman any such conduct in church is *unpardonable*. The effect on other people is positively ruinous. *You*, for instance, would not have talked about such things in the light you do, if you had not been encouraged in it, by seeing a clergyman conducting himself so."

"Mind, you've *promised* poor little Agnes, you'll not bring her into the business, no matter what *I* do," said Sedley.

"I have, certainly."

"Well, I'll stay in Cardyllian to-morrow, and I'll see Doctor Splayfoot." Sedley was buttoning his coat and pulling on his gloves, with a wicked smile on his good-humoured face. "And I'll tell him that you think the curate ogles you through a hole in the reading-desk. That *you* like *him*, and *he's* very much gone about *you*; and that you wish the affair brought to a point; and that you're going to appeal to him – Doctor Splayfoot – to use his authority either to affect *that*, or to stop the ogling. I will, upon my honour!"

"And I shall speak to papa to prevent it," said Miss Charity, who was fierce and literal.

"And that will bring about a duel, and he'll be shot in his Bath chair, and I shall be hanged" – old Vane Etherage, with his spectacles on, was plodding away serenely at the little table by the fire, over his *Naval Chronicle* – "and Pritchard will be deprived of his curacy, and you'll go mad, and Agnes will drown herself like Ophelia, and a nice little tragedy you'll have brought about. Good night; I'll not disturb him" – he glanced toward the unconscious Admiral – "I'll see you both to-morrow, after I've spoken to the Rector." He kissed his hand, and was gone.

CHAPTER VI

MALORY BY MOONLIGHT

When Tom Sedley stepped out from the glass door on the gravel walk, among the autumn flowers and the evergreens in the pleasant moonlight, it was just nine o'clock, for in that primitive town and vicinage people keep still wonderfully early hours.

It is a dark and lonely walk, down the steep Hazelden Road, by the side of the wooded glen, from whose depths faintly rises the noise of the mill-stream. The path leads you down the side of the glen, with dense forest above and below you; the rocky steep ascending at the left hand, the wooded precipice descending into utter darkness at your right, and beyond that, rising black against the sky, the distant side of the wooded ravine. Cheery it was to emerge from the close overhanging trees, and the comparative darkness, upon the high road to Cardyllian, which follows the sweep of the estuary to the high street of the town, already quiet as at midnight.

The moon shone so broad and bright, the landscape looked so strange, and the air was so frosty and pleasant, that Tom Sedley could not resist the temptation to take a little walk which led him over the Green, and up the steep path overhanging the sea, from which you command so fine a view of the hills and headlands of the opposite side, and among other features of the landscape, of Malory, lying softly in its dark and misty woodlands.

Moonlight, distance, and the hour, aided the romance of my friend Tom Sedley, who stood in the still air and sighed toward that antique house.

With arms folded, his walking-cane grasped in his right hand, and passed, sword-fashion, under his left arm, I know not what martial and chivalric aspirations concerning death and combat rose in his good-natured heart, for in some temperaments the sentiment of love is mysteriously associated with the combative, and our homage to the gentler sex connects itself magnanimously with images of wholesale assault and battery upon the other. Perhaps if he could have sung, a stave or two might have relieved his mind; or even had he been eloquent in the language of sentiment. But his vocabulary, unhappily, was limited, and remarkably prosaic, and not even having an appropriate stanza by rote, he was fain to betake himself to a cigar, smoking which he at his leisure walked down the hill toward Malory.

Halfway down, he seated himself upon the dwarf wall, at the roadside, and by the ivied stem of a huge old tree, smoked at his ease, and sighed now and then.

"I can't understand it – it is like some confounded witchcraft," said he. "I *can't* get her out of my head."

I dare say it was about the same time that his friend Cleve Verney was performing, though not with so sublime an enthusiasm, his romantic devotions in the same direction, across the water from Ware.

As he stood and gazed, he thought he saw a figure standing near the water's edge on the shingle that makes a long curve in front of Malory.

If a living figure, it was very still. It looked gray, nearly white, in the moonlight. Was there an upright shaft of stone there, or a post to moor the boats by? He could not remember.

He walked slowly down the road. "By Jove! I think it's moving," he said aloud, pulling up all at once and lowering his cigar. "No, it *isn't* moving, but it *did* move, I *think* – yes, it has changed its ground a little – hasn't it? Or is it only my stand-point that's changed?"

He was a good deal nearer now, and it did look much more like a human figure – tall and slight, with a thin gray cloak on – but he could not yet be *quite* certain. Was there not a resemblance in the proportions – tall and slight? The uncertainty was growing intense; there was a delightful confusion of conjecture. Tom Sedley dropped his cigar, and hastened forward with an instinctive

stealthiness in his eagerness to arrive before this figure – if such it were – should be scared away by his approach.

