## CHRISTMAS EVE AT THE GRANGE

BY ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT.

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Gorham, spurring to Hardinge to fetch me in hot haste to Lanston Grange, I the cause must be urgent and fresh Jacobite trouble, and I feared my uncle, Sir Guy Lanston, had allowed himself to be drawn once more into the

Some ten days before a stranger, a Master Richard Lovelace, had appeared suddenly at the grange, and my uncle had set off on a mysterious visit from which he had not returned. Now it was concerning this Lovelace that something of a cloud had come between my sweet Awdrey and me. I my fingers pricking with a desire to en Awdrey for having rejected him punish him for his meddlesome in-

Awdrey had but laughed at my moody remonstrance, and when I questioned her would tell me nothing. "Geoffrey, Geoffrey, you but worsen matters," she cried, with a toss of her pretty head. "Because a gallant gen-

are not sharp enough to see the rea-

selors who had advised that a rising could be organized if he would but show himself to his followers; and scented danger in the air. We had now the plans had all miscarried, his heard whisperings and mutterings of presence in England had been discovered, and he had fled to Lanston to hide while means could be devised for his crossing again to France. It was this business which had taken Sir Guy away, and the ill news had come that he had been laid by the heels by his old enemy, the gout, and had done

nothing. Nor was that the worst. Sir Burton Prendergast had got wind of the matter in some way and might be trusted to do his worst against Lans-A more malignant, rancorous, had come upon the two in close conton. A more malignant, rancorous, versation, and had seen the fellow kiss spiteful rat of a man did not breathe that had set my blood tingling and Sir Burton; and he had never forgiv year ago, nor me for having won he from him, and would welcome a chance

to strike at Lanston. If it were once known who Lovelace was and that the grange had sheltered him, the consequences would be no less than ruin. The government had not yet forgiven Sir Guy for his old Jacobite work, and tleman in a hard case lays his lips to would readily seize on a pretext now Awdrey's poor fingers and your wits for punishing him and his.

When Awdrey sent her young brother the bidding of certain reckless coun- in providing the needed vessel and arranging among my own men for the boat to be in readiness at Master's cove; and late though it was I rattled to Lanston to tell Awdrey that all was

But Sir Burton Prendergast was not a vindictive malignant for nothing, and in laying my plans I had not paid sufficient need to all that I knew or to all that he would do, and this I was to discover at the Grange in the afternoon of that fateful Christmas eve.

was just dark, and while waiting for Master Lovelace to put himself in my charge, Awdrey and young Gorham and I stood in the decorated hall chatting with that mingling of ousness and strained cheerfulness which the crisis of such a matter will commonly evoke when the actors are all alike full of anxiety and each wishful to hide the feeling from the others.

We are rather like our guest in build, Geoffrey," said Gorham, but Awdrey protested with a blush and a flash of the eyes. Gorham, boylike, was the more positive for the protest, however, and made me stand my back to them while he pointed out the marks of resemblance, and we were still discussing this when we caught sight of the guest coming down stairs. Just at that same moment one of the serving men dashed in at the front

CONCENSION CONCENSION CONCENSION DESCRIPTION CONCENSION your will speedily."
Without more ado a number of the men were brought in, and while Awdrey, Gorham and I waited in the hall, they spread all over the house and searched it from roof to cellar. At the end of an hour or so Capt. Hilary came with many apologies for the unwelcome business, and declared that he had evidently been misled by wrong

We watched the soldiers form up and depart, and Awdrey drew a deep sigh of relief as she linked her arm in mine.

"How good that you were here, Geof-rey," she whispered. "And what

next? "As soon as they are well away, your guest and I must be off. Gorham, see that the horses are ready, and then slip away and watch the men well out of sight, and note the road they take. Quick, lad!"

Awdrey and I waited alone together in the hall. The strain of the excitement had wrought upon her nerves somewhat, and she was very sweet, gracious and loving, as I sought to oothe and reassure her. Gorham came hurrying in.

"There's something wrong, still, coffrey. Sir Burton Prendergast Geoffrey. was waiting by Overbury Cross, and met the captain there; they had a long conference, and are now coming back here together. Can Sir Burton know

"We shall see, and must hope he does not," I answered quietly; and soon after Capt. Hilary returned Sir Burton with him.

