# THE TENANTS OF MALORY

## VOLUME II

## BY

## JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER I.

IN THE OAK PARLOUR—A MEETING AND PARTING.

"Gossiping place Cardyllian is," said Miss Anne Sheckleton, after they had walked on a little in silence. "What nonsense the people do talk. I never heard anything like it. Did you ever hear such a galamathias?"

The young lady walking by her side answered by a cold little laugh—

"Yes, I suppose so. All small country towns are, I believe," said she.

"And that good old soul, Mrs. Jones, she does invent the most absurd gossip about every body that imagination can conceive. Wilmot told me the other day that she had given her to understand that your father is a madman, sent down here by London doctors for change of air. I make it a point never to mind one word she says; although her news, I confess, does amuse me."

"Yes, it is, very foolish. Who are those Etherages?" said Margaret.

"Oh! They are village people—oddities," said Miss Sheckleton. "From all I can gather, you have no idea what absurd people they are."

"He was walking with them. Was not he?" asked the young lady.

"Yes—I think so," answered her cousin.

Then followed a long silence, and the elder lady at length said—

"How fortunate we have been in our weather; haven't we? How beautiful the hills look this evening!" said the spinster; but her words did not sound as if she cared about the hills or the light. I believe the two ladies were each acting a part.

"Yes," said Margaret; "so they do."

The girl felt as if she had walked fifty miles instead of two—quite worn out—her limbs aching with a sense of fatigue; it was a trouble to hold her head up. She would have liked to sit down on the old stone bench they were passing now, and to die there like a worn-out prisoner on a march.

Two or three times that evening as they sat unusually silent and listless, Miss Anne Sheckleton peeped over her spectacles, lowering her work for a moment, with a sad inquiry, into her face, and seemed on the point of speaking. But there was nothing inviting to talk, in Margaret's face, and when she spoke there was no reference to the subject on which Miss Sheckleton would have liked to speak.

So, at last, tired, with a pale, wandering smile, she kissed the kind old spinster, and bid her good night. When she reached her room, however, she did not undress, but having secured her door, she sat down to her little desk, and wrote a letter; swiftly and resolutely the pen glided over the page. Nothing added—nothing erased; each line remained as she penned it first.

Having placed this letter in its envelope, and addressed it to "Cleve Verney, Esq., Ware," she opened her window. The air was mild; none of the sharpness in it that usually gives to nights at that time of year, a frosty foretaste of winter. So sitting by the window, which, placed in one of the gables of the old house, commands a view of the uplands of Cardyllian, and to the left, of the sea, and the misty mountains—she sat there, leaning upon her hand.

Here, with the letter on her lap, she sat, pale as a meditating suicide, and looking dreamily over the landscape. It is, at times, some little incident of by-play, or momentary hesitation of countenance, that gives its whole character and force to a situation. Before the retina of Margaret one image was always visible, that of Cleve Verney as she saw him to-day, looking under Agnes Etherage's bonnet, with interest, into her eyes, as he talked and walked by her side, on the Green of Cardyllian.

Of course there are false prophecies as well as true, in love; illusions as well as inspirations, and fancied intimations may mislead. But Margaret could not doubt here. All the time she smiled and assumed her usual tone and manner, there was an agony at her heart.

Miss Fanshawe would trust no one with her secret. She was not like other girls. Something of the fiery spirit of her southern descent she had inherited. She put on the shawl and veil she had worn that day, unbarred the hall-door, and at two o'clock, when Cardyllian was locked in the deepest slumber, glided through its empty streets, to the

little wooden portico, over which that day she had read "Post-office," and placed in it the letter which next morning made quite a little sensation in the Post-office coterie.

Under the awful silence and darkness of the old avenue, she reached again the hall-door of Malory. She stood for a moment upon the steps looking seaward—I think towards Ware—pale as a ghost, with one slender hand clenched, and a wild sorrow in her face. She cared very little, I think, whether her excursion were discovered or not. The messenger had flown from her empty hand; her voice could not recall it, or delay it for an hour—quite irrevocable, and all was over.

She entered the hall, closed and barred the door again, ascended to her room, and lay awake, through the long night, with her hand under her cheek, not stunned, not dreaming, but in a frozen apathy, in which she saw all with a despairing clearness.

Next day Cleve Verney received a note, in a hand which he knew not; but having read—could not mistake—a cold, proud note, with a gentle cruelty, ending all between them, quite decisively, and not deigning a reason for it.

I dare say that Cleve could not himself describe with much precision the feelings with which he read this letter.

Cleve Verney, however, could be as impetuous and as rash too, on occasion, as other people. There was something of rage in his soul which scouted all consequences. Could temerity be imagined more audacious than his?

Right across from Ware to the jetty of Malory ran his yacht, audaciously, in open sea, in broad daylight. There is, in the Dower House, a long low room, wainscoted in black shining panels from floor to ceiling, and which in old times was called the oak parlour. It has two doors, in one of its long sides, the farther opening near the stairs, the other close to the hall door.

Up the avenue, up the steps, into the hall, and, taking chance, into this room, walked Cleve Verney, without encountering interruption or even observation. Fortuna favet fortibus, so runs the legend in faded gold letters, under the dim portrait of Sir Thomas Verney, in his armour, fixed in the panel of the hall. So it had proved with his descendant.

Favoured by fortune, without having met a human being, and directed by the same divinity it would seem, he had entered the room I have described; and at the other end, alone, awaiting Miss Sheckleton, who was to accompany her in a little ramble among the woods, stood Miss Fanshawe, dressed for her walk.

In came Cleve pale with agitation; approached her quickly, and stopped short, saying—

"I've come; I'm here to ask—how could you—my God!—how could you write the letter you sent this morning?"

Miss Fanshawe was leaning a little against the oak window-frame, and did not change this pose, which was haughty and almost sullen.

"Why I wrote that letter, no one has a right to ask me, and I shall say no more than is contained in the letter itself." She spoke so coldly and quietly that there seemed almost a sadness in her tones.

"I don't think you can really mean it," said Cleve, "I'm sure you can't; you can't possibly think that any one would use another so, without a reason."

"Not without a reason," said she.

"But I say, surely I have a right to hear it," urged Cleve. "Is it fair to condemn me, as your letter does, unheard, and to punish me, in ignorance?"

"Not in ignorance; at this moment, you know the reason perfectly," replied the girl, and he felt as if her great hazel eyes lighted up all the dark labyrinths of his brain, and disclosed every secret that lurked there.

Cleve was for a moment embarrassed, and averted his eyes. It was true. He did know; he could not fail to guess the cause. He had been cursing his ill luck all the morning, and wondering what malign caprice could have led her, of all times and places, at that moment, to the Green of Cardyllian.

In the "Arabian Nights," that delightful volume which owes nothing to trick or book-craft, and will preserve its charm undimmed through all the mutations of style and schools, which, projecting its images from the lamp and hues of a dazzling fancy, can no more be lectured into neglect than the magic lantern, and will preserve its popularity while the faculty of imagination and the sense of colour remain, we all remember a parallel. In the "Sultan's Purveyor's Story," where the beautiful favourite of Zobaïde is about to make the bridegroom of her love quite happy, and in the moment of his adoration, starts up transformed with a "lamentable cry," and hate and fury in her aspect, all about an unfortunate "ragout made with garlic," and thereupon, with her own hand and a terrible scourge, lashes him, held down by slaves, into a welter of blood, and then orders the executioner to strike off, at the wrist, his offending hand.

"Yes! you do know, self-convicted, why I think it better for both that we should part now—better that we should thus early be undeceived; with little pain and less reluctance, forget the precipitation and folly of an hour, and go our several ways through life apart. You are fickle; you are selfish; you are reckless; you are quite unworthy of the love you ask for; if you are trifling with that young lady, Miss Etherage, how cruel and unmanly! and if not, by what right do you presume to stand here?"

Could he ever forget that beautiful girl as he saw her before him there, almost terrible—her eyes—the strange white light that seemed to flicker on her forehead—her attitude, Italian more than English, statuesque and wild?

On a sudden came another change, sad as a broken-hearted death and farewell—the low tone—the fond lingering—of an unspeakable sorrow, and eternal leave-taking.

"In either case my resolution is taken. I have said Farewell; and I will see you no more—no more—never."

And as she spoke, she left the room by the door that was beside her.

It was a new sensation for Cleve Verney to feel as he did at that moment. A few steps he followed toward the door, and then hesitated. Then with a new impulse, he did follow and open it. But she was gone. Even the sound of her step was lost.

He turned back, and paused for a minute to collect his thoughts. Of course this must not be. The idea of giving her up so, was simple nonsense, and not to be listened to.

The door at which the young lady had left the room but two or three minutes before, now opened, and Miss Sheckleton's natty figure and kind old face came in. Quite aghast she looked at him.

"For God's sake, Mr. Verney, why are you here? How can you be so rash?" she almost gasped. "You must go, instantly."

"How could you advise the cruelty and folly of that letter?" he said, impetuously.

"What letter?"

"Oh! Miss Sheckleton, do let us be frank; only say what have I done or said, or thought, that I should be condemned and discarded without a hearing?"

Hereupon Miss Sheckleton, still urging his departure in frightened whispers, protested her innocence of his meaning, and at last bethought her of persuading him, to leave the house, and meet her for the purpose of explaining all, of which he soon perceived she was honestly ignorant, in their accustomed trysting-place.

There, accordingly, among the old trees, they met, and discussed, and she blamed and pitied him; and promised, with such caution as old ladies use in speaking for the resolves of the young of their own sex, that Margaret should learn the truth from her, although she could not of course say what she might think of it, taking as she did such decided, and, sometimes, strange views of things.

So they parted kindly. But Cleve's heart was disquieted within him, and his sky this evening was wild and stormy.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER II.

## JUDÆUS APELLA.

On the stillest summer day did you ever see nature quite still, even that circumscribed nature that hems you round with densest trees, as you lounge on your rustic seat, in lazy contemplation, amid the shorn grass of your flower-beds, while all things are oppressed and stifled with heat and slumber? Look attentively, and you will see a little quiver like a dying pulse, in the hanging flower-bells, and a light faint tremble in this leaf and that. Of nature, which is, being interpreted, life, the law is motion, and this law controls the moral as well as the physical world. Thus it is that there is nowhere any such thing as absolute repose, and everywhere we find change and action.

Over Malory, if anywhere, broods the spirit of repose. Buried in deep forest—fenced on one side by the lonely estuary—no town or village lying beyond it; seaward the little old-world road that passes by it is quite forsaken by traffic. Even the sound of children's laughter and prattle is never heard there, and little but the solemn caw of the rooks and the baying of the night-dog. Yet chance was then invading that quiet seclusion with an unexpected danger.

A gentleman driving that day to the "George Inn" at Cardyllian, from a distant station on the Great London line, and having picked up from his driver, a Cardyllian man, all he could about Malory, and an old Mrs. Mervyn who lived there, stopped suddenly at the corner of the old road, which, two miles below Cardyllian, turns off inland, and rambles with many pleasant windings into the road that leads to Penruthyn Priory.

This gentleman, whose dress was in the cheap and striking style, and whose jewellery was conspicuous, was high-shouldered, with a very decided curve, though not exactly a hunch. He was small, with rather long arms. His hair, whiskers, and beard were glossy black, and his features Jewish. He switched and twirled a black walking-cane, with silver knobs on it, in his hand, and he had two or three rings on his fingers.

His luggage had gone on to the "George," and whenever opportunity occurred along that solitary road he renewed his inquiries about Malory, with a slight peculiarity of accent which the unsophisticated rustics in that part of the world had never heard before.

By this time it was evening, and in the light of the approaching sunset, he might now, as the view of the sea and the distant mountains opened, have enjoyed a pleasure for which, however, he had no taste; these evening glows and tints were to him but imperfect light, and he looked along the solemn and shadowy hills as he would have run his eye along the shops in Cheapside—if with any interest, simply to amuse himself with a calculation of what they might be worth in money.

He was now passing the pretty church-yard of Llanderris. The gray head-stones and grass-grown graves brought home to him no passing thought of change and mortality; death was to him an arithmetical formula by which he measured annuities and reversions and policies. And now he had entered the steep road that leads down with an irregular curve to Malory.

He looked down upon the grand old wood. He had a smattering of the value of timber, and remembered what a hit Rosenthal and Solomons had made of their purchase of the wood at East Milton, when the railway was about to be made there; and what a nice bit of money they had made of their contract for sleepers and all sorts of other things. Could not Jos. Larkin, or some better man, be found to get up a little branch line from Llwynan to Cardyllian? His large mouth almost watered as he thought of it; and how that eight or nine miles of rail would devour every inch of timber that grew there—not a branch would be lost.

But now he was descending toward Malory, and the banks at the right hand and the left shut out the view. So he began to descend the slope at his leisure, looking up and about him and down at the worn road for material for thought, for his mind was bustling and barren.

The road is not four steps across. It winds steeply between high banks. Over these stoop and mingle in the perspective, the gray stems of tall ash trees mantled in ivy, which here and there climbs thickly among the boughs, and makes a darker umbrage among the foliage of the trees. Beneath, ascending the steep banks, grow clumps of nettles, elder,

hazel, and thorn. Only down the slope of the road can the passenger see anything of the country it traverses, for the banks out-top him on either side. The rains have washed its stones so bare, wearing a sort of gulley in the centre, as to give it the character in some sort of a forest ravine.

The sallow, hatchet-faced man, with prominent black eyes, was walking up this steep and secluded road. Those sharp eyes of his were busy. A wild bee hummed over his head, and he cut at it pleasantly with his stick, but it was out of reach, and he paused and eyed its unconscious flight, with an ugly smile, as if he owed it a grudge for having foiled him. There was little life in that secluded and dark track. He spied a small dome-shaped black beetle stumbling through the dust and pebbles, across it.

The little man drew near and peered at it with his piercing eyes and a pleasant grin. He stooped. The point of his pale nose was right over it. Across the desert the beetle was toiling. His path was a right line. The little man looked across to see what he was aiming at, or where was his home. There was nothing particular that he could perceive in the grass and weeds at the point witherward he was tending in a right line. The beetle sprawled and stumbled over a little bead of clay, recovered his feet and his direction, and plodded on in a straight line. The little man put his stick, point downward, before him. The beetle rounded it carefully, and plodded on inflexibly in the same direction. Then he of the black eyes and long nose knocked him gently in the face, and again and again, jerking him this way or that. Still, like a prize-fighter he rallied between the rounds, and drove right on in his old line. Then the little man gave him a sharper knock, which sent him a couple of feet away, on his back; right and left sprawled and groped the short legs of the beetle, but alas! in vain. He could not right himself. He tried to lurch himself over, but in vain. Now and then came a frantic gallop with his little feet; it was beating the air. This was pleasant to the man with the piercing eyes, who stooped over, smiling with his wide mouth, and showing his white fangs. I wonder what the beetle thought of his luck—what he thought of it all. The paroxysms of hope, when his feet worked so hard, grew shorter. The intervals of despair and inaction grew longer. The beetle was making up his mind that he must lie on his back and die slowly, or be crushed under a hoof, or picked up and swallowed by a wandering farm-yard fowl.

Though it was pleasant to witness his despair, the man with the prominent eyes tired of the sight, he gave him a poke under the back, and tumbled him up again on his feet, and watched him. The beetle seemed a little bothered for a while, and would have shaken himself I'm sure if he could. But he soon came to himself, turned in his old direction,

and, as it seemed to the observer, marched stumbling on with indomitable perseverance toward the selfsame point. I know nothing of beetle habits. I can make no guess why he sought that particular spot. Was it merely a favourite haunt, or were there a little beetle brood, and a wife awaiting him there? A strong instinct of some sort urged him, and a most heroic perseverance.

And now I suppose he thought his troubles over, and that his journey was about surely to be accomplished. Alas! it will never be accomplished. There is an influence near which you suspect not. The distance is lessening, the green grass, and dock leaves, and mallows, very near. Alas! there is no sympathy with your instinct, with the purpose of your life, with your labours and hopes. An inverted sympathy is there; a sympathy with the difficulty—with "the Adversary"—with death. The little man with the sharp black eyes brought the point of his stick near the beetle's back, having seen enough of his pilgrimage, and squelched him.

The pleasure of malice is curious. There are people who flavour their meals with their revenges, whose future is made interesting by the hope that this or that person may come under their heel. Which is pleasantest, building castles in the air for ourselves, or dungeons in pandemonium for our enemies? It is well for one half of the human race that the other has not the disposal of them. More rare, more grotesque, more exquisitely fiendish, is that sport with the mysteries of agony, that lust of torture, that constitute the desire and fruition of some monstrous souls.

Now, having ended that beetle's brief life in eternal darkness, and reduced all his thoughts and yearnings to cypher, and dissolved his persevering and resolute little character, never to be recombined, this young gentleman looked up among the yellow leaves in which the birds were chirping their evening gossip, and treated them to a capital imitation of a wild cat, followed by a still happier one of a screech-owl, which set all the sparrows in the ivy round twittering in panic; and having sufficiently amused himself, the sun being now near the horizon, he bethought him of his mission to Malory. So on he marched whistling an air from an opera, which, I am bound to admit, he did with the brilliancy and precision of a little flageolet, in so much that it amounted to quite a curiously pretty accomplishment, and you would have wondered how a gentleman with so unmistakeable a vein of the miscreant in him, could make such sweet and bird-like music.

A little boy riding a tired donkey into Cardyl lian, pointed out to him the gate of the old place, and with a jaunty step, twirling his cane, and whistling as he went, he reached the open space before the door steps.

The surly servant who happened to see him as he hesitated and gaped at the windows, came forth, and challenged him with tones and looks the reverse of hospitable.

"Oh! Mrs. Mervyn?" said he; "well, she doesn't live here. Get ye round that corner there, and you'll see the steward's house with a hatch-door to it, and you may ring the bell, and leave, d'ye mind, by the back way. You can follow the road by the rear o' the house."

So saying, he warned him off peremptorily with a flunkey's contempt for a mock gentleman, and the sallow man with the black eyes and beard, not at all put out by that slight treatment, for he had seen all sorts of adventures, and had learned unaffectedly to despise contempt, walked listlessly round the corner of the old house, with a somewhat knock-kneed and ungainly stride, on which our bandy friend sneered gruffly.

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## CHAPTER III.

## MR. LEVI VISITS MRS. MERVYN.

And now the stranger stood before the steward's house, which is an old stone building, just three stories high, with but few rooms, and heavy stone shafts to the windows, with little diamond lattices in them, all stained and gray with age—antiquaries assign it to the period of Henry VII.—and when the Jewish gentleman, his wide, loose mouth smiling in solitary expectation, slapped and rattled his cane upon the planks of the hatch, as people in old times called "house!" to summon the servants, he was violating the monastic silence of a building as old as the bygone friars, with their matin bells and solemn chants.

A little Welsh girl looked over the clumsy banister, and ran up with his message to Mrs. Mervyn.

"Will you please come up stairs, sir, to the drawing-room?" asked the child.

He was amused at the notion of a "drawing-room" in such a place, and with a lazy sneer climbed the stairs after her.

This drawing-room was very dark at this hour, except for the patch of red light that came through the lattice and rested on the old cupboard opposite, on which stood, shelf above shelf, a grove of coloured delf candlesticks, tea-cups, jugs, men, women, teapots, and beasts, all in an old-world style, a decoration which prevails in humble Welsh chambers, and which here was a property of the house, forgotten, I presume, by the great house of Verney, and transmitted from tenant to tenant, with the lumbering furniture.

The flighty old lady, Mrs. Mervyn of the large eyes, received him with an old-fashioned politeness and formality which did not in the least embarrass her visitor, who sate himself down, smiling his moist, lazy smile, with his knees protruded under the table, on which his elbows rested, and with his heels on the rung of his chair, while his hat and cane lay in the sunlight beside him.

"The maid, I think, forgot to mention your name, sir?" said the old lady gently, but in a tone of inquiry.

"Very like, ma'am—very like, indeed—because, I think, I forgot to mention my name to her," he drawled pleasantly. "I've taken a deal of trouble—I have—to find you out, ma'am, and two hundred and forty-five miles here, ma'am, and the same back again—a journey of four hundred and ninety miles—is not just nothing. I'm glad to see you, ma'am—happy to find you in your drawing-room, ma'am—hope you find yourself as well, ma'am, as your numerous friends could wish you. My name, ma'am, is Levi, being junior governor of the firm of Goldshed and Levi, well known on 'Change, ma'am, and justly appreciated by a large circle of friends, as you may read upon this card."

The card which he tendered did not, it must be allowed, speak of these admiring friends, but simply announced that "Goldshed and Levi" were "Stockbrokers," pursuing their calling at "Offices—, Scroop Street, Gimmel Lane," in the City. And having held this card before her eyes for a sufficient time, he put it into his pocket.

"You see, ma'am, I've come all this way for our house, to ask you whether you would like to hear some news of your governor, ma'am?"

"Of whom, sir?" inquired the tall old lady, who had remained standing all this time, as she had received him, and was now looking at him with eyes, not of suspicion, but of undisguised fear.

"Of your husband, ma'am, I mean," drawled he, eyeing her with his cunning smile.

"You don't mean, sir——" said she faintly, and thereupon she was seized with a trembling, and sat down, and her very lips turned white, and Mr. Levi began to think "the old girl was looking uncommon queerish," and did not like the idea of "its happening," under these circumstances.

"There, ma'am—don't take on! Where's the water? Da-a-a-mn the drop!" he exclaimed, turning up mugs and jugs in a flurry. "I say—Mary Anne—Jane—chick-a-biddy—girl—be alive there, will ye?" howled the visitor over the banister. "Water, can't ye? Old woman's sick!"

"Better now, sir—better—just open that—a little air, please," the old lady whispered.

With some hurried fumbling he succeeded in getting the lattice open.

"Water, will you? What a time you're about it, little beast!" he bawled in the face of the child.

"Much better, thanks—very much better," whispered the old lady.

"Of course, you're better, ma'am. Here it is at la-a-ast. Have some water, ma'am? Do. Give her the water, you little fool."

She sipped a little.

"Coming round—all right," he said tenderly. "What cattle them old women are! drat them." A little pause followed.

"A deal better now, ma'am?"

"I'm startled, sir."

"Of course you're startled, ma'am."

"And faint."

"Why not, ma'am?"

Mrs. Rebecca Mervyn breathed three or four great sighs, and began to look again like a living woman.

"Now she looks quite nice," (he pronounced it ni-i-ishe) "doesn't she? You may make tracksh, young woman; go, will you?"

"I feel so much better," said the old lady when they were alone, "pray go on."

"You do—quite—ever so much better. Shall I go on?"

"Pray do, sir."

"Well now, see, if I do, there must be no more of that, old lady. If you can't talk of the governor, we'll just let him alone," said Levi, sturdily.

"For God's sake, sir, if you mean my husband, tell me all you know."

"All aint a great deal, ma'am; but a cove has turned up who knew him well."

"Some one who knew him?"

"Just so, ma'am." He balanced whether he should tell her that he was dead or not, but decided that it would be more convenient, though less tragic, to avoid getting up a new scene like the other, so he modified his narrative. "He's turned up, ma'am, and knew him very intimate; and has got a meogny" (he so pronounced mahogany) "desk of his, gave in charge to him, since he could not come home at present, containing a law paper, ma'am, making over to his son and yours some property in England."

"Then, he is not coming?" said she.

"Not as I knowzh, ma'am."

"He has been a long time away," she continued.

"So I'm informed, ma'am," he observed.

"I'll tell you how it was, and when he went away."

"Thank ye, ma'am," he interposed. "I've heard—melancholy case, ma'am; got seven penn'orth, didn't he, and never turned up again?"

"Seven what, sir?"

"Seven years, ma'am; seven penn'orth we call it, ma'am, familiar like."

"I don't understand you, sir—I don't know what it means; I saw him sail away. It went off, off, off."

"I'll bet a pound it did, ma'am," said Mr. Levi.

"Only to be for a very short time; the sail—I could see it very far—how pretty they look on the sea; but very lonely, I think—too lonely."

"A touch of solitary, ma'am," acquiesced Levi.

"Away, in the yacht," she dreamed on.

"The royal yacht, ma'am, no doubt."

"The yacht, we called it. He said he would return next day; and it went round Pendillion—round the headland of Pendillion, I lost it, and it never came again; but I think it will, sir—don't you? I'm sure it will—he was so confident; only smiled and nodded, and he said, 'No, I won't say good-bye.' He would not have said that if he did not mean to return—he could not so deceive a lonely poor thing like me, that adored him."

"No, he couldn't ma'am, not he; no man could. Betray the girl that adored him! Ba-a-ah! impossible," replied Mr. Levi, and shook his glossy ringlets sleepily, and dropped his eyelids, smiling. This old girl amused him, her romance was such a joke. But the light was perceptibly growing more dusky, and business must not wait upon fun, so Mr. Levi said—

"He'sh no chicken by this time, ma'am—your son, ma'am; I'm told he'sh twenty-sheven yearsh old—thatsh no chicken—twenty-sheven next birthday."

"Do you know anything of him, sir? Oh, no, he doesn't," she said, looking dreamily with her great sad eyes upon him.

"Jest you tell me, ma'am, where was he baptised, and by what name?" said her visitor.

A look of doubt and fear came slowly and wildly into her face as she looked at him.

"Who is he—I've been speaking to you, sir?"

"Oh! yesh, mo-o-st beautiful, you 'av, ma'am," answered he; "and I am your son's best friend—and yours, ma'am; only you tell me where to find him, and he'sh a made man, for all his dayzh."

"Where has he come from?—a stranger," she murmured.

"I told you, ma'am."

"I don't know you, sir; I don't know your name," she dreamed on.

"Benjamin Levi. I'll spell it for you, if you like," he answered, beginning to grow testy. "I told you my name, and showed you my ca-a-ard. Bah! it ravels at one end, as fast as it knits at the other."

And again he held the card of the firm of Goldshed and Levi, with his elbows on the table, between the fingers of his right and left hand, bowed out like an old-fashioned shopboard, and looking as if it would spring out elastically into her face.

"There, ma'am, that'sh the ticket!" said he, eyeing her over it.

"Once, sir, I spoke of business to a stranger, and I was always sorry; I did mischief," said the old woman, with a vague remorsefulness.

"I'm no stranger, ma'am, begging your pardon," he replied, insolently; "you don't half know what you're saying, I do think. Goldshed and Levi—not know us; sich precious rot, I never!"

"I did mischief, sir."

"I only want to know where to find your son, ma'am, if you know, and if you won't tell, you ruin that poor young man. It aint a pound to me, but it'sh a deal to him," answered the good-natured Mr. Levi.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but I once did mischief by speaking to a gentleman whom I didn't know. Lady Verney made me promise, and I'm sure she was right, never to speak about business without first consulting some member of her family. I don't understand business—never did," pleaded she.

"Well, here's a go! not understaan'? Why, there's nothing to understaan'. It isn't business. S-o-n," he spelt "son. H-u-s-b-a-n-d—uzbaan' that aint business—da-a-m me! Where's the business? Ba-ah!"

"Sir," said the old lady, drawing herself up, "I've answered you. It was about my husband—God help me—I spoke before, and did mischief without knowing it. I won't speak of him to strangers, except as Lady Verney advises—to any stranger—especially to you, sir."

There was a sound of steps outside, which, perhaps, modified the answer of Mr. Levi. He was very much chagrined, and his great black eyes looked very wickedly upon her helpless face.

"Ha, ha, ha! as you please, ma'am. It isn't the turn of a shilling to me, but you ru-in the poo-or young man, your son, for da-a-am me, if I touch his bushinesh again, if it falls through now; mind you that. So, having ruined your own flesh and blood, you tell me to go as I came. It's nau-thing to me—mind that—but ru-in to him; here's my hat and stick—I'm going, only just I'll give you one chance more for that poor young man, just a minute to think again." He had stood up, with his hat and cane in his hand. "Just one chance—you'll be sending for me again, and I won't come. No—no—never, da-a-am me!"

"Good evening, sir," said the lady.

Mr. Levi bit his thumb-nail.

"You don't know what you're a-doing, ma'am," said he, trying once more.

"I can't, sir—I can't," she said, distractedly.

"Come, think—I'm going—going; just think—what do you shay?"

He waited.

"I won't speak, sir."

"You won't?"

"No, sir."

He lingered for a moment, and the red sunlight showed like a flush of anger on his sallow face. Then, with an insolent laugh, he turned, sticking his hat on his head, and walked down the stairs, singing.

Outside the hatch, he paused for a second.

"I'll get it all another way," he thought. "Round here," he said, "wasn't it—the back way. Good evening, you stupid old crazy cat," and he saluted the windows of the steward's house with a vicious twitch of his cane.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER IV.

### MR. BENJAMIN LEVI RECOGNISES AN ACQUAINTANCE.

Mr. Benjamin Levi, having turned the corner of the steward's house, found himself before two great piers, passing through the gate of which he entered the stable-yard, at the further side of which was a second gate, which he rightly conjectured would give him access to that back avenue through which he meant to make his exit.

He glanced round this great quadrangle, one end of which was over-looked by the rear of the old house, and that quaint old refectory with its clumsy flight of stone steps, from the windows of which our friend Sedley had observed the ladies of Malory while engaged in their garden work.

There was grass growing between the paving stones, and moss upon the walls, and the stable doors were decaying upon their rusty hinges. Commenting, as so practical a genius naturally would, upon the surrounding capabilities and decay, Mr. Levi had nearly traversed this solitude when he heard some one call, "Thomas Jones!" twice or thrice, and the tones of the voice arrested him instantly.

He was a man with a turn for musical business, and not only dabbled in concerts and little operatic speculations, but, having a naturally musical ear, had a retentive memory for voices—and this blind man's faculty stood him in stead here, for, with a malicious thrill of wonder and delight, he instantly recognised this voice.

The door of that smaller yard which is next the house opened now, and Sir Booth Fanshawe entered, bawling with increased impatience—"Thomas Jones!"

Sir Booth's eye lighted on the figure of Mr. Levi, as he stood close by the wall at the other side, hoping to escape observation.

With the same instinct Sir Booth stepped backward hastily into an open stable door, and Mr. Levi skipped into another door, within which unfortunately, a chained dog, Neptune, was dozing.

The dog flew the length of his tether at Mr. Levi's legs, and the Jewish gentleman sprang forth more hastily even than he had entered.

At the same moment, Sir Booth's pride deter mined his vacillation, and he strode boldly forward and said—

"I think I know you, sir; don't I?"

As there was still some little distance between them, Mr. Levi affected near-sightedness, and, compressing his eyelids, smiled dubiously, and said—

"Rayther think not, sir. No, sir—I'm a stranger; my name is Levi—of Goldshed and Levi—and I've been to see Mrs. Mervyn, who lives here, about her young man. I don't know you, sir—no—it is a mishtake."

"No, Mr. Levi—you do know me—you do," replied Sir Booth, with a grim oath, approaching, while his fingers clutched at his walking-stick with an uneasy gripe, as if he would have liked to exercise it upon the shoulders of the Israelite.

"Oh! crikey! Ay, to be sure—why, it's Sir Booth Fanshawe! I beg pardon, Sir Booth. We thought you was in France; but no matter, Sir Booth Fanshawe, none in the world, for all that little bushiness is blow'd over, quite. We have no interest—no more than your horse—in them little securities, upon my shoul; we sold them two months ago to Sholomons; we were glad to sell them to Sholomons, we were; he hit us pretty hard with

some of Wilbraham and Cumming's paper, and I don't care if he never sees a shilling of it—we would raythe like it." And Mr. Levi again made oath to that confession of feeling.

"Will you come into the house and have a glass of sherry or something?" said Sir Booth, on reflection.

"Well, I don't mind," said Mr. Levi.

And in he went and had a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and grew friendly and confidential.

"Don't you be running up to town, Sir Booth—Sholomons is looking for you. Clever man, Sholomons, and you should get quietly out of this country as soon as you conveniently can. He thinks you're in France now. He sent Rogers—you know Rogers?"

He paused so long here that Sir Booth had to answer "No."

"Well, he sent him—a good man, Rogers, you know, but drinks a bit—after you to Vichy, ha, ha, ha! Crikey! it was rich. Sholomons be blowed! It was worth a pound to see his face—ugly fellow. You know Sholomons?"

And so Mr. Levi entertained his host, who neither loved nor trusted him, and at his departure gave him all sorts of friendly warnings and sly hints, and walked and ran partly to the "George," and got a two-horse vehicle as quickly as they could harness the horses, and drove at great speed to Llywnan, where he telegraphed to his partner to send a writ down by the next train for Sir Booth, the message being from Benjamin Levi, George Inn, Cardyllian, to Goldshed and Levi, &c., &c., London.

Mr. Levi took his ease in his inn, sipped a good deal of brandy and water, and smoked many cigars, with a serene mind and pleasant anticipations, for, if nothing went wrong, the telegram would be in his partner's hand in ample time to enable him, with his

accustomed diligence, to send down a "beak" with the necessary documents by the night train who would reach Cardyllian early, and pay his little visit at Malory by nine o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Levi, as prosperous gentlemen will, felt his solitude, though luxurious, too dull for the effervescence of his spirits, and having questioned his host as to the amusements of Cardyllian, found that its normal resources of that nature were confined to the billiard and reading rooms, where, on payment of a trifling benefaction to the institution, he enjoyed, as a "visitor," the exhilarating privileges of a member of the club.