He was now under the shadow of the tall trees that overhang the outer wall of Malory, and cast their shadows some way down upon the sloping shore, near the edge of which a tall female figure was undoubtedly standing, with her feet almost touching the ripple of the water, and looking steadfastly in the direction of the dim headland of Pendillion, which at the far side guards the entrance of the estuary.

In the wall of Malory, at some three hundred yards away from the gate, is a small door, a little sally-port that opens a nearly direct access from the house to the rude jetty where the boats are sometimes moored. This little door stood now wide open, and through it the figure had of course emerged.

Tom Sedley now for the first time began to feel a little embarrassed. The general privacy of the place, the fact that the jetty, and in point of law the strand itself, here, belonged to Malory, from which the private door which still stood open, showed that the lady had emerged – all these considerations made him feel as if he were guilty of an impertinence, and very nearly of a trespass.

The lady stood quite still, looking across the water. Tom Sedley was upon the road that skirts the wall of Malory, in the shadow of the great trees. It would not have done to walk straight across the shingle to the spot where the lady stood, neither could he place himself so as to intercept her return to the doorway, directly so, as a less obvious stratagem, he made a detour, and sauntering along the water's edge like a man intent solely on the picturesque, with a beating heart he approached the female, who maintained her pose quite movelessly until he approached within a few steps.

Then she turned, suddenly, revealing an old and almost agonized face, that looked, in the intense moonlight, white, and fixed as if cut in stone. There is something ludicrous in the sort of shock which Tom Sedley experienced. He stood staring at the old lady with an expression which, if she had apprehended it, would not have flattered her feminine self-esteem, if any of that good quality remained to her.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the old woman, with a nervous eagerness, drawing near. "But pray, can *you* see a sail in that direction, a yawl, sir, they call it, just *there*?" – she pointed – "I fancied about two miles beyond that vessel that lies at anchor *there*? I can't see it now, sir, can *you*?"

She had come so close that Sedley could see not only the deep furrows, but the finely etched wrinkles about the large eyes that gazed on him, and from him to the sea, with an imploring stare.

"There's no sail, ma'am, between us and Pendillion," said Sedley, having first raised his hat deferentially; for did not this strange old lady with her gray mantle drawn over her head, nevertheless, represent Malory, and was not Malory saddened and glorified by the presence of that beautiful being whom he had told himself a thousand times since morning service, he never, *never* could forget?

"Ha, ha! I thought I saw it, exactly, sir, in *that* direction; *pray* look more carefully, sir, my old eyes tire, and fail me."

"No, ma'am, positively nothing there. How long ago is it since you first saw it?"

"Ten – twenty – minutes, it must be."

"A yawl will run a good way in that time, ma'am," said Tom with a little shake of his head, and a smile. "The yawl they had at Ware last year would make eight knots an hour in this breeze, light as it is. She might have been up to Bryll by this time, or down to Pendrewist, but there's no sail, ma'am, either way."

"Oh! sir, are you very sure?"

"Quite sure, ma'am. No sail in sight, except that brig just making the head of Pendillion, and that can't be the sail you saw, for she wasn't in sight twenty minutes since. There's nothing more, ma'am, except boats at anchor."

"Thank you, sir," said the lady, still looking across the water, and with a deep sigh. "No, I suppose there's none. It sometimes happens to me – fancy, I suppose, and long expectation, from my window, looking out. It's a clear view, between the trees, across the bay to Pendillion; my eyes tire, I think; and so I fancy I see it. Knowing, that is, feeling so very sure, it will come again. Another disappointment for a foolish old woman. I sometimes think it's all a dream." She had turned and was now stumbling over the large loose stones toward the door. "Foolish dreams – foolish head – foolish old head, yet, sir, it *may* be that which goes away may come back, all except life. I've been looking out that way," and she turned and moved her hand towards the distant headlands. "You see nothing?"

"No *sail*, ma'am," answered Tom.

"No, no sail," she repeated to the shingle under her feet, as she picked her steps again homeward.

"A little longer – another wait; wait patiently. Oh! God, how slowly years and months go over!"

"May I see you to the door, ma'am?" asked Tom Sedley, prosaically. The old lady, thinking, I dare say, of other things, made him no answer – a silence which he accepted as permission, and walked on beside her, not knowing what to say next, and terribly anxious to hit upon something, and try to found an acquaintance. The open door supplied him.

"Charming place this Cardyllian, ma'am. I believe no one ever was robbed in it. They leave their doors open half the night, just like that."