The officer came to the point at once. He had learned that the prisoner he sought was still concealed in the house and said he must therefore take further measures, and must remain in the grange

I did not like the thing at all, and liked it far less when at Sir Burton's instigation he said he would remain in the hail; that all must pass in or out of the house by that way, so that he could see them, and that all the other doors must be locked, with men

posted outside. It was in all truth a very awkward predicament; and as I was racking my brain for some expedient, young Gorham's words, that I was like Mr. Lovelace, when seen from behind, occurred to me, and suggested a plan to outwit them. If the soldiers re-mained in the hall, poor Master Lovelace must either be starved or driven to surrender, and either event spelled ruin. My plan was therefore to play escaping from the house, get to my horse and lead the soldiers a dance across the country in pursuit.

There was a small casement from which I could easily leap to the terrace below, make a dash for the stable yard, where the horses were ready, and ride away across the park yond. That was easy, but it must be so done that one or other of the sentries should catch sight of me, and thus bring the rest of the pack upon my heels.

I knew where the men were posted, and having from an upper window attracted the attention of the groom who had my horse in readiness, I went down, opened the casement, and leaped out. It was now getting dusk, and a soldier who was close at hand saw and challenged me instantly, and discharged his musket as I was darting towards the stable.

In a moment the whole place was in

the utmost confusion, and as I mount-ed, taking care to pretend a violent attack upon the man who held my horse, while I told him to say I was a stranger to him, the troopers were already to horse at once and came clattering round the old house after me. Things went just as I would have had them. I was careful that none of the men should see my face, and I put my horse at the ha-ha and leapt

I did not hurry matters at the start. The ha-ha caused a little trouble to some of the troopers, and my wish being to bring as many as I could away from the grange, it was my cue to let them think that they could catch me. But this had consequences of a different kind. Those who could not take the lead stopped to empty their muskets after me, and then, finding the gate, they came streaming

through. Old Noll had little relish for the shooting, and when one of the balls, from an accidentally well-aimed shot, came ripping and singing close to his ears, he shook his head and plunged forward as though impatient to be out

It was a new sensation to play the part of the fox in the hunt, but I had no qualms about the result.

I went easily across the great park, therefore, dropped into Winthrop lane at the end, rattled across Twinbury common, and skirted Three-Cornered Copse, being careful all the time to keep as much in sight of the hounds as the fast darkening evening would

Once I played a trick on them and let them come almost upon me. I had breathed old Noll up the steep side of the Haunch, and one across it I dismounted and waited for my pursuers. On catching sight of me the men raised such a shout of exultation as brought all the laggards spurring up, and they dashed toward me, making

sure of their capture.

But I was ready, and picking my way along the zig-zag sides of the fir wood there, I carried out the plan I had formed. At the bottom of the valley, between the Haunch and Dandy Chine, lie the Quagmire woods, as nasty and dangerous a bit of country as the name could mean, and into this purposed to lead them by degrees. Noll and I knew the way well enough, but it was another case with the fellows who were after me. I led them on, keeping in sight, till they were well into the middle of the woods, and when I reached the sudden turn by Dead Man's Corner, I gave Noll his head, and away we flew along the narrow track, leaving the men floundering in the quagmire, calling to one-another and shouting and oathing

We were soon clear off, and urging the old horse to his utmost efforts, I headed in the direction of Hardinge, and rattled home at a pace which would have surprised the soldiers indeed could they have seen it.

Once at Hardinge I changed my costume rapidly, while another horse was saddled, and then galloped through the night to Lan Lanston. I was all anxiety to know how matters had sped there in my absence, and hoped indeed that Master Lovelace had already been released,

and was away with young Gorham as I had arranged. But to my chagrin my ruse had been but partly a success. Capt. Hilary and Sir Burton were still at the

grange, and in the hall awaiting the return of the troopers with their cap-tive. A number of the guests had arrived and were grouped about in the rooms and the hall, looking mightly ill at ease and uncomfortable, while Awdrey was far more distressed than before, and had been weeping. "You have been away, Sir Geoffrey?" said the captain.
"I am not aware that I am your

prisoner, or accountable to you for my movements," I answered bruse "I think you have carried this brusquely. far enough. In truth, I shall hold you

chose to leave here and gallop to Hardinge for a change of costume, your fellows, forsooth must needs come clattering after me, firing their muskets, and actually putting r.y life to the hazard. You'll find them now, hard stuck in the bogs on the other side of Muttlebury Haunch. But the thing is intolerable. Come, Awdrey, let us go to the guests and leave the

gentleman to do his will."
The captain's face darkened as said this, while Sir Burton Prendergast gave me an ugly, sneering look; and when Awdrey put her hand on my arm she showed in her fingers a slip of a note and whispered. "Take

it. Danger." "This farce, has gone far enough, Sir Geoffrey, as you say," cried Pren-dergast, growing angry, and coming to us. "Mistress Awdrey, will you re-main in my charge. Have a care," he added in a whisper, which could not reach the captain's ears. "I know the secret of this statue, and shall tell it, unless Mistress Awdrey purchases my silence in the way I have told her.