In the billiard-room, accordingly, that night, was the fragrance of Mr. Levi's cheroot agreeably perceptible, the sonorous drawl of his peculiar accent vocal amongst pleasanter intonations, and his "cuts," "double doubles," and "long crosses," painfully admired by the gentlemen whose shillings he pocketed at pool. And it was pleasant to his exquisitively commercial genius to think that the contributions of the gentlemen to whom he had "given a lesson," and whose "eyes he had opened," would constitute a fund sufficient to pay his expenses at the "George," and even to leave something towards his return fare to London.

The invalid who was suffering from asthma in the bed-room next his was disturbed by his ejaculations as he undressed, and by his repeated bursts of laughter, and rang his bell and implored the servant to beg of the two gentlemen who were conversing in the next room to make a little less noise, in consideration of his indisposition.

The manner in which he had "potted" the gentlemen in the billiard-room, right and left, and the uncomfortable admiration of his successes exhibited in their innocent countenances, had, no doubt, something to do with these explosions of merriment. But the chief source of his amusement was the anticipated surprise of Sir Booth, when the little domiciliary visit of the next morning should take place, and the recollection of his own adroitness in mystifying the Baronet.

So he fell into a sweet slumber, uncrossed by even an ominous dream, not knowing that the shrewd old bird for whom his chaff was spread and his pot simmering had already flown with the scream of the whistle on the wings of the night train to Chester, and from

that centre to an unknown nook, whence, in a day or two more, he had flitted to some continental roost, which even clever Mr. Levi could not guess.

Next morning early, the ladies were on their way to London, through which they were to continue their journey, and to join Sir Booth abroad.

Two persons were, therefore, very much disappointed next day at Malory; but it could not be helped. One was Cleve Verney, who tried the inexorable secrecy of the servant in every way, but in vain; possibly because the servant did not himself know where "the family" were gone. The other was Mr. Benjamin Levi, who resented Sir Booth's selfish duplicity with an exasperation which would hardly have been appeased by burning that "old mizzled robber" alive.

Mr. Levi flew to Chester with his "beak" in a third-class carriage, and thence radiated telegraphic orders and entreaties affecting Sir Booth wherever he had a friend, and ready, on a hint by the wires, to unleash his bailiff on his track, and fix him on the soil, immovable as the petrified witch of Mucklestane Muir, by the spell of his parchment legend.

But no gleam of light rewarded his labours. It was enough to ruffle even Mr. Levi's temper, which, accordingly, was ruffled. To have been so near! To have had his hand, as it were, upon the bird. If he had only had the writ himself in his pocket he might have dropped, with his own fingers, the grain of salt upon his tail. But it was not to be. At the moment of possession, Mr. Levi was balked. He could grind curses under his white teeth, and did not spare them now. Some of them were, I dare say, worthy of that agile witch, "Cuttie Sark," as she stood baffled on the "key-stane" of the bridge, with Meggie's severed tail in her grip.

In the meantime, for Cleve Verney, Malory is stricken with a sudden blight. Its woods are enchanted no longer; it is dark, now, and empty. His heart aches when he looks at it.

He missed his accustomed walk with the Etherage girls. He wrote to tell old Vane Etherage that he was suffering from a severe cold, and could not dine with him, as he

had promised. The cold was a lie—but was he really well? Are the spirits no part of health; and where were his?

About a fortnight later, came a letter from his good friend, Miss Sheckleton. How delightfully interesting, though it contained next to nothing. But how interesting! How often he read it through! How every solitary moment was improved by a glance into it!

It was a foreign letter. It would be posted, she said, by a friend in Paris. She could not yet tell, even to a friend so kind as he, the address which would find them. She hoped, however, very soon to be at liberty to do so. All were well. Her young friend had never alluded since to the subject of the last painful interview. She, Miss Sheckleton, could not, unless a favourable opening presented, well invite a conversation on the matter. She had no doubt, however, that an opportunity would occur. She understood the peculiar character of her beautiful young cousin, and saw a difficulty, and even danger, in pressing the question upon her, possibly prematurely. When he, Cleve, wrote—which she supposed he would so soon as he was in possession of her address—he could state exactly what he wished her to say. Meanwhile, although as she had before hinted, dear Margaret was admired and sought by a man both of rank and fortune, with very great constancy, (she thought it not improbable that Cleve had already suspected that affair,) there was in her opinion nothing to appre hend, at least at present, in that gentleman's suit—flattered, of course, she must be by a constancy so devoted; but she hardly thought there was a chance that the feeling would grow to anything beyond that. So, she bid God bless him, and wrote Anne Sheckleton at the foot of the page.

The physician who, mistaking a complaint, administers precisely the concoction which debilitates the failing organ, or inflames the tortured nerve, commits just such an innocent cruelty as good Miss Sheckleton practised, at the close of her letter, upon Cleve Verney.

She had fancied that he knew something of the suit to which she referred for the purpose of relieving an anxiety to which her thoughtful allusion introduced him, in fact, for the first time.

Who was this faithful swain? He knew enough of Sir Booth Fanshawe's surroundings, his friends and intimates, to count up four, or five, or six possible rivals. He knew what

perseverance might accomplish, and absence undo, and his heart was disquieted within him.

If he had consulted his instinct, he would have left Ware forthwith, and pursued to the Continent, and searched every town in France; but he could not act quite according to impulse. He had told the Cardyllian people that he was not to leave Ware till the fourteenth; would no remark attend his sudden departure, following immediately upon the mysterious flitting of the Malory people? He knew what wonderful stories might thereupon arise in Cardyllian, and how sure they would be, one way or another, to reach his uncle Kiffyn, and how that statesman's suspicions might embarrass him. Then a letter might easily reach Ware while he was away, and be lost, or worse.

So he resolved to see out the rest of his time where he was. In Cardyllian church, how dark and cold looked the cavity of the Malory pew! The saints and martyrs in the great eastern window were subdued, and would not glow, and their glories did not burn, but only smouldered that day. And oh! how long was Dr. Splayfoot's sermon! And how vague was his apprehension of the "yarn" to which Miss Charity Etherage treated him all the way from the church porch to the top of Castle Street.

He was glad when the fifteenth, which was to call him away from Ware, approached. He was glad to leave this changed place, glad to go to London—anywhere.

Just as all was ready for his flight by the night train, on the evening of the th, to his great joy, came a letter, a note, almost, so short, from kind Anne Sheckleton.

All—underlined—were well. There was no thing more, in fact, but one satisfactory revelation, which was the address which would now find them.

So Cleve Verney made the journey to London that night in better spirits.

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## CHAPTER V.

## A COUNCIL OF THREE.

Messrs. Goldshed and Levi have a neat office in Scroop Street. As stockbrokers, strictly, they don't, I am told, do anything like so large a business as many of their brethren. Those brethren, for the most part, are not proud of them. Their business is of a somewhat contraband sort. They have been examined once or twice uncomfortably before Parliamentary Committees. They have been savagely handled by the great Mr. Hackle, the Parliamentary counsel. In the great insurance case of "The executors of Shakerly v. The Philanthropic Union Company," they were hideously mangled and eviscerated by Sergeant Bilhooke, whose powers are well known. They have been called "harpies," "ghouls," "Madagascar bats," "vermin," "wolves," and "mousing owls," and are nothing the worse of it. Some people think, on the contrary, rather the better, as it has helped to advertise them in their particular line, which is in a puffing, rigging, fishy, speculative, "queerish" business, at which moral stockbrokers turn up their eyes and noses, to the amusement of Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, who have—although the sober office in Scroop Street looks sometimes a little neglected—no end of valuable clients, of the particular kind whom they covet, and who frequent the other office, in Wormwood Court, which looks so dirty, mean, and neglected, and yet is the real seat of power.

The "office" in Wormwood Court is an old-fashioned, narrow-fronted, dingy house. It stands apart, and keeps its own secrets, having an uninhabited warehouse on one side, and a shabby timber-yard at the other. In front is a flagged court-yard, with dingy grass sprouting here and there, and lines of slimy moss, grimed with soot.

The gate is, I believe, never opened—I don't know that its hinges would work now. If you have private business with the firm on a wet day, you must jump out of your cab in the street, and run up through the side door, through the rain, over the puddled flags, and by the famous log of mahogany which the Messrs. Goldshed and Levi and their predecessors have sold, in bill transactions, nearly six thousand distinct times, without ever losing sight of it.

In the street this day there stood a cab, at that door. Mr. Jos. Larkin, the Gylingden attorney, was in consultation with the firm. They were sitting in "the office," the front room which you enter at your right from the hall. A high, old-fashioned chimney-piece cuts off the far angle of the room, obliquely. It is wainscoted in wood, in tiny square panels, except over the fireplace, where one great panel runs across, and up to the ceiling, with somebody's coat of arms carved in relief upon it. This woodwork has been painted white, long ago, but the tint has degenerated to a cream or buff colour, and a good washing would do it no harm. Mr. Levi and others have pencilled little sums in addition, subtraction, and multiplication on it. You can see the original oak where the hat-rack was removed, near the window, as also in those places where gentlemen have cut their names or initials.

The window is covered with dust and dirt, beaten by the rain into all sorts of patterns. A chastened light enters through this screen, and you can't see from without who is in the room.

People wonder why Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, with so well-appointed an office in Scroop Street, will keep this private office in so beggarly a state; without a carpet, only a strip of nearly-obliterated oil-cloth on its dirty floor. Along the centre of the room extends a great old, battered, oblong mahogany quadrangle, full of drawers, with dingy brass handles, and having midway a sort of archway, like a bridge under a railway embankment, covered with oil-cloth of an undistinguishable pattern, blotched with old stains of red ink and black, and dribblings of sealing-wax, curling up here and there dustily, where office-knives, in fiddling fingers, have scarred its skin. On top of this are two clumsy desks. Behind one sits the junior partner, on a high wooden stool, and behind the other, the senior, on a battered office chair, with one of its haircloth angles protruding, like the corner of a cocked hat, in front, dividing the short, thick legs of Mr. Goldshed, whose heels were planted on the rungs, bending his clumsy knees, and reminding one of the attitude in which an indifferent rider tries to keep his seat on a restive horse.

Goldshed is the senior in every sense. He is bald, he is fat, he is short. He has gems on his stumpy fingers, and golden chains, in loops and curves, cross the old black velvet waistcoat, which is always wrinkled upward by the habit he has of thrusting his broad, short hands into his trousers pockets.

At the other side, leaning back in his chair, and offering, he flatters himself, a distinguished contrast to the vulgar person opposite, sat Mr. Jos. Larkin, of the Lodge, Gylingden. His tall, bald head was thrown a little back; one arm, in its glossy black sleeve, hung over the back of his chair, with his large red knuckles near the floor. His pink eyes wore their meek and dove-like expression; his mouth a little open, in repose; an air of resignation and beatitude, which, together with his well-known elegance, his long, lavender tinted trousers, and ribbed silk waistcoat of the same favourite hue, presented a very perfect picture, in this vulgar Jewish setting, of a perfect Christian gentleman.

"If everything favours, Mr. Goldshed, Mr. Dingwell may be in town to-morrow evening. He sends for me immediately on his arrival, to my quarters, you understand, and I will send him on to you, and you to Mrs. Sarah Rumble's lodgings."

"Mish Rumble," drawled Goldshed; "not married—a girl, Mish."

"Yes, Mrs. Rumble," continued Larkin, gently, "there's no harm in saying Mrs.; many ladies in a position of responsibility, prefer that style to Miss, for obvious reasons."

Here Goldshed, who was smiling lazily, winked at his junior, who returned that signal in safety, for Mr. Larkin, whose countenance was raised toward the ceiling, had closed his eyes. The chaste attorney's discretion amused them, for Miss Sarah Rumble was an industrious, careworn girl of two-and-fifty, taciturn, and with a brown pug face, and tresses somewhat silvery.

"We are told by the apostle," continued Mr. Larkin, musingly, "not only to avoid evil, but the appearance of evil. I forgot, however, our religions differ."

"Yes—ay—our religions differ, he says; they differ, Levi, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," drawled that theologian.

"Yes, they do; we see our way to that," concluded Goldshed.

Larkin sighed.

There was a short silence here. Mr. Larkin opened his pink eyelids, and showing his small, light blue eyes, while he maintained his easy and gentlemanlike attitude.

The senior member of the firm looked down on his desk, thoughtfully, and picked at an old drop of sealing wax with his office knife, and whistled a few slow bars, and Mr. Levi, looking down also, scribbled the cipher of the firm thirteen times, with flourishes, on a piece of paper.

Mr. Goldshed worked his short thick knees and his heels a little uneasily; the office chair was growing a little bit frisky, it seemed.

"Nishe shailing, Mr. Larkin, and oh, dear! a great lot of delicashy! What do you think?" said Mr. Goldshed, lifting up the office knife, with the edge toward the attorney, and letting it fall back two or three times, between his finger and thumb, dubiously. "The parties being swells, makesh it more delicate—ticklish—ticklish; do you shinsherely think it's all quite straight?"

"Of course, it's straight. I should hope, Mr. Goldshed, I have never advised any course that was not so," said Mr. Larkin, loftily.

"I don't mean religious—law blesh you—I mean safe," said Mr. Goldshed, soothingly.

A light pink flush touched the bald forehead of the attorney.

"Whatever is right, sir, is safe; and that, I think, can hardly be wrong—I hope not—by which all parties are benefited," said the attorney.

"All parties be diddled—except our shelves. I'm thinking of my shelf—and Mr. Levi, here—and, of courshe, of you. Very much of you," he added, courteously.

Mr. Larkin acknowledged his care by a faint meek bow.

"They're swells," repeated Mr. Goldshed.

"He saysh they're swelsh," repeated Mr. Levi, whose grave look had something of the air of a bully in it, fixing his dark prominent eyes on Mr. Larkin, and turning his cheek that way a little, also. "There's a danger in handling a swell—in them matters specially."

"Suppose theresh a contempt?" said Mr. Goldshed, whose chair grew restive, and required management as he spoke.

"He saysh a contempt," repeated Mr. Levi, "or shomething worse," and he heightened the emphasis with an oath.

"I'll guarantee you for twopence, Mr. Levi; and pray consider me, and do not swear," urged Mr. Larkin.

"If you guarantee us, with a penalty," began Mr. Levi, who chose to take him literally.

"I said that, of course, Mr. Levi, by way of illustration, only; no one, of course, dreams of guaranteeing another without a proper consideration. I should have hoped you could not have misunderstood me. I don't understand guarantees, it is a business I have never touched. I'm content, I hope, with the emoluments of my profession, and what my

landed property gives me. I only mean this—that there is no risk. What do we know of Mr. Dingwell, that is not perfectly above board—perfectly? I challenge the world upon that. If anything should happen to fall through, we, surely, are not to blame. At the same time if you—looking at it with your experience—apprehend any risk, of course, I couldn't think of allowing you to go on. I can arrange, this evening, and not very far from this house, either."

As Mr. Larkin concluded, he made a feint of rising.

"Ba-ah!" exclaimed Levi. "You don't think we want to back out of thish transhaction, Mr. Larkin? no-o-oh! That's not the trick of thish offishe—is it, gov'nor? He saysh no."

"No," echoed Goldshed.

"No, never—noways! you hear him?" reiterated Mr. Levi. "In for a penny, in for a pound—in for a shilling, in for a thousand. Ba-ah!—No, never."

"No, noways—never!" reverberated Goldshed, in deep, metallic tones. "But, Levi, there, must look an inch or two before his noshe—and sho must I—and sho, my very good friend, Mr. Larkin, must you—a bit before your noshe. I don't see no great danger. We all know, the Honourable Arthur Verney is dead. We are sure of that—and all the rest is not worth the odd ha'pensh in that book," and he touched the mighty ledger lying by him, in which millions were entered. "The rest is Dingwell's affair."

"Just so, Mr. Goldshed," acquiesced Mr. Larkin. "We go together in that view."

"Dingwell be blowed!—what need we care for Dingwell?" tolled out Mr. Goldshed, with his ringing bass.

"Ba-ah!—drat him!" echoed the junior.

"Yes—a—quite as you say—but where's the good of imprecation? With that exception, I quite go with you. It's Dingwell's affair—not ours. We, of course, go straight—and I certainly have no reason to suspect Dingwell of anything crooked or unworthy."

"Oh, no—ba-ah!—nothing!" said Levi.

"Nor I," added Goldshed.

"It'sh delicate—it izh delicate—but very promishing," said Mr. Goldshed, who was moistening a cigar in his great lips. "Very—and no-thing crooked about it."

"No-thing crooked—no!" repeated Mr. Levi, shaking his glossy curls slowly. "But very delicate."

"Then, gentlemen, it's understood—I'm at liberty to assume—that Mr. Dingwell finds one or other of you here whenever he calls after dark, and you'll arrange at once about the little payments."

To which the firm having promptly assented, Mr. Larkin took his leave, and, being a client of consideration, was accompanied to the shabby doorstep by Mr. Levi, who, standing at the hall-door, with his hands in his pockets, nodded slily to him across the flagged court-yard, into the cab window, in a way which Mr. Jos. Larkin of the Lodge thought by many degrees too familiar.

"Well—there's a cove!" said Mr. Levi, laughing lazily, and showing his long rows of ivory fangs, as he pointed over his shoulder, with the point of his thumb, towards the street.

"Rum un!" said Mr. Goldshed, laughing likewise, as he held his lighted cigar between his fingers.

And they laughed together tranquilly for a little, till, with a sudden access of gravity, Mr. Goldshed observed, with a little wag of his head—

"He's da-a-am clever!"

"Ay—yes—da-a-am clever!" echoed Levi.

"Not as much green as you'd put your finger on—I tell you—no muff—devilish good lay, as you shall see," continued Goldshed.

"Devilish good—no, no muff—nothing green," repeated Mr. Levi, lighting his cigar. "Good head for speculation—might be a bit too clever, I'm thinking," and he winked gently at his governor.

"Believe you, my son, if we'd let him—but we won't—will we?" drawled Mr. Goldshed, jocosely.

"Not if I knows it," said Mr. Levi, sitting on the table, with his feet on the stool, and smoking towards the wall.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER VI.

## MR. DINGWELL ARRIVES.

Messrs. Goldshed and Levi owned four houses in Rosemary Court, and Miss Sarah Rumble was their tenant. The court is dark, ancient, and grimy. Miss Rumble let lodgings, worked hard, led an anxious life, and subsisted on a remarkably light diet, and at the end of the year never had a shilling over. Her Jewish landlords used to pay her a visit now and then, to receive the rent, and see that everything was right. These visits she dreaded; they were grumbling and minatory, and enlivened by occasional oaths and curses. But though it was part of their system to keep their tenants on the alert by perpetual fault-findings and menaces, they knew very well that they got every shilling the house brought in, that Miss Rumble lived on next to nothing, and never saved a shilling, and was, in fact, their underfed, overworked, and indefatigable slave.

With the uncomplaining and modest charity of the poor, Sarah Rumble maintained her little orphan niece and nephew by extra labour at needle-work, and wonderful feats of domestic economy.

This waste of resources Mr. Levi grudged. He had never done complaining of it, and demonstrating that it could only be accomplished by her holding the house at too low a rent; how else could it be? Why was she to keep other people's brats at the expense of Messrs. Goldshed and Levi? What was the workhouse for? This perpetual pressure was a sore trouble to the poor woman, who had come to love the children as if they were her own; and after one of Mr. Levi's minatory visits she often lay awake sobbing, in the terror and yearnings of her unspeakable affection, whilst its unconscious objects lay fast asleep by her side.

From Mr. Levi, in his accustomed vein, Miss Rumble had received full instructions for the reception and entertainment of her new lodger, Mr. Dingwell. He could not say when he would arrive, neither the day nor the hour; and several days had already elapsed, and no arrival had taken place. This evening she had gone down to "the shop," so designated, as if there had been but one in London, to lay out a shilling and seven

pence very carefully, leaving her little niece and nephew in charge of the candle and the house, and spelling out their catechism for next day.

A tapping came to the door; not timid, nor yet menacing; a sort of double knock, delivered with a walking-cane; on the whole a sharp but gentlemanlike summons, to which the little company assembled there were unused. The children lifted their eyes from the book before them, and stared at the door without answering. It opened with a latch, which, without more ado, was raised, and a tall, white-haired gentleman, with a stoop, and a very brown skin, looked in inquisitively, and said, with a smile that was not pleasant, and a voice not loud but somewhat harsh and cold—

"Mrs. or Miss Rumble hereabouts, my dears?"

"Miss Rumble; that's aunt, please, sir;" answered the little girl, slipping down from her chair, and making a courtesy.

"Well, she's the lady I want to speak with, my love. Where is she?" said the gentleman, glancing round the homely chamber from under his white eyebrows with a pair of cold, gray, restless eyes.

"She's—she's"——hesitated the child.

"Not in bed, I see; nor in the cupboard" (the cupboard door was open). "Is she up the chimney, my charming child?"

"No, sir, please; she's gone to Mrs. Chalk's for the bacon."

"Mrs. Chalk's for the bacon?" echoed the gentleman. "Very good! Excellent woman! excellent bacon, I dare say. But how far away is it?—how soon shall we have your aunt back again?"

"Just round the corner, please, sir; aunt's never no time," answered the child. "Would you please call in again?"

"Charming young lady! So accomplished! Who taught you your grammar? So polite—so suspicious. Do you know the meaning of that word, my dear?"

"No, sir, please."

"And I'm vastly obliged for your invitation to call again; but I find your company much too agreeable to think of going away; so, if you allow me—and do shut that door, my sweet child; many thanks—I'll do myself the honour to sit down, if I may venture, and continue to enjoy your agreeable conversation, till your aunt returns to favour us with her charming presence—and bacon."

The old gentleman was glancing from under his brows, from corner to corner of this homely chamber; an uneasy habit, not curiosity; and, during his ceremonious speech, he kept bowing and smiling, and set down a black leather bag that he had in his hand, on the deal table, together with his walking-cane, and pulled off his gloves, and warmed his hands at the tiny bit of fire. When his back was toward them the children exchanged a glance, and the little boy looked frightened, and on the point of bursting into tears.

"Hish!" whispered the girl, alarmed, for she could not tell what effect the demonstration might have upon the stranger—"quiet!"—and she shook her finger in urgent warning at Jemmie. "A very nice gent, as has money for aunty—there!"

So the tears that stood in Jemmie's big eyes were not followed by an outcry, and the gentleman, with his hat and outside wrapper on, stood, now, with his back to the little fire, looking, in his restless way, over the children's heads, with his white, cold eyes, and the same smile. There was a dreamy idea haunting Lucy Maria's head that this gentleman was very like a white animal she had seen at the Surrey Zoological Gardens when her uncle had treated her to that instructive show; the same sort of cruel grin, and the same restless oscillation before the bars of its cage.

"Hey! so she'll be back again?" said he, recollecting the presence of the two children; "the excellent lady, your aunt, I mean. Superb apartment this is, but it strikes me, hardly sufficiently lighted, hey? One halfpenny candle, however brilliant, can hardly do justice to such a room; pretty taper—very pretty—isn't it? Such nice mutton fat, my dear young lady, and such a fine long snuff—like a chimney, with a Quaker's hat on the top of it—you don't see such fine things everywhere! And who's this young gentleman, who enjoys the distinction of being admitted to your salon; a page, or what?"

"It's Jemmie, sir; stand up, and bow to the gentleman, Jemmie."

Jemmie slipped down on the floor, and made a very alarmed bow, with his great eyes staring deprecatingly in the visitor's face.

"I'm charmed to make your acquaintance. What grace and ease! It's perfectly charming! I'm too much honoured, Mr. Jemmie. And so exquisitely got up, too! There's only one little toilet refinement I would venture to recommend. The worthy lady, Mrs. Chalks, who contributes bacon to this house, and, I presume, candles—could, I dare say, also supply another luxury, with which you are not so well acquainted, called soap—one of the few perfectly safe cosmetics. Pray try it; you'll find it soluble in water. And, ho? reading too! What have you been reading out of that exquisite little volume?"

"Catechism, please sir," answered the little girl.

"Ho, Catechism? Delightful! What a wonderful people we English are!" The latter reflection was made for his own entertainment, and he laughed over it in an undertone. "Then your aunt teaches you the art of godliness? You've read about Babel, didn't you?—the accomplishment of getting up to heaven is so nice!"

"Sunday school, sir, please," said the girl.

"Oh, it's there you learn it? Well, I shall ask you only one question in your Catechism, and that's the first—what's your name?"

"Lucy Maria."

"Well, Lucy Maria and Mr. Jemmie, I trust your theological studies may render you at last as pious as I am. You know how death and sin came into the world, and you know what they are. Sin is doing anything on earth that's pleasant, and death's the penalty of it. Did you ever see any one dead, my sweet child—not able to raise a finger or an eyelid? rather a fix, isn't it?—and screwed up in a stenching box to be eaten by worms—all alone, under ground? You'll be so, egad, and your friend, Jemmie, there, perhaps before me—though I'm an old boy. Younkers go off sometimes by the score. I've seen 'em trundled out in fever and plague, egad, lying in rows, like plucked chickens in a poulterer's shop. And they say you have scarlatina all about you here, now; bad complaint, you know, that kills the little children. You need not frighten yourselves though, because it must happen, sooner or later—die you must. It's the penalty, you know, because Eve once eat an apple."

"Yes, sir."

"Rather hard lines on us, isn't it? She eat an apple, and sin, and death, and colic—I never eat an apple in consequence—colic came into the world, and cider, as a consequence—the worst drink ever invented by the devil. And now go on and learn your Church Catechism thoroughly, and you'll both turn into angels. Upon my life, I think I see the feathers beginning to sprout from your shoulders already. You'll have wings, you know, if all goes right, and tails for anything I know."

The little boy looked in his face perplexed and frightened—the little girl, answering his haggard grin with an attempted smile, showed also bewilderment and dismay in her eyes. They were both longing for the return of their aunt.

Childish nature, which is only human nature without its scarf skin, is always afraid of irony. It is not its power, but its treachery that is dreadful—the guise of friendship

hiding a baleful purpose underneath. One might fancy the seasoned denizens of Gehenna welcoming, complimenting, and instructing new comers with these profound derisions. How children delight in humour! how they wince and quail under irony! Be it ever so rudely fashioned and clumsily handled, still it is to them a terrible weapon. If children are to be either ridiculed or rebuked, let it be honestly, in direct terms. We should not scare them with this jocularity of devils.

Having thus amused himself with the children for a time, he unlocked his leather bag, took out two or three papers, ordered the little girl to snuff the candle, and pulled it across the table to the corner next himself, and, sitting close by, tried to read, holding the letter almost in the flame, screwing his white eyebrows together, and shifting his position, and that of the candle also, with very little regard to the studious convenience of the children.

He gave it up. The red and smoky light tried his eyes too severely. So, not well pleased, he locked his letters up again.

"Cat's eyes—owls! How the devil they read by it passes my comprehension. Any more candles here—hey?" he demanded with a sudden sharpness that made the children start.

"Three, please sir."

"Get 'em."

"On the nail in the closet, please sir."

"Get 'em, d—n it!"

"Closet's locked, please sir. Aunt has the key."

"Ha!" he snarled, and looked at the children as if he would like to pick a quarrel with them.

"Does your aunt allow you to let the fire out on nights like this—hey? You're a charming young lady, you—and this young gentleman, in manners and appearance, everything the proudest aunt could desire; but I'm curious to know whether either one or the other is of the slightest earthly use; and secondly, whether she keeps a birch-rod in that closet—hey?—and now and then flogs you—ha, ha, ha! The expense of the rod is trifling, the pain not worth mentioning, and soon over, but the moral effects are admirable, better and more durable—take my word for it—than all the catechisms in Paternoster Row."

The old gentleman seemed much tickled by his own pleasantries, and laughed viciously as he eyed the children.

"You did not tell me a fib, I hope, my dear, about your aunt? She's a long time about coming; and, I say, do put a little coal on the fire, will you?"

"Coal's locked up, please sir," said the child, who was growing more afraid of him every minute.

"'Gad, it seems to me that worthy woman's afraid you'll carry off the bricks and plaster. Where's the poker? Chained to the wall, I suppose. Well, there's a complaint called kleptomania—it comes with a sort of irritation at the tips of the fingers, and I should not be surprised if you and your friend Jemmie, there, had got it."

Jemmie looked at his fingers' ends, and up in the gentleman's face, in anxious amazement.

"But there's a cure for it—essence of cane—and if that won't do, a capital charm—nine tails of a gray cat, applied under competent direction. Your aunt seems to understand that disorder—it begins with an itching in the fingers, and ends with a pain in the back—

ha, ha, ha! You're a pair of theologians, and, if you've read John Bunyan, no doubt understand and enjoy an allegory."

"Yes, sir, please, we will," answered poor Lucy Maria, in her perplexity.

"And we'll be very good friends, Miss Maria Louise, or whatever your name is, I've no doubt, provided you play me no tricks and do precisely whatever I bid you; and, upon my soul, if you don't, Til take the devil out of my pocket and frighten you out of your wits, I will—ha, ha, ha!—so sure as you live, into fits!"

And the old gentleman, with an ugly smile on his thin lips, and a frown between his white eyebrows, fixed his glittering gaze on the child and wagged his head.

You may be sure she was relieved when, at that moment, she heard her aunt's well-known step on the lobby, and the latch clicked, the door opened, and Miss Rumble entered.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER VII.

## MR. DINGWELL MAKES HIMSELF COMFORTABLE.

"Ah!—ho! you are Miss Rumble—hey?" said the old gentleman, fixing a scrutinising glance from under his white eyebrows upon Sally Rumble, who stood in the doorway, in wonder, not unmixed with alarm; for people who stand every hour in presence of Giant Want, with his sword at their throats, have lost their faith in fortune, and long ceased to expect a benevolent fairy in any stranger who may present himself dubiously, and anticipate rather an enemy. So, looking hard at the gentleman who stood before the little fire, with his hat on, and the light of the solitary dipt candle shining on his by no means pleasant countenance, she made him a little frightened courtesy, and acknowledged that she was Sally Rumble, though she could not tell what was to follow.

"I've been waiting; I came here to see you—pray, shut the door—from two gentlemen, Jews whom you know—friends—don't be uneasy —friends of mine, friends of yours—Mr. Goldshed and Mr. Levi, the kindest, sweetest, sharpest fellows alive, and here's a note from them—you can read?"

"Read! Law bless you—yes, sir," answered Sally.

"Thanks for the blessing: read the note; it's only to tell you I'm the person they mentioned this morning, Mr. Dingwell. Are the rooms ready? You can make me comfortable—eh?"

"In a humble way, sir," she answered, with a courtesy.

"Yes, of course; I'm a humble fellow, and—I hear you're a sensible young lady. These little pitchers here, of course, have ears: I'll say all that's necessary as we go up: there's a fellow with a cab at the door, isn't there? Well, there's some little luggage of mine on it—

we must get it up stairs; give the Hamal something to lend a hand; but first let me see my rooms."

"Yes, sir," said Sally, with another courtesy, not knowing what a Hamal meant. And Mr. Dingwell, taking up his bag and stick, followed her in silence, as with the dusky candle she led the way up the stairs.

She lighted a pair of candles in the drawing-room. There was some fire in the grate. The rooms looked better than he had expected; there were curtains, and an old Turkish carpet, and some shabby, and some handsome, pieces of furniture.

"It will do, it will do—ha, ha, ha! How like a pawnbroker's store it looks—no two things match in it; but it is not bad: those Jew fellows, of course, did it? All this stuff isn't yours?" said Mr. Dingwell.

"Law bless you, no, sir," answered Sally, with a dismal smile and a shake of her head.

"Thanks again for your blessing. And the bed-room?" inquired he.

She pushed open the door.

"Capital looking-glass," said he, standing before his dressing-table—"cap-i-tal! if it weren't for that great seam across the middle—ha, ha, ha! funny effect, by Jove! Is it colder than usual, here?"

"No, sir, please; a nice evening."

"Devilish nice, by Allah! I'm cold through and through my great coat. Will you please poke up that fire a little? Hey! what a grand bed we've got! what tassels and ropes! and,

by Jove, carved angels or Cupids—I hope Cupids—on the foot-board!" he said, running the tip of his cane along the profile of one of them. "They must have got this a wonderful bargain. Hey! I hope no one died in it last week?"

"Oh, la! sir; Mr. Levi is a very pitickler gentleman; he wouldn't for all he's worth."

"Oh! not he, I know; very particular."

Mr. Dingwell was holding the piece of damask curtain between his finger and thumb, and she fancied was sniffing at it gently.

"Very particular, but I'm more so. We, English, are the dirtiest dogs in the world. They ought to get the Turks to teach 'em to wash and be clean. I travelled in the East once, for a commercial house, and know something of them. Can you make coffee?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Very strong?"

"Yes, sir, sure."