"Do they, indeed?" said she. I think she had forgotten her companion altogether in the interval. "I don't remember. It's fifteen years and upwards since I was there. I live here, at Malory." She nodded, and raised her eyes to his face as she spoke.

Suddenly she stopped, and looked at him more earnestly in silence for some seconds, and then said she —

"Sir, will you forgive me? Are you related to the Verneys?"

"No, I haven't that honour," said he, smiling. "I *know* Cleve Verney very well, and a very good fellow he is; but we're not connected; my name is Sedley – Thomas Sedley."

"Sedley!" she repeated once or twice, still looking at him, "I recollect the name. No – no connection, I dare say, Cleve; and how *is* Cleve?"

"Very well; he's at Ware, now, for a few days."

"Ah! I dare say, and very well; a pretty boy – very pretty; but not like – no, not the least."

"I've heard people say he's very like what his father was," said Tom.

"Oh! *yes*, I think so; there *is* a likeness," acquiesced she.

"His father's been dead a long time, you know?"

"I know; *yes*. Cleve is at Oxford or Cambridge by this time?" she continued.

Tom Sedley shook his head and smiled a little.

"Cleve has done with all that ever so long. He's in the House of Commons now, and likely to be a swell there, making speeches, and all that."

"I know – I know. I had forgot how long it is since; he was a clever boy, wild, and talkative; *yes*, *yes*, he'll do for Parliament, I suppose, and be a great man, some day, there. There was no resemblance though; and you, sir, are like him, he was so handsome – no one so handsome."

Tom Sedley smiled. He fancied he was only amused. But I am sure he was also pleased.

"And I don't know. I can make out nothing. No one can. There's a picture. I think they'd burn it, if they knew. It is drawn in chalks by a French artist; they colour so beautifully. It hangs in my room. I pray before it, every morning, for him."

The old lady moaned, with her hands folded together, and still looking steadfastly in his face.

"They'd burn it, I think, if they knew there was a picture. I was always told they were a cruel family. Well, I don't know, I forgive him; I've forgiven him long ago. You are very like the picture,

and even more like what I remember him. The picture was taken just when he came of age. He was twenty-seven when I first saw him; he was brilliant, a beautiful creature, and when I looked in his face I saw the sorrow that has never left me. You are wonderfully like, sir; but there's a difference. You're not so handsome." Here was a blow to honest Tom Sedley, who again thought he was only amused, but was really chagrined.

"There is goodness and kindness in your face; his had little of that, nothing soft in it, but everything brilliant and interesting; and yet you are wonderfully like."

She pressed her hand on her thin bosom.

"The wind grows cold. A pain shoots through me while I look at you, sir. I feel as if I were speaking to a spirit, God help me! I have said more to you to-night, than I have spoken for ten years before; forgive me, sir, and thank you, very much."

She turned from him again, took one long look at the distant headland, and then, with a deep sigh, almost a sob, she hastened towards the door. He followed her.

"Will you permit me to see you to the house?" he pleaded, with a benevolence I fear not quite disinterested. She was by this time at the door, from which with a gesture, declining his offer, she gently waved him back, and disappeared within it, without another word. He heard the key turned in the lock, and remained without, as wise with respect to his particular quest as he had arrived.

CHAPTER VII

A VIEW FROM THE REFECTORY WINDOW

The old discoloured wall of Malory, that runs along the shore overshadowed by grand old timber, that looks to me darker than any other grove, is seven feet high, and as he could see neither through nor over it, and could not think of climbing it, after a few seconds spent in staring at the gray door, Tom Sedley turned about and walked down to the little hillock that stands by the roadside, next the strand, and from the top of this he gazed, during an entire cigar, upon the mullioned windows of Malory, and was gratified by one faint gleam of a passing candle from a gallery window.

"That's a nice old woman, odd as she is; she looks quite like a lady; she's certainly not the woman we saw in church to-day; how well she looked; what a nice figure, that time, as she stood looking from the shore; that cloak thing is loose to be sure; but, by Jove, she might have been a girl almost; and what large eyes she has got, and a well-shaped face. She must have been quite charming, about a hundred years ago; she's not the mother: she's too old; a grand-aunt, perhaps; what a long talk we had, and I such a fool, listening to all that rubbish, and never getting in a word about the people, that peerless creature!"

His walk home to Cardyllian was desultory and interrupted. I should not like to risk my credit by relating how often he halted on his way, and how long, to refresh his eyes with the dim outlines of the trees and chimneys of Malory; and how, very late and melancholy, and abstracted, he reached his crib in the Verney Arms.