I could have struck him for his mean, cowardly threat, but I masked my temper. "Probably she will put herself in my hands, Sir Burton, seeing that she is

affianced to me." "If she does not wish to ruin her father and you all, she will tell you rather that she is affianced to me, Sir Geoffrey. A word from me and this thing will be known. And I am in deadly earnest.'

But the game was not lost yet, for all that. I knew that my ruse had drawn off nearly all the troops, and that if I could but smuggle Master Lovelace out of the statue he could get away easily from the house with

one of my men to act as guide. I stood a moment as if thinking, in great perplexity, and then giving Awdrey, who was very pale and frightena significant pressure of the hand that lay on my arm, I released it.

"I see no other course, Awdrey, but to comply. You had better take Sir Burton's arm and go to the ballroom. We must start things going, or the whole country will think we are mad." His face lighted with triumph as he held out his arm and my sweet Aw-drey placed the tips of her fingers upon it, while I turned to Gorham, and under pretense of giving him some directions, about the evening's arrangements, whispered that he was to get the prisoner out when I had cleared the hall, and send him away with my

man as guide. I exchanged a few sentences with the captain, who stood plucking moodily at his mustache, and then went after Awdrey.

All the guests were now in the great ballroom, and signaling to Awdrey to come with her partner to me, I took my stand close to the door of a small room that lay between that and the dining-room. I maneuvered so that Sir Burton stood between me and the door, which I placed ajar, and then my plan was ready.
"This is a serious matter, Awdrey

I said, "and I think Sir Burton and I had better talk it over together.' "I have no wish for your interference, Sir Geoffrey,' he replied, insolent-

"I can manage my own affairs." ly. "I can manage my own affairs."
"But this is more my affair than yours," I retorted, and before he know what I was intending, I linked my arm in his, and pushed him roughly through the door, and, clapping my hand on his mouth, forced him through into the dining-room beyond. Then I freed his mouth, and he did precisely what I had reckoned on his doing.

He set up a cry for help, shouting that there was treachery, and called in from the hall, on to which the din-ing-room opened. As soon as the captain entered I slammed the door for Capt. Hilary, who behind him, and this gave Gorham his cue to act, and setting my back to the door turned upon the two men.

"This is a private quarrel between Sir Burton Prendergast and myself, Capt. Hilary, and you will have the goodness not to interfere."
"There is treachery afoot," shouted

Sir Burton, mad with rage. prisoner you want is in the hall concealed in the statue, captain. This is a trick to cheat you of him." "Let me pass, sir; I shall hold you

responsible," said the captain to me on the instant, speaking very angrily.
"Responsible for what?" I exclaimed. The man's mad. Does he mean that he and you have been all this time in the hall there and he has given you no inkling of the story he now tells? You don't believe that, surely?" I said, holding my place at the door and listening with all my ears for some sound that Gorham had done his work. "Let me pass, sir," cried the officer, drawing his sword. "In the name of

the king let me pass." "Do you draw upon an unarmed man?" I exclaimed, and as I spoke I heard a sound from the hall which seemed to show that young Gorham

had succeeded. "If you hinder me further your blood will be on your own head. Will you let me pass?" said the officer fiercely. "Do you mean you would murder me for a cock and bull story such as Sir Burton Prendergast's?" I asked, delaying him to the last safe second. "The door there through the antercom open, but if you prefer this it is

nothing to me." He dashed out, sword in hand, and Sir Burton was following waen I laid my hand on him and barred the way. "I have a reckoning with you,"

said, for I wished to give time for Master Lovelace to get clear away; and words between us grew hot and fast until Captain Hilary came back and demanded that Sir Burton should hiding place. I let him go then, and followed.

The Awdrey and some of the guests came out into the hall, and a pretty scene of cross purposes followed. Burton Prendergast asserted that the horse was the hiding place, and he and the officer tried vainly to discover the opening, until Capt. Hilary, losing all patience, declared that he would have the statue hewn to pieces if the secret could not be found.

"But there is nothing in it," I said for the twentieth time; and at length, when I saw Gorham among the rest. and a glance told me all was well, and fearing, moreover, that the statue would really be destroyed, I myself opened it.

"You can see yor yourself," I said; and while Capt. Hilary thrust his head into the opening a smile ran round the faces of the guests, who came crowding forward in curiosity at the secret of the statue and amusement at the apparent farce of the proceedings.

The captain flushed with vexation at cutting so sorry a figure, and was in doubt whether to vent his anger on me or on Sir Burton.