"Very, mind. As strong as the devil it must be, and as clear as—as your conscience." He was getting out a tin case, as he spoke. "Here it is. I got it in—I forget the name—a great place, near one of your bridges. I suppose it's as good as any to be had in this place. Of course it isn't all coffee. We must go to the heathen for that; but if they haven't ground up toasted skeletons, or anything dirty in it, I'm content. I'm told you can't eat or drink a mouthful here without swallowing something you never bargained for. Everything is drugged. Look at our Caiquejees! You have no such men in your padded Horse- guards. And what do they live on? Why, a crust of brown bread and a melon, and now and then a dish of pilauf! But it's good—it's pure—it's what it calls itself. You d——d Christian cheats, you're an opprobrium to commerce and civilisation; you're the greatest oafs on

earth, with all your police and spies. Why it's only to will it, and you don't; you let it go on. We are assuredly a beastly people!"

"Sugar, please, sir?"

"No, thank you."

"Take milk, sir?"

"Heaven forbid! Milk, indeed! I tell you what, Mrs.—What's your name?—I tell you, if the Sultan had some of your great fellows—your grocers, and bakers, and dairymen, and brewers, egad!—out there, he'd have 'em on their ugly faces and bastinado their great feet into custard pudding! I've seen fellows—and devilish glad I was to see it, I can tell you—screaming like stuck pigs, and their eyes starting out of their heads, and their feet like bags of black currant jelly, ha, ha, ha!—for a good deal less. Now, you see, ma'am, I have high notions of honesty; and this tin case I'm going to give you will give me three small cups of coffee, as strong as I've described, six times over; do you understand?—six times three, eighteen; eighteen small cups of coffee; and don't let those pretty little foxes' cubs down stairs meddle with it. Tell 'em I know what I'm about, and they'd better not, ha, ha, ha! nor with anything that belongs to me, to the value of a single piastre."

Miss Sarah Rumble was a good deal dismayed by the jubilant severity of Mr. Dingwell's morals. She would have been glad had he been of a less sharp and cruel turn of pleasantry. Her heart was heavy, and she wished herself a happy deliverance, and had a vague alarm about the poor little children's falling under suspicion, and of all that might follow. But what could she do? Poverty is so powerless, and has so little time to weigh matters maturely, or to prepare for any change; its hands are always so full, and its stomach so empty, and its spirits so dull.

"I wish those d——d curtains were off the bed," and again they underwent the same disgusting process; "and the bed-clothes, egad! They purify nothing here. You know nothing about them either, of course? No—but they would not like to kill me. No;—that would not do. Knock their little game on the head, eh? I suppose it is all right. What's

prevalent here now? What sort of—I mean what sort of death—fever, small-pox, or scarlatina—eh? Much sickness going?"

"Nothink a'most, sir; a little measles among the children."

"No objection to that; it heads them down a bit, and does not trouble us. But what among the grown people?"

"Nothink to signify in the court here, for three months a'most."

"And then, ma'am, what was it, pray? Give those to your boy" (they were his boots); "let him rub 'em up, ma'am, he's not a bit too young to begin; and, egad! he had better do 'em well, too;" and thrusting his feet into a great pair of slippers, he reverted to his question—"What sickness was then, ma'am, three months ago, here in this pleasant little prison-yard of a place—hey?"

"Fever, please, sir, at No. . Three took it, please: two of 'em went to hospital."

"And never walked out?"

"Don't know, indeed, sir—and one died, please, sir, in the court here, and he left three little children."

"I hope they're gone away?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Well, that's a release. Rest his soul, he's dead! as our immortal bard, that says everything so much better than anyone else, says; and rest our souls, they're gone with their vile noise. So your bill of mortality is not much to signify; and make that coffee—d'ye see?—this moment, and let me have it as hot as—as the final abode of Dissenters and Catholics—I see you believe in the Church Catechism—immediately, if you please, to the next room."

So, with a courtesy, Sally Rumble tripped from the room, with the coffee-case in her hand.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE LODGER AND HIS LANDLADY.

Sally was beginning to conceive a great fear of her guest, and terror being the chief spring of activity, in a marvellously short time the coffee was made, and she, with Lucy Maria holding the candle behind her, knocking at what they called the drawing-room door. When, in obedience to his command, she entered, he was standing by the chimney-piece, gazing at her through an atmosphere almost hazy with tobacco smoke. He had got on his dressing-gown, which was pea-green, and a scarlet fez, and stood with his inquisitive smile and scowl, and his long pipe a little removed from his lips.

"Oh, it's you? yes; no one—do you mind—except Mr. Larkin, or Mr. Levi, or Mr. Goldshed, ever comes in to me—always charmed to see you, and them—but there ends my public; so, my dear lady, if any person should ask to see Mr. Dingwell, from New York in America, you'll simply say there's no such person here—yes—there's—no—such—person—here—upon my honour. And you're no true woman if you don't say so with pleasure—because it's a fib."

Sarah Rumble courtesied affirmatively.

"I forgot to give you this note—my letter of introduction. Here, ma'am, take it, and read it, if you can. It comes from those eminent harpies, the Messrs. Goldshed and Levi—your landlords, aren't they?"

Another courtesy from grave, dark-browed Miss Rumble acknowledged the fact.

"It is pleasant to be accredited by such gentlemen—good landlords, I dare say?"

"I've nothing to say against Mr. Levi; and I'm 'appy to say, sir, my rent's bin always paid up punctual," she said.

"Yes, just so—capital landlord! charming tenant; and I suspect if you didn't, they'd find a way to make you—eh? Your coffee's not so bad—you may make it next time just a degree stronger, bitter as wormwood and verjuice, please—black and bitter, ma'am, as English prejudice. It isn't badly made, however—no, it is really good. It isn't a common Christian virtue, making good coffee—the Mahometans have a knack of it, and you must be a bit of a genius, ma'am, for I think you'll make it very respectably by to- morrow evening, or at latest, by next year. You shall do everything well for me, madam. The Dingwells are always d—d flighty, wicked, unreasonable people, ma'am, and you'll find me a regular Dingwell, and worse, madam. Look at me—don't I look like a vampire. I tell you, ma'am, I've been buried, and they would not let me rest in my grave, and they've called me up by their infernal incantations, and here I am, ma'am, an evoked spirit. I have not read that bit of paper. How do they introduce me—as Mr. Dingwell, or Mr. Dingwell's ghost? I'm wound up in a sort of way; but I'm deficient in blood, ma'am, and in heat. You'll have to keep the fire up always like this, Mrs. Rumble. You'd better mind, or you'll have me a bit too like a corpse to be pleasant. Egad! I frighten myself in the glass, ma'am. There is what they call transfusion of blood now, ma'am, and a very sensible thing it is. Pray, don't you think so?"

"I do suppose what you say's correct, sir."

"When a fellow comes out of the grave, ma'am—that's sherry in that bottle; be kind enough to fill this glass—he's chilly, and he wants blood, Mrs. Rumble. A gallon, or so, transfused into my veins wouldn't hurt me. You can't make blood fast enough for the wear and tear of life, especially in a place like merry England, as the poets call it—and merry England is as damp all over as one of your charnel vaults under your dirty churches. Egad! it's enough to make a poor ghost like me turn vampire, and drain those rosy little brats of yours—ha, ha, ha!—your children, are they, Mrs. Rumble—eh?"

"No, sir, please—my brother's children."

"Your brother's—ho! He doesn't live here, I hope?"

"He's dead, sir."

"Dead—is he?"

"Five years last May, sir."

"Oh! that's good. And their mother?—some more sherry, please."

"Dead about four years, poor thing! They're orphans, sir, please."

"'Gad! I do please; it's a capital arrangement, ma'am, as they are here, and you mustn't let 'em go among the children that swarm about places like this. Egad! ma'am, I've no fancy for scarlatina or small-pox, or any sort or description of your nursery maladies."

"They're very 'ealthy, sir, I thank you," said grave Sarah Rumble, a little mistaking Mr. Dingwell's drift.

"Very glad to hear it, ma'am."

"Very kind o' you, sir," she said, with a courtesy.

"Kind, of course, yes, very kind," he echoed.

"Very 'ealthy, indeed, sir, I'm thankful to say."

"Well, yes, they do look well—for town brats, you know—plump and rosy—hang 'em, little skins of sweet red wine; egad! enough to make a fellow turn vampire, as I said. Give me a little more sherry—thank you, ma'am. Any place near here where they sell ice?"

"Yes, sir, there's Mr. Candy's hice-store, in Love Lane, sir."

"You must arrange to get me a pound, or so, every day at twelve o'clock, broken up in lumps, like sugar, and keep it in a cold cellar; do you mind, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"How old are you, ma'am? Well, no, you need not mind—hardly a fair question; a steady woman—a lady who has seen the world—something of it, hey?" said he; "so have I—I'm a steady old fellow, egad!—you must give me a latch-key, ma'am."

"Yes, sir."

"Some ten or twelve years will see us out; curious thing life, ma'am, eh? ha, ha, ha!—Sparkling cup, ma'am, while it lasts—sometimes; pity the flask has so few glasses, and is flat so soon; isn't it so, ma'am?"

"I never drank wine, sir, but once."

"No! where was that?"

"At Mr. Snelly's wedding, twenty years since."

"'Gad! you'd make a good Turk, ma'am—don't mistake me—it's only they drink no wine. You've found life an up-hill business, then, hey?"

Mrs. Rumble sighed profoundly, shook her head, and said,—

"I've 'ad my trials, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha! to be sure, why not? then you're a bit tired, I dare say; what do you think of death?"

"I wish I was ready, sir."

"An ugly fellow, hey? I don't like the smell of him, ma'am."

"We has our hopes, sir."

"Oh! sure and certain hope—yes, the resurrection, hey?"

"Yes, sir, there's only one thing troubles me—them poor little children. I wouldn't care how soon I went if they was able to do for themselves."

"They do that very early in London—girls especially; and you're giving them such an excellent training—Sunday school—eh—and Church Catechism, I see. The righteous are never forsaken, my excellent mother used to tell me; and if the Catechism does not make little Miss what's- her-name righteous, I'm afraid the rosy little rogue has a spice of the devil in her."

"God forbid, sir."

"Amen, of course. I'm sure they're all right—I hope they are—for I'll whip 'em both; I give you fair warning, on my honour, I will, if they give me the least trouble."

"I'll be very careful, sir, and keep them out of the way," said the alarmed Sarah Rumble.

"Oh! I don't care about that; let 'em run about, as long as they're good; I've no objection in life to children—quite the contrary—plump little rogues—I like 'em—only, egad! if they're naughty, I'll turn 'em up, mind."

Miss Rumble looked at him with as much alarm as if the threat had been to herself.

He was grinning at her in return, and nodded once or twice sharply.

"Yes, ma'am, lollypops and sugar-candy when they're good; but, egad! when they're naughty, ma'am, you'll hear 'em squalling."

Miss Rumble made an alarmed courtesy.

"'Gad, I forgot how cold this d——d town is. I say, you'll keep a fire in my bed-room, please; lay on enough to carry me through the night, do you mind?"

"Yes, sir."

"And poke this fire up, and put some more wood, or coal, on it; I don't expect to be ever warm again—in this world, eh?—ha, ha, ha! I remember our gardener, when we were boys, telling me a story of a preacher in a hard frost, telling his congregation that hell was a terribly cold place, lest if he described what good fires they kept there they'd all

have been wishing to get into it. Did you ever know any one, ma'am, of my name, Dingwell, before, eh? Where were you born?"

"London, sir, please."

"Ho! Canterbury was our place; we were great people, the Dingwells, there once. My father failed, though—fortune of war—and I've seen all the world since; 'gad, I've met with queer people, ma'am, and one of those chances brings me here now. If I had not met the oddest fish I ever set my eyes on, in the most out-o'-the-way-place on earth, I should not have had the happiness of occupying this charming apartment at this moment, or of making your acquaintance, or that of your plump little Cupid and Psyche, down stairs. London, I suppose, is pretty much what it always was, where any fellow with plenty of money may have plenty of fun. Lots of sin in London, ma'am, eh? Not quite so good as Vienna. But the needs and pleasures of all men, according to their degree, are wonderfully provided for; wherever money is there is a market—for the cabman's copper and the guinea of the gentleman he drives—everything for money, ma'am—bouquets, and smiles, and coffins, wooden or leaden, according to your relative fastidiousness. But things change very fast, ma'am. Look at this map; I should not know the town—a wilderness, egad! and no one to tell you where fun is to be found."

She gazed, rather frightened, at this leering, giggling old man, who stood with his shoulders against the chimney-piece, and his hands tumbling over his shillings in his pockets, and his sinister and weary face ever so little flushed with his sherry and his talk.

"Well, if you can give a poor devil a wrinkle of any sort—hey?—it will be a charity; but, egad! I'm as sleepy as the Homilies," and he yawned direfully. "Do, like an angel, go and see to my room, I can scarcely keep my eyes open."

From the next room she heard him hi-yeawing in long-drawn yawns, and talking in snatches to himself over the fire, and when she came back he took the candle and said,—

"Beaten, ma'am, fairly beaten to-night. Not quite what I was, though I'm good for something still; but an old fellow can't get on without his sleep."

Mr. Dingwell's extraordinary communicativeness would have quite charmed her, had it not been in a faint way racy of corruption, and followed with a mocking echo of insult, which she caught, but could not accurately interpret. The old rascal was irrepressibly garrulous; but he was too sleepy to talk much more, and looked ruefully worn out.

He took the bed-room candle with a great yawn, and staggering, I am bound to say only with sleep, he leaned for a moment against the doorway of his room, and said, in his grimmer vein,—

"You'll bring me a cup of coffee, mind, at eight o'clock—black, no milk, no sugar—and a bit of dry toast, as thin as a knife and as hard as a tile; do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And why the devil don't you say so? And, lest I should forget, Mr. Levi will be here to-morrow, at eleven, with another gentleman. Show them both up; and, I say, there are several things I'm particular about, and I'll put them on paper—egad! that's the best way—to-morrow, and I'll post it up in my room, like a firmaun, and you had better attend to them, that's all;" and holding up his candle, as he stood in the doorway, he gazed round the bed-room, and seemed satisfied, and shut the door sharply in her face, without turning about, or perhaps intending that rudeness, as she was executing her valedictory courtesy.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER IX.

## IN WHICH MR. DINGWELL PUTS HIS HAND TO THE POKER.

At eleven o'clock next morning, Mr. Dingwell was refreshed, and ready to receive his expected visitors. He had just finished a pipe as he heard their approaching steps upon the stairs, and Miss Sarah Rumble pushed open the door and permitted Mr. Levi and his friend to enter and announce themselves. Mr. Dingwell received them with a slight bow and a rather sarcastic smile.

Mr. Levi entered first, with his lazy smile showing his glittering fangs, and his fierce, cunning, prominent eyes swept the room, and rested on Mr. Dingwell. Putting down his hat on the middle of the narrow table, he stooped across, extending his lank arm and long hand toward the white-headed old man with the broad forehead and lean brown face, who happened to turn to the chimney-piece just then, to look for a paper, and so did not shake hands.

"And Mr. Larkin?" said Mr. Dingwell, with the same smile, as he turned about and saw that slim, bald, pink-eyed impersonation of Christianity overtopping the dark and glossy representative of the Mosaic dispensation.

"Sit down, pray—though—eh?—has my friend, Miss Rumble, left us chairs enough?" said Mr. Dingwell, looking from corner to corner.

"Quite ample; thanks, many thanks," answered Mr. Larkin, who chose, benignantly, to take this attention to himself. "Three chairs, yes, and three of us; pray, Mr. Dingwell, don't take any trouble."

"Oh! thank you; but I was not thinking of taking any trouble, only I should not like to be left without a chair. Miss Sarah Rumble, I dare say she's very virtuous, but she's not brilliant," he continued as he approached. "There, for instance, her pot-house habits! She leaves my old hat on the centre of the table!" and with a sudden sweep of the ebony stem of his long pipe, he knocked Mr. Levi's hat upon the floor, and kicked it into the far corner of the room.

"Da-a-am it; that'sh my hat!" said Mr. Levi, looking after it.

"So much the better for me," said Mr. Dingwell, with an agreeable smile and a nod.

"An error—quite a mistake," interposed Mr.  Larkin, with officious politeness. "Shall I pick it up, Mr. Levi?"

"Leave it lay," said Mr. Levi, sulkily; "no use now. It's got its allowance, I expect."

"Gentlemen, you'll not detain me longer than is necessary, if you please, because I hate business, on principle, as a Jew does ham—I beg pardon Mr. Levi, I forgot for a moment—the greatest respect for your religion, but I do hate business as I hate an attorney—'Gad! there is my foot in it again: Mr. Larkin, no reflection, I assure you, on your excellent profession, which everyone respects. But life's made up of hours: they're precious, and I don't want to spoil 'em."

"A great trust, sir, a great trust, Mr. Dingwell, is time. Ah, sir, how little we make of it, with eternity yawning at our feet, and retribution before us!"

"Our and us; you don't narrow it to the legal profession, Mr. Larkin?"

"I speak of time, generally, Mr. Dingwell, and of eternity and retribution as applicable to all professions," said Mr. Larkin, sadly.

"I don't follow you, sir. Here's a paper, gentlemen, on which I have noted exactly what I can prove."

"Can I have it, Mr. Dingwell?" said the attorney, whose dove-like eyes for a moment contracted with a hungry, rat-like look.

"No, I think, no," said Mr. Dingwell, withdrawing it from the long, red fingers extended to catch the paper; Mr. Levi's fingers, at a more modest distance, were also extended, and also disappointed; "anything I write myself I have a kind of feeling about it; I'd rather keep it to myself, or put it in the fire, than trouble the most artless Jew or religious attorney I know with the custody of it: so, if you just allow me, I'll read it. It's only half a dozen lines, and I don't care if you make a note of it, Mr. Larkin."

"Well," he resumed, after he had glanced through the paper, Mr. Larkin sitting expectant arrectis auribus, and with a pen in his fingers, "you may say that I, Mr. Dingwell, knew the late Honourable Arthur Verney, otherwise Hakim Frank, otherwise Hakim Giaour, otherwise Mamhoud Ali Ben-Nezir, for five years and two months, and upwards—three days, I think—immediately preceding his death; for the latter four years very intimately. That I frequently procured him small loans of money, and saw him, one way or another, nearly every day of my life: that I was with him nearly twice a day during his last illness: that I was present when he expired, and was one of the three persons who saw him buried: and that I could point out his grave, if it were thought desirable to send out persons acquainted with his appearance, to disinter and identify the body."

"No need of that, I think," said Mr. Larkin, looking up and twiddling his eye-glass on his finger.

He glanced at Levi, who was listening intensely, and almost awfully, and, reading no sign in his face, he added,—

"However, I see no harm in making the note."

So on went Mr. Dingwell, holding a pair of gold glasses over his nose.

"I can perfectly identify him as the Hon. Arthur Verney, having transacted business for him respecting an annuity which was paid him by his family; written letters for him when his hand was affected; and read his letters for him when he was ill, which latter letters, together with a voluminous correspondence found in his box, and now in my possession, I can identify also as having been in his."

"I don't see any need, my dear Mr. Dingwell, of your mentioning your having written any letters for him; it has, in fact, no bearing that I can recognise upon the case. I should, in fact, apprehend complicating the case. You might find it difficult to specify, and we to produce, the parti cular letters referred to; so I should simply say you read them to him, at his desire, before he despatched them for England; that is, of course, assuming that you did so."

"Very good, sir; knock it out, and put that in; and I can prove that these letters, which can easily, I suppose, be identified by the writers of them in England, were in his possession, and that several of them I can recollect his having read to me on the day he received them. That's pretty nearly what strikes me—eh?"

"Yes, sir—certainly, Mr. Dingwell—most important; but surely he had a servant; had he not, my dear sir?—an attendant of some sort? they're to be had there for next to nothing, I think," hesitated Mr. Larkin.

"Certainly—so there was—yes; but he started for Egypt in a boat full of tiles, or onions, or something, a day or two after the Hakim was buried, and I'm afraid they'll find it rather hard to find him. I think he said Egypt, but I won't swear."

And Mr. Dingwell laughed, very much tickled, with intense sarcastic enjoyment; so much so that Mr. Larkin, though I have seldom before or since heard of his laughing, did suddenly laugh a short, explosive laugh, as he looked down on the table, and

immediately looked very grave and sad, and pinked up to the very summit of his narrow bald head; and coughing a little, he said,—

"Thank you, Mr. Dingwell; this will suffice very nicely for an outline, and I can consult with our adviser as to its particular sufficiency—is not that your impression, Mr. Levi?"

"You lawyer chaps undusta-ans that line of business best; I know no more about it than watch-making—only don't shleep over it, for it's costing us a da-a-am lot of money," said Mr. Levi, rising with a long yawn and a stretch, and emphasising it with a dismal oath; and shutting his great glaring eyes and shaking his head, as if he were being victimised at a pace which no capital could long stand.

"Certainly, Mr. Levi," said the attorney, "you quite take me with you there. We are all contributing, except, perhaps, our valued friend, Mr. Dingwell, our quota towards a very exhausting expense."

"Da-a-md exhausting," interposed Mr. Levi.

"Well, pray allow me my own superlative," said the attorney, with religious grandeur. "I do say it is very exhausting; though we are all, I hope, cheerfully contributing——"

"Curse you! to be sure you are," said Mr. Dingwell, with an abrupt profanity that startled Mr. Larkin. "Because you all expect to make money by it; and I'm contributing my time, and trouble, and danger, egad! for precisely the same reason. And now, before you go—just a moment, if you please, as we are on the subject—who's Chancellor of the Exchequer here?"

"Who advances the necessary funds?" interpreted Mr. Larkin, with his politest smile.

"Yes," said the old man, with a sharp menacing nod. "Which of you two comes down, as you say, with the dust? Who pays the piper for this dance of yours, gentlemen?—the

Christian or the Jew? I've a word for the gentleman who holds the purse—or, as we Christians would say, who carries the bag;" and he glanced from one to the other with a sniff, and another rather vicious wag of his head.

"I believe, sir, you may address us both as voluntary contributors towards a fund for carrying on, for the present, this business of the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, who will, of course, recoup us," said Mr. Larkin, cautiously.

He used to say sometimes to his conducting man, with a smile, sly and holy, up at the yellow letters of one of the tin deed-boxes on his shelves at the Lodge, after an adroit conversation, "I think it will puzzle him, rather, to make an assumpsit out of that."

"Well, you talk of allowing me—as you term it—four pounds a week. I'll not take it," said Mr. Dingwell.

"My hye! That'sh liberal, shir, uncommon 'anshome, be Ga-a-ad!" exclaimed Mr. Levi, in a blessed mistake as to the nature of Mr. Dingwell's objection.

"I know, gentlemen, this business can't advance without me—to me it may be worth something; but you'll make it worth a great deal more to yourselves, and whatever else you may find me, you'll find me no fool; and I'll not take one piastre less than five-and-twenty pounds a week."

"Five-and-twenty pounsh!" howled Mr. Levi; and Mr. Larkin's small pink eyes opened wide at the prodigious idea.

"You gentlemen fancy you're to keep me here in this black-hole making your fortunes, and living on the wages of a clerk, egad! You shall do no such thing, I promise you; you shall pay me what I say. I'll see the town, sir, and I'll have a few guineas in my pocket, or I'll know the reason why. I didn't come ALL the way here for nothing—d—n you both!"

"Pray, sir, a moment," pleaded Mr. Larkin.

"Pray, sir, as much as you like; but pay, also, if you please. Upon my life, you shall! Fortune owes me something, and egad! I'll enjoy myself while I can."

"Of course, sir; quite reasonable—so you should; but, my dear Mr. Dingwell, five-and-twenty pounds!—we can hardly be expected, my dear sir, to see our way."

"'Gad, sir! I see mine, and I'll go it," laughed Mr. Dingwell, with a most unpleasant glare in his eyes.

"On reflection, you will see, my dear Mr. Dingwell, the extreme inexpediency of anything in the least resembling a fraycas" (Mr. Larkin so pronounced his French) "in your particular case. I should certainly, my dear sir, recommend a most cautious line."

"Cautious as the devil," seconded Mr. Levi.

"You think I'm afraid of my liabilities," croaked Mr. Dingwell, with a sudden flush across his forehead, and a spasm of his brows over his wild eyes, and then he laughed, and wagged his head.

"That's right—quite right," almost sighed Mr. Larkin—"do—do—pray do—just reflect for only a moment—and you'll see it."

"To be sure, I see it, and you shall see it, too. Egad! I know something, sir, at my years. I know how to deal with screws, and bullies, and schemers, sir—and that is by going straight at them—and I'll tell you what, sir, if you don't pay me the money I name, I'll make you regret it."

For a moment, Mr. Larkin, for one, did almost regret his share in this uncomfortable and highly "speculative" business. If this Mr. Dingwell chose to turn restive and extortionate, it would have been better it had never entered into his ingenious head, and he could already see in the Jew's eyes the sulky and ferocious expression that seemed to forebode defeat.

"If you don't treat me, as I say, with common fairness, I'll go straight to young Mr. Verney myself, and put you out of the baby-house altogether."

"What babby-houshe?" demanded Mr. Levi, glowering, and hanging the corners of his great half-open mouth with a sullen ferocity.

"Your castle—in the air—your d—d plot, sir."

"If you mean you're going to turn stag," began the Jew.

"There—do—pray, Mr. Levi—you—you mistake," interposed Mr. Larkin, imploringly, who had heard tales of this Mr. Dingwell's mad temper.

"I say," continued Levi, "if you're going to split——"

"Split, sir!" cried Mr. Dingwell, with a malignant frown, and drawing his mouth together into a puckered ring, as he looked askance at the Jew. "What the devil do you mean by split, sir? 'Gad! sir, I'd split your black head for you, you little Jew miscreant!"

Mr. Larkin saw with a qualm that the sinews of that evil face were quivering with an insane fury, and that even under its sun-darkened skin it had turned pale, while the old man's hand was instinctively extended towards the poker, of which he was thinking, and which was uncomfortably near.

"No, no, no—pray, gentlemen—I entreat—only think," urged Mr. Larkin, seriously alarmed for the Queen's peace and his own precious character, and for the personal safety of his capitalist and his witness.

Mr. Larkin confronted the Jew, with his great hands upon Mr. Levi's shoulders, so as to prevent his advance; but that slender Hebrew, who was an accomplished sparrer, gave the godly attorney a jerk by the elbows which quite twirled him about, to his amazement and chagrin.

"'Andsh off, old chap," said the Jew, grimly, to Mr. Larkin, who had not endured such a liberty since he was at his cheap day-school, nearly forty years ago.

But Mr. Larkin interposed again, much alarmed, for behind him he thought he heard the clink of the fire-irons.

"He thinks he may say what he pleases," cried the old man's voice furiously, with a kind of choking laugh.

"No, sir—no, Mr. Dingwell—I assure you—do, Mr. Levi—how can you mind him?" he added in an undertone, as he stood between.

"I don't mind him, Mr. Larkin: only I won't let no one draw it that sort. I won't stand a lick of a poker for no one; he shan't come that over me"—and concurrently with this the shrill voice of Mr. Dingwell was yelling—

"Because I'm—because I'm—I'm—every d—d little whipper-snapper—because they think I'm down, the wretches, I'm to submit to their insults!"

"I don't want to hurt him, Mr. Larkin; if I did, I'd give'm his tea in a mug this minute; but I don't, I say—only he shan't lift a poker to me."

"No one, my dear sir, has touched a poker; no one, Mr. Levi, ever dreamed of such a thing. Pray, my dear sir, my dear Mr. Dingwell, don't misconceive; we use slang phrases, now and then, without the least meaning or disrespect: it has become quite the tong. I assure you—it was only last week, at Nyworth Castle, where I had the honour to be received, Lady Mary Wrangham used the phrase yarn, for a long story."

"D—n you, can't you answer my question?" said Mr. Dingwell, more in his accustomed vein.

"Certainly, sir, we'll reply to it. Do, Mr. Levi, do leave the room; your presence at this moment only leads to excitement."

Levi, for a moment, pondered fiercely, and then nodded a sulky acquiescence.

"I shall overtake you in the court, Mr. Levi, if you can wait two or three minutes there."

The Jew nodded over his shoulder, and was gone.

"Mr. Dingwell, sir, I can't, I assure you. It's not in my power; it is in the hands of quite other people, on whom, ultimately, of course, these expenses will fall, to sanction the outlay by way of weekly allowance, which you suggest. It is true I am a contributor, but not exactly in cash; only in money's worth—advice, experience, and technical knowledge. But I will apply in the proper quarter, without delay. I wish, Mr. Dingwell, I were the party; you and I would not, I venture to think, be long in settling it between us."

"No, to be sure, you're all such liberal fellows—it's always some one else that puts us under the screw," laughed Mr. Dingwell, discordantly, with his face still flushed, and his hand trembling visibly, "you never have the stock yourselves —not you,—there's always, Mr. Sheridan tells us, you know, in that capital play of his, a d——d unconscionable

fellow in the background, and in Shakspeare's play, Shylock, you remember, he hasn't the money himself, but Tubal, a wealthy Hebrew of his tribe, will furnish him. Hey! I suppose they gave the immortal Shakspeare a squeeze in his day; he understood 'em. But Shylock and Tubal are both dead and rotten long ago. It's a comfort you can't escape death, with all your cunning, d—n you."

But Mr. Larkin spoke peaceably to Mr. Dingwell. The expense, up to a certain time, would, of course, fall upon Mr. Kiffyn Verney; after that, however, Mr. Larkin and the Jew firm would feel it. But be it how it might, they could not afford to quarrel with Mr. Dingwell; and Mr. Dingwell was a man of a flighty and furious temper.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER X.

## CLEVE VERNEY SEES THE CHATEAU DE CRESSERON.

I fancy that these estimates, on a rather large scale, moved by Mr. Dingwell, were agreed to, for sufficient reasons, by the parties interested in disputing them.

Mr. Dingwell kept very close during the daytime. He used to wander listlessly to and fro, between his bed-room and his drawing-room, with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown, and his feet in a pair of hard leather slippers, with curled-up toes and no heels, that clattered on the boards like sabots.

Miss Sarah Rumble fancied that her lodger was a little shy of the windows; when he looked out into the court, he stood back a yard or more from the window-sill.

Mr. Larkin, indeed, made no secret of Mr. Dingwell's uncomfortable position, in his conferences with the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney. Mr. Dingwell had been a bankrupt, against whom many transactions to which the Court had applied forcible epithets, had been proved; to whom, in fact, that tribunal had refused quarter; and who had escaped from its fangs by a miracle. There were judgments, however, in force against him; there was a warrant procurable any day for his arrest; he was still "in contempt;" I believe he was an "outlaw;" and, in fact, there was all but a price set on his head. Thus, between him and his outcast acquaintance, the late Hon. Arthur Verney, had subsisted some strong points of sympathy, which had no doubt helped to draw them into that near intimacy which stood the Hon. Kiffyn, no less than Mr. Dingwell (to whose mill it was bringing very comfortable grist), so well in stead, at this moment.

It behoved Mr. Dingwell, therefore, to exercise caution. Many years had passed since he figured as a London trader. But time, the obliterator, in some cases works slowly; or rather, while the pleasant things of memory are sketched in with a pencil, the others are written in a bold, legible, round hand, as it were, with a broad-nibbed steel pen, and the

best durable japanned ink; on which Father Time works his India-rubber in vain, till his gouty old fingers ache, and you can fancy him whistling curses through his gums, and knocking his bald pate with his knuckles. Mr. Dingwell, on the way home, was, to his horror, half recognised by an ancient Cockney at Malta. Time, therefore, was not to be relied upon, though thirty years had passed; and Mr. Dingwell began to fear that a debtor is never forgotten, and that the man who is thoroughly dipt, like the lovely woman who stoops to folly, has but one way to escape consequences, and that is to die—a step which Mr. Dingwell did not care to take.

The meeting on the th, at the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney's house, Mr. Dingwell was prevented by a cold from attending. But the note of his evidence sufficed, and the consultation, at which Mr. Larkin assisted, was quite satisfactory. The eminent parliamentary counsel who attended, and who made, that session, nearly fifty-thousand pounds, went to the heart of the matter direct; was reverentially listened to by his junior, by the parliamentary agent, by the serious Mr. Larkin, at whom he thrust sharp questions, in a peremptory and even fierce way, like a general in action, to whom minutes are everything; treated them once or twice to a recollection or short anecdote, which tended to show what a clever, sharp fellow the parliamentary counsel was, which, indeed, was true; and talked to no one quite from a level, except to one Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, to whom he spoke confidentially in his ear, and who him self quickly grew into the same confidential relations.

"I'm glad you take my view—Mr.—Mr. Forsythe—very happy about it, that we should be in accord. I've earned some confidence in my opinion, having found it more than once, I may say, come out right; and it gives me further confidence that you take my view," said the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, grandly.

That eminent parliamentary counsel, Forsythe, was on his way to the door, when Mr. Verney interposed with this condescension.

"Oh! Ha! Do I? Very happy. What is it?" said Forsythe, smiling briskly, glancing at his watch and edging towards the door, all together.

"I mean the confident view—the cheerful—about it," said the Hon. Mr. Verney, a little flushed, and laying his thin hand on his counsel's arm.

"Certainly—confident, of course, smooth sailing, quite. I see no hitch at present."

