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opening extract from

Montmorency's Revenge

written by

Eleanor Updale

published by

Scholastic Publishers

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Chapter 1

Glendarvie Castle, Scotland
January 1901

Lord Francis Fox-Selwyn felt the pressure of the blade against his head. He closed his eyes and grasped the arms of his chair.

"Go on. Just do it," he said, trying to sound brave. There was a pause, then a stinging sensation, and he knew he was bleeding.

"You stupid fool!"

"It's not my fault," said Tom, flinging the razor into a pot of soapy water. "I've never done this before. Do it yourself!"

"Do I look as if I've got eyes in the back of my head?"

Tom laughed. "I don't know yet. Your hair's in the way."

"Well, have another go," said Frank, calming

down. "But be careful. That hurt."

Tom tried again, more gently this time, wiping the razor on his leather apron, and scraping away every tuft from Frank's scalp. The newly exposed skin was a pale, sickly shade of grey. Frank held up the hand mirror.

"See. I told you. I'm unrecognizable. I could go anywhere like this, and no one would know that it's me."

In the reflection Frank could see the door opening, and Montmorency's face dropping from a smile into horror as he saw the bald head and then the clumps of ginger curls scattered about the floor.

"What on earth is going on? Frank! What have you done to yourself?"

"It's a disguise. Everyone thinks I've got to stay hidden. But see, I could help you find Uncle George's killers. I'm completely transformed."

Montmorency was firm. "No, Frank. You're not. You look a bit strange, it's true. But you'll never be able to disguise yourself completely. Nature's seen to that. Your red hair is always going to show through." He stood behind Frank and guided his hand so that they could both see in the mirror. "Look at your eyebrows. Your pale lashes."

"I can dye them. One of the maids has some stuff. You can tell her hair isn't really black. Only yesterday when she bent to clean out the grate I

could see a lighter colour at the roots."

"Exactly," said Montmorency. "And the same would be true for you. Except it's worse than that. Your pale skin and your freckles would give you away at once."

"I could use make-up, or scarves, or something," said Frank, as his father, Gus, Duke of Monaburn, came in. Gus was even more shocked than Montmorency. He was angry.

"Frank! You idiot! What sort of game is this?"

"It's not a game, Father. It's serious. I'm changing myself so I can do something about Uncle George."

"Don't be ridiculous. You of all people have to keep out of sight." The Duke looked at Tom, who was still holding the razor. "Did you do this? Did you mutilate him?"

Frank dived to Tom's defence. "I told him to."

"And Tom can't think for himself, I suppose?"

"Of course I can," said Tom. "And I thought it was a good idea."

"Stupid boy! Do you want to put him in danger again?"

Frank grabbed the razor. "It's nothing to do with Tom. It's my decision, and I've got to do something or I'll go mad." He dipped the razor into the water and started scraping away at his eyebrows.

"Stop it!" cried the Duke. He turned to Tom, still shouting. "You thought it was a good idea? Well,

see what you've done. Look at him now!"

"Stop picking on Tom," said Frank. "Stop blaming him for everything, Dad. You're always criticizing Tom."

With no eyebrows Frank seemed crazed and wild, his face round and puffy, colouring up with rage. Tom pushed his way out of the room.

"I was only trying to help," he said, slamming the door as he stomped off into the back yard, where embarrassed servants could hear the raised voices of the other three men, even though the windows were closed tight against the winter cold. Tom ran to the stables. Most of the horses were gone. The rest of the family were out for a ride. But they had left his favourite, a young grey, and he jumped on to its back, not bothering with a saddle or tackle. He rode fast to the edge of the estate, half thinking of escaping for ever: of finding some way of returning to the simplicity of Tarimond, his island home. But he urged the beast to a stop as they reached the boundary with the road. Over the top of the hedge he caught sight of a dark figure, wrapped in a heavy cloak, limping along towards the castle gates. The man shouted up to Tom, his breath freezing into white vapour in the cold air:

"Is this Glendarvie Castle?"

"Yes," said Tom.

"And the people here? Fox-Selwyn?"

"That's the family name," said Tom, still bitter after the quarrel. "But that's not enough for them. Rightly speaking, you should say 'His Grace the Duke of Monaburn', 'the Marquess of Rosseley', 'Lord this and the Honourable that'."

"You work here?" asked the stranger.

Tom realized that in his dishevelled state, with his sleeves rolled up and his apron flapping, he looked more like a disgruntled stable boy than the heir to a fortune. The truth was that he was virtually one of the family – he'd inherited a huge legacy from Frank's uncle, Lord George Fox-Selwyn, who had been brutally murdered not six months before.

The man spoke again before Frank could reply. "And Lord Francis Fox-Selwyn. What does he look like? About your age, I think?"

"No. Older," said Tom. He was still too angry to think properly, to realize that he had no reason to engage in conversation with a passing traveller. "He's older. And right now he looks mad. Crazy." Tom stopped himself, suddenly alive to the danger he and his friends might be in. Who was this man? What was Tom doing answering his impertinent questions?