"There was someone there, I know," said the latter, trying to bluff it off. "Do I understand that you make an insinuation of falsehood against me, Sir Burton Prendergast?" I asked, facing him and speaking sternly. "This matter is now personal to me." And not relishing my stare and having no stomach for a quarrel, he flinched, and with a shrug of his shoulders, said to

the officer: "I am very sorry, Capt. Hilary, but it seems I was wrong."



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captain?" I asked. "We are at your commands, but you will understand that our Christmas keeping is not likely to be the merrier for any prolonging of this matter."

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"I shall hold you responsible for this, Sir Burton. You have kept me while things have been arranged for the prisoner's escape. I withdraw my men and shall make my report." Thus the interfering bully found himself prostrate between the two of us and in danger of kicks from us both. "If the prisoner was in concealment there and you knew it you have prevented my capturing him. Why didn't you tell me, sir?"

I smiled at this turn, but it was not our cue to let the captain believe we had ever concealed any one.

"Rest your mind easy and do not blame even this meddling mischiefmaker causelessly. We have no one at the grange whome we wish to conceal," and this was true, for by this time Master Lovelace was well on his way to the boat.

Capt. Hilary went away then, grumbling and smarting with the irritation of the man who feels he has been tricked but cannot lay finger on the proof, and as soon as he was gone I signaled to Awdrey and Gorham to lead the guests away while I detained the cowardly traitor who had come so near to causing serious mischief.

"A word with you, Sir Burton," I said shortly. "You have acted tonight the part of a coward and a spy, and in doing it you have cast imputations Tonight I do not make it a on me. personal matter, but tomorrow if you are still in the county of Sussex, or if within six months you show your face here, I give you my honor that I will

here, I give you my nonor that I will horsewhip you first and shoot you afterward. You know whether I am a man to keep my word."

He turned pallid with fear, said not a syllable, and without more than one conclude in the state of the state sneaking, furtive, frightened look at me, slunk away, and the next morning left the country for his health's

I was still loitering in the hall when Gorham came and told me how he had managed to get Master Lovelace away, and as I was praising him for his smartness Awdrey came "Is all safe now, Geoffrey?"
"Yes, sweetheart, you can dance

with a free heart."
"A 'free heart?" she echoed, playing on my words and smiling.

"So far as all that is concerned."
"'All that' was very terrible, while it lasted. But you did splendidly." "A penitent had to earn his forgiveness, Awdrey. Is it earned?"

"Not quite earned yet, You gave me up very readily to Sir Burton, you she cried, and withdrew the know," hand she had slipped into mine, moved some paces away, and stood glancing at me, demure in face, but with eyes all alight with smiles. "How can I earn it? I did what I

did for the best." "Your are bad at guessing riddles," she laughed. "She's under the mistletce, Geof-

come and explain the secret of the frey, don't you see?" cried Gorham from the doorway, with a laugh.
"Marlpot, Gorham!" exclaimed Awdrey, blushing rose red, but before she could turn to run after him I had caught her in my arms. "It is Christmas eve, sweetheart,

and I am a clown of a penitent," I whispered, as I kissed her. "You deserve to be punished for your dullness," she protested.

"Then give it me back, Awdrey," and I held her happy, blushing face close to mine.

"If I do it's under compulsion." "That's a new name for mistletoe," cried Gorham again, as he ran off to join the dancers.

We lingered a moment for that which

was under neither mistletoe nor compulsion, and then followed him, forgetting all about the recent crisis, and as happy a pair of lovers as all Sussex

could find that merry Christmas eve.

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"You can see for yourself.," I said.

son, you must needs leap like a blind; cried my cousin, wringing her hands door, and with signs of great excite-horseman into the slough of mistrust distractedly. "Tomorrow we have, as ment and fear exclaimed: and cry, 'It is Awdrey's fault.' Is ev- you know, our customary Christmas There's a troop of soldiers in the erything you cannot understand to be eve masquerade and every one will

Mistress Pallister's fingers would you aroused, while if he does, he may be ory 'Geoffrey is right. Well met, lips recognized and we shall be ruined." and fingers? "Mistress Pallister, forsooth!" she

walked away with her head in the "If you leave me like that, Awdrey, I'd better go anda laugh.