Mr. Forsythe was now, more decidedly, going. But he could not treat the Hon. Kiffyn Verney quite like an ordinary client, for he was before him occasionally in Committees of the House of Commons, and was likely soon to be so in others of the Lords, and therefore, chafing and smiling, he hesitated under the light pressure of the old gentleman's stiff fingers.

"And you know the, I may say, absurd state of the law, about it—there was, you know, my unfortunate brother, Arthur—you are aware—civiliter mortuus, stopping the way, you know, for nearly twenty years, about it, ever since my poor father, Lord Verney, you know, expired, about it, and I've been, as you know, in the most painful position—absurd, you know."

"Quite so; I'm afraid—" Forsythe was again edging toward the door.

"And I always contended that where the heir was civilly dead, about it, the law should make proper provision—don't you see?"

"Quite so, only fair—a very wise and politic statute—and I wish very much, with your experience, you'd turn your attention to draw one. I'm obliged to be off now, to meet the New Discount directors; consultation at my chambers."

And so, smiling, Forsythe, Q.C., did vanish, at last.

All this over, Mr. Cleve Verney proposed to himself a little excursion, of a day or two, to Paris, to which his uncle saw no objection.

Not very far from the ancient town of Caen, where the comparative quietude of Normandy, throughout the throes of the great revolution, has spared so many relics of the bygone France, is an old château, still habitable—still, after a fashion, comfortable—and which you may have at a very moderate rent indeed.

Here is an old wood, cut in a quincunx; old ponds stocked with carp; great old stables gone to decay; and the château itself, is indescribably picturesque and sad.

It is the Château de Cresseron—withdrawn in historic seclusion, amid the glories and regrets of memory, quite out of the tide of modern traffic.

Here, by the side of one of the ponds, one evening, was an old lady, throwing in little bits of bread to the carp that floated and flitted, like golden shadows, this way and that, as the crumbs sank in the water, when she heard a well-known voice near her which made her start.

"Good heavens! Mr. Verney! You here?" she exclaimed, with such utter wonderment, her little bit of bread raised in her fingers, that Cleve Verney, though in no merry mood, could not help smiling.

"Yes—here indeed—and after all, is it quite so wonderful?" said he.

"Well, of course you know, Mr. Verney, I'm very glad to see you. Of course, you know that; but I'm very far from being certain that you have done a wise or a prudent thing in coming here, and I don't know that, under the circumstances, I ought to be glad to see you; in fact, I'm afraid it is very rash," said Miss Sheckleton, growing more decided as she proceeded.

"No, not rash. I've been very miserable; so miserable, that the worst certainty which this visit might bring upon me would be almost a relief compared with the intolerable suspense I have lived in; therefore, you see, it really is not rash."

"I'm very bad at an argument," persisted the old lady; "but it is rash, and very rash. You can't conceive," and here she lowered her voice, "the state of exasperation in which he is."

"He," of course, could only mean Sir Booth Fanshawe; and Cleve answered,—

"I assure you, I can't blame him. I don't wonder. I think a great deal has been very wantonly done to aggravate his misfortunes; but surely, he can't fancy that I could sympathise with any such proceedings, or feel anything but horror and disgust. Surely, you would not allow him to connect me, however slightly? I know you would not."

"My dear Mr. Verney, you don't know Booth Fanshawe, or rather, you do, I believe, know him a great deal too well, to fancy that I could venture to speak to him upon the subject. That, I assure you, is quite out of the question; and I may as well tell you frankly, if he were at home, I mean here, I should have begged you at once, inhospitable as it might seem, to leave this place, and trust to time and to letters, but here I would not have allowed you to linger."

"He's away from home, then!" exclaimed Cleve.

"Yes; but he'll be back to-night at ten o'clock."

"At ten o'clock," repeated Cleve, and the young man thought what a treasure of minutes there was in the interval. "And Miss Fanshawe—Margaret—she's quite well?"

"Yes, she's quite well," answered kind Miss Sheckleton, looking in his earnest eyes, and thinking that he looked a little thin and pale. "She's quite well, and, I hope, you have been."

"Oh, yes," answered the young man, "as well as a man with a good many troubles can be. In fact, I may tell you, I've been very unhappy. I was thinking of writing to Sir Booth."

"Don't," implored Miss Sheckleton, looking quite wildly into his eyes, and with her hand upon his arm, as if to arrest the writing of that letter, "you have no notion how he feels. I assure you, an allusion—the slightest thing is quite enough to set him in a blaze. The other day, for instance, I did not know what it was, till I took up the paper he had been reading, and I found there something about the Verney peerage, and proof that Arthur Verney was dead, and your uncle to get it; and really I can't wonder—some people seem so unaccountably fortunate, and others, everything goes wrong with—even I felt vexed when I read it, though, of course, any good fortune happening to you, I should be very glad of. But he did not see any of us till next day—even Macklin."

"Yes, it is very true," said Cleve, "my uncle is dead, and we shall prove it, that is, my uncle Kiffyn will. But you are quite right to distinguish as you do. It involves nothing for me. Since it has come so near, I have lost all faith in it's ever reaching me. I have, I can't call it a conviction, but a superstition, that it never will. I must build my own fortunes from their foundations, with my own hand. There is but one success on earth that can make me very proud and very happy. Do you think, that having come all this way, in that hope, on that one chance, that Margaret will see me?"

"I wish you had written to me before coming," said Anne Sheckleton, after a little pause. "I should have liked to find out first, all I could, from herself; she is so odd. I've often told you that she is odd. I think it would have been wiser to write to me before coming over, and I should have talked to her,—that is, of course, if she had allowed me,—for I can't in the least say that she would even hear me on the subject."

"Well," said Cleve, with a sigh, "I have come—I am here—and go I cannot without seeing her—I cannot—and you, I think, are too kind to wish that I should. Yes, Miss Sheckleton, you have been my true friend throughout this—what shall I call it?—wild and terrible dream—for I cannot believe it real—I wonder at it myself—I ought to wish I had never seen her—but I cannot—and I think on the result of this visit depends the whole course of my life. You'll not see me long, I think, in the House of Commons, nor in England; but I'll tell you more by-and-by."

The sun had gone down now. A red and melancholy glow, rising from piles of western cloud, melted gradually eastward into the deep blue of night in which the stars were already glimmering.

Along one of the broad avenues cut through the forest that debouches upon the court-yard of the quaint old château they were now walking, and, raising his eyes, he saw Margaret approaching from the antique house.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XI.

## SHE COMES AND SPEAKS.

"She is coming, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, speaking low and quietly; but her voice sounded a little strangely, and I think the good-natured spinster was agitated.

Cleve, walking by her side, made no answer. He saw Margaret approach, and while she was yet a good way off, suddenly stop. She had not seen them there before. There seemed no indecision. It was simply that she was startled, and stood still.

"Pray, Miss Sheckleton, do you go on alone. Entreat her not to refuse me a few minutes," said he.

"I will—she shall—I will, indeed, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, very much fidgetted. "But you had better remain where we were, just now; I will return to you, and—there are some French servants at the house—will you think me very strange—unkind, I am sure, you will not—if I say it is only common prudence that you should not be seen at the house? You understand why I say so."

"Certainly. I shall do whatever you think best," he answered. They had arrested their walk, as Margaret had done, during this little parley. Perhaps she was uncertain whether her approach had been observed. The sun had gone down by this time, and the twilight had begun to make distant objects a little indistinct.

But there was no time for man[oeuvring here, for Miss Fanshawe resumed her walk, and her cousin, Anne Sheckleton, advanced alone to meet her.

"Margaret, dear, a friend has unexpectedly arrived," began Miss Sheckleton.

"And gone, perhaps," answered Margaret Fanshawe, in one of her moods. "Better gone—come, darling, let us turn, and go towards home—it is growing so dark."

And with these words, taking Miss Sheckleton's hand in hers, she turned towards the house, not choosing to see the friend whom that elderly lady had so eagerly indicated.

Strangely did Cleve Verney feel. That beautiful, cruel girl!—what could she mean?—how could she treat him so? Is there not, in strange countries, where people meet, a kindlier impulse than elsewhere?—and here—could anything be more stony and utterly cruel? The same wonderful Cenci—the same low, sweet voice—the same laugh, even—just for a moment heard—but now—how unspeakably cruel! He could see that Miss Sheckleton was talking earnestly to her, as they walked slowly away. It all seemed like a dream. The formal old wood—the grey château in the background, rising, with its round turrets, and conical tops, and steep roofs against the rose-tinted sky of evening; and in the foreground—not two score steps away—those figures—that girl to whom so lately he was so near being all the world—to whom, it now appeared, he was absolutely nothing—oh! that he had never heard, in Shakspeare's phrase, that mermaid voice!

His pride was wounded. With a yearning that amounted to agony, he watched their receding steps. Follow them he would not. He leaned against the tree by which Miss Sheckleton had left him, and half resolved to quit that melancholy scene of his worst disaster without another look or word—with only the regrets of all a life.

When Miss Sheckleton had reached Margaret, before the young lady spoke, she saw, by her unusual paleness and by something at once of pain and anger in her face, that she had seen Cleve Verney.

"Well, Margaret, if you will go, you will; but, before you make it irreparable, you must, at least, think."

"Think of what?" said Margaret, a little disdainfully.

"Think that he has come all this way for nothing but the chance of seeing you; of perhaps saying a few words to set himself right."

"If he wished to speak to me, he might have said so," she answered. "Not that I see any reason to change my mind on that point, or any good that can come, possibly, or for ever, if he could talk and I listen for so long."

"Well, but you can't doubt what he has come for," said Miss Sheckleton.

"I don't doubt, because I don't mean to think about it," said the young lady, looking fiercely up toward the gilded weather vanes that glimmered on the grey pinnacles of the château.

"Yes, but it is not a matter of doubt, or of thinking, but of fact, for he did say so," pleaded Miss Sheckleton.

"I wish we were in Italy, or some out-of-the-way part of Spain," said the handsome girl, in the same vein, and walking still onward; "I always said this was too near England, too much in the current."

"No, dear, it is a quiet place," said good Anne Sheckleton.

"No, cousin Anne, it is the most unquiet place in all the world," answered the girl, in a wild, low tone, as she walked on.

"And he wants to speak to you; he entreats a few words, a very few."

"You know I ought not," said she.

"I know you ought, my dear; you'll be sorry for it, all your days, Margaret, if you don't," replied Anne Sheckleton.

"Come home, dear, come home, darling," said the girl, peremptorily, but sadly.

"I say, Margaret, if you let him go without speaking to him, you will regret it all your days."

"You have no right to talk this way, cousin Anne; I am unhappy enough as it is. Let us go on," she said.

"If you send him away, as I say, it is all over between you."

"So it is, it is all over; let the dead rest."

"The world is wide enough; there are many beautiful creatures there, and he is himself so beautiful, and so clever; be very sure you care nothing for him, before you send him away, for you will never see him again," said Miss Anne Sheckleton.

"I know—I am sure—I have thought of everything. I have made up my account long ago, for now, and for all my days," said she.

"So you have," answered Miss Sheckleton. "But while you have a moment still allowed you, Margaret, review it, I implore of you."

"Come, darling, come—come—you ought not to have spoken to me; why have you said all this?" said Margaret, sadly and hurriedly.

"Now, Margaret darling, you are going to stay for a moment, and I will call him."

"No!" said the girl, passionately, "my mind's made up; not in haste, cousin Anne, but long ago. I've looked my last on him."

"Darling, listen: you know I've seen him, he's looking ill, I think; and I've told him that you must speak to him, Margaret; and I tell you you must," said Miss Sheckleton, blushing in her eagerness.

"No, cousin Anne, let there be an end of this between us; I thought it was over long ago. To him, I will never, never—while life remains—never speak more."

As she thus spoke, walking more hurriedly toward the house, she heard a voice beside her say,—

"Margaret! Margaret, darling—one word!"

And turning suddenly, she saw Cleve Verney before her. Under the thick folds of her chestnut hair, her features were pale as marble, and for a time it seemed to him he saw no thing but her wild, beautiful eyes fixed upon him.

Still as a statue, she stood confronting him. One little foot advanced, and her tiny hand closed, and pressed to her heart in the attitude in which an affrighted nun might hold her crucifix.

"Yes, Margaret," he said at last, "I was as near going—as you were near leaving me—unheard; but, thank God! that is not to be. No, Margaret darling, you could not. Wild as my words may sound in your ears, you will listen to them, for they shall be few; you will listen to them, for you are too good to condemn any one that ever loved you, unheard."

There was a little pause, during which all that passed was a silent pressure of Miss Sheckleton's hand upon Margaret's, as very pale, and with her brow knit in a painful anxiety, she drew hurriedly back, and left the two young people together, standing by the roots of the old tree, under the faint, rose-tinted sky of evening.

Lovers' promises or lovers' cruelties—which oaths are most enduring? Where now were Margaret's vows? Oh! inexhaustible fountain of pity, and beautiful mutability of woman's heart! In the passion avowed, so often something of simulation; in the feeling disowned, so often the true and beautiful life. Who shall read this won derful riddle, running in romance, and in song, and in war, the world's history through?

"Margaret, will you hear me?" he pleaded.

To her it was like a voice in a dream, and a form seen there, in that dream-land in which we meet the dead, without wonder, forgetting time and separation.

"I don't know that I ought to change my purpose. I don't know why I do; but we shall never meet again, I am sure, so speak on."

"Yes, Margaret, I will speak on, and tell you how entirely you have mistaken and wronged me," said Cleve Verney, in the same sad and passionate tones.

Good-natured Anne Sheckleton, watching at a little distance, saw that the talk—at first belonging altogether to Mr. Verney, at last began to divide itself a little; then side by side they walked a few steps, and then paused again: and so once more a short way, the lady looking down, and then on and on to the margin of that long straight pond, on which in their season are floating water-lilies, and, under its great oblong mirror, gliding those golden fishes which are, as we have seen, one of our spinster friend's kindly resources in this quaint exile. And so the twilight deepened: and Miss Sheckleton saw these two figures like shadows gliding side by side, to and fro, along the margin, till the moonlight came and lighted the still pool over, and dappled the sward with the shadows of the

trees, and made the old château in the background, with its white front, its turrets and pinnacles and gilded vanes, look filmy as a fairy castle.

Wrapping her cloak about her, she sat herself down upon the marble seat close by, unobserved and pleased, watching this picture of Lorenzo and Jessica, and of all such moonlighted colloquies, with a wonderful and excited interest—with, indeed, a mixture of melancholy and delight and fear.

Half-hour after half-hour glided by, as she looked on this picture, and read in fancy the romance that was weaving itself out of the silvery thread of their discourse in this sad old scene. And then she looked at her watch, and wondered how the time had sped, and sighed; and smiling and asking no question, came before them, and in a low, gentle warning, told them that the hour for parting had come.

As they stood side by side in the moonlight, did the beautiful girl, with the flush of that romantic hour, never, never to be forgotten, on her cheek, with its light in her wonderful eyes, ever look so beautiful before? Or did that young man, Cleve Verney, whom she thought she under stood, but did not, ever look so handsome?—the enthusiasm and the glow of his victory in his strangely beautiful face.

There were a few silent moments: and she thought could fancy paint a more beautiful young couple than these!

There are scenes—only momentary—so near Paradise—sights, so nearly angelic, that they touch us with a mysterious ecstasy and sorrow. In the glory and translation of the moment, the feeling of its transitoriness, and the sense of our mortal lot, cross and thrill us with a strange pain, like the anguish that mingles in the rapture of sublime music. So, Miss Sheckleton, very pale, smiling very tenderly, sobbed and wept, one would have said bitterly, for a little while; and, drying her eyes quickly, saw before her the same beautiful young faces, looking upon hers; and the old lady took their hands and pressed them, and smiled a great deal through her tears, and said—"All, at last, as I wished it: God bless you both—God Almighty bless you, my darling:" and she put her arms about Margaret's neck, and kissed her very tenderly.

And then came the reminder, that must not be slighted. The hour had come, indeed, and Cleve must positively go. Miss Sheckleton would hear of no further delay—no, not another minute. Her fear of Sir Booth was profound; so, with a "God bless you, darling," and a very pale face, and—why should there not be?—one long, long kiss, Cleve Verney took his leave, and was gone; and the sailing moon lost herself among clouds, so darkness stole swiftly over the landscape.

Margaret Fanshawe drew her dear old cousin near to her, and in her turn, placing her arms round her neck, folded her close, and Anne Sheckleton could feel the wild throbbing of the young girl's heart close to her own.

Margaret was not weeping, but she stood very pale, with her arms still laid on her cousin's shoulders, and looked almost wildly down into her wistful eyes.

"Cousin Anne—oh, darling! you must pray for me," said Margaret Fanshawe. "I thought it could never be; I thought I knew myself, but all that is vain: there is another will above us—Fate—Eternal Fate, and I am where I am, I know not how."

"Why, Margaret, darling, it is what I have been longing for—the very best thing that could have happened; you ought to be the happiest girl in the world," urged Miss Anne Sheckleton, cheerily.

"No, darling; I am not happy, except in this, that I know I love him, and would not give him up for all the world; but it seems to me to have been, from first to last, a fatality, and I can't shake off the fear that lies at my heart."

"Hush, dear—I hear wheels, I think," said Miss Sheckleton, listening.

Margaret was pre-occupied, and did not listen. I don't think she cared much at that moment who came or went, except that one to whom her love was now irrevocably given.

"No; I can't hear—no; but he will be here immediately. We must not be out, you know; he may ask for me, and he is so—so very—what shall I say?"

Margaret did not mind. She turned a wild and plaintive look upward towards the struggling moon—now emerging, now lost again.

"Come, darling—let us go," said Margaret.

And she looked round her gently, as if awaking from a dream.

"Yes, darling, come," she continued, placing her hand on Anne Sheckleton's arm.

"And you are not to tease yourself, Margaret, dear, with fancies and follies. As I said before, you ought to be one of the happiest girls in existence."

"So I am," she answered, dreamily—"very happy—oh! wonderfully happy—but there is the feeling of something—fatal, as I said; and, be it what it may, let it come. I could not lose him now, for all the world."

She was looking up, as she spoke, towards the broken moonlight, herself as pale, and a strange plaintive smile of rapture broke over her beautiful face, as if answering the smile of a spirit in the air.

"Come quickly, darling, come," whispered Miss Sheckleton, and they walked side by side in silence to the house, and so to Margaret's room, where she sat down by the window, looking out, and kind Anne Sheckleton sat by the table, with her thin old hand to her cheek, watching her fondly, and awaiting an opportunity to speak, for she was longing to hear a great deal more.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XII.

## CLEVE VERNEY HAS A VISITOR.

So Cleve Verney returned direct to England, and his friends thought his trip to Paris, short as it was, had done him a world of good. What an alterative and tonic a little change of air sometimes is!

The Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney was, in his high, thin-minded way, at last tolerably content, and more pompous and respected than ever. The proof of his succession to the peerage of Verney was in a perfectly satisfactory state. He would prove it, and take his seat next session. He would add another to the long list of Lord Viscounts Verney of Malory to be found in the gold and scarlet chronicle of such dignities. He had arranged with the trustees for a provisional possession of Verney House, the great stone mansion which glorifies one side of the small parallelogram called Verney Square. Already contractors had visited it and explored its noble chambers and long corridors, with foot-rule and note-book, getting together material for tenders, and Cleve had already a room there when he came up to town. Some furniture had been got in, and some servants were established there also, and so the stream of life had begun to transfuse itself from the old town residence of the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney into these long-forsaken channels.

Here, one morning, called a gentleman named Dingwell, whom Cleve Verney, happening to be in town, desired the servant to show into the room where he sat, with his breakfast, and his newspapers about him.

The tall old man entered, with a slight stoop, leering, Cleve thought, a little sarcastically over his shoulder as he did so.

Mr. Dingwell underwent Mr. Cleve Verney's reception, smiling oddly, under his white eyebrows, after his wont.

"I suspect some little mistake, isn't there?" said he, in his cold, harsh, quiet tones. "You can hardly be the brother of my old friend, Arthur Verney. I had hoped to see Mr. Kiffyn Fulke Verney—I—eh?"

"I'm his nephew."

"Oh! nephew? Yes—another generation—yes, of course. I called to see the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney. I was not able to attend the consultation, or whatever you call it. You know I'm your principal witness, eh? Dingwell's my name."

"Oh, to be sure—I beg pardon, Mr. Dingwell," said Cleve, who, by one of those odd slips of memory, which sometimes occur, had failed to connect the name with the case, on its turning up thus unexpectedly.

"I hope your admirable uncle, Kiffyn Verney, is, at all events, alive and approachable," said the old man, glancing grimly about the room; "though perhaps you're his next heir, and the hope is hardly polite."

This impertinence of Mr. Dingwell's, Mr. Cleve Verney, who knew his importance, and had heard something of his odd temper, resented only by asking him to be seated.

"That," said the old man, with a vicious laugh and a smirk, also angry, "is a liberty which I was about to take uninvited, by right of my years and fatigue, eh?"

And he sat down with the air of a man who is rather nettled than pleased by an attention.

"And what about Mr. Kiffyn Verney?" he asked, sharply.

"My uncle is in the country," answered Cleve, who would have liked to answer the fool according to his folly, but he succumbed to the necessity, inculcated with much shrewdness, garnished with some references to Scripture, by Mr. Jos. Larkin, of indulging the eccentricities of Mr. Dingwell's temper a little.

"Then he is alive? I've heard such an account of the Verneys, their lives are so brittle, and snap so suddenly; my poor friend Arthur told me, and that Jew fellow, Levi, here, who seems so intimate with the family—d—n him!—says the same: no London house likes to insure them. Well, I see you don't like it: no one does; the smell of the coffin, sir; time enough when we are carrion, and fill it. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, sir, quite," said Cleve, drily.

"No young man likes the sight of that stinking old lantern-jawed fellow, who shall be nameless, looking over his spade so slily; but the best way is to do as I've done. Since you must meet him one day, go up to him, and make his acquaintance, and shake hands; and egad! when you've grown a little bit intimate, he's not half so disgusting, and sometimes he's even a little bit funny."

"If I were thinking of the profession of a sexton, or an undertaker, I might," began Cleve, who felt a profound disgust of this old Mr. Dingwell, "but as I don't, and since by the time it comes to my turn, I shall be pretty well past seeing and smelling——"

"Don't be too sure of that," said Mr. Dingwell, with one of his ugly smirks. "Some cheerful people think not, you know. But it isn't about such matters that I want to trouble you; in fact, I came to say a word to your uncle; but as I can't see him, you can tell him, and urge it more eloquently too, than I can. You and he are both orators by profession; and tell him he must give me five hundred pounds immediately."

"Five hundred pounds! Why?" said Cleve, with a scornful surprise.

"Because I want it," answered the old gentleman, squaring himself, and with the corner of his mouth drawn oddly in, his white head a little on one side, and his eyebrows raised, with altogether an air of vicious defiance.

"You have had your allowance raised very much, sir—it is an exorbitant allowance—what reason can you now urge for this request?" answered Cleve.

"The same reason, sir, precisely. If I don't get it I shall go away, re infecta, and leave you to find out proof of the death how you may."

Cleve was very near giving this unconscionable old extortioner a bit of his mind, and ordering him out of the house on the instant. But Mr. Larkin had been so very urgent on the point, that he commanded himself.

"I hardly think, sir, you can be serious," said Cleve.

"Egad, sir! you'll find it a serious matter if you don't; for, upon my soul, unless I'm paid, and well paid for it, I'll depose to nothing."

"That's plain speaking, at all events," said Mr. Cleve Verney.

"Oh! sir, I'll speak more plainly still," said Mr. Dingwell, with a short sarcastic bow. "I never mince matters; life is too short for circumlocutions."

"Verney life, at all events, by your account, sir, and I don't desire them. I shall mention the matter to my uncle to-day in my letter, but I really can't undertake to do more; for I may tell you frankly, Mr. Dingwell, I can't, for the life of me, understand what you can possibly want of such a sum."

"I suppose, young gentleman, you have your pleasures, and I have mine, and they're not to be had without money; and egad, sir! if you fancy it's for love of your old uncle or of you, that I'm here, and taking all this trouble, you are very much mistaken; and if I help you to this house, and the title, and estates, I'll take leave to help myself to some little amusement—money, I mean, also. Cool fellows, egad!"

The brown features of the old man flushed angrily as he laughed.

"Well, Mr. Dingwell, I can only repeat what I have said, and I will also speak to Mr. Larkin. I have no power in the business myself, and you had better talk to him," said Cleve.

"I prefer the fountain-head, sir. I don't care twopence how you arrange it among yourselves; but you must give me the money by Saturday."

"Rather an early day, Mr. Dingwell; however, as I said, the question is for my uncle; it can't affect me," said Cleve.

Mr. Dingwell mused angrily for a little, and Cleve thought his face one of the wickedest he had ever seen while in this state of excited rumination.

"You all—both owe me more in that man's death—there are very odd circumstances about it, I can tell you—than, perhaps, you at present imagine," said Mr. Dingwell, looking up suddenly, with a dismal sneer, which subsided into an equally dismal stare.

Cleve, for a second or two, returned the stare, while the question crossed his mind: "Can the old villain mean that my miserable uncle met his death by foul means, in which he took a part, and intends to throw that consideration in with his averred services, to enhance his claim?"

"You had better tell your uncle, with my compliments," said Mr. Dingwell, "that he'll make a kettle of fish of the whole affair, in a way he doesn't expect, unless he makes matters square with me. I often think I'm a d——d fool, sir, to let you off as I do."

"I don't see, Mr. Dingwell, that you are letting us off, as you say, so very easily," answered Cleve, with a cold smile.

"No, you don't see, but I'll make you see it," said Mr. Dingwell, very tartly, and with an unpleasant laugh. "Arthur Verney was always changing his quarters—was never in the light. He went by different nicknames. There were in all Constantinople but two men, except myself, the Consul, and the stockbroker, who cashed the money-orders for him, who could identify him, or who knew his name. He lived in the dark, and not very cleanly—you'll excuse the simile—like one of your sewer-rats. He died suddenly and oddly, sir, like a candle on which has fallen a drop of water, with a splutter and a flash, in a moment—one of your Verney deaths, sir. You might as well hope to prove the death of a particular town-dog there, without kennel, or master, or name, a year after his brothers had eaten him." Cleve knew that old Dingwell in this spoke the truth and lied not. Lord Verney had written to great people there, who had set small ones in motion, with a result very like what Dingwell described. Arthur Verney was a gipsy—seldom sleeping for two weeks in the same house—with so many different names that it was vain attempting to trace him, and merely emerging when he wanted money. "So, sir," said Mr. Dingwell, with a smirk, "I see my value."

"I don't recollect that my uncle ever disputed it," replied Mr. Cleve Verney.

"I understand your difficulty perfectly. The presumption of English law, ha! ha! ha! is in favour of the duration of human life, whenever you can't prove a death. So, English law, which we can't dispute—for it is the perfection of human wisdom—places the putrid body of my late friend Arthur in the robes, coronet, and staff of the Verneys, and would give him the spending of the rents, too, but that you can't make a horse drink, though you may bring him to the water. At all events, sir, my festering friend in the shroud will hold secure possession of the estates against all comers till he exhausts that patient presumption, and sees Kiffyn, and you, sir, and every Verney now alive, laid with their faces upward. So, sir, you see I know my value. I have the grand arcanum; I hold in my hand the Philosopher's Stone that can turn your pewter and brass into gold. I hold it fast, sir, and, egad! I'll run away with it, unless I see a reason." And the old gentleman

laughed, and shrugged and expanded his slender hands with a deprecation that was menacing.

Cleve was very angry, but he was also alarmed; for Mr. Dingwell looked quite capable of any treason against the Verney interest to which his avarice or his spites might prompt him. A wild, cold, wandering eye; a play of the nostrils, and a corrugation of the brows that gave to his smile, or his laugh, a menace that was villanous, and almost insane—warned the young man of the quality of the beast, and invited him to the exercise of all his self-control.

"I am quite certain, Mr. Dingwell, that my uncle will do whatever is reasonable and fair, and I am also sure that he feels his obligations to you. I shall take care that he hears all that you have said, and you understand that I literally have neither power nor influence in his decision."

"Well, he feels his obligations," said Mr. Dingwell. "That is pleasant."

"Certainly; and, as I said, whatever is fair and reasonable I am certain he will do," said Cleve Verney.

"Fair and reasonable—that is exactly the thing—the value; and you know—

'The worth precise of anything

Is so much money as 'twill bring.'

And I'll make it bring what I say; and I make it a rule to treat money matters in the grossest terms, because that is the only language which is at once intelligible and direct—and grossness I believe to be the soul of business; and so, sir, tell him with my compliments, I shall expect five hundred pounds at ten o'clock in the morning, in Bank of England notes."

At this moment the servant announced the Rev. Isaac Dixie, and Mr. Dingwell stood up, and, looking with a kind of amusement and scorn round the room upon the dusty portraits, made a sharp bow to Cleve Verney, and saying,—

"That's all; good morning, sir"—with another nod, turned about, and walked jauntily out of the room.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE REV. ISAAC DIXIE SETS FORTH ON A MISSION.

There was, as Cleve knew, a basis of truth in all that Mr. Dingwell had said, which made his voice more grating, his eye more alarming, and his language more disgusting.

Would that Fortune had sent them, Cleve thought, some enchanted horse, other than that beast, to fly them into the fairy-land of their long-deferred ambition! Would that she had sent them a Rarey, to lead him by a metaphoric halter, and quell, by his art, the devil within him—the evil spirit before which something in Cleve's nature quailed, because it seemed to know nothing but appetite, and was destitute of sympathy and foresight.

Dingwell was beset with dangers and devils of his own; but he stood in his magic circle, making mouths and shaking his fist, and cursing at them. He seemed to have no imagination to awe, or prudence to restrain him. He was aware, and so was Cleve, that Larkin knew all about his old bankruptcy, the judgments against him, the impounded forgeries on which he had been on the brink of indictment, and his escape from prison; and yet he railed at Larkin, and defied the powerful Verneys, as if he had been an angel sent to illuminate, to lecture, and to rule them.

Mr. Larkin was usually an adroit and effectual tamer of evil beasts, in such case as this Mr. Dingwell. He waved his thin wand of red-hot iron with a light and firm hand, and made every raw smoke in turn, till the lion was fit to lie down with the lamb. But this Dingwell was an eccentric brute; he had no awe for the superior nature, no respect for the imposing airs of the tamer—not the slightest appreciation even of his cautery. On the contrary, he seemed to like the sensation, and amuse himself with the exposure of his sores to the inspection of Mr. Larkin, who began to feel himself drawn into an embarrassing and highly disreputable confidence.

Mr. Larkin had latterly quite given up the idea of frightening Mr. Dingwell, for when he tried that method, Mr. Dingwell had grown uncomfortably lively and skittish, and, in fact, frightened the exemplary Mr. Larkin confoundedly. He had recapitulated his own enormities with an elation and frightful merriment worthy of a scandalous corner at a Walpurges ball; had demonstrated that he perfectly understood the game of the serious attorney, and showed himself so curiously thick of skin, and withal so sportive and formidable a rhinoceros, that Mr. Larkin then and there learned a lesson, and vowed no more to try the mesmerism that succeeded with others, or the hot rod of iron under which they winced and gasped and succumbed.

Such a systematic, and even dangerous defiance of everything good, he had never encountered before. Such a person exactly as this Mr. Dingwell he could not have imagined. There was, he feared, a vein of insanity in that unfortunate man.

He had seen quite enough of the horrid adroitness of Mr. Dingwell's horse-play, and felt such qualms whenever that animal capered and snorted, that he contented himself with musing and wondering over his idiosyncrasies, and adopted a soothing treatment with him—talked to him in a friendly, and even tender way—and had some vague plans of getting him ultimately into a mad-house.

But Mr. Dingwell was by this time getting into his cab, with a drapery of mufflers round him, and telling the man through the front window to drive to Rosemary Court; he threw him self back into a corner, and chuckled and snorted in a conceited ecstasy over his victory, and the money which was coming to minister to no good in this evil world.

Cleve Verney leaned back in his chair, and there rose before him a view of a moonlighted wood, an old château, with its many peaked turrets, and steep roofs, showing silvery against the deep, liquid sky of night, and with a sigh, he saw on the white worn steps, that beautiful, wonderful shape that was his hope and his fate; and as he leaned on his hand, the Reverend Isaac Dixie, whose name had strangely summoned this picture from the deep sea of his fancy, entered the room, smiling rosily, after his wont, and extending his broad hand, as he marched with deliberate strides across the floor, as much as to say—"Here I am, your old tutor and admirer, who always predicted great things for you; I know you are charmed, as I am; I know how you will greet me."

"Ha! old Dixie," and Cleve got up, with a kind of effort, and not advancing very far, shook hands.

"So you have got your leave—a week—or how long?"

"I've arranged for next Sunday, that's all, my dear Mr. Verney; some little inconvenience, but very happy—always happy."

"Come, I want to have a talk with you," said Cleve, drawing the clergyman to a chair. "Don't you remember—you ought, you know—what Lord Sparkish (isn't it?) says in Swift's Polite Conversations—"'Tis as cheap sitting as standing.'"

The clergyman took the chair, simpering bashfully, for the allusion was cruel, and referred to a time when the Reverend Isaac Dixie, being as yet young in the ways of the world, and somewhat slow in apprehending literary ironies, had actually put his pupil through a grave course of "Polite Conversation," which he picked up among some odd volumes of the works of the great Dean of St. Patrick's, on the school-room shelf at Malory.