They both looked up sharply as a dog started barking. A second later they could hear wheels and hooves, and a carriage pulled round a bend in the

road and through the gates to make its way towards the castle.

"That's odd," said Tom. "No one's expected." He turned back. The inquisitive stranger was gone.

Chapter 2

The Inspector

Tom galloped across the fields, knowing he could make it back to the castle before the carriage arrived. The stable yard was full of activity. Harvey, the chief family servant, had seen the carriage meandering along the drive, and was organizing a reception for the unexpected guest. Tom tried to tell him about the limping man.

"I haven't got time for that just now, sir. There's somebody coming."

"But he was asking questions. I think we ought to find out who he is."

"I'll get someone to go down to the village and see if he's been spotted there," said Harvey. "And I'll make sure everyone keeps an eye out for intruders. Now you go upstairs and get yourself cleaned up. Lunch is almost ready, and it looks as if you've got

company. The Duke won't like it if you go in looking like that."

"The Duke doesn't like me, whatever I look like," said Tom.

Harvey knew his place, and said nothing, but his kind smile showed that he understood. Tom went upstairs to his room as the mystery coach and horses were led into the yard behind him.

He washed and put on more presentable clothes. His mother was still in control of the money he had inherited, and would be for another seven years, until he was 21, but she had used some of it to buy him the sort of outfits the Fox-Selwyns had worn in their youth. Tom was getting used to starched collars and shiny shoes after a lifetime of rough work wear at home on the remote island of Tarimond.

He could hear voices from the library downstairs. The anger of a few minutes before had turned to a more polite, but serious, tone. From his window he could see the real stable lads tending to the horses that had brought the unexpected visitor to Glendarvie. He didn't recognize the coach from which they were being uncoupled. It wasn't a neighbour who had disturbed the family row.

Tom went downstairs and hovered outside the door of the library. He could hear Montmorency, the Duke, and another man with an English accent. A maid entered with a tray of tea, and the Duke caught

sight of Tom through the open door. He looked a little guiltily at the boy, and beckoned him to join them.

"Tom," he said, in a much calmer voice than before. "This is Inspector Howard from Scotland Yard. Inspector Howard. Tom Evans."

Tom shook hands with the policeman, who looked familiar.

He addressed the boy with all the respect due to his apparent class, and none of the contempt usually given to people of his youth. "We have met before, sir. Last summer. In London. After that unfortunate business."

"Oh yes," said Tom. "You came to ask Frank questions." He remembered how the police had spent days drawing information from Frank after the shoot-out at the Hippodrome theatre which had led to the smashing of an anarchist plot.

"Indeed. Lord Francis Fox-Selwyn was most helpful then," said Inspector Howard. "And I am hoping that he can help us again now."

"I'm sure he'll be only too pleased," said Tom. But the Duke interrupted him.

"Inspector, you must realize that my son has undergone a terrible ordeal. We have taken great trouble to keep him out of the public eye, and to make him safe from anyone who might wish him ill. After my brother's death we are all, to some extent,

liable to be in danger. Our only prudent course of action is to live quietly, and out of the way."

"I understand," said Howard. "But I fear that your son may be indispensable to our efforts." The Inspector stopped. He could not disguise his alarm as Frank came in, smartly dressed now, but still looking bizarre after his radical shave. "My lord," said Howard, awkwardly. "A pleasure to see you again, I'm sure."

In his surprise at seeing the policeman, Frank had quite forgotten about his bald head and missing eyebrows. His mind was back on the horrors of the previous summer, when he had nearly lost his life.

"How do you do, Inspector? What brings you here? I overheard you saying that I could help you."

"I have been explaining to His Grace and Mr Montmorency."

The Duke interrupted again. "And if you don't want to repeat yourself several times over, I suggest you save the full story until the family sit down for lunch. We are all involved in this, and I don't want secrets kept from anyone. Even young Tom here."

Montmorency saw how pleased Tom was by the Duke's implied acknowledgement of his place amongst the Fox-Selwyns. It was clear they assumed Tom was George's child. Montmorency had still not admitted that Tom was his son, and as ever, the time did not seem right. Particularly as Tom had news for them all.

"I saw a strange man on the edge of the estate." He told them the story of his encounter.

"This is worrying," said the Inspector. "We are going to have to be even more careful than I thought."

"We should search the grounds," said the Duke. "Really, Tom, you should have told us sooner."

"Go easy on the boy, Gus," said Montmorency. "We haven't given him the chance to say anything till now."

"And Harvey and his men are looking already," said Tom. "I told him straight away."

As he spoke, a drop of water fell from the ceiling on to Frank's bald head. The drip became a stream and everyone started rushing around, looking for something to catch the flood. Montmorency emptied the coal scuttle into the hearth and dragged it across, sending Tom to the kitchen to find someone with a bucket and mop. Then he dashed upstairs.

"It's Robert," he cried as he left the room. "He's left the taps running again."