Yes, better go away and stav away until your wits are sharpened enough as she laid her hand in mine. to guess the riddle of your own mistrust. Mistress Pallister, indeed!' "I'll return when your Master Lovelace has gone," I replied bluntly, and by there, and we'll have her off the came away; and for a week had not coast by dusk tomorrow and a boat been to the grange. Seven miserable in Master's cove, down by Dencher's

days they had been. So you may think how my heart beat when I got her lace by then. Let him keep close till message by young Gorham, and knew then; nay, better let him ride away that in the time of danger she had openly this afternoon and return seturned to me, and how willingly I cretiy after dark, then lie here hidden sent my horse galloping straight across till the morrow at dusk. I'll be here country to Lanston that bright December morning. She was waiting for me in the large

domed hall of the grange, pacing restlessly up and down by the huge eques- should come they will surely find him trian statue—the statue of old Guy, who fought with the great Edward and won his gold spurs at if they do have you not the safest hid-Cressy and Poitiers, and founded the ing place in all the three kingdoms, Lanston family. Her face and man-ner were full of trouble.

"I have not forgiven you, Sir Mistrust, though I have sent for you," she said: but her sweet blue eyes were telling another tale.

"You are in trouble, sweetheart. When I have helped you, send me away again if you will," I said. "You have learned how to stay away.'

"And a harder penance never grieved a penitent, Awdrey." "A sincere penitent should never sue "A sincere penitent should never sue contrivance the legs of the knight in vain, it is true," she said demurely; swung on hinges and covered a space and then with a smile looked up and large enough to admit a man's body; added: "So you're forgiven. And, O, Geoffrey, the trouble is sore, indeed."

"Tell me," I answered, and when pings of the horse; and means had she did tell me I saw in truth she had been devised by which air could be not underjudged it. This Lovelace admitted through the joints of the was a far greater one than I had armor.

deemed—no lesser that the young Pre
I lost no time, but rode off at once tender himself. He had come over at on my errand. I had but little difficulty

be here; and if he does not show "And were my lips to go a-mumbling among the guests suspicion will be "He must be away, sweetheart, I

can do it. Why didn't Sir Guy come exclaimed again in high drudgeon, and to me?" "Because you are not with us in "True, I am no Jacobite, but when

She broke into my surly words with an hour of trouble? But I can do it. "I knew you would," and she smiled

> "I see it," I exclaimed, as a thought struck me. "I'll to Shoreham and charter a vessel from old Nick Nasel-"I'll to Shoreham and gully, ready manned for Master Loveto guide him, and if we don't this Prendergast, write me down fool."
> "Where can we hide him, Geoffrey?" cried Awdrey, nervously.

Sir here.' 'No one will come, sweetheart. And here in this very hall? It is not the first time old Sir Guy has served and saved the Lanstons. Where are your sharp woman's wits, dearest?"

"Of course. I had forgotten the bronze horse," and she smiled. The statue was, in truth, a hiding place of the best. In the troubles of the civil war the Lanston of his day had conceived a cunning arrangement by which arms and ammunition and at need a fugitive royalist could be hidden in the great house. By a shrewd the entrance being concealed by the armour of the knight and the trap-

avenue, Miss Awdrey, coming to the house. They are almost at the door." Our consternation may be imagined. Awdrey turned as white as the marble pedestal of the great statue against which we were grouped. Catching Gorham by the arm 1 pushed him and the servant toward the door, and whispered:

"Take the fellow away and go to meet the soldiers, and shut the door was a Hardinge not with Lanston in behind you. Quick, for God's sake, an hour of trouble? But I can do it. boy, quick!" The moment he was gone I darted behind the statue, thrust open the secret entrance to the hiding-place, and called to Master Lovelace. "Your only chance of safety is here, sir," without more ado. I bundled him into it, and closed the entrance after him, whispering to him to be as still as death. "Open the door now, Awdrey, and remember, sweetheart. Master Lovelace left yesterday!" Then making a great effort, we be-gan to talk and laugh together, much

in our usual fashion, when Gorham came back with the officer in command of the soldiers. "I am sorry to intrude upon an unpleasant errand at such a time, madam," he said to Awdrey; "but unhappily, I have no option. I am Captain Hilary, and my instructions are that a person

of dangerous importance, no less than

the young Pretender, is here in Lanston Grange, disguised as one Richard Lovelace, and I have to request you to deliver him to me." "Perhaps you will allow me to answer you, captain. I am Sir Guy Lanston's nephew, Sir Geoffrey Hardinge, at your service, and caring for matters here in my uncle's absence. My cousins are scarcely fit to deal with such a business. A Master Richard Lovelace was here, but if you will in-

quire you will find that he left yes-The officer answered sauvely: "My instructions are very precise and clear, sir.' 'That may be, but I am not concerned with them. Whence comes your

information? "I cannot reveal the source of my in formation, sir, but I have my duty to do," answered the officer.
"And will do it like a gentleman and

a man of honor, I am sure. And since responsible for the outrage to which we have many Christmas guests on the I have been subjected. Because I