"And for my accomplishment of saying smart things in a polite way, I am entirely obliged to you and Dean Swift," said Cleve, mischievously.

"Ah! ah! you were always fond of a jest, my dear Mr. Verney; you liked poking fun, you did, at your old tutor; but you know how that really was—I have explained it so often; still, I do allow, the jest is not a bad one."

But Cleve's mind was already on quite another subject.

"And now, Dixie," said he, with a sharp glance into the clergyman's eyes, "you know, or at least you guess, what it is I want you to do for me?"

The clergyman looked down by his gaiter, with his head a little a-one-side, and his mouth a little pursed; and said he, after a momentary silence,—

"I really, I may say, unaffectedly, assure you that I do not."

"You're a queer fellow, old Dixie," said Cleve; "you won't be vexed, but you are always a little bit too clever. I did not tell you exactly, but I told you enough to enable you to guess it. Don't you remember our last talk? Come now, Dixie, you're no muff."

"I hope not, my dear Cleve; I may be, but I don't pretend to that character, though I have still, I apprehend, much to learn in the world's ways."

"Yes, of course," said the young man; and tapped his small teeth that glittered under his moustache, with the end of his pencil-case, while he lazily watched the face of the clergyman from under his long lashes.

"And I assure you," continued the clergyman, "if I were to pretend that I did apprehend your intentions, I should be guilty of an inaccuracy amounting, in fact, to an untruth."

He thought he detected something a little mocking in the handsome face of the young gentleman, and could not tell, in the shadow of the window-curtain, whether those even white teeth were not smiling at him outright; and a little nettled, but not forgetting himself, he went on,—

"You know, my dear Cleve, it is nothing on earth to me—absolutely; I act merely to oblige—merely, I mean, to be useful—if in my power, consistently with all other considerations, and I speak, I humbly, but confidently hope, habitually the truth"——

"Of course you do," said the young gentleman, with emphasis, and growing quite serious again. "It is very kind, I know, your coming all this way, and managing your week's absence; and you may for the present know just as little or as much of the matter as you please; only mind, this is—not of course in any wrong sense—a dark business—awfully quiet. They say that, in England, a talent for speaking may raise a man to anything, but I think a talent for holding one's tongue is sometimes a better one. And—I'm quite serious, old Dixie—I'll not forget your fidelity to me, upon my honour—really, never; and as you know, I may yet have the power of proving it."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie folded his hands, and hung his head sideways in a meek modesty, and withal smiled so rosily and gloriously, as he sate in front of the window, that had it happened an hour before sunrise, the sparrows in the ivy all along the stable walls, would undoubtedly have mistaken it for the glow of Aurora, and commenced their chirping and twittering salutations to the dawn an hour too soon.

"It is very gratifying, very, you cannot readily estimate, my dear, and—may I not say?—my illustrious pupil, how gratifying to me, quite irrespective of all those substantially kind intentions which you are pleased to avow in my behalf, to hear from your lips so frank and—may I say,—almost affectionate a declaration; so just an estimate of my devotion to your interests, and I may say, I hope, of my character generally?"

The Rector of Clay was smiling with a huge bashfulness, and slowly folding and rubbing one hand over the other, with his head gently inclined, and his great blue chin upon his guileless, single-breasted, black silk bosom, as he spoke all this in mellow effusion.

"Now, Dixie," said the young man, while a very anxious expression for the first time showed itself in his face, "I want you to do me a kindness—a kindness that will tie me to you all the days of my life. It is something, but not much; chiefly that you will have to keep a secret, and take some little trouble, which I know you don't mind; but nothing serious, not the slightest irregularity, a trifle, I assure you, and chiefly, as I said, that you will have to keep a secret for me."

Dixie also looked a good deal graver as he bowed his acquiescence, trying to smile on, and still sliding his hands softly, one over the other.

"I know you guess what it is—no matter—we'll not discuss it, dear Dixie; it's quite past that now. You'll have to make a little trip for me—you'll not mind it; only across what you used to call the herring-pond; and you must wait at the Silver Lion at Caen; it is the best place there—I wish it was better—not a soul will you see—I mean English, no one but quite French people; and there is quite amusement, for a day or so, in looking over the old town. Just wait there, and I'll let you know everything before you have been two days there. I've got your passport; you shall have no trouble. And you need not go to a bank; there's gold here; and you'll keep it, and spend it for me till I see you; and you must go to-day."

"And, of course, I know it is nothing wrong, my dear Cleve; but we are told to avoid even the appearance of evil. And in any case, I should not, of course, for the world offend your uncle—Lord Verney, I may call him now—the head of the family, and my very kind patron; for I trust I never forget a kindness; and if it should turn out to be anything which by any chance he might misinterpret, I may reckon upon your religious silence, my dear Cleve, as respects my name?"

"Silence! of course—I'd die before I should tell, under any pressure. I think you know I can keep a secret, and my own especially. And never trust my honour more if your name is ever breathed in connexion with any little service you may render me."

He pressed the Rev. Isaac Dixie's hand very earnestly as he spoke.

"And now, will you kindly take charge of this for me, and do as I said?" continued Cleve, placing the gold in Dixie's not unwilling hand. "And on this paper I have made a note of the best way—all about the boat and the rest; and God bless you, my dear Dixie, good-bye."

"And God bless you, my dear Cleve," reciprocated the clergyman, and they shook hands again, and the clergyman smiled blandly and tenderly; and as he closed the door, and

crossed the hall, grew very thoughtful, and looked as if he were getting into a possible mess.

Cleve, too, was very pale as he stood by the window, looking into the sooty garden at the back of Verney House.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XIV.

## OVER THE HERRING-POND.

Like the vision that had visited Cleve as he sate in the breakfast-room of Verney House, awaiting the Rev. Isaac Dixie, the old Château de Cresseron shared that night in the soft yet brilliant moonlight. That clergyman—vulgar I am afraid; worldly, perhaps; certainly not beautiful—had undertaken this foreign mission into the land of romance; and among its shadows and enchanted lights, and heroic phantoms, looked, I am afraid, incongruous, as the long-eared, shaggy head of Bottom in the fairy-haunted wood near Athens.

In the ancient town of Caen, in the Silver Lion, the Rev. Isaac Dixie that evening made himself partially understood, and altogether comfortable. He had an excellent dinner, and partook, moderately of course, of the very best vintage in the crypt of that venerable inn. Why should he not? Was he not making harmless holiday, and guilty of no extravagance; for had not Mr. Cleve Verney buckled a long purse to his girdle, and told him to dip his fingers in it as often and as deep as he pleased? And if he undertook the task—trod out Cleve Verney's corn, surely it was no business of his to call for a muzzle, and deny himself his heart's content.

In that exquisite moonlight, having had his cup of coffee, the Rev. Isaac Dixie made a loitering promenade: everything was bewitching—a little wonderful, he fancied—a little strange—from his shadow, that looked so sharp on the white road, to the gothic fronts and gables of old carved houses, emitting ruddy glimmerings from diamond casemates high in air, and half-melting in the deep liquid sky, gleaming with stars over his head.

All was perfectly French in language and costume: not a note of the familiar English accent mingled in the foreign hum of life. He was quite at his ease. To all censorious eyes he walked invisible; and, shall I tell it? Why not? For in truth, if his bishop, who abhors that narcotic, and who, I am sure, never reads novels, and therefore cannot read it here,

learns nothing of it, the telling can hurt nobody. He smoked three great cheroots, mild and fragrant, that evening, in the ancient streets of Caen, and returned to his inn, odorous of that perfume.

It would have been altogether a delicious excursion, had there not been a suspense and an anxiety to trouble the divine. The Rev. Isaac Dixie regretted now that he had not asked Cleve to define his object. He suspected, but did not know its nature. He had no idea how obstinately and amazingly the problem would recur to his mind, and how serious would grow his qualms as the hour of revelation drew near.

The same moon is shining over the ancient streets of Caen, and over smoke-canopied Verney House, and over the quaint and lonely Château de Cresseron. In a tapestried room in this old French house candles were burning, the window open, and Margaret Fanshawe sitting at it, and looking out on the moonlit woods and waters, and breathing the still air, that was this night soft as summer, in the raptures of a strange dream: a dream no more; the uncertainty is over, and all her griefs. No longer is she one of that forlorn race that hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. She is not born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward, but translated. Is it so? Alas! alas! the angelic voice has not yet proclaimed "that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." These words are for the glorified, who have passed the gates of death.

In this bliss, as in all that pertains to love, reason has small share. The heart rejoices as the birds sing. A great suspense—the greatest care that visits the young heart—has ended in a blessed certainty, and in so far the state resembles heaven; but, as in all mortal happiness, there mingles in this also a sadness like distant music.

Old Sir Booth Fanshawe is away on one of his mysterious journeys, and cannot return for three or four days, at soonest. I do not know whether things are beginning to look brighter with Sir Booth, or whether his affairs are being "managed" into utter ruin. Meanwhile, the evil spirit has departed from the house, and the spirit of music has come, music with yet a cadence of sadness in it.

This fair, quaint landscape, and beautiful moonlight! Who ever looks on such a scene that does not feel a melancholy mingling in his delight?

"The moon shines bright:—in such a night as this,

When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,

And they did make no noise; in such a night,

Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,

And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,

Where Cresid lay that night. In such a night

Stood Dido, with a willow in her hand,

Upon the wild sea-banks, and waved her love

To come again to Carthage."

Thus, in the visions of the Seer who lies in Stratford-on-Avon, moonlight and love and melancholy are related; and so it is, and will be, to the end of time, till mortal love is no more, and sadness ends, and the moon is changed to blood, and all things are made new.

And now over the moonlit water, through the boughs of the old trees, the still night air is thrilled with a sweet contralto—a homely song—the echo of childish days and the nursery. Poor Milly! her maid who died so early, whose lover was a young sailor, far away, used to sing it for her in the summer evenings, when they sat down under the hawthorns, on Winnockhough, looking toward the sea, though the sea was many a mile away:—

"As Eve went forth from Paradise,

She, weeping, bore away

One flower that, reared, in tears and sighs,

Is growing to this day.

"Where'er the children of the fall

Are toiling to this hour,

It blooms for each, it blooms for all,

And Love we call this flower.

"Red roses of the bygone year

Are mingled with the mould,

And other roses will appear

Where they grew pale and old.

"But where it grew, no other grows,

No bloom restores the sere;

So this resembles not the rose,

And knows no other year.

"So, welcome, when thy bloom is red,

The glory of thy light;

And welcome when thy bloom is shed,

The long sleep of my night."

And now the song is ended, and, listening, nature seems to sigh; and looking toward the old château, the front next you is in shadow, the window is open, and within you see two ladies. The elder is standing by the girl, who sits still at the open window, looking up into the face of her old friend—the old friend who has known, in the early days of romance, what love is, for whom now "the bloom is shed, and mingling with the mould," but who remembers sadly the blush and glory of its light that died five-and-thirty years ago upon Canadian snows.

Gently the old lady takes her hand, and sits beside her girlish kinswoman, and lays her other hand over that, and smiles with a strange look of affection, and admiration, and immeasurable compassion, that somehow seems to translate her, it is so sad and angelic. I cannot hear what she is saying, but the young lady looks up, and kisses her thin cheek, and lays her head upon her old shoulder.

Behind, high over the steep roofs and pinnacles, and those glimmering weather-vanes, that seem sometimes to melt quite away, hangs the moon, unclouded—meet emblem of a pure love—no longer crossed by the sorrows of true love's course—Dian the Chaste, with her sad, pure, and beautifully misleading light—alas! the emblem, also, of mutation.

In a few concise and somewhat dry sentences, as old prison stones bear the records which thin hands, long since turned to dust, have carved, the world's corridors and corners bear the tracings of others that were busy two thousand years ago; and the inscriptions that tell the trite story of human fears and sadness, cut sharp and deep in the rock, tell simply and briefly how Death was the King of Terrors, and the shortness of Life the bitter wonder, and black Care the companion of the wayfarers who marched by the same route to the same goal, so long ago. These gigantic griefs and horrors are all in a nutshell. A few words tell them. Their terror is in their truth. There is no use in expanding them: they are sublimely simple. Among the shadowy men and women that people these pages, I see them everywhere—plots too big and complicated to be got, by any compression, within the few pages and narrow covers of the book of their lives: Care, in her old black weeds, and Death, with stealthy foot and blow like thunder.

Twelve months had come and gone for ever since the Reverend Isaac Dixie made that little trip to Caen, every month bringing his portion of blossom, fruit, or blight to every mortal. All had gone well and gloriously in this Verney Peerage matter.

The death of the late Honourable Arthur Verney was proved; and the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, as next heir, having complied with the proper forms, duly succeeded to the ancient peerage of the Verneys. So the dream was accomplished more splendidly, perhaps, than if the prize had come earlier, for the estates were in such condition as they had never attained to since the great rebellion; and if Viscount Verney was not among the more potent of his peers, the fault was not in the peerage and its belongings.

I don't know that Lord Verney was on the whole a happier man than the Honourable Kiffyn had been. He had become somewhat more exacting; his pride pronounced itself more implacably; men felt it more, because he was really formid able. Whatever the Viscount in the box might be, the drag he drove was heavy, and men more alert in getting out of his way than they would, perhaps, had he been a better whip.

He had at length his heart's desire; but still there was something wanting. He was not quite where he ought to be. With his boroughs, and his command of one county, and potent influence in another, he ought to have been decidedly a greater man. He could not complain of being slighted. The minister saw him when he chose; he was listened to, and in all respects courteously endured. But there was something unsatisfactory. He was not telling, as he had expected. Perhaps he had no very clear conceptions to impress. He had misgivings, too, that secretly depressed and irritated him. He saw Twyndle's eye wander wildly, and caught him yawning stealthily into his hand, while he was giving him his view of the affair of the "the Matilda Briggs," and the right of search. He had seen Foljambe, of the Treasury, suddenly laugh at something he thought was particularly wise, while unfolding to that gentleman, in the drawing-room, after dinner, his ideas about local loans, in aid of agriculture. Foljambe did not laugh outright. It was only a tremulous qualm of a second, and he was solemn again, and rather abashed. Lord Verney paused, and looked for a second, with stern inquiry in his face, and then proceeded politely. But Lord Verney never thought or spoke well of Foljambe again; and often reviewed what he had said, in secret, to try and make out where the absurdity lay, and was shy of ventilating that particular plan again, and sometimes suspected that it was the boroughs and the county, and not Kiffyn Lord Verney, that were listened to.

As the organ of self-esteem is the region of our chief consolations and irritations (and its condition regulates temper), this undivulged mortification, you may be sure, did not make Lord Verney, into whose ruminations was ever trickling, through a secret duct, this fine stream of distilled gall, brighter in spirits, or happier in temper.

Oh! vanity of human wishes! Not that the things we wish for are not in themselves pleasant, but that we forget that, as in nature every substance has its peculiar animalcule and infestings, so every blessing has, too minute to be seen at a distance, but quite inseparable, its parasite troubles.

Cleve Verney, too, who stood so near the throne, was he happy? The shadow of care was cast upon him. He had grown an anxious man. "Verney's looking awfully thin, don't you think, and seedy? and he's always writing long letters, and rather cross," was the criticism of one of his club friends. "Been going a little too fast, I dare say."

Honest Tom Sedley thought it was this pending peerage business, and the suspense; and reported to his friend the confident talk of the town on the subject. But when the question was settled, with a brilliant facility, his good humour did not recover. There was still the same cloud over his friend, and Tom began to fear that Cleve had got into some very bad scrape, probably with the Hebrew community.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XV.

## MR. CLEVE VERNEY PAYS A VISIT TO ROSEMARY COURT.

That evoked spirit, Dingwell, was now functus officio, and might be dismissed. He was as much afraid of the light of London—even the gaslight—as a man of his audacity could be of anything. Still he lingered there.

Mr. Larkin had repeatedly congratulated the Verney peer, and his young friend and patron, Cleve, upon his own masterly management, and the happy result of the case, as he called it. And although, with scriptural warning before him, he would be the last man in the world to say, "Is not this great Babylon that I have builded?" Yet he did wish Lord Viscount Verney, and Cleve Verney, M.P., distinctly to understand that he, Mr. Larkin, had been the making of them. There were some things—very many things, in fact, all desirable—which those distinguished persons could effect for the good attorney of Glyng den, and that excellent person in consequence presented himself diligently at Verney House.

On the morning I now speak of, he was introduced to the library, where he found the peer and his nephew.

"I ventured to call, my lord—how do you do, Mr. Verney?—to invite your lordship's attention to the position of Mr. Dingwell, who is compelled by lack of funds to prolong his stay in London. He is, I may say, most anxious to take his departure quietly and expeditiously, for Constantinople, where, I venture to think, it is expedient for all parties, that his residence should be fixed, rather than in London, where he is in hourly danger of detection and arrest, the consequence of which, my lord;—it will probably have struck your lordship's rapid apprehension already,—would be, I venture to think, a very painful investigation of his past life, and a concomitant discrediting of his character, which although, as your lordship would point out to me, it cannot disturb that which is already settled, would yet produce an unpleasant effect out of doors, which, it is

to be feared, he would take care to aggravate by all means in his power, were he to refer his detention here, and consequent arrest, to any fancied economy on your lordship's part."

"I don't quite follow you about it, Mr. Larkin," said Lord Verney, who generally looked a little stern when he was puzzled. "I don't quite apprehend the drift—be good enough to sit down—about it—of your remarks, as they bear upon Mr. Dingwell's wishes, and my conduct. Do you, Cleve?"

"I conjecture that Dingwell wants more money, and can't be got out of London without it," said Cleve.

"Eh? Well, that did occur to me; of course, that's plain enough—about it—and what a man that must be! and—God bless me! about it—all the money he has got from me! It's incredible, Mr.—a—Larkin, three hundred pounds, you know, and he wanted five, and that absurdly enormous weekly payment besides!"

"Your lordship has exactly, as usual, touched the point, and anticipated, with your wonted accuracy, the line at the other side; and indeed, I may also say, all that may be urged by way of argument, pro and con. It is a wonderful faculty!" added Mr. Larkin, looking down with a contemplative smile, and a little wondering shake of the head.

"Ha, ha! Something of the same sort has been remarked in our family about it," said the Viscount, much pleased. "It facilitates business, rather, I should hope—about it."

The attorney shook his head, reflectively, raising his hands, and said, "No one but a professional man can have an idea!"

"And what do you suggest?" asked Cleve, who was perhaps a little tired of the attorney's compliments.

"Yes, what do you suggest, Mr.—Mr. Larkin? Your suggestion I should be prepared to consider. Anything, Mr. Larkin, suggested by you shall be considered," said Lord Verney grandly, leaning back in his chair, and folding his hands.

"I am much—very much—flattered by your lordship's confidence. The former money, I have reason to think, my lord, went to satisfy an old debt, and I have reason to know that his den has been discovered by another creditor, from whom, even were funds at his disposal to leave England to-night, escape would be difficult, if not impossible."

"How much money does he want?" asked Mr. Cleve Verney.

"A moment, a moment, please. I was going to say," said Lord Verney, "if he wants money—about it—it would be desirable to state the amount."

Mr. Larkin, thus called on, cleared his voice, and his dove-like eyes contracted, and assumed their rat-like look, and he said, watching Lord Verney's face,—

"I am afraid, my lord, that less than three hundred——"

Lord Verney contracted his brows, and nodded, after a moment.

"Three hundred pounds. Less, I say, my lord, will not satisfy the creditor, and there will remain something still in order to bring him back, and to keep him quiet there for a time; and I think, my lord, if you will go the length of five hundred——"

"'Gad, it's growing quite serious, Mr.—Mr. Sir, I confess I don't half understand this person, Mr. Ding—Dong—whatever it is—it's going rather too fast about it. I—I—and that's my clear opinion—" and Lord Verney gazed and blinked sternly at the attorney, and patted his fragrant pocket-handkerchief several times to his chin—"very unreasonable and monstrous, and, considering all I've done, very ungrateful."

"Quite so, my lord; monstrously ungrateful. I can't describe to your lordship the trouble I have had with that extraordinary and, I fear I must add, fiendish person. I allude, of course, my lord, in my privileged character as having the honour of confidential relations with your lordship, to that unfortunate man, Dingwell. I assure you, on one occasion, he seized a poker in his lodgings, and threatened to dash my brains out."

"Very good, sir," said Lord Verney, whose mind was busy upon quite another point; "and suppose I do, what do we gain, I ask, by assisting him?"

"Simply, my lord, he is so incredibly reckless, and, as I have said, fiendish, that if he were disappointed, I do think he will stick at nothing, even to the length of swearing that his evidence for your lordship was perjured, for the purpose of being revenged, and your generosity to him pending the inquiry, or rather the preparation of proofs, would give a colour unfortunately even to that monstrous allegation. Your lordship can have no idea—the elevation of your own mind prevents it—of the desperate character with whom we have had to deal."

"Upon my life, sir, a pleasant position you seem to have brought me into," said Lord Verney, flushing a good deal.

"My lord, it was inevitable," said Mr. Larkin, sadly.

"I don't think he could have helped it, really," said Cleve Verney.

"And who says he could?" asked Lord Verney, tartly. "I've all along said it could not well be helped, and that's the reason I did it, don't you see? but I may be allowed to say, I suppose, that the position is a most untoward one; and so it is, egad!" and Lord Verney got up in his fidget, and walked over to the window, and to the chimney-piece, and to the table, and fiddled with a great many things.

"I remember my late brother, Shadwell Verney—he's dead, poor Shadwell—had a world of trouble with a fellow—about it—who used to extort money from him—something I suppose—like this Mr. Ringwood—or I mean—you know his name—till he called in the police, and put an end to it."

"Quite true, my lord, quite true; but don't you think, my lord, such a line with Mr. Dingwell might lead to a fraycas, and the possible unpleasantness to which I ventured to allude? You have seen him, Mr. Verney?"

"Yes; he's a beast, he really is; a little bit mad, I almost think."

"A little bit mad, precisely so; it really is, my lord, most melancholy. And I am so clearly of opinion that if we quarrel definitively with Mr. Dingwell, we may find ourselves in an extremely difficult position, that were the case my own, I should have no hesitation in satisfying Mr. Dingwell, even at a sacrifice, rather than incur the annoyance I anticipate. If you allow me, my lord, to conduct the matter with Mr. Dingwell, I think I shall succeed in getting him away quietly."

"It seems to me a very serious sum, Mr. Larkin," said Lord Verney.

"Precisely so, my lord; serious—very serious; but your lordship made a remark once in my hearing which impressed me powerfully: it was to the effect that where an object is to be accomplished, it is better to expend a little too much power, than anything too little." I think that Mr. Larkin invented this remark of Lord Verney's, which, however, his lordship was pleased to recognise, notwithstanding.

So the attorney took his departure, to call again next day.

"Clever man that Mr.—Mr. Larkin—vastly clever," said Lord Verney. "I rather think there's a great deal in what he says—it's very disgusting—about it; but one must consider, you know—there's no harm in considering—and—and that Mr.—Dong—

Dingleton, isn't it?—about it—a most offensive person. I must consider—I shall think it over, and give him my ideas to-morrow."

Cleve did not like an expression which had struck him in the attorney's face that day, and he proposed next day to write to Mr. Dingwell, and actually did so, requesting that he would be so good as to call at Verney House.

Mr. Dingwell did not come; but a note came by post, saying that the writer, Mr. Dingwell, was not well enough to venture a call.

What I term Mr. Larkin's rat-like eyes, and a certain dark and even wicked look that crosses the attorney's face, when they appear, had left a profound sense of uncertainty in Cleve's mind respecting that gentleman's character and plans. It was simply a conviction that the attorney meditated something odd about Mr. Dingwell, and that no good man could look as he had looked.

There was no use in opening his suspicion, grounded on so slight a thing as a look, to his uncle, who, though often timid and hesitating, and in secret helpless, and at his wits' end for aid in arriving at a decision, was yet, in a matter where vanity was concerned, or a strong prejudice or caprice involved, often incredibly obstinate.

Mr. Larkin's look teased Cleve. Larkin might grow into an influence very important to that young gentleman, and was not lightly to be quarrelled with. He would not quarrel with him; but he would see Dingwell, if indeed that person were still in London; a fact about which he had begun to have some odd misgivings. The note was written in a straight, cramp hand, and Mr. Larkin's face was in the background always. He knew Mr. Dingwell's address; an answer, real or forged, had reached him from it. So, full of dark dreams and conjectures, he got into a cab, and drove to the entrance of Rosemary Court, and knocked at Miss Sarah Rumble's door.

That good lady, from the shadow, looked suspiciously on him.

"Is Mr. Dingwell at home?"

"Mr. Dingwell, sir?" she repeated.

"Yes. Is he at home?"

"Mr. Dingwell, sir? No sir."

"Does not Mr. Dingwell live here?"

"There was a gentleman, please, sir, with a name like that. Go back, child," she said, sharply to Lucy Maria, who was peeping in the background, and who might not be edified, perhaps, by the dialogue. "Beg parding, sir," she continued, as the child disappeared; "they are so tiresome! There was an old gentleman lodging here, sir, please, which his name was like that I do remember."

Cleve Verney did not know what to think.

"Is there anyone in the house who knows Mr. Dingwell? I've come to be of use to him; perhaps he could see me. Will you say Mr. Verney?"

"Mr.—what, sir, please?"

"Verney—here's my card; perhaps it is better."

As the conversation continued, Miss Rumble had gradually come more and more forward, closing the door more and more as she did so, so that she now confronted Cleve upon the step, and could have shut the door at her back, had he made any attempt to get

in; and she called over her shoulder to Lucy Maria, and whispered something, and gave her, I suppose, the card; and in a minute more Miss Rumble opened the door wide, and showed "the gentleman" upstairs, and told him on the lobby she hoped he would not be offended, but that she had such positive orders as to leave her no choice; and that in fact Mr. Dingwell was in the drawing-room, and would be happy to see him, and almost at the same moment she threw open the door and introduced him, with a little courtesy, and—

"This way, please, sir; here's the gentleman, please, sir."

There he did find Mr. Dingwell, smoking a cigar, in his fez, slippers, and pea-green silk dressing-gown, with a cup of black coffee on the little table beside him, his Times and a few maga zines there also. He looked, in vulgar parlance, "seedy," like an old fellow who had been raking the night before, and was wofully tired, and in no very genial temper.

"Will you excuse an old fellow, Mr. Verney, and take a chair for yourself? I'm not very well to-day. I suppose, from your note, you thought I had quitted London. It was not to be expected so old a plant should take root; but it's sometimes not worth moving 'em again, and they remain where they are, to wither, ha, ha, ha!"

"I should be sorry it was for any such purpose; but I am happy to find you still here, for I was really anxious to call and thank you."

"Anxious—to thank me! Are you really serious, Mr. Verney?" said Dingwell, lowering his cigar again, and looking with a stern smile in his visitor's face.

"Yes, sir; I did wish to call and tell you," said Cleve, determined not to grow angry; "and I am here to say that we are very much obliged."

"We?"

"Yes; my uncle and I."

"Oh, yes; well, it is something. I hope the coronet becomes him, and his robes. I venture to say he has got up the masquerading properties already; it's a pity there isn't a coronation or something at hand; and I suppose he'll put up a monument to my dear friend Arthur—a mangy old dog he was, you'll allow me to say, though he was my friend, and very kind to me; and I, the most grateful fellow he ever met; I've been more grieved about him than any other person I can remember, upon my soul and honour—and a devilish dirty dog he was."

This last reflection was delivered in a melancholy aside, after the manner of a soliloquy, and Cleve did not exactly know how to take this old fellow's impertinence.

"Arthur Verney—poor fellow! your uncle. He had a great deal of the pride of his family, you know, along with utter degradation. Filthy dog!—pah!" And Mr. Dingwell lifted both his hands, and actually used that unpleasant utensil called a "spittoon," which is seen in taverns, to give expression, it seemed, to his disgust.

"But he had his pride, dear Arthur; he was proud, and wished for a tombstone. When he was dying, he said, 'I should like a monument—not of course in a cathedral, for I have been living so darkly, and a good deal talked about; but there's an old church or abbey near Malory (that I'm sure was the name of the place) where our family has been accustomed to bury its quiet respectabilities and its mauvais sujets; and I think they might give me a pretty little monument there, quite quietly.' I think you'll do it, for you're a grateful person, and like thinking people; and he certainly did a great deal for his family by going out of it, and the little vanity of a monument would not cost much, and, as he said himself, no one would ever see it; and I promised, if I ever had an opportunity, to mention the subject to your uncle."

Cleve bowed.

"'And,' said he, 'there will be a little conflict of feeling. I am sure they'd like the monument, but they would not make an ostentation of me. But remind them of my Aunt

Deborah. Poor old girl! she ran away with a fiddler.' Egad, sir! these were his very words, and I've found, on inquiring here, they were quite true. She ran away with a fiddler—egad! and I don't know how many little fiddlers she had; and, by Jove! he said if I came back I should recognise a possible cousin in every street-fiddler I met with, for music is a talent that runs in families. And so, when Atropos cut his fiddlestring, and he died, she took, he said, to selling mutton pies, for her maintenance, in Chester, and being properly proud as a Verney, though as a fiddler's widow necessitous, he said she used to cry, behind her little table, 'Hot mutton pies!' and then, sotto voce, 'I hope nobody hears me;' and you may rely upon that family anecdote, for I had it from the lips of that notorious member of your family, your uncle Arthur, and he hoped that they would comply with the tradition, and reconcile the Verney pride with Verney exigencies, and concede him the secret celebration of a monument."

"If you are serious——"

"Serious about a monument, sir! who the devil could be lively on such a subject?" and Mr. Dingwell looked unaccountably angry, and ground his teeth, and grew white. "A monument, cheap and nasty, I dare say; it isn't much for a poor devil from whom you've got everything. I suppose you'll speak to your uncle, sir."

"I'll speak to him, sir."

"Yes, do, pray, and prevail. I'm not very strong, sir, and there's something that remains for you and me to do, sir."

"What is that?"

"To rot under ground, sir; and as I shall go first, it would be pleasant to me to be able to present your affectionate regards to your uncle, when I meet him, and tell him that you had complied with his little fancy about the monument, as he seemed to make a point that his name should not be blotted totally from the records of his family."

Cleve was rather confirmed in his suspicions about the sanity of this odious old man—as well he might—and, at all events, was resolved to endure him without a row.

"I shall certainly remember, and mention all you have said, sir," said Cleve.

"Yes," said the old man, in a grim meditation, looking down, and he chucked away the stump of his cigar, "it's a devilish hard case, Kismet!" he muttered.

"I suppose you find our London climate very different from that you have grown accustomed to?" said Cleve, approaching the point on which he desired some light.

"I lived in London for a long time, sir. I was—as perhaps you know—junior partner in the great Greek house of Prinkipi and Dingwell—d——n Prinkipi! say I. He ran us into trouble, sir; then came a smash, sir, and Prinkipi levanted, making a scapegoat of me, the most vilified and persecuted Greek merchant that ever came on 'Change! And, egad! if they could catch me, even now, I believe they'd bury me in a dungeon for the rest of my days, which, in that case, would not be many. I'm here, therefore, I may say, at the risk of my life."

"A very anxious situation, indeed, Mr. Dingwell; and I conclude you intend but a short stay here?"

"Quite the contrary, sir. I mean to stay as long as I please, and that may be as long as I live."

"Oh! I had thought from something that Mr. Larkin said," began Cleve Verney.

"Larkin! He's a religious man, and does not put his candle under a bushel. He's very particular to say his prayers; and provided he says them, he takes leave to say what he likes beside."

Mr. Dingwell was shooting his arrows as freely as Cupid does; but Cleve did not take this satire for more than its worth.

"He may think it natural I should wish to be gone, and so I do," continued the old man, setting down his coffee cup, "if I could get away without the trouble of going, or was sure of a tolerably comfortable berth, at my journey's end; but I'm old, and travelling shakes me to pieces, and I have enemies elsewhere, as well as here; and the newspapers have been printing sketches of my life and adventures, and poking up attention about me, and awakening the slumbering recollection of persons by whom I had been, in effect, forgotten, every-where. No rest for the wicked, sir. I'm pursued; and, in fact, what little peace I might have enjoyed in this, the closing period of my life, has been irreparably wrecked by my visit and public appearance here, to place your uncle, and by consequence you, in the position now secured to you. What do you think of me?"

"I think, sir, you have done us a great service; and I know we are very much obliged," said Cleve, with his most engaging smile.

"And do you know what I think of myself? I think I'm a d——d fool, unless I look for some advantage."

"Don't you think, sir, you have found it, on the whole, advantageous, your coming here?" insinuated Cleve.

"Barren, sir, as a voyage on the Dead Sea. The test is this—what have I by it? not five pounds, sir, in the world. Now, I've opened my mind a little to you upon this subject, and I'm of the same mind still; and if I've opened Aladdin's garden to you, with its fruitage of emeralds, rubies, and so forth, I expect to fill my snuff-box with the filings and chippings of your gigantic jewellery."