Early next morning, in pursuance of a clever idea, Tom Sedley made, I admit, his most picturesque and becoming toilet. It consisted of his black velvet knickerbocker suit, with those refined jack-boots of shining leather, and the most charming jerry that had ever appeared in Cardyllian, and away he marched over the hill, while the good people of the town were champing their muffins and sipping their tea, to the back gate of Malory.

It stood half open, and with as careless a boldness as he could assume, in he went and walked confidently up the straight farmyard lane, girt with high thorn hedges. Here, bribing a rustic who showed symptoms of churlishness, with half-a-crown, he was admitted into a sort of farmyard, under pretext of examining the old monastic chapel and refectory, now used as a barn, and some other relics of the friary, which tourists were wont to admire.

From the front of the refectory there is a fine view of the distant mountains. Also, as Tom Sedley recollected, a foreground view, under the trees, in front of the hall-door, and there, with a sudden bound at his heart, he beheld the two ladies who had yesterday occupied the Malory pew, the old and the young, busy about the flower-bed, with garden gauntlets on, and trowel in hand.

They were chatting together cheerily enough, but he could not hear what they said. The young lady now stood up from her work, in a dress which looked to him like plain holland.

The young lady had pushed her hat a little back, and stood on the grass, at the edge of the flowers, with her trowel glittering in the early sun, in her slender right hand, which rested upon her left; her pretty right foot was advanced a little on the short grass, and showed just its tip, over the edge of the flower-bed. A homely dress and rustic appliances. But, oh! that oval, beautiful face!

Tom Sedley – the "peeping Tom" of this story – from his deep monastic window, between the parting of the tall trees, looked down upon this scene in a breathless rapture. From the palmy days of the Roman Pantheon down, was ever Flora so adored?

From under his Gothic arch, in his monkish shade, Tom could have stood, he fancied, for ever, gazing as friar has seldom gazed upon his pictured saint, on the supernatural portrait which his enthusiasm worshipped.

The young lady, as I have described her, looking down upon her old companion, said something with a little nod, and smiled; then she looked up at the tree tops from where the birds were chirping; so Tom had a fair view of her wonderful face, and though he felt himself in imminent danger of detection, he could not move. Then her eyes with a sidelong glance, dropped on the window where he stood, and passed on instantly.

With the instinct which never deceives us, he felt her glance touch him, and knew that he was detected. The young lady turned quietly, and looked seaward for a few moments. Tom relieved his suspense with a sigh; he hoped he might pass muster for a tourist, and that the privileges of such visitors had not been abridged by the recluses.

The young lady then quietly turned and resumed her work, as if nothing had happened; but, I think, she said something to her elderly companion, for that slim lady, in a Tweed shawl, closely brooched across her breast, stood up, walked a step or two backward upon the grass, and looked straight up at the window, with the inquisitive frown of a person a little dazzled or near-sighted.

Honest Tom Sedley, who was in a rather morbid state all this morning, felt his heart throb again, and drum against his ribs, as he affected to gaze in a picturesque absorption upon the distant headlands.

The old lady, on the other hand, having distinctly seen in the deep-carved panel of that antique wall, the full-length portrait of our handsome young friend, Tom Sedley, in his killing knickerbocker suit of black velvet, with his ivory-headed cane in his hand, and that "stunning" jerry which so exactly suited his countenance, and of which he believed no hatter but his own possessed the pattern, or could produce a similar masterpiece.

The old lady with her hand raised to fend off the morning sun that came flickering through the branches on her wrinkled forehead, and her light gray eyes peering on him, had no notion of the awful power of her gaze upon that "impudent young man."

With all his might Tom Sedley gazed at the Welsh headlands, without even winking, while he felt the basilisk eye of the old spinster in gray Tweed upon him. So intense was his stare, that old Pendillion at last seemed to nod his mighty head, and finally to submerge himself in the sea. When he ventured a glance downward, he saw Miss Anne Sheckleton with quick steps entering the house, while the young lady had recommenced working at a more distant flower-bed, with the same quiet diligence.

It was to be feared that the old lady was taking steps for his expulsion. He preferred anticipating her measures, and not caring to be caught in the window, left the refectory, and walked down the stone stairs, whistling and tapping the wall with the tip of his cane.

To him, as the old play-books say, entered from the side next the house, and just as he set the sole of his resplendent boot upon the paving-stones, a servant. Short, strong, and surly was the man. He did not seem disposed for violence, however, for he touched an imaginary hatbrim as he came up, and informed Mr. Sedley, who was properly surprised and pained to hear it, that he had in fact committed a trespass; that since it had been let, the place was no longer open to the inspection of tourists; and, in short, that he was requested to withdraw.

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