Cleve half repented his visit, now that the presence of the insatiable Mr. Dingwell, and his evident appetite for more money, had justified the representations of the suspected attorney.

"I shall speak to Mr. Larkin on the subject," said Cleve Verney.

"D——n Larkin, sir! Speak to me."

"But, Mr. Dingwell, I have really, as I told you before, no authority to speak; and no one has the least power in the matter but my uncle."

"And what the devil did you come here for?" demanded Mr. Dingwell, suddenly blazing up into one of his unaccountable furies. "I suppose you expected me to congratulate you on your success, and to ask leave to see your uncle in his coronet—ha, ha, ha!—or his cap and bells, or whatever he wears. By —— sir, I hope he holds his head high, and struts like a peacock, and has pleasant dreams; time enough for nightmares, sir, hereafter, eh? Uneasy rests the head that wears the crown! Good evening, sir; I'll talk to Mr. Larkin."

And with these words Mr. Dingwell got up, looking unaccountably angry, and made a half-sarcastic, half-furious bow, wherewith he dismissed Mr. Cleve Verney, with more distinct convictions than ever that the old gentleman was an unmitigated beast, and more than half a lunatic.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XVI.

## IN LORD VERNEY'S LIBRARY.

Who should light upon Cleve that evening as he walked homeward but our friend Tom Sedley, who was struck by the anxious pallor and melancholy of his face.

Good-natured Sedley took his arm, and said he, as they walked on together,—

"Why don't you smile on your luck, Cleve?"

"How do you know what my luck is?"

"All the world knows that pretty well."

"All the world knows everything but its own business."

"Well, people do say that your uncle has lately got the oldest peerage—one of them—in England, and an estate of thirty-seven thousand a year, for one thing, and that you are heir-presumptive to these trifles."

"And that heirs-presumptive often get nothing but their heads in their hands."

"No, you'll not come Saint Denis nor any other martyr over us, my dear boy; we know very well how you stand in that quarter."

"It's pleasant to have one's domestic relations so happily arranged by such very competent persons. I'm much obliged to all the world for the parental interest it takes in my private concerns."

"And it also strikes some people that a perfectly safe seat in the House of Commons is not to be had for nothing by every fellow who wishes it."

"But suppose I don't wish it."

"Oh! we may suppose anything."

Tom Sedley laughed as he said this, and Cleve looked at him sharply, but saw no uncomfortable meaning in his face.

"There is no good in talking of what one has not tried," said he. "If you had to go down to that tiresome House of Commons every time it sits; and had an uncle like mine to take you to task every time you missed a division—you'd soon be as tired of it as I am."

"I see, my dear fellow, you are bowed down under a load of good luck." They were at the door of Tom Sedley's lodgings by this time, and opening it, he continued, "I've something in my room to show you; just run up with me for a minute, and you'll say I'm a conjuror."

Cleve, not to be got into good spirits that even ing, followed him upstairs, thinking of something else.

"I've got a key to your melancholy, Cleve," said he, leading the way into his drawing-room. "Look there," and he pointed to a clever copy in crayons of the famous Beatrice Cenci, which he had hung over his chimney-piece.

Tom Sedley laughed, looking in Cleve's eyes. A slight flush had suddenly tinged his visitor's face, as he saw the portrait. But he did not seem to enjoy the joke, on the contrary, he looked a little embarrassed and angry. "That's Guido's portrait—well, what about it?" he asked, rather surlily.

"Yes, of course; but who is it like?"

"Very few, I dare say, for it is very pretty; and except on canvas, there is hardly such a thing as a pretty girl to be seen. Is that all? for the life of me, I can't see where the conjuring lies."

"Not in the picture, but the likeness; don't you see it?"

"No" said Cleve. "I must go; are you coming?"

"Not see it!" said Tom. "Why if it were painted for her, it could not be more like. Why, it's the Flower of Cardyllian, the Star of Malory. It is your Miss Fanshawe—my Margaret—our Miss Margaret Fanshawe. I'm making the fairest division I can, you see; and I would not be without it for all the world."

"She would be very much gratified if she heard it. It is so flattering to a young lady to have a fellow buy a coloured lithograph, and call it by her name, and crack jokes and spout mock heroics over it. It is the modern way of celebrating a lady's name. Don't you seriously think, Sedley, it would be better to smash it with a poker, and throw it into the fire, than go on taking such liberties with any young lady's name?"

"Upon my honour, Cleve, you mistake me; you do me great injustice. You used to laugh at me, you know, when I'm quite sure, thinking over it now, you were awfully gone about her yourself. I never told any one but you why I bought that picture; it isn't a lithograph, but painted, or drawn, or whatever they call it, with chalks, and it cost five guineas; and no one but you ever heard me mention Miss Fanshawe's name, except the people at Cardyllian, and then only as I might mention any other, and always with respect."

"What does it signify?" interrupted Cleve, in the middle of a forced yawn. "I'm tired to-day, and cross—don't you see; and man delights not me, nor woman neither. So, if you're coming, come, for I must go."

"And, really, Cleve, the Cardyllian people do say (I've had letters) that you were awfully in love with her yourself, and always haunting those woods of Malory while she was there, and went away immediately she left, and have never been seen in Cardyllian since."

"Those Cretans were always liars, Tom Sedley. That comes direct from the club. I can fancy old Shrapnell in the light of the bow-window, composing his farrago of dreams, and lies, and chuckling and cackling over it."

"Well, I don't say that Shrapnell had anything to do with it; but I did hear at first they thought you were gone about little Agnes Etherage."

"Oh! they found that out—did they?" said Cleve. "But you know those people—I mean the Cardyllian people—as well, or better than I, and really, as a kindness to me, and to save me the trouble of endless explanations to my uncle, I would be so much obliged if you would not repeat their follies—unless, of course, you happen to believe them."

Cleve did not look more cheerful as he drove away in a cab which he took to get rid of his friend Tom Sedley. It was mortifying to find how vain were his clever stratagems, and how the rustic chapmen of that Welsh village and their wives had penetrated his diplomacy. He thought he had killed the rumours about Malory, and yet that grain of mustard seed had grown while his eye was off it, with a gigantic luxuriance, and now was large enough to form a feature in the landscape, and quite visible from the windows of Ware—if his uncle should happen to visit that mansion—overtopping the roofs and chimneys of Cardyllian. His uncle meditated an early visit to Cardyllian, and a short stay at Ware, before the painters and gilders got possession of the house; a sort of ovation in demi-toilette, grand and friendly, and a foretaste of the splendours that were coming. Cleve did hope that those beasts would be quiet while Lord Verney was (as he in his grand manner termed it) "among them." He knew the danger of a vague suspicion

seizing on his mind, how fast it clung, how it fermented like yeast, fantastic and obstinate as a foolish woman's jealousy—and as men sometimes will, he even magnified this danger. Altogether, Cleve was not causelessly anxious and alarmed. He had in the dark to navigate a channel which even in broad daylight tasked a good steersman.

When Cleve reached Verney House it was eight o'clock. Lord Verney had ordered his brougham at half-past, and was going down to the House; he had something to say on Lord Frompington's bill. It was not very new, nor very deep, nor very much; but he had been close at it for the last three weeks. He had amused many gentlemen—and sometimes even ladies—at many dinner parties, with a very exact recital of his views. I cannot say that they were exactly his, for they were culled, perhaps unconsciously, from a variety of magazine articles and pamphlets, which happened to take Lord Verney's view of the question.

It is not given to any mortal to have his heart's desire in everything. Lord Verney had a great deal of this world's good things—wealth, family, rank. But he chose to aim at official station, and here his stars denied him.

Some people thought him a goose, and some only a bore. He was, as we know, pompous, conceited, obstinate, also weak and dry. His grandfather had been a cabinet minister, respectable and silent; and was not he wiser, brighter, and more learned than his grandfather? "Why on earth should not he?" His influence commanded two boroughs, and virtually two counties. The minister, therefore, treated him with distinction; and spoke of him confidentially as horribly foolish, impracticable, and at times positively impertinent.

Lord Verney was subject to small pets and huffs, and sometimes was affronted with the Premier for four or five weeks together, although the fact escaped his notice. And when the viscount relented, he would make him a visit to quiet his mind, and show him that friendly relations were re-established; and the minister would say, "Here comes that d——d Verney; I suppose I must give him half-an-hour!" and when the peer departed, thinking he had made the minister happy, the minister was seriously debating whether Lord Verney's boroughs were worth the price of Lord Verney's society.

His lordship was now in that sacred apartment, his library; where not even Cleve had a right to disturb him uninvited. Preliminaries, however, were now arranged; the servant announced him, and Cleve was commanded to enter.

"I have just had a line to say I shall be in time at half-past ten o'clock, about it. Frompington's bill won't be on till then; and take that chair and sit down, about it, won't you? I've a good many things on my mind; people put things upon me. Some people think I have a turn for business, and they ask me to consider and direct matters about theirs, and I do what I can. There was poor Wimbledon, who died, about it, seven years ago. You remember Wimbledon—or—I say—you either remember him or you don't recollect him; but in either case it's of no importance. Let me see: Lady Wimbledon—she's connected with you, about it—your mother, remotely—remotely also with us, the Verneys. I've had a world of trouble about her settlements—I can't describe—I can't describe—I was not well advised, in fact, to accept the trust at all. Long ago, when poor Frompington—I mean poor Wimbledon, of course—have I been saying Wimbledon?"

Cleve at once satisfied him.

"Yes, of course. When poor Wimbledon looked as healthy and as strong as I do at this moment, about it—a long time ago. Poor Wimbledon!—he fancied, I suppose, I had some little turn, about it, for business—some of my friends do—and I accepted the trust when poor Wimbledon looked as little likely to be hurried into eternity, about it, as I do. I had a regard for him, poor Wimbledon, and he had a respect for me, and thought I could be of use to him after he was dead, and I have endeavoured, and people think I have. But Lady Wimbledon, the dowager, poor woman! She's very long-winded, poor soul, and gives me an infinity of trouble. One can't say to a lady, 'You are detaining me; you are wandering from the subject; you fail to come to the point.' It would be taking a liberty, or something, about it. I had not seen Lady Wimbledon, simple 'oman, for seven years or more. It's a very entangled business, and I confess it seems rather unfair, that I should have my time, already sufficiently occupied with other, as I think, more important affairs, so seriously interrupted and abridged. There's going to be a bill filed—yes, and a great deal of annoyance. She has one unmarried daughter, Caroline, about it, who is not to have any power over her money until she is thirty-one. She's not that now. It was hardly fair to me, putting it in trust so long. She is a very superior person—a young woman one does not meet with every day, about it; and—and very apprehensive—a great deal of mind—quite unusual. Do you know her?"

The viscount raised his eyes toward the ceiling with a smile that was mysterious and pleased.

Cleve did know that young lady of eight-and-twenty, and her dowager mamma, "simple 'oman," who had pursued him with extraordinary spirit and tenacity for several years, but that was past and over. Cleve experienced a thrill of pain at his heart. He suspected that the old torturing idea was again active in his uncle's mind.

Yes, he did know them—ridiculous old woman; and the girl—he believed she'd marry any one; he fancied she would have done him that honour at one time, and he fancied that the trust, if it was to end when she was thirty-one, could not be very long in force.

"My dear Cleve, don't you think that's rather an odd way of speaking of a young lady? People used not in my time—that is, when I was a young man of two or three-and-twenty, about it—to talk so of young ladies. It was not considered a thing that ought to be done. I—I never heard a word of the kind."

Lord Verney's chivalry had actually called a little pink flush to his old cheeks, and he looked very seriously still at the cornice, and tapped a little nervous tattoo with his pencil-case on the table as he did so.

"I really did not mean—I only meant—in fact, uncle, I tell you everything; and poor Caroline is so much older than I, it always struck me as amusing."

"Their man of business in matters of law is Mr. Larkington, about it. Our man, you know—you know him."

"Oh, yes. They could not do better. Mr. Larkin—a very shrewd fellow. I went, by-the-by, to see that old man, Dingwell."

"Ah, well, very good. We'll talk of that by-and-by, if you please; but it has been occurring to my mind, Cleve, that—that you should look about you. In fact, if you don't like one young lady, you may like another. It strikes me I never saw a greater number of pretty young women, about it, than there are at present in town. I do assure you, at that ball—where was it?—the place I saw you, and sent you down to the division—don't you remember?—and next day, I told you, I think, they never said so much as 'I'm obliged to you' for what I had done, though it was the saving of them, about it. I say I was quite struck; the spectacle was quite charming, about it, from no other cause; and you know there is Ethel—I always said Ethel—and there can be no objection there; and I have distinct reasons for wishing you to be well connected, about it—in a political sense—and there is no harm in a little money; and, in fact, I have made up my mind, my dear Cleve, it is indispensable, and you must marry. I'm quite clear upon the point."

"I can promise you, my dear uncle, that I shan't marry without your approbation."

"Well, I rather took that for granted," observed Lord Verney, with dry solemnity.

"Of course. I only say it's very difficult some times to see what's wisest. I have you, I know, uncle, to direct me; but you must allow I have also your example. You relied entirely upon yourself for your political position. You made it without the aid of any such step, and I should be only too proud to follow your example."

"A—yes—but the cases are different; there's a difference, about it. As I said in the debate on the Jewish Disabilities, there arc no two cases, about it, precisely parallel; and I've given my serious consideration to the subject, and I am satisfied that for every reason you ought to choose a wife immediately; there's no reason against it, and you ought to choose a wife, about it, immediately; and my mind is made up quite decidedly, and I have spoken repeatedly; but now I tell you I recognise no reason for further delay—no reason against the step, and every reason for it; and in short, I shall have no choice but to treat any dilatory procedure in the matter as amounting to a distinct trifling with my known wishes, desire, and opinion."

And the Right Hon. Lord Viscount Verney smote his thin hand emphatically at these words, upon the table, as he used to do in his place in the House.

Then followed an impressive silence, the peer holding his head high, and looking a little flushed; and Cleve very pale, with the ghost of the smile he had worn a few minutes before.

There are instruments that detect and measure with a beautiful accuracy, the presence and force of invisible influences—heat, electricity, air, moisture. If among all these "meters"—electronometers, hygrometers, anemometers—an odynometer, to detect the presence and measure the intensity of hidden pain, were procurable, and applied to the breast of that pale, smiling young man at that moment, I wonder to what degree in its scale its index would have pointed!

Cleve intended to make some slight and playful remark, he knew not what, but his voice failed him.

He had been thinking of this possibility—of this hour—for many a day, as some men will of the Day of Judgment, and putting it aside as a hateful thought, possibly never to be embodied in fact, and here it was come upon him, suddenly, inevitably, in all its terrors.

"Well, certainly, uncle,—as you wish it. I must look about me—seriously. I know you wish me to be happy. I'm very grateful; you have always bestowed so much of your thought and care upon me—too good, a great deal."

So spoke the young man—white as that sheet of paper on which his uncle had been pencilling two or three of what he called his thoughts—and almost as unconscious of the import of the words he repeated.

"I'm glad, my dear Cleve, you are sensible that I have been, I may say, kind; and now let me say that I think Ethel has a great deal in her favour. There are others, however, I am well aware, and there is time to look about, but I should wish something settled this

season—in fact, before we break up, about it; in short I have, as I said, made up my mind. I don't act without reasons; I never do, and mine are conclusive; and it was on this topic, my dear Cleve, I wished to see you. And now I think you may as well have some dinner. I'm afraid I've detained you here rather long."

And Lord Verney rose, and moved toward a book-case with Hansard in it, to signify that the conference was ended, and that he desired to be alone in his study.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XVII.

## AN OVATION.

Cleve had no dinner; he had supped full of horrors. He got on his coat and hat, and appeared nowhere that evening, but took an immense walk instead, in the hope I dare say of tiring out his agony—perhaps simply because quietude and uninterrupted thought were unendurable.

Next day hope began a little to revive. An inventive mind is inexhaustible; and are not the resources of delay always considerable?

Who could have been acting upon his uncle's mind in this matter? The spring of Lord Verney's action was seldom quite within himself. All at once he recollected that he had come suddenly upon what seemed an unusually secret conference between his uncle and Mr. Larkin about ten days since; it was in the library. He was sure the conversation had some reference to him. His uncle looked both annoyed and embarrassed when he came into the room; even the practised coun tenance of Mr. Larkin betrayed some faint signs of confusion.

Larkin he knew had been down in the neighbourhood of Ware, and probably in Cardyllian. Had anything reached him about the Malory romance? Mr. Larkin was a man who would not stick at trifles in hunting up evidence, and all that concerned him would now interest Mr. Larkin, and Cleve had too high an opinion of that gentleman's sagacity not to assume that if he had obtained the clue to his mystery he would make capital of the secret with Lord Verney. Viscera magnorum domuum—nothing like secret relations—confidences,—and what might not come of this? Of course, the first result would be a peremptory order on which Lord Verney had spoken last night. The only safety for the young man, it will be concluded, is to marry him suitably forthwith.

And—by Jove!—a flash of light! He had it! The whole thing was clear now. Yes; he was to be married to Caroline Oldys, because Mr. Larkin was the professional right hand of that family, and so the attorney would glide ultimately into the absolute command of the House of Verney!

To think of that indescribably vulgar rogue's actually shaping the fortunes and meting out the tortures of Cleve Verney.

How much of our miseries result from the folly of those who would serve us! Here was Viscount Verney with, as respected Cleve, the issues of life very much in his fingers, dropping through sheer imbecility into the coarse hands of that odious attorney!

Cleve trembled with rage as he thought of the degradation to which that pompous fool, Lord Verney, was consigning him, yet what was to be done? Cleve was absolutely at the disposal of the peer, and the peer was unconsciously placing himself in the hands of Mr. Larkin, to be worked like a puppet, and spoken for by the Pharisaical attorney.

Cleve's theory hung together plausibly. It would have been gross folly to betray his jealousy of the attorney, whose opportunities with his uncle he had no means of limiting or interrupting, and against whom he had as yet no case.

He was gifted with a pretty talent for dissimulation; Mr. Larkin congratulated himself in secret upon Cleve's growing esteem and confidence. The young gentleman's manner was gracious and even friendly to a degree that was quite marked, and the unconscious attorney would have been startled had he learned on a sudden how much he hated him.

Ware—that great house which all across the estuary in which its princely front was reflected, made quite a feature in the landscape sketched by so many tourists, from the pier on the shingle of Cardyllian on bright summer days, was about to be re-habilitated, and very splendid doings were to follow.

In the mean time, before the architects and contractors, the plumbers, and painters, and carpenters, and carvers, and gilders had taken possession, and before those wonderful artists in stucco who were to encrust and overspread the ceilings with noble designs, rich and graceful and light, of fruit and flowers and cupids, and from memory, not having read the guide-book of Cardyllian and its vicinity for more than a year, I should be afraid to say what arabesques, and imagery beside, had entered with their cements and their scaffolding; and before the three brother artists had got their passports for England who were to paint on the panels of the doors such festive pieces as Watteau loved. In short, before the chaos and confusion that attend the throes of that sort of creation had set in, Lord Verney was to make a visit of a few days to Ware, and was to visit Cardyllian and to receive a congratulatory address from the corporation of that ancient town, and to inspect the gas-works (which I am glad to say are hid away in a little hollow), and the two fountains which supply the town—constructed, as the inscription tells, at the expense of "the Right Honourable Kiffyn Fulke, Nineteenth Viscount Verney, and Twenty-ninth Baron Penruthyn, of Malory." What else his lordship was to see, and to do, and to say on the day of his visit the county and other newspapers round about printed when the spectacle was actually over, and the great doings matter of history.

There were arches of evergreens and artificial flowers of paper, among which were very tolerable hollyhocks, though the roses were startling. Under these, Lord Viscount Verney and the "distinguished party" who accompanied him passed up Castle Street to the town-hall, where he was received by the mayor and town-councillors, accompanied and fortified by the town-clerk and other functionaries, all smiling except the mayor, on whom weighed the solemn responsibility of having to read the address, a composition, and no mean one, of the Rev. Dr. Splayfoot, who attended with parental anxiety "to see the little matter through," as he phrased it, and was so awfully engaged that Mrs. Splayfoot, who was on his arm, and asked him twice, in a whisper, whether the tall lady in purple silk was Lady Wimbledon, without receiving the slightest intimation that she was so much as heard, remarked testily that she hoped he would not write many more addresses, inasmuch as it made him ill-bred to that degree that if the town-hall had fallen during the reading, he never would have perceived it till he had shaken his ears in kingdom-come. Lord Verney read his answer, which there was much anxiety and pressure to hear.

"Now it really was be-autiful—wasn't it?" our friend Mrs. Jones, the draper, whispered, in particular reference to that part of it, in which the viscount invoked the blessing of the Almighty upon himself and his doings, gracefully admitting that in contravention of the

Divine will and the decrees of heaven, even he could not be expected to accomplish much, though with the best intentions. And Captain Shrapnell, who felt that the sentiment was religious, and was anxious to be conspicuous, standing with his hat in his hand, with a sublime expression of countenance, said in an audible voice—"Amen."

All this over, and the building inspected, the distinguished party were conducted by the mayor, the militia band accompanying their march—[air—"The Meeting of the Waters"—to the "Fountains" in Gunner's Lane, to which I have already alluded.

Here they were greeted by a detachment of the Llanwthyn Temperance Union, headed by short, fat Thomas Pritchard, the interesting apostle of total abstinence, who used to preach on the subject alternately in Welsh and English in all the towns who would hear his gospel, in most of which he was remembered as having been repeatedly fined for public intoxication, and known by the familiar pet-name of "Swipey Tom," before his remarkable conversion.

Mr. Pritchard now led the choir of the Lanwthyn Temperance Union, consisting of seven members, of various sizes, dressed in their Sunday costume, and standing in a row in front of fountain No. —each with his hat in his left hand and a tumbler of fair water in his right.

Good Mrs. Jones, who had a vague sense of fun, and remembered anecdotes of the principal figure in this imposing spectacle, did laugh a little modestly into her handkerchief, and answered the admonitory jog of her husband's elbow by pleading—"Poor fellows! Well, you know it is odd—there's no denying that you know;" and from the background were heard some jeers from the excursionists who visited Cardyllian for that gala, which kept Hughes, the Cardyllian policeman, and Evans, the other "horney," who had been drafted from Llwynan, to help to overawe the turbulent, very hot and active during that part of the ceremony.

Particularly unruly was John Swillers, who, having failed as a publican in Liverpool, in consequence of his practice of drinking the greater part of his own stock in trade, had migrated to "The Golden Posts" in Church Street, Cardyllian, where he ceased to roll his barrel, set up his tressels, and had tabernacled for the present, drinking his usual proportion of his own liquors, and expecting the hour of a new migration.

Over the heads of the spectators and the admiring natives of Cardyllian were heard such exhortations as "Go it, Swipey." "There's gin in that," "Five shillin's for his vorship, Swipey," "I say, Swipey Tom, pay your score at the Golden Posts, will ye?" "Will ye go a bit on the stretcher, Swipey?" "Here's two horneys as 'll take ye home arter that."

And these interruptions, I am sorry to say, continued, notwithstanding the remonstrances which Mr. Hughes addressed almost pathetically to John Swillers of the Golden Posts, as a respectable citizen of Cardyllian, one from whose position the police were led to expect assistance and the populace an example. There was something in these expostulations which struck John Swillers, for he would look with a tipsy solemnity in Hughes's face while he delivered them, and once took his hand, rather affectionately, and said, "That's your sort." But invariably these unpleasant interpolations were resumed, and did not cease until this moral exhibition had ended with the last verse of the temperance song, chanted by the deputation with great vigour, in unison, and which, as the reader will perceive, had in it a Bacchanalian character, which struck even the gravest listeners as a hollow mockery:—

Refreshing more than sinful swipes,

The weary man

Who quaffs a can,

That sparkling foams through leaden pipes.

Chorus.

Let every man

Then, fill his can,

And fill the glass

Of every lass

In brimming bumpers sparkling clear,

To pledge the health of Verney's Peer!

And then came a chill and ghastly "hip-hip, hurrah," and with some gracious inquiries on Lord Verney's part, as to the numbers, progress, and finances of "their interesting

association," and a subscription of ten pounds, which Mr. John Swillers took leave to remark, "wouldn't be laid out on water, by no means," the viscount, with grand and radiant Mr. Larkin at his elbow, and frequently murmuring in his ear—to the infinite disgust of my friend, Wynne Williams, the Cardyllian attorney, thus out-strutted and out-crowed on his own rustic elevation—was winning golden opinions from all sorts of men.

The party went on, after the wonders of the town had been exhausted, to look at Malory, and thence returned to a collation, at which toasts were toasted and speeches spoken, and Captain Shrapnell spoke, by arrangement, for the ladies of Cardyllian in his usual graceful and facetious manner, with all the puns and happy allusions which a month's private diligence, and, I am sorry to say, some shameless plagiarisms from three old numbers of poor Tom Hood's "Comic Annual," could get together, and the gallant captain concluded by observing that the noble lord whom they had that day the honour and happiness to congratulate, intended, he understood, everything that was splendid and liberal and handsome, and that the town of Cardyllian, in the full radiance of the meridian sunshine, whose golden splendour proceeded from the south—"The cardinal point at which the great house of Ware is visible from the Green of Cardyllian"—(hear, hear, and laughter)—"there remained but one grievance to be redressed, and that set to rights, every ground of complaint would slumber for ever, he might say, in the great bed of Ware"—(loud cheers and laughter) —"and what was that complaint? He was instructed by his fair, lovely, and beautiful clients—the ladies of Cardyllian—some of whom he saw in the gallery, and some still more happily situated at the festive board"—(a laugh). "Well, he was, he repeated, instructed by them to say that there was one obvious duty which the noble lord owed to his ancient name—to the fame of his public position—to the coronet, whose golden band encircled his distinguished brow—and above all, to the ancient feudal dependency of Cardyllian"—(hear, hear)—"and that was to select from his county's beauty, fascination, and accomplishment, and he might say loveliness, a partner worthy to share the ermine and the coronet and the name and the—ermine" (hear, hear) "of the ancient house of Verney" (loud cheers); "and need he add that when the selection was made, it was hoped and trusted and aspired after, that the selection would not be made a hundred miles away from the ivied turrets, the feudal ruins, the gushing fountains, and the spacious town-hall of Cardyllian" (loud and long-continued cheering, amid which the gallant captain, very hot, and red, and smiling furiously, sat down with a sort of lurch, and drank off a glass of champagne, and laughed and giggled a little in his chair, while the "cheering and laughter" continued).

And Lord Verney rose, not at all hurt by this liberty, very much amused on the contrary, and in high good humour his lordship said,—

"Allow me to say—I am sure you will"—(hear, hear, and cries of "We will")—"I say, I am sure you will permit me to say that the ladies of Cardyllian, a-a-about it, seem to me to have chosen a very eloquent spokesman in the gallant, and I have no doubt, distinguished officer who has just addressed the house. We have all been entertained by the eloquence of Captain Scollop"—[here the mayor deferentially whispered something to the noble orator—"I beg pardon—Captain Grapnell—who sits at the table, with his glass of wine, about it—and very good wine it is—his glass, I say, where it should be, in his hand"—(hear, hear, and laughter, and "You got it there, captain"). "And I assure the gallant captain I did not mean to be severe—only we were all joking—and I do say that he has his hand—my gallant friend, Captain Grabblet, has it—where every gallant officer's ought to be, about it, and that is, upon his weapon"—(hear, hear, laughter, and cries of "His lordship's too strong for you, captain"). "I don't mean to hurt him, though, about it," (renewed cries of hear, and laughter, during which the captain shook his ears a little, smiling into his glass rather fool ishly, as a man who was getting the worst of it, and knew it, but took it pleasantly). "No, it would not be fair to the ladies about it," (renewed laughter and cheering), "and all I will say is this, about it—there are parts of Captain Scraplet's speech, which I shan't undertake to answer at this moment. I feel that I am trespassing, about it, for a much longer time than I had intended," (loud cries of "No, no, go on, go on," and cheering, during which the mayor whispered something to the noble lord, who, having heard it twice or thrice repeated, nodded to the mayor in evident apprehension, and when silence was restored, proceeded to say), "I have just heard, without meaning to say anything unfair of the gallant captain, Captain Scalpel, that he is hardly himself qualified to give me the excellent advice, about it, which I received from him; for they tell me that he has rather run away, about it, from his colours, on that occasion." (Great laughter and cheering). "I should be sorry to wound Captain Shat—Scat—Scrap, the gallant captain, to wound him, I say, even in front." (Laughter, cheering, and a voice from the gallery "Hit him hard, and he won't swell," "Order.") "But I think I was bound to make that observation in the interest of the ladies of Cardyllian, about it;" (renewed laughter); "and, for my part, I promise my gallant friend—my—captain—about it—that although I may take some time, like himself" (loud laughter); "although I cannot let fall, about it, any observation that may commit me, yet I do promise to meditate on the excellent advice he has been so good as to give me, about it." And the noble lord resumed his seat amid uproarious cheering and general laughter, wondering what had happened to put him in the vein, and regretting that some of the people at Downing Street had not been present to hear it, and witness its effect.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## OLD FRIENDS ON THE GREEN.

Tom Sedley saw the Etherage girls on the green, and instead of assisting as he had intended, at the great doings in the town, he walked over to have a talk with them.

People who know Cardyllian remember the two seats, partly stone, partly wood, which are placed on the green, near the margin of the sea—seats without backs—on which you can sit with equal comfort, facing the water and the distant mountains, or the white-fronted town and old Castle of Cardyllian. Looking toward this latter prospect, the ladies sat, interested, no doubt, though they preferred a distant view, in the unusual bustle of the quiet old place.

On one of these seats sat Charity and Agnes, and as he approached, smiling, up got Charity and walked some steps towards him! looking kindly, but not smiling, for that was not her wont, and with her thin hand, in doe-skin glove, extended to greet him.

"How are you, Thomas Sedley? when did you come?" asked Miss Charity, much gladder to see him than she appeared.

"I arrived this morning; you're all well, I hope;" he was looking at Agnes, and would have got away from Miss Charity, but that she held him still by the hand.

"All very well, thank you, except Agnes. I don't think she's very well. I have ever so much to tell you when you and I have a quiet opportunity, but not now,"—she was speaking in a low tone;—"and now go and ask Agnes how she is."

So he did. She smiled a little languidly, he thought, and was not looking very strong, but prettier than ever—so very pretty! She blushed too, very brilliantly, as he approached; it would have been flattering had he not seen Cleve Verney walking quickly over the green toward the Etherage group. For whom was the blush? Two gentlemen had fired simultaneously.

"Your bird? I rather think my bird?—isn't it?"

Now Tom Sedley did not think the bird his, and he felt, somehow, strangely vexed. And he got through his greeting uncomfortably; his mind was away with Cleve Verney, who was drawing quickly near.

"Oh! Mr. Verney, what a time it is since we saw you last!" exclaimed emphatic Miss Charity; "I really began to think you'd never come."

"Very good of you, Miss Etherage, to think about me."

"And you never gave me your subscription for our poor old women, last winter!"

"Oh! my subscription? I'll give it now—what was it to be—a pound?"

"No, you promised only ten shillings, but it ought to be a pound. I think less would be shameful."

"Then, Miss Agnes, shall it be a pound?" he said, turning to her with a laugh—with his fingers in his purse, "whatever you say I'll do."

"Agnes—of course, a pound," said Charity, in her nursery style of admonition.

"Charity says it must be a pound," answered Agnes.

"And you say so?"

"Of course, I must."

"Then a pound it is—and mind," he added, laughing, and turning to Miss Charity with the coin in his fingers, "I'm to figure in your book of benefactors—your golden book of saints, or martyrs, rather; but you need not put down my name, only 'The old woman's friend,' or 'A lover of flannel' or 'A promoter of petticoats,' or any other benevolent alias you think becoming."

"'The old woman's friend,' will do very nicely," said Charity, gravely. "Thank you, Mr. Verney, and we were so glad to hear that your uncle has succeeded at last to the peerage. He can be of such use—you really would be—he and you both, Mr. Verney—quite amazed and shocked, if you knew how much poverty there is in this town."

"It's well he does not know just now, for he wants all his wits about him. This is a critical occasion, you know, and the town expects great things from a practised orator. I've stolen away, just for five minutes, to ask you the news. We are at Ware, for a few days; only two or three friends with us. They came across in my boat to-day. We are going to set all the tradespeople on earth loose upon the house in a few days. It is to be done in an incredibly short time; and my uncle is talking of getting down some of his old lady relations to act chaperon, and we hope to have you all over there. You know it's all made up, that little coldness between my uncle and your father. I'm so glad. Your father wrote him such a nice note to-day explaining his absence —he never goes into a crowd, he says—and Lord Verney wrote him a line to say, if he would allow him, he would go up to Hazelden to pay his respects this afternoon."

This move was a suggestion of Mr. Larkin's, who was pretty well up in election strategy.

"I've ascertained, my lord, he's good for a hundred and thirty-seven votes in the county, and your lordship has managed him with such consummate tact that a very little more will, with the Divine blessing, induce the happiest, and I may say, considering the disparity of your lordship's relations and his, the most dutiful feelings on his part—resulting, in fact, in your lordship's obtaining the absolute command of the constituency. You were defeated, my lord, last time, by only forty-three votes, with his influence against you. If your lordship were to start your nephew, Mr. Cleve Verney, for it next time, having made your ground good with him, he would be returned, humanly speaking, by a sweeping majority."

"So, Lord Verney's going up to see papa! Agnes, we ought to be at home. He must have luncheon."

"No—a thousand thanks—but all that's explained. There's luncheon to be in the town-hall—it's part of the programme—and speeches —and all that kind of rubbish; so he can only run up for a few minutes, just to say, 'How do ye do?' and away again. So, pray, don't think of going all that way, and he'll come here to be introduced, and make your acquaintance. And now tell me all your news."

"Well, those odd people went away from Malory"—began Charity.

"Oh, yes, I heard, I think, something of that," said Cleve, intending to change the subject, perhaps; but Miss Charity went on, for in that eventless scene an occurrence of any kind is too precious to be struck out of the record on any ground.

"They went away as mysteriously as they came—almost—and so suddenly"——

"You forgot, Charity, dear, Mr. Verney was at Ware when they went, and here two or three times after they left Malory."

"So I was," said Cleve, with an uneasy glance at Tom Sedley; "I knew I had heard something of it."

"Oh, yes; and they say that the old man was both mad and in debt."

"What a combination!" said Cleve.

"Yes, I assure you, and a Jew came down with twenty or thirty bailiffs—I'm only telling you what Mr. Apjohn heard, and the people here tell us—and a mad doctor, and people with strait waistcoats, and they surrounded Malory; but he was gone!—not a human being knew where—and that handsome girl, wasn't she quite bee-au-tiful?"

"Oh, what everyone says, you know, must be true," said Cleve.

"What do you say?" she urged upon Tom Sedley.

"Oh, I say ditto to everyone, of course."

"Well, I should think so, for you know you are quite desperately in love with her," said Miss Charity.

"I? Why, I really never spoke to her in all my life. Now, if you had said Cleve Verney."

"Oh, yes! If you had named me. But, by Jove! there they go. Do you see? My uncle and the mayor, and all the lesser people, trooping away to the town-hall. Good-bye! I haven't another moment. You'll be here, I hope, when we get out; do, pray. I have not a moment."

And he meant a glance for Miss Agnes, but it lost itself in air, for that young lady was looking down, in a little reverie, on the grass, at the tip of her tiny boot.

"There's old Miss Christian out, I declare!" exclaimed Charity. "Did you ever hear of such a thing? I wonder whether Doctor Lyster knows she is out to-day. I'll just go and speak to her. If he doesn't, I'll simply tell her she is mad!"

And away marched Miss Charity, bent upon finding out, as she said, all about it.

"Agnes," said Tom Sedley, "it seemed to me to-day, you were not glad to see me. Are you vexed with me?"

"Vexed? No, indeed!" she said, gently, and looking up with a smile.

"And your sister said——" Tom paused, for he did not know whether Charity's whisper about her not having been "very strong" might not be a confidence.

"What does Charity say?" asked Agnes, almost sharply, while a little flush appeared in her cheeks.

"Well, she said she did not think you were so strong as usual. That was all."

"That was all—no great consequence," said she, with a little smile upon the grass and sea-pinks—a smile that was bitter.

"You can't think I meant that, little Agnes, I of all people; but I never was good at talking. And you know I did not mean that."

"People often say—I do, I know—what they mean without intending it," she answered, care lessly. "I know you would not make a rude speech—I'm sure of that; and as to what we say accidentally, can it signify very much? Mr. Verney said he was coming back after

the speeches, and Lord Verney, he said, didn't he? I wonder you don't look in at the town-hall. You could make us laugh by telling all about it, by-and-by—that is, if we happen to see you again."

"Of course you should see me again."

"I meant this evening; to-morrow, perhaps, we should," said she.

"If I went there; but I'm not going. I think that old fellow, Lord Verney, Cleve's uncle, is an impertinent old muff. Every one knows he's a muff, though he is Cleve's uncle; he gave me just one finger to-day, and looked at me as if I ought to be anywhere but where I was. I have as good a right as he to be in Cardyllian, and I venture to say the people like me a great deal better than they like him, or ever will."

"And so you punish him by refusing your countenance to this—what shall I call it?—gala."

"Oh! of course you take the Verneys' part against me; they are swells, and I am a nobody."

He thought Miss Agnes coloured a little at this remark. The blood grows sensitive and capricious when people are ailing, and a hint is enough to send it to and fro; but she said only,—

"I never heard of the feud before. I thought that you and Mr. Verney were very good friends."

"So we were; so we are—Cleve and I. Of course, I was speaking of the old lord. Cleve, of course, no one ever hears anything but praises of Cleve. I suppose I ought to beg your pardon for having talked as I did of old Lord Verney; it's petty treason, isn't it, to talk lightly of a Verney, in Cardyllian or its neighbourhood?" said Sedley, a little sourly.

"I don't know that; but I dare say, if you mean to ask leave to fish or shoot, it might be as well not to attack them."

"Well, I shan't in your hearing."

And with this speech came a silence.

"I don't think, somehow, that Cleve is as frank with me as he used to be. Can you imagine any reason?" said Tom, after an interval.

"I? No, upon my word—unless you are as frank to him about his uncle, as you have been with me."

"Well, I'm not. I never spoke to him about his uncle. But Shrapnell, who tells me all the news of Cardyllian while I'm away"—this was pointedly spoken—"said, I thought, that he had not been down here ever since the Malory people left, and I find that he was here for a week—at least at Ware—last autumn, for a fortnight; and he never told me, though he knew, for I said so to him, that I thought that he had stayed away; and I think that was very odd."

"He may have thought that he was not bound to account to you for his time and movements," said Miss Agnes.

"Well, he was here; Mrs. Jones was good enough to tell me so, though other people make a secret of it. You saw him here, I dare say."

"Yes, he was here, for a few days. I think in October, or the end of September."

"Oh! thank you. But, as I said, I had heard that already from Mrs. Jones, who is a most inconvenient gossip upon nearly all subjects."

"I rather like Mrs. Jones; you mean the 'draper,' as we call her? and if Mr. Verney is not as communicative as you would have him, I really can't help it. I can only assure you, for your comfort, that the mysterious tenants of Malory had disappeared long before that visit."

"I know perfectly well when they went away," said Sedley, drily.

Miss Agnes nodded with a scarcely perceptible smile.

"And I know—that is, I found out afterwards—that he admired her, I mean the young lady—Margaret, they called her—awfully. He never let me know it himself, though. I hate fellows being so close and dark about everything, and I've found out other things; and, in short, if people don't like to tell me their—secrets I won't call them, for everyone in Cardyllian knows all about them—I'm hanged if I ask them. All I know is, that Cleve is going to live a good deal at Ware, which means at Cardyllian, which will be a charming thing, a positive blessing,—won't it?—for the inhabitants and neighbours; and that I shall trouble them very little henceforward with my presence. There's Charity beckoning to me; would you mind my going to see what she wants?"

So, dismissed, away he ran like a "fielder" after a "by," as he had often run over the same ground before.

"Thomas Sedley, I want you to tell Lyster, the apothecary, to send a small bottle of sal volatile to Miss Christian immediately. I'd go myself—it's only round the corner—but I'm afraid of the crowd. If he can give it to you now, perhaps you'd bring it, and I'll wait here."

When he brought back the phial, and Miss Charity had given it with a message at Miss Christian's trelliced door, she took Tom's arm, and said,—

"She has not been looking well."

"You mean Agnes?" conjectured he.

"Yes, of course. She's not herself. She does not tell me, but I know the cause, and, as an old friend of ours, and a friend, beside, of Mr. Cleve Verney, I must tell you that I think he is using her disgracefully."

"Really?"

"Yes, most flagitiously."

"How do you mean? Shrapnell wrote me word that he was very attentive, and used to join her in her walks; and afterwards he said that he had been mistaken, and discovered that he was awfully in love with the young lady at Malory."

"Don't believe a word of it. I wonder at Captain Shrapnell circulating such insanity. He must know how it really was, and is. I look upon it as perfectly wicked, the way that Captain Shrapnell talks. You're not to mention it, of course, to anyone. It would be scandalous of you, Thomas Sedley, to think of breathing a word to mortal—mind that; but I'm certain you wouldn't."

"What a beast Cleve Verney has turned out!" exclaimed Tom Sedley. "Do you think she still cares for him?"

"Why, of course she does. If he had been paying his addresses to me, and that I had grown by his perseverance and devotion to like him, do you think, Thomas Sedley, that although I might give him up in consequence of his misconduct, that I could ever cease to feel the same kind of feeling about him?" And as she put this incongruous case, she

held Tom Sedley's arm firmly, showing her bony wrist above her glove; and with her gaunt brown face and saucer eyes turned full upon him, rather fiercely, Tom felt an inward convulsion at the picture of Cleve's adorations at this shrine, and the melting of the nymph, which by a miracle he repressed.

"But you may have more constancy than Agnes," he suggested.

"Don't talk like a fool, Thomas Sedley. Every nice girl is the same."

"May I talk to Cleve about it?"

"On no account. No nice girl could marry him now, and an apology would be simply ridiculous. I have not spoken to him on the subject, and though I had intended cutting him, my friend Mrs. Splayfoot was so clear that I should meet him just as usual, that I do control the expression of my feelings, and endeavour to talk to him indifferently, though I should like uncommonly to tell him how odious I shall always think him."

"Yes, I remember," said Tom, who had been pondering. "Cleve did tell me, that time—it's more than a year ago now—it was a year in autumn—that he admired Agnes, and used to walk with you on the green every day; he did certainly. I must do him that justice. But suppose Agnes did not show that she liked him, he might not have seen any harm."

"That's the way you men always take one another's parts. I must say, I think it is odious!" exclaimed Charity, with a flush in her thin cheeks, and a terrible emphasis.

"But, I say, did she let him see that she liked him?"

"No, of course she didn't. No nice girl would. But of course he saw it," argued Charity.

"Oh, then she showed it?"

"No, she did not show it; there was nothing in anything she said or did, that could lead anyone, by look, or word, or act, to imagine that she liked him. How can you be so perverse and ridiculous, Thomas Sedley, to think she'd show her liking? Why, even I don't know it. I never saw it. She's a great deal too nice. You don't know Agnes. I should not venture to hint at it myself. Gracious goodness! What a fool you are, Thomas Sedley! Hush."

The concluding caution was administered in consequence of their having got very near the seat where Agnes was sitting.

"Miss Christian is only nervous, poor old thing! and Thomas Sedley has been getting sal volatile for her, and she'll be quite well in a day or two. Hadn't we better walk a little up and down; it's growing too cold for you to sit any longer, Agnes, dear. Come."

And up got obedient Agnes, and the party of three walked up and down the green, conversing upon all sorts of subjects but the one so ably handled by Charity and Tom Sedley in their two or three minutes' private talk.

And now the noble lord and his party, and the mayor, and the corporation, and Mr. Larkin, and Captain Shrapnell, and many other celebrities, were seen slowly emerging from the lane that passes the George Inn, upon the green; and the peer having said a word or two to the mayor, and also to Lady Wimbledon, and bowed and pointed toward the jetty, the main body proceeded slowly toward that point, while Lord Verney, accompanied by Cleve, walked grandly towards the young ladies who were to be presented.

Tom Sedley, observing this movement, took his leave hastily, and, in rather a marked way, walked off at right angles with Lord Verney's line of march, twirling his cane.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XIX.

## VANE ETHERAGE GREETS LORD VERNEY.

So the great Lord Verney, with the flush of his brilliant successes in the town-hall still upon his thin cheeks, and a countenance dry and solemn, to which smiling came not easily, made the acquaintance of the Miss Etherages, and observed that the younger was "sweetly pretty, about it, and her elder sister appeared to him a particularly sensible young woman, and was, he understood, very useful in the charities, and things." And he repeated to them in his formal way, his hope of seeing them at Ware, and was as gracious as such a man can be, and instead of attorneys and writs sent grouse and grapes to Hazelden.

And thus this narrow man, who did not easily forgive, expanded and forgave, and the secret of the subsidence of the quarrel, and of the Christian solution of the "difficulty," was simply Mr. Vane Etherage's hundred and thirty votes in the county.

What a blessing to these counties is repre sentative government, with its attendant institution of the canvass! It is the one galvanism which no material can resist. It melts every heart, and makes the coldest, hardest, and heaviest metals burst into beautiful flame. Granted that at starting, the geniality, repentance, kindness, are so many arrant hypocrisies; yet who can tell whether these repentances, in white sheets, taper in hand, these offerings of birds and fruits, these smiles and compliments, and "Christian courtesies," may not end in improving the man who is compelled to act like a good fellow and accept his kindly canons, and improve him also with whom these better relations are established? As muscle is added to the limb, so strength is added to the particular moral quality we exercise, and kindness is elicited, and men perhaps end by having some of the attributes which they began by affecting. At all events, any recognition of the kindly and peaceable social philosophy of Christianity is, so far as it goes, good.

"What a sensible, nice, hospitable old man Lord Verney is; I think him the most sensible and the nicest man I ever met," said Miss Charity, in an enthusiasm which was quite

genuine, for she was, honestly, no respecter of persons. "And young Mr. Verney certainly looked very handsome, but I don't like him."

"Don't like him! Why?" said Agnes, looking up.

"Because I think him perfectly odious," replied Miss Charity.

Agnes was inured to Miss Charity's adjectives, and even the fierce flush that accompanied some of them failed to alarm her.

"Well, I rather like him," she said, quietly.

"You can't like him, Agnes. It is not a matter of opinion at all; it's just simply a matter of fact—and you know that he is a most worldly, selfish, cruel, and I think, wicked young man, and you need not talk about him, for he's odious. And here comes Thomas Sedley again."

Agnes smiled a faint and bitter smile.

"And what do you think of him?" she asked.

"Thomas Sedley? Of course I like him; we all like him. Don't you?" answered Charity.

"Yes, pretty well—very well. I suppose he has faults, like other people. He's good-humoured, selfish, of course—I fancy they all are. And papa likes him, I think; but really, Charrie, if you want to know, I don't care if I never saw him again."

"Hush!"

"Well! You've got rid of the Verneys, and here I am again," said Tom, approaching. "They are going up to Hazelden to see your father."

And so they were—up that pretty walk that passes the mills and ascends steeply by the precipitous side of the wooded glen, so steep, that in two places you have to mount by rude flights of steps—a most sequestered glen, and utterly silent, except for the sound of the mill-stream tinkling and crooning through the rocks below, unseen through the dense boughs and stems of the wood beneath.

If Lord Verney in his conciliatory condescension was grand, so was Vane Etherage on the occasion of receiving and forgiving him at Hazelden. He had considered and constructed a little speech, with some pomp of language, florid and magnanimous. He had sat in his bath-chair for half an hour at the little iron gate of the flower-garden of Hazelden, no inmate of which had ever seen him look, for a continuance, so sublimely important, and indeed solemn, as he had done all that morning.

Vane Etherage had made his arrangements to receive Lord Verney with a dignified deference. He was to be wheeled down the incline about two hundred yards, to "the bower," to meet the peer at that point, and two lusty fellows were to push him up by Lord Verney's side to the house, where wine and other comforts awaited him.

John Evans had been placed at the mill to signal to the people above at Hazelden, by a musket-shot, the arrival of Lord Verney at that stage of his progress. The flagstaff and rigging on the green platform at Hazelden were fluttering all over with all the flags that ever were invented, in honour of the gala.

Lord Verney ascended, leaning upon the arm of his nephew, with Mr. Larkin and the mayor for supporters, Captain Shrapnell, Doctor Lyster, and two or three other distinguished inhabitants of Cardyllian bringing up the rear.

Lord Verney carried his head high, and grew reserved and rather silent as they got on, and as they passed under the solemn shadow of the great trees by the mill, an

overloaded musket went off with a sound like a cannon, as Lord Verney afterwards protested, close to the unsuspecting party, and a loud and long whoop from John Evans completed the concerted signal.

The Viscount actually jumped, and Cleve felt the shock of his arm against his side.

"D—— you, John Evans, what the devil are you doing?" exclaimed Captain Shrapnell, who, turning from white to crimson, was the first of the party to recover his voice.

"Yes, sir, thank you—very good," said Evans, touching his hat, and smiling incessantly with the incoherent volubility of Welsh politeness. "A little bit of a squib, sir, if you please, for Captain Squire Etherage—very well, I thank you—to let him know Lord Verney—very much obliged, sir—was at the mill—how do you do, sir?—and going up to Hazelden, if you please, sir."

And the speech subsided in a little, gratified laugh of delighted politeness.

"You'd better not do that again, though," said the Captain, with a menacing wag of his head, and availing himself promptly of the opportunity of improving his relations with Lord Verney, he placed himself by his side, and assured him that though he was an old campaigner, and had smelt powder in all parts of the world, he had never heard such a report from a musket in all his travels and adventures before; and hoped Lord Verney's hearing was not the worse of it. He had known a general officer deafened by a shot, and, by Jove! his own ears were singing with it still, accustomed as he was, by Jupiter! to such things.

His lordship, doing his best on the festive occasion, smiled uncomfortably, and said,—

"Yes—thanks—ha, ha! I really thought it was a cannon, or the gas-works—about it."

And Shrapnell called back and said,—

"Don't you be coming on with that thing,  John Evans—do you mind?—Lord Verney's had quite enough of that. You'll excuse me, Lord Verney, I thought you'd wish so much said," and Lord Verney bowed graciously.

The answering shot and cheer which were heard from above announced to John Evans that the explosion had been heard at Hazelden, and still smiling and touching his heart, he continued his voluble civilities—"Very good, sir, very much obliged, sir, very well, I thank you; I hope you are very well, sir, very good indeed, sir," and so forth, till they were out of hearing.

The shot, indeed, was distinctly heard at the gay flagstaff up at Hazelden, and the Admiral got under weigh, and proceeded down the incline charmingly till they had nearly reached the little platform at the bower, where, like Christian in his progress, he was to make a halt.

But his plans at this point were disturbed. Hardly twenty yards before they reached it, one of his men let go, the drag upon the other suddenly increased, and resulted in a pull, which caused him to trip, and tripping as men while in motion downhill will, he butted forward, charging headlong, and finally tumbling on his face, he gave to the rotatory throne of Mr. Etherage such an impulse as carried him quite past the arbour, and launched him upon the steep descent of the  gravel-walk with a speed every moment accelerated.

"Stop her!—ease her!—d—— you, Williams!" roared the Admiral, little knowing how idle were his orders. The bath-chair had taken head, the pace became furious; the running footmen gave up pursuit in despair, and Mr. Vane Etherage was obliged to concentrate his severest attention, as he never did before, on the task of guiding his flying vehicle, a feat which was happily favoured by the fact that the declivity presented no short turns.

The sounds were heard below—a strange ring of wheels, and a powerful voice bawling, "Ease her! stop her!" and some stronger expressions.

"Can't be a carriage, about it, here?" exclaimed Lord Verney, halting abruptly, and only restrained from skipping upon the side bank by a sense of dignity.

"Never mind, Lord Verney! don't mind—I'll take care of you—I'm your vanguard," exclaimed Captain Shrapnell, with a dare-devil gaiety, inspired by the certainty that it could not be a carriage, and the conviction that the adventure would prove nothing more than some children and nursery maids playing with a perambulator.

His feelings underwent a revulsion, however, when old Vane Etherage, enveloped in cloak, and shawls, his hat gone, and his long grizzled hair streaming backward, with a wild countenance, and both hands working the directing handle, came swooping into sight, roaring, maniacally, "Ease her! back her!" and yawing frightfully in his descent upon them.

Captain Shrapnell, they say, turned pale at the spectacle; but he felt he must now go through with it, or for ever sacrifice that castle-in-the-air, of which the events of the day had suggested the ground-plan and elevation.

"Good heaven! he'll be killed, about it!" exclaimed Lord Verney, peeping from behind a tree, with unusual energy; but whether he meant Shrapnell, or Etherage, or both, I don't know, and nobody in that moment of sincerity minded much what he meant. I dare say a front-rank man in a square at Waterloo did not feel before the gallop of the Cuirassiers as the gallant Captain did before the charge of the large invalid who was descending upon him. All he meditated was a decent show of resistance, and as he had a stout walking-stick in his hand, something might be done without risking his bones. So, as the old gentleman thundered downward, roaring, "Keep her off—keep her clear," Shrapnell, roaring "I'm your man!" nervously popped the end of his stick under the front wheel of the vehicle, himself skipping to one side, unhappily the wrong one, for the chair at this check spun round, and the next spectacle was Mr. Vane Etherage and Captain Shrapnell, enveloped in cloaks and mufflers, and rolling over and over in one another's arms, like athletes in mortal combat, the Captain's fist being visible, as they rolled round, at Mr. Vane Etherage's back, with his walking-stick still clutched in it.

The chair was lying on its side, the gentlemen were separated, and Captain Shrapnell jumped to his feet.

"Well, Lord Verney, I believe I did something there!" said the gallant Captain, with the air of a man who has done his duty, and knows it.

"Done something! you've broke my neck, you lubber!" panted Mr. Vane Etherage, who, his legs not being available, had been placed sitting with some cloaks about him, on the bank.

Shrapnell grinned and winked expressively, and confidentially whispered, "Jolly old fellow he is—no one minds the Admiral; we let him talk."

"Lord Verney," said his lordship, introducing himself with a look and air of polite concern.

"No, my name's Etherage," said the invalid, mistaking—he fancied that Jos. Larkin, who was expounding his views of the accident grandly to Cleve Verney in the background, could not be less than a peer—"I live up there, at Hazelden—devilish near being killed here, by that lubber there. Why I was running at the rate of five-and-twenty knots an hour, if I was making one; and I remember it right well, sir, there's a check down there, just before you come to the mill-stile, and the wall there; and I'd have run my bows right into it, and not a bit the worse, sir, if that d—— fellow had just kept out of the—the—king's course, you know; and egad! I don't know now how it is—I suppose I'm smashed, sir."

"I hope not, sir. I am Lord Verney—about it; and it would pain me extremely to learn that any serious injuries, or—or—things—had been sustained, about it."

"I'll tell that in a moment," said Doctor Lyster, who was of the party, briskly.

So after a variety of twists and wrenches and pokes, Vane Etherage was pronounced sound and safe.

"I don't know how the devil I escaped!" exclaimed the invalid.

"By tumbling on me—very simply," replied Captain Shrapnell with a spirited laugh.

"You may set your mind at rest, Shrapnell," said the Doctor, walking up to him, with a congratulatory air. "He's all right, this time; but you had better mind giving the old fellow any more rolls of that sort—the pitcher to the well, you know—and the next time might smash him."

"I'm more concerned about smashing myself, thank you. The next time he may roll to the devil—and through whoever he pleases for me—knocked down with that blackguard old chair, and that great hulking fellow on top of me—all for trying to be of use, egad! when everyone of you funked it—and not a soul asks about my bones, egad! or my neck either."

"Oh! come, Shrapnell, you're not setting up for an old dog yet. There's a difference between you and Etherage," said the Doctor.

"I hope so," answered the Captain, sarcastically, "but civility is civility all the world over; and I can tell you, another fellow would make fuss enough about the pain I'm suffering."

It was found, further, that one wheel of the bath-chair was disorganised, and the smith must come from the town to get it to rights, and that Vane Etherage, who could as soon have walked up a rainbow as up the acclivity to Hazelden, must bivouac for a while where he sat.

So there the visit was paid, and the exciting gala of that day closed, and the Viscount and his party marched down, with many friends attendant, to the jetty, and embarked in the yacht for Ware.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XX.

## REBECCA MERVYN READS HER LETTER.

The evenings being short, the shops alight, and the good people of Cardyllian in their houses, Tom Sedley found the hour before dinner hang heavily on his hands. So he walked slowly up Castle Street, and saw Mr. Robson, the worthy post-master, standing, with his hands in his pockets, at the open door.

"No letter for me, I dare say?" asked Sedley.

"No, sir—nothing."

"I don't know how to kill the time. I wish my dinner was ready. You dined, like a wise man, at one o'clock, I dare say?"

"We do—we dine early here, sir."

"I know it; a capital plan. I do it myself, whenever I make any stay here."

"And you can eat a bit o' something hearty at tea then."

"To be sure; that's the good of it. I don't know what to do with myself. I'll take a walk round by Malory. Can I leave the Malory letters for you?"

"You're only joking, sir."

"I was not, upon my honour. I'd be glad to bolt your shutters, or to twig your steps—anything to do. I literally don't know what to do with myself."

"There's no family at Malory, you know, now, sir."

"Oh! I did not know. I knew the other family had gone. No letters to be delivered then?"

"Well, sir, there is—but you're only joking."

"What is it?"

"A letter to Mrs. Rebecca Mervyn—but I would not think of troubling a gentleman with it."

"Old Rebecca? why I made her acquaintance among the shingles and cockles on the sea-shore last year—a charming old sea-nymph, or whatever you call it."

"We all have a great respect for Mrs. Mervyn, down here, in Cardyllian. The family has a great opinion of her, and they think a great deal of her, like us," said Mr. Robson, who did not care to hear any mysterious names applied to her without a protest.

"Well—so I say—so have I. I'll give her the letter, and take a receipt," said Sedley, extending his hand.

"There really is a receipt, sir, wanting," said the official, amused. "It came this morning—and if you'll come in—if it isn't too much trouble—I'll show it to you, please, sir."

In he stepped to the post-office, where Mr. Robson showed him a letter which he had that afternoon received. It said,—

"Sir,—I enclose five shillings, represented by postage-stamps, which will enable you to pay a messenger on whom you can depend, to deliver a letter which I place along with this in the post-office, into the hand of Mrs. Mervyn, Steward's House, Malory, Cardyllian, to whom it is addressed, and which is marked with the letter D at the left-hand corner.

"I am, sir,

"Your obt. servant,

"J. Dingwell."

"The letter is come," said Mr. Robson, taking it out of a pigeon-hole in a drawer, and thumbing it, and smiling on it with a gentle curiosity.

"Yes—that's it," said Tom Sedley, also reading the address. "'Mrs. Mervyn'—what a queer old ghost of a lady she is—'Malory,' that's the ground—and the letter D in the corner. Well, I'm quite serious. I'll take the letter with pleasure, and see the old woman, and put it into her hand. I'm not joking, and I shall be back again in an hour, I dare say, and I'll tell you what she says, and how she looks—that is, assuming it is a love-letter."

"Well, sir, as you wish it; and it's very kind of you, and the old lady must sign a receipt, for the letter's registered—but it's too much trouble for you, sir, isn't it really?"

"Nonsense; give me the letter. If you won't, I can't help it."

"And this receipt should be signed."

"And the receipt also."

So away went our friend, duly furnished, and marched over the hill we know so well, that over-hangs the sea, and down by the narrow old road to Malory, thinking of many things.

The phantom of the beautiful lady of Malory was very much faded now. Even as he looked down on the old house and woodlands, the romance came not again. It was just a remembered folly, like others, and excited or pained him little more. But a new trouble vexed him. How many of our blessings do we take for granted, enjoy thanklessly, like our sight, our hearing, our health, and only appreciate when they are either withdrawn or in danger!

Captain Shrapnell had written among his gossip some jocular tattle about Cleve's devotion to Miss Agnes Etherage, which had moved him oddly and uncomfortably; but the next letter disclosed the mystery of Cleve's clandestine visits to Malory, and turned his thoughts into a new channel.

But here was all revived, and worse. Charity, watching with a woman's eyes, and her opportunities, had made to him a confidence about which there could be no mistake; and then Agnes was so changed—not a bit glad to see him! And did not she look pretty? Was there not a slight look of pride—a reserve—that was new—a little sadness—along with the heightened beauty of her face and figure? How on earth had he been so stupid as not to perceive how beautiful she was all this time? Cleve had more sense. By Jove! she was the prettiest girl in England, and that selfish fellow had laid himself out to make her fond of him, and, having succeeded, jilted her! And now she would not care for any one but him.

There was a time, he thought, when he, Tom Sedley, might have made her like him. What a fool he was! And that was past—unimproved—irrevocable—and now she never

could. Girls may affect those second likings, he thought, but they never really care after the first. It is pride, or pique, or friendship, or convenience—anything but love.

Love! And what had he to do with love? Who would marry him on four hundred a year, and no expectations? And now he was going to teaze himself because he had not stepped in before Cleve Verney and secured the affections of little Agnes. What a fool he was! What business had he dreaming such dreams? He had got on very well without falling in love with Agnes. Why should he begin now? If he found that folly gaining upon him, he would leave Cardyllian without staying his accustomed week, and never return till the feeling had died as completely as last year's roses.

Down the hill he marched in his new romance, as he had done more than a year ago, over the same ground, in his old one, when in the moonlight, on the shingle, he had met the same old lady of whom he was now in quest.

The old trees of Malory rose up before him, dark and silent, higher and higher as he approached. It was a black night—no moon; even the stars obscured by black lines of cloud as he pushed open the gate, and entered the deeper darkness of the curving carriage-road that leads up through the trees.

It was six o'clock now, and awfully dark. When he reached the open space before the hall-door, he looked up at the dim front of the house, but no light glimmered there. The deep-mouthed dog in the stable-yard was yelling his challenge, and he further startled the solitary woods by repeated double-knocks that boomed through the empty hall and chambers of the deserted house.

Despairing of an entrance at last, and not knowing which way to turn, he took the way by chance which led him to the front of the steward's house, from the diamond casement of which a light was shining. The door lay open; only the latch was closed, such being the primitive security that prevails in that region of poverty and quietude.

With his stick he knocked a little tattoo, and a candle was held over the clumsy banister, and the little servant girl inquired in her clear Welsh accent what he wanted.

So, preliminaries over, he mounted to that chamber in which Mr. Levi had been admitted to a conference among the delft and porcelain, stags, birds, officers, and huntsmen, who, in gay tints and old-fashioned style, occupied every coigne of vantage, and especially that central dresser, which mounted nearly to the beams of the ceiling.

The room is not large, the recesses are deep, the timber-work is of clumsy oak, and the decorations of old-world teapots, jugs, and beasts of the field, and cocked-hatted gentlemen in gorgeous colouring and gilding, so very gay and splendid, reflecting the candle-light and the wavering glare of the fire from a thousand curves and angles; the old shining furniture, and carved oak clock; the room itself, and all its properties so perfectly neat and tidy, not one grain of dust or single cob-web to be seen in any nook or crevice, that Tom Sedley was delighted with the scene.

What a delightful retreat, he thought, from the comfortless affectations of the world. Here was the ideal of snugness, and of brightness, and warmth. It amounted to a kind of beauty that absolutely fascinated him. He looked kindly on the old lady, who had laid down her knitting, and looked at him through a pair of round spectacles, and thought that he would like to adopt her for his housekeeper, and live a solitary life of lonely rabbit-shooting in Penruthyn Park, trout-fishing in the stream, and cruising in an imaginary yacht on the estuary and the contiguous seaboard.

This little plan, or rather vision, pictured itself to Tom Sedley's morbid and morose imagination as the most endurable form of life to which he could now aspire.

The old lady, meanwhile, was looking at him with an expression of wonder and anxiety, and he said—

"I hope, Mrs. Mervyn, I have not disturbed you much. It is not quite so late as it looks, and as the post-master, Mr. Robson, could not find a messenger, and I was going this way, I undertook to call and give you the letter, having once had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, although you do not, I'm afraid, recollect me."

"I knew it, the moment his face entered the room. It was the same face," she repeated, as if she had seen a picture, not a face.

"Just under the walls of Malory; you were anxious to learn whether a sail was in sight, in the direction of Pendillion," said he, suggesting.

"No, there was none; it was not there. People—other people—would have tired of watching long ago; my old eyes never dazzled, sir. And he came, so like. He came—I thought it—was a spirit from the sea; and here he is. There's something in your voice, sir, and your face. It is wonderful; but not a Verney—no, you told me so. They are cruel men—one way or other they were all cruel, but some more than others—my God! much more. There's something in the eyes—the setting, the light—it can't be mistaken; something in the curve of the chin, very pretty—but you're no Verney, you told me—and see how he comes here a second time, smiling—and yet when he goes, it is like waking from a dream where they were, as they all used to look, long ago; and there's a pain at my heart, for weeks after. It never can be again, sir; I'm growing old. If it ever comes, it will find me so changed—or dead, I sometimes begin to think, and try to make up my mind. There's a good world, you know, where we'll all meet and be happy, no more parting or dying, sir. Yet I'd like to see him even once, here, just as he was, a beautiful mortal. God is so good; and while there's life there is hope."

"Certainly, hope, there's always hope; everyone has something to vex them. I have, I know, Mrs. Mervyn; and I was just thinking what a charming drawing-room this is, and how delightful it must be, the quiet and comfort, and glow of such a room. There is no drawing-room on earth I should like so well," said good-natured Tom Sedley, whose sympathies were easy, and who liked saying a pleasant thing when he could; "And this is the letter, and here is a printed receipt, which, when you have been so kind as to sign it, I've promised to give my friend, Mr. Robson of the post-office."

"Thank you, sir; this is registered, they call it. I had one a long time ago, with the same kind of green ribbon round it. Won't you sit down while I sign this?"

"Many thanks," said Sedley, sitting down gravely at the table, and looking so thoughtful, and somehow so much at home, that you might have fancied his dream of living in the Steward's House had long been accomplished.

"I'd rather not get a letter, sir; I don't know the handwriting of this address, and a letter can but bring me sorrow. There is but one welcome chance which could befall me, and that may come yet, just a hope, sir. Sometimes it brightens up, but it has been low all to-day."

"Sorry you have been out of spirits, Mrs. Mervyn, I know what it is; I've been so myself, and I am so, rather, just now," said Tom, who was, in this homely seclusion, tending towards confidence.

"There are now but two handwritings that I should know; one is his, the other Lady Verney's; all the rest are dead; and this is neither."

"Well, Mrs. Mervyn, if it does not come from either of the persons you care for, it yet may tell you news of them," remarked Tom Sedley, sagely.

"Hardly, sir. I hear every three months from Lady Verney. I heard on Tuesday last. Thank God, she's well. No, it's nothing concerning her, and I think it may be something bad. I am afraid of this letter, sir—tell me I need not be afraid of it."

"I know the feeling, Mrs. Mervyn; I've had it myself, when duns were troublesome. But you have nothing of the kind in this happy retreat; which I really do envy you from my heart."

"Envy! Ah, sir—happy retreat! Little you know, sir. I have been for weeks and months at a time half wild with anguish, dreaming of the sea. How can he know?"

"Very true, I can't know; I only speak of it as it strikes me at the moment. I fancy I should so like to live here, like a hermit, quite out of the persecutions of luck and the nonsense of the world."

"You are wonderfully like at times, sir—it is beautiful, it is frightful—when I moved the candle then——"

"I'll sit any way you like best, Mrs. Mervyn, with pleasure, and you can move the candle, and try; if it amuses—no, I mean interests you."

If some of his town friends could have peeped in through a keyhole, and seen Tom Sedley and old Rebecca Mervyn seated at opposite sides of the table, in this very queer old room, so like Darby and Joan, it would have made matter for a comical story.

"Like a flash it comes!"

Tom Sedley looked at the wild, large eyes that were watching him—the round spectacles now removed—across the table, and could not help smiling.

"Yes, the smile—it is the smile! You told me, sir, your name was Sedley, not Verney."

"My name is Thomas Sedley. My father was Captain Sedley, and served through a part of the Peninsular campaign. He was not twenty at the battle of Vittoria, and he was at Waterloo. My mother died a few months after I was born."

"Was she a Verney?"

"No; she was distantly connected, but her name was Melville," said he.

"Connected. That accounts for it, perhaps."

"Very likely."

"And your father—dead?" she said, sadly.

"Yes; twenty years ago."

"I know, sir; I remember. They are all locked up there, sir, and shan't come out till old Lady Verney dies. But he was not related to the Verneys?"

"No, they were friends. He managed two of the estates after he left the army, and very well, I'm told."

"Sedley—Thomas Sedley—I remember the name. I did not know the name of Sedley—except on one occasion—I was sent for, but it came to nothing. I lived so much in the dark about things," and she sighed.

"I forgot, Mrs. Mervyn, how late it is growing, and how much too long I have stayed here admiring your pretty room, and I fear interrupting you," said Tom, suddenly remembering his dinner, and standing up—"If you kindly give me the receipt, I'll leave it on my way back."

Mrs. Mervyn had clipped the silken cord, and was now reading the letter, and he might as well have addressed his little speech to the china shepherdess, with the straw disc and ribbons on her head, in the bodice and short petticoat of flowered brocade, leaning against a tree, with a lamb with its hind leg and tail broken off, looking affectionately in her face.

"I can't make it out, sir; your eyes are young—perhaps you would read it to me—it is not very long."

"Certainly, with pleasure"—and Tom Sedley sat down, and, spreading the letter on the table, under the candles, read as follows to the old lady opposite:—

"Private.

"Madam,—As an old and intimate friend of your reputed husband, I take leave to inform you that he placed a sum of money in my hands for the use of your son and his, if he be still living. Should he be so, will you be so good as to let me know where it will reach him. A line to Jos. Larkin, Esq., at the Verney Arms, Cardyllian, or a verbal message, if you desire to see him, will suffice. Mr. Larkin is the solvent and religious attorney of the present Lord Verney, and you have my consent to advise with him on the subject.

"I have the honour to be,

"Madam,

"Your obedient servant,

"J. Dingwell."

"P.S.—You are aware, I suppose, madam, that I am the witness who proved the death of the late Hon. Arthur Verney, who died of a low fever in Constantinople, in July twelve months."

"Died! My God! Died! did you say died?"

"Yes. I thought you knew. It was proved a year ago nearly. The elder brother of the present Lord Verney."

There followed a silence while you might count ten, and then came a long, wild, and bitter cry.

The little girl started up, with white lips, and said, "Lord bless us!" The sparrows in the ivy about the windows fluttered—even Tom Sedley was chilled and pierced by that desolate scream.

"I'm very sorry, really, I'm awfully sorry," Tom exclaimed, finding himself, he knew not how, again on his feet, and gazing at the white, imploring face of the trembling old woman. "I really did not know—I had not an idea you felt such an interest in any of the family. If I had known, I should have been more careful. I'm shocked at what I've done."

"Oh! Arthur—oh! Arthur. He's gone—after all, after all. If we could have only met for one minute, just for one look." She was drawing back the window-curtain, looking towards the dark Pendillion and the starless sea. "He said he'd come again—he went—and my heart misgave me. I said, he'll never come again—my beautiful Arthur—never—never—never. Oh, darling, darling. If I could even see your grave."

"I'm awfully sorry, ma'am; I wish I could be of any use," said honest Tom Sedley, speaking very low and kindly, standing beside her, with, I think, tears in his eyes. "I wish so much, ma'am, you could employ me any way. I'd be so glad to be of any use, about your son, or to see that Mr. Larkin. I don't like his face, ma'am, and would not advise your trusting him too much."

"Our little child's dead. Oh! Arthur—Arthur!—a beautiful little thing; and you, my darling,—that I watched for, so long—never to come again—never, never—never—I have no one now."

"I'll come to you and see you in the morning," said Tom.

And he walked home in the dark, and stopped on the summit of the hill, looking down upon the twinkling lights of the town, and back again toward solemn Malory, thinking of what he had seen, and what an odd world it was.

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XXI.

## BY RAIL TO LONDON.

About an hour later, Tom Sedley, in solitude, meditated thus—

"I wonder whether the Etherages"—(meaning pretty Miss Agnes)—"would think it a bore if I went up to see them. It's too late for tea. I'm afraid they mightn't like it. No one, of course, like Cleve now. They'd find me very dull, I dare say. I don't care, I'll walk up, and if I see the lights in the drawing-room windows, I'll try."

He did walk up; he did see the lights in the drawing-room windows; and he did try, with the result of finding himself upon the drawing-room carpet a minute after, standing at the side of Agnes, and chatting to Miss Charity.

"How is your father?" asked Tom, seeing the study untenanted.

"Not at all well, I think; he had an accident to-day. Didn't you hear?"

"Accident! No, I didn't."

"Oh! yes. Somehow, when Lord Verney and the other people were coming up here to-day, he was going to meet them, and among them they overturned his bath-chair, and I don't know really who's to blame. Captain Shrapnell says he saved his life; but, however it happened, he was upset and very much shaken. I see you laughing, Thomas Sedley! What on earth can you see in it to laugh at? It's so exactly like Agnes—she laughed! you did, indeed, Agnes, and if I had not seen it, with my own eyes, I could not have believed it!"

"I knew papa was not hurt, and I could not help laughing, if you put me to death for it, and they say he drove over Lord Verney's foot."

"That would not break my heart," said Sedley. "Did you hear the particulars from Cleve?"

"No, I did not see Mr. Verney to speak to, since the accident," said Miss Charity. "By-the-by, who was the tall, good-looking girl, in the seal-skin coat, he was talking to all the way to the jetty? I think she was Lady Wimbledon's daughter."

"So she was; has she rather large blue eyes?"

"Yes."

"Oh! it must be she; that's Miss Caroline  Oldys. She's such a joke; she's elder than Cleve."

"Oh! that's impossible; she's decidedly younger than Mr. Cleve Verney, and, I think, extremely pretty."

"Well, perhaps she is younger, and I do believe she's pretty; but she's a fool, and she has been awfully in love with him for I don't know how many years—every one was laughing at it, two or three seasons ago; she is such a muff!"

"What do you mean by a muff?" demanded Charity.

"Well, a goose, then. Lord Verney's her guardian or trustee, or something; and they say, that he and Lady Wimbledon had agreed to promote the affair. Just like them. She is

such a scheming old woman; and Lord Verney is such a—I was going to say, such a muff,—but he is such a spoon. Cleve's wide awake, though, and I don't think he'll do that for them."

I believe there may have been, at one time, some little foundation in fact for the theory which supposed the higher powers favourable to such a consummation. But time tests the value of such schemes, and it would seem that Lady Wimbledon had come to the conclusion that the speculation was a barren one: for, this night, in her dressing-gown, with her wig off, and a silken swathing about her bald head, she paid a very exciting visit to her daughter's room, and blew her up in her own awful way, looking like an angry Turk. "She wondered how any person with Caroline's experience could be such an idiot as to let that young man go on making a fool of her. He had no other idea but the one of making a fool of her before the world. She, Lady Wimbledon, would have no more of any such insensate folly—her prospects should not be ruined, if she could prevent it, and prevent it she could and would—there should be an end of that odious nonsense; and if she chose to make herself the laughing-stock of the world, she, Lady Wimbledon, would do her duty and take her down to Slominton, where they would be quiet enough at all events; and Cleve Verney, she ventured to say, with a laugh, would not follow her."

The young lady was in tears, and blubbered in her romantic indignation till her eyes and nose were inflamed, and her mamma requested her to look in the glass, and see what a figure she had made of herself, and made her bathe her face for an hour, before she went to bed.

There was no other young lady at Ware, and Cleve smiled in his own face, in his looking-glass, as he dressed for dinner.

"My uncle will lose no time—I did not intend this; but I see very well what he means, and he'll be disappointed and grow suspicious, if I draw back; and she has really nothing to recommend her, poor Caroline, and he'll find that out time enough, and meanwhile I shall get over some months quietly."

There was no great difficulty in seeing, indeed, that the noble host distinguished Lady Wimbledon and her daughter. And Lord Verney, leaning on Cleve's arm, asked him

lightly what he thought of Miss Caroline Oldys; and Cleve, who had the gift of presence of mind, rather praised the young lady.

"My uncle would prefer Ethel, when he sees a hope in that direction, I shan't hear much more of Caroline, and so on—and we shall be growing older—and the chapter of accidents—and all that."

For a day or two Lord Verney was very encouraging, and quite took an interest in the young lady, and showed her the house and the place, and unfolded all the plans which were about to grow into realities, and got Cleve to pull her across the lake, and walked round to meet them, and amused the young man by contriving that little opportunity. But Lady Wimbledon revealed something to Lord Verney, that evening, over their game of ecarté, which affected his views.

Cleve was talking to the young lady, but he saw Lord Verney look once or twice, in the midst of a very serious conversation with Lady Wimbledon, at Caroline Oldys and himself, and now without smiling.

It was Lady Wimbledon's deal, but she did not deal, and her opponent seemed also to have forgotten the cards, and their heads inclined one toward the other as the talk proceeded.

It was about the hour when ladies light their bed-room candles, and ascend. And Lady Wimbledon and Caroline Oldys had vanished in a few minutes more, and Cleve thought, "She has told him something that has given him a new idea." His uncle was rather silent and dry for the rest of that evening, but next morning seemed pretty much as usual, only Lord Verney took an opportunity of saying to him—

"I have been considering, and I have heard things, and, with reference to the subject of my conversation with you, in town, I think you ought to direct your thoughts to Ethel, about it—you ought to have money—don't you see? It's very important—money—very well to be le fils de ses [oeuvres, and that kind of thing; but a little money does no harm; on the contrary, it is very desirable. Other people keep that point in view; I don't see why

we should not. I ask myself this question:—How is it that people get on in the world? And I answer—in great measure by amassing money; and arguing from that, I think it desirable you should have some money to begin with, and I've endeavoured to put it logically, about it, that you may see the drift of what I say." And he made an excuse and sent Cleve up to town next day before him.

I have been led into an episode by Miss Charity's question about Miss Caroline Oldys; and returning to Hazelden, I find Tom Sedley taking his leave of the young ladies for the night, and setting out for the Verney Arms with a cigar between his lips.

Next morning he walked down to Malory again, and saw old Rebecca, who seemed, in her odd way, comforted on seeing him, but spoke little—almost nothing; and he charged her to tell neither Dingwell, of whom he had heard nothing but evil, nor Jos. Larkin, of whom he had intuitively a profound suspicion,—anything about her own history, or the fate of her child, but to observe the most cautious reserve in any communications they might seek to open with her. And having delivered this injunction in a great variety of language, he took his leave, and got home very early to his breakfast, and ran up to London, oddly enough, in the same carriage with Cleve Verney.

Tom Sedley was angry with Cleve, I am afraid not upon any very high principle. If Cleve had trifled with the affections of Miss Caroline Oldys, I fear he would have borne the spectacle of her woes with considerable patience. But if the truth must be told, honest Tom Sedley was leaving Cardyllian in a pet. Anger, grief, jealousy, were seething in his good-natured heart. Agnes Etherage—his little Agnes—she had belonged to him as long as he could remember; she was gone, and he never knew how much he had liked her until he had lost her.

Gone? No; in his wanton cruelty this handsome outlaw had slain his deer—had shot his sweet bird dead, and there she lay in the sylvan solitude she had so beautified—dead; and he—heartless archer—went on his way smiling, having darkened the world for harmless Tom Sedley. Could he like him ever again?

Well, the world brooks no heroics now; there are reserves. Men cultivate a thick skin—nature's buff-coat—in which, with little pain and small loss of blood, the modern man-at-arms rides cheerily through life's battle. When point or edge happen to go a little

through, as I have said, there are reserves. There is no good in roaring, grinning, or cursing. The scathless only laugh at you; therefore wipe away the blood quietly and seem all you can like the rest. Better not to let them see even that. Is there not sometimes more of curiosity than of sympathy in the scrutiny? Don't you even see, at times, just the suspicion of a smile on your friend's pitying face, as he prescribes wet brown paper or basilicon, or a cob-web, according to his skill?

So Tom and Cleve talked a little—an acquaintance would have said, just as usual—and exchanged newspapers, and even laughed a little now and then; but when at Shillingsworth the last interloper got out, and Tom and Cleve were left to themselves, the ruling idea asserted itself, and Sedley looked hurriedly out of the window, and grew silent for a time, and pretended not to hear Cleve when he asked him whether he had seen the report of Lord Verney's visit to Cardyllian, as displayed in the county paper of that day, which served to amuse him extremely.

"I don't think," said Tom Sedley, at last, abruptly, "that nice, pretty little creature, Agnes Etherage—the nicest little thing, by Jove, I think I ever saw—I say she is not looking well."

"Is not she really?" said Cleve, very coolly cutting open a leaf in his magazine.

"Didn't you observe?" exclaimed Tom, rather fiercely.

"Well, no, I can't say I did; but you know them so much better than I," answered Cleve; "it can't be very much; I dare say she's well by this time."

"How can you speak that way, Verney, knowing all you do?"

"Why, what do I know?" exclaimed Cleve, looking up in unaffected wonder.

"You know all about it—why she's out of spirits, why she's looking so delicate, why she's not like herself," said Tom, impatiently.

"Upon my soul I do not," said Cleve Verney, with animation.

"That's odd, considering you've half broken her heart," urged Tom.

"I broken her heart?" repeated Cleve. "Now, really, Sedley, do pray think what you're saying."

"I say I think you've broken her heart, and her sister thinks so too; and it's an awful shame," insisted Tom, very grimly.

"I really do think the people want to set me mad," said Cleve, testily. "If anyone says that I have ever done anything that could have made any of that family, who are in their senses, fancy that I was in love with Miss Agnes Etherage, and that I wished her to suppose so, it is simply an untruth. I never did, and I don't intend; and I can't see, for the life of me, Tom Sedley, what business it is of yours. But thus much I do say, upon my honour, it is a lie. Miss Charity Etherage, an old maid, with no more sense than a snipe, living in that barbarous desert, where if a man appears at all, during eight months out of the twelve, he's a prodigy, and if he walks up the street with a Cardyllian lady, he's pronounced to be over head and ears in love, and of course meditating marriage—I say she's not the most reliable critic in the world in an affair of that sort; and all I say is, that I've given no grounds for any such idea, and I mean it, upon my honour; and I've seldom been so astonished in my life before."

There was an air of frank and indignant repudiation in Cleve's manner and countenance, which more even than his words convinced Tom Sedley, who certainly was aware how little the Cardyllian people knew of the world, and what an eminently simple maiden in all such matters the homely Miss Charity was. So Tom extended his hand and said—

"Well, Cleve, I'm so glad, and I beg your pardon, and I know you say truth, and pray shake hands; but though you are not to blame—I'm now quite sure you're not—the poor girl is very unhappy, and her sister very angry."

"I can't help that. How on earth can I help it? I'm very sorry, though I'm not sure that I ought to care a farthing about other people's nonsense, and huffs, and romances. I could tell you things about myself, lots of things you'd hardly believe—real dreadful annoyances. I tell you Tom, I hate the life I'm leading. You only see the upper surface, and hardly that. I'm worried to death, and only that I owe so much money, and can't get away, I can tell you—I don't care two pins whether you believe it or not—I should have been feeding sheep in Australia a year ago."

"Better where you are, Cleve."

"How the devil do you know? Don't be offended with me, Tom, only make allowances, and if I sometimes talk a bit like a Bedlamite don't repeat my ravings; that's all. Look at that windmill; isn't it pretty?"

# The Tenants of Malory Volume II by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

## CHAPTER XXII.

## LADY DORMINSTER'S BALL.

Cleve Verney was in harness again—attending the House with remarkable punctuality; for the eye of the noble peer, his uncle, was upon him. He had the division lists regularly on his table, and if Cleve's name was missing from any one of even moderate importance, his uncle took leave to ask an explanation. Cleve had also reasons of his own for working diligently at the drudgery of public life. His march was not upon solid ground, but over a quaking bog, every undulation and waver of which was answered by a qualm at his heart.

Still it was only some nice management of time and persons; it was a mere matter of presence of mind, of vigilance, of resource, to which he felt—at least hoped he might be found equal, and all must end well. Was not his uncle sixty-six his last birthday? People might natter and say he looked nothing like it; but the red book so pro nounced, and there is no gainsaying that sublime record. After all, his uncle was not an everlasting danger. Time and the hour will end the longest day; and then must come the title, and estates, and a quiet heart at last.

When the House did not interfere, Cleve was of course seen at all the proper places. On the night of which I am now speaking there was among others Lady Dorminster's ball, and a brilliant muster of distinguished persons.

On that crowded floor, in those celebrated salons, in an atmosphere of light and music, in which moved so much of what is famous, distinguished, splendid, is seen the figure of Cleve Verney. Everyone knew that slight and graceful figure, and the oval face, delicate features, and large, dark, dreamy eyes, that never failed to impress you with the same ambiguous feeling. It was Moorish, it was handsome; but there was a shadow there—something secret and selfish, and smilingly, silently insolent.

This session he had come out a little, and made two speeches of real promise. The minister had complimented his uncle upon them, and had also complimented him. The muse was there; something original and above routine—genius perhaps—and that passion for distinction which breaks a poor man's heart, and floats the rich to greatness.

A man of Cleve's years, with his position, with his promise, with London life and Paris life all learned by rote, courted and pursued, wary, contemptuous, sensual, clever, ambitious—is not young. The whole chaperon world, with its wiles, was an open book for him. For him, like the man in the German legend, the earth under which they mined and burrowed had grown to his eyes transparent, and he saw the gnomes at work. For him young ladies' smiles were not light and magic—only marsh fires and tricks. To him old and young came up and simpered or fawned; but they dimpled, or ogled, or grinned, all in the Palace of Truth. Truth is power, but not always pretty. For common men the surface is best; all beyond is knowledge—an acquisition of sorrow.

Therefore, notwithstanding his years, the clear olive oval of his handsome face, the setting—void of line or colour—of those deep dark eyes, so enthusiastic, yet so cold, the rich wave of his dark hair, and the smooth transparency of temples and forehead, and all the tints and signs of beautiful youth, Cleve Verney was well stricken in years of knowledge; and of that sad gift he would not have surrendered an iota in exchange for the charms and illusions of innocence, so much for the most part do men prefer power to happiness.

"How d'ye do, Miss Oldys?" said this brilliant young man of actualities and expectations.

"Oh, Mr. Verney, you here!"

This Miss Caroline Oldys was just nine-and-twenty. Old, like him, in the world's dismal psychology, but with one foolish romance still at her heart; betrayed into a transient surprise, smiling in genuine gladness, almost forgetting herself, and looking quite country-girlish in the momentary effusion. It is not safe affecting an emotion with men like Cleve, especially when it does not flatter them. He did not care a farthing whether she was surprised or not, or glad or sorry. But her very eye and gesture told him that she had marked him as he stood there, and had chosen the very seat on which her partner

had placed her of malice aforethought. Fine acting does it need to succeed with a critic like Cleve.

"Yes, I here—and where's the wonder?"

"Why,—who was it?—some one told me only half an hour ago, you were somewhere in France."

"Well, if it was a man he told a story, and if a lady she made a mistake," said Cleve, coolly but tartly, looking steadily at her. "And the truth is, I wanted a yacht, and I went down to look at her, tried her, liked her, and bought her. Doesn't it sound very like a marriage?"

Caroline laughed.

"That's your theory—we're all for sale, and handed over to the best bidder."

"Pretty waltz," said Cleve, waving his slender hand just the least in the world to the music. "Pretty thing!"

He did not use much ceremony with this young lady—his cousin in some remote way—who, under the able direction of her mother, Lady Wimbledon, had once pursued him in a barefaced way for nearly three years; and who, though as we have seen, her mother had by this time quite despaired, yet liked him with all the romance that remained to her.

"And who are you going to marry, Caroline? There's Sedley—I see him over there. What do you say to Sedley?"

"No, thanks—much obliged—but Sedley, you know, has seen his fate in that mysterious lady in Wales, or somewhere."

"Oh? has he?" He signed to Sedley to come to them.

Looking through the chinks and chasms that now and then opened in the distinguished mob of which he formed a unit, he occasionally saw the stiff figure and small features of his pompous uncle, Lord Verney, who was talking affably to Lady Wimbledon. Lord Verney did not wear his agreeable simper. He had that starch and dismal expression, rather, which came with grave subjects, and he was tapping the fingers of his right hand upon the back of his left, in time to the cadence of his periods, which he did when delivering matter particularly well worth hearing. It plainly did not displease Lady Wimbledon, whatever his discourse might be. "I'm to be married to Caroline, I suppose. I wish that old woman was at the bottom of the Red Sea."

Cleve looked straight in the eyes of the Honourable Miss Caroline Oldys, and said he, with a smile, "Lady Wimbledon and my uncle are deep in some mystery—is it political? Have you an idea?"

Caroline Oldys had given up blushing very long ago indeed; but there was the confusion, without the tint of a blush in her face, as he said these words.

"I dare say—mamma's a great politician."

"Oh! I know that. By Jove, my uncle's looking this way. I hope he's not coming."

"Would you mind taking me to mamma?"

"No—pray stay for a moment. Here's Sedley."

And the young man, whom we know pretty well, with the bold blue eyes and golden moustaches, and good frank handsome face, approached smiling.

"How are you, Sedley?" said Cleve, giving him two fingers. "Caroline Oldys says you've had an adventure. Where was it?"

"The lady in black, you know, in Wales," reminded Miss Oldys.

"Oh! to be sure," said Sedley, laughing. "A lady in gray, it was. I saw her twice. But that's more than a year old, and there has been nothing ever since."

"Do go on."

Sedley laughed.

"It was at Cardyllian, in the church. She lived at Malory—that dark old place you went to see with the Verneys, the day you were at Cardyllian—don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes,—what a romantic place!"

"What an awfully cross old fellow, old enough to be her father, but with the air of her husband, guarding her like a dragon, and eyeing every fellow that came near as if he'd knock him down; a lean, white-whiskered, bald old fellow, with bushy eyebrows, and a fierce face, and eyes jumping out of his head, and lame of one foot, too. Not a beauty, by any means."

"Where did you see him?" said Cleve.

"I did not see him—but Christmass Owen the boatman told me."

"Well, and which is your fate—which is to kill you—the husband or wife?" inquired Cleve, looking vaguely among the crowd.

"Oh, the wife, as he calls her, is really quite beautiful, melancholy and that, you know. I'd have found out all about them, but they left before I had time to go back, but Verney was at Cardyllian, when I was there."

"When was that?" asked Cleve.

"I mean when these people were at Malory. Cleve was much more gone about her than I was—at least so I've heard," answered Sedley.

"That's very ungrateful of you, Sedley. I never interfered, upon my honour. I saw her once in church, and accompanied him in his pursuit at his earnest request, and I never saw her again. Are you going on to the Halbury's, Caroline?"

"Yes; are you?"

"No, quite used up. Haven't slept since Wednesday night."

Here a partner came to claim Miss Caroline.

"I'll go with you," said Sedley.

"Very well," answered Cleve, without looking back. "Come to my lodgings, Sedley—we'll smoke, shall we? I've got some capital cigars."

"I don't care. I'm going on also."

"What a delicious night!" exclaimed Tom Sedley, looking up at the stars. "Suppose we walk—it isn't far."

"I don't care—let us walk," said Cleve.

So walk they did. It was not far to Cleve's lodgings, in a street off Piccadilly. The young men had walked rather silently; for, as it seemed to Sedley, his companion was not in a temper to talk a great deal, or very pleasantly.

"And what about this gray woman? Did you ever follow it up? Did the romance take fire where it ought? Is it a mutual flame?" asked Cleve, like a tired man who feels he must say something, and does not care what. "I don't think you mentioned her since the day you showed me that Beatrice Cenci, over your d——d chimney-piece."

"Of course I'd have told you if there had been anything to tell," said Tom.

"They haven't been at Malory since?"

"Oh! no—frightened away—you'll never see them there again. There's nothing absolutely in it, and never was, not even an adventure. Nothing but the little that happened long ago—and you know all about that," continued Sedley. "She's a wonderfully beautiful creature, though; I wish you saw her again, Cleve. You're such a clever fellow, you'd make a poem of her, or something—she'd bring you back to the days of chivalry, and that style of thing. I'm a sort of fellow, you know, that feels a lot, and I think, I think some too; but I haven't the knack of saying it, or writing it—I'm not particularly good at anything; but I went that morning, you know, into the Refectory—you know—there are such a lot of stairs, and long places and doors, it makes a fellow quite foolish—and there

she was—don't you remember?—I wish I could describe her to you gardening there with her gloves on."

"Don't try—you've tried so often—there's a good fellow; but just tell me her name?" said Cleve, looking straight before him, above the lamps and the slanting slates and chimneys, into the deep sky, where brilliantly, spite of London smoke, shone the clear sad moon.

"Her name?—I never found out, except Margaret—I don't know; but I believe they did not want their name told."

"That did not look well—did it?" suggested Cleve.

"Well, no more it generally does; but it is not her fault. It was—in fact it was—for I did find it out, I may as well tell you—old Sir Booth Fanshawe, you know he's broken—not worth a guinea—and always running about from place to place to avoid pursuit, in fact. It can't signify, you know, now that I think of it, mentioning him, because, of course, he's gone somewhere else long ago."

So said romantic little Sedley, and Cleve sneered.

"I see you can tell a fib on occasion, Tom, like another man. So you found out the name, and knew it all the time you were protesting ignorance. And who told you that? People here thought Sir Booth had gone to Italy."

"Well, it was—but you mustn't tell him I told you. There was a Jew fellow down at Malory, with a writ and a lot of fellows to nab him; but the old fellow was off; and the Jew, thinking that Wynne Williams knew where he was, came to his office and offered him a hatfull of money to tell, and he was going to kick him out; and that's the way he found out it was old Sir Booth; and he is awfully afraid of getting into a scrape about it, if the old people heard who the tenant was."

"So he would—the worst scrape he ever was in, with my uncle, at all events. And that d—d Larkin would get into the management of everything, I suppose. I hope, you have not been telling everyone?"

"Not a soul—not a human being."

"There are some of the Cardyllian people that hardly come under that term; and, by Jove, if you breathe it to one of them, it's all over the town, and my uncle will be sure to hear it; and poor Wynne Williams!—you'll be the ruin of him, very likely."

"I tell you, except to you, I swear to you, I haven't mentioned it to a soul on earth," exclaimed Tom.

"Well, I do think, as a matter of conscience and fairness, you ought to hold your tongue, and keep faith with poor Wynne," said Cleve, rudely, "and I think he was a monstrous fool to tell you. You know I'm interested," continued Cleve, perceiving that his vehemence surprised Tom Sedley; "because I have no faith in Larkin—I think him a sneak and a hypocrite, and a rogue—of course that's in confidence, and he's doing all in his power to get a fast hold of my uncle, and to creep into Wynne Williams's place, and a thing like this, with a hard unreasonable fellow like my uncle, would give him such a lift as you can't imagine."

"But, I'm not going to tell; unless you tell, or he, I don't know who's to tell it—I won't, I know."

"And about Sir Booth—of course he's not in England now—but neither is he in Italy," said Tom.

"It's well he has you to keep his 'log' for him," said Cleve.

"He's in France."

"Oh!"

"Yes, in the north of France, somewhere near Caen," said Tom Sedley.

"I wonder you let him get so near England. It seems rather perilous, doesn't it?"

"So one would think, but there he is. Tom Blackmore, of the Guards—you know him?"

"No, I don't."

"Well he saw old Fanshawe there. He happened to be on leave."

"Old Fanshawe?"

"No, Tom Blackmore. He likes poking into out-of-the-way places."

"I dare say."

"He has such a turn for the picturesque and all that, and draws very nicely."

"The long bow, I dare say."

"Well, no matter, he was there—old Fanshawe I mean—Blackmore saw him. He knows his appearance perfectly—used to hunt with his hounds, and that kind of thing, and often talked to him, so he could not be mistaken—and there he was as large as life."

"Well?"

"He did not know Tom a bit, and Tom asked no questions—in fact, he did not care to know where the poor old fellow hides himself—he preferred not—but Madame something or other—I forget her name—gave him a history, about as true as Jack the Giant-Killer, of the eccentric English gentleman, and told him that he had taken a great old house, and had his family there, and a most beautiful young wife, and was as jealous as fifty devils; so you see Margaret must have been there. Of course that was she," said Tom.

"And you said so to your friend Blackmore?" suggested Cleve Verney.

"Yes," said Tom.

"It seems to me you want to have him caught."

"Well, I did not think—I hope not—and I did not know you took any interest in him," said Sedley, quite innocently.

"Interest! I—me! Interest, indeed! Why the devil should I take an interest in Sir Booth Fanshawe? Why you seem to forget all the trouble and annoyance he has cost me. Interest, indeed! Quite the contrary. Only, I think, one would not like to get any poor devil into worse trouble than he's in, for no object, or to be supposed to be collecting information about him."

"No one could suppose anything like that of me," said Tom Sedley.

"I beg your pardon; they can suppose anything of anybody," answered Cleve, and, seeing that Tom looked offended, he added, "and the more absurd and impossible, the more likely. I wish you heard the things that have been said of me—enough to make your hair stand on end, by Jove!"

"Oh! I dare say."

They were now turning into the street where Cleve had taken lodgings.

"I could not stand those fellows any longer. My uncle has filled the house with them—varnish and paint and that stifling plaster—so I've put up here for a little time."

"I like these streets. I'm not very far away from you here," said Tom. "And talking of that affair at Caen, you know, he said, by Jove he did, that he saw you there."

"Who said?"

"Tom Blackmore of the Guards."

"Then Tom Blackmore of the Guards lies—that's all. I never saw him—I never spoke to him—I don't know him; and how should he know me? And if he did, I wasn't there; and if I had been, what the devil was it to him? So besides telling lies, he tells impertinent lies, and he ought to be kicked."

"Well, of course as you say so, he must have made a mistake; but Caen is as open to you as to him, and there's no harm in the place; and he knows you by appearance."

"He knows everybody by appearance, it seems, and nobody knows him; and, by Jove, he describes more like a bailiff than a Guardsman."

"He's a thorough gentleman in every idea. Tom Blackmore is as nice a little fellow as there is in the world," battled Tom Sedley for his friend.

"Well, I wish you'd persuade that faultless gentleman to let me and my concerns alone. I have a reason in this case; and I don't mind if I tell you I was at Caen, and I suppose he did see me. But there was no romance in the matter, except the romance of the Stock Exchange and a Jew; and I wish, Tom, you'd just consider me as much as you do the old baronet, for my own sake, that is, for I'm pretty well dipped too, and don't want everyone to know when or where I go in quest of my Jews. I was—not very far from that about four months ago; and if you go about telling everyone, by Jove my uncle will guess what brought me there, and old fellows don't like post-obits on their own lives."

"My dear Cleve, I had not a notion——"

"Well, all you can do for me now, having spread the report, is to say that I wasn't there—I'm serious. Here we are."


Freeditorial