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The Ash Tree – Part 2

The servants locked Sir Matthew's room that day and it stayed locked up for the next forty years. By that time, Sir Richard Fell, Sir Matthews grandson, was living at Castringham Hall.

He enjoyed spending money, especially on rebuilding parts of the Hall. He also decided to make the local church bigger so that his family could have a fine new seat in the new part of the church.

In order to complete this building work, some of the graves in the graveyard had to be moved. One of the graves was that of Mrs Mothersole, the old witch who began this story.

The villagers were excited about the opening of her grave and a crowd came to watch. However, they and the workmen were

amazed to find the grave completely empty: no body, no bones, no dust.

At about this time, Sir Richard started to sleep very badly. The wind made his fire smoke and the curtains move and, because his room faced east, the sun woke him up early in the morning.

One morning he asked his servant to help him choose a better room and he made a tour of the house, finding something wrong with each room. Each one was either too cold or too noisy or it faced the wrong direction.

Finally, he found himself outside his grandfather's old room. His servant tried to persuade him not to go in:

'It's a bad room, sir. They say terrible things happened in there, and no one has opened the door since the death of your grandfather. Also, the ash-tree is right outside the window and that's always unlucky, sir.'

But Sir Richard was not listening. He unlocked the door and walked straight in. 'See? Nothing unusual in here, James!' he said and he opened the window. As he did so, he noticed how tall and dark the ash-tree was. Its branches seemed to be trying to reach into the room.

But he said nothing. At that moment, a stranger rang the bell at the front door of the Hall.

The servant brought him up to the bedroom, where Sir Richard was standing, looking around him at the old paintings and old hooks. 'I must apologize for interrupting you. Sir

Richard,' said the stranger,' but please allow me to introduce myself.

My name is William Crome. My grandfather was the vicar here in your grandfather's time. I have some papers to deliver to you.' 'Delighted to meet you,' said Sir Richard. 'James, please bring us some wine in the library and then move my clothes and things into this room for me.

'I will sleep here in future.' While he was drinking a glass of wine with William Crome in the library. Sir Richard looked at the papers, many of which belonged to his grandfather.

Among them he found the notes made by the old vicar about the day of Sir Matthew's mysterious death.

'Well, well,' said Sir Richard, laughing quietly. 'How very interesting! It seems that my grandfather's Bible gave a piece of advice on the day he died and your grandfather thought it could be about that old ash-tree outside the bedroom window.

"Cut it down" the Good Book told him. Those were the first words your grandfather saw when he opened the Bible on the day of my grandfather's death.'

'Do you still have that old Bible?' asked William Crome, 'I'd very much like to see it.' Sir Richard found the old Bible easily. 'Yes, here it is. A bit dusty, I'm afraid. Let's see what it has to tell me.

I'll open it at any page and read the first words I see, just as your grandfather did.' He opened the book and his eyes fell on

the words, 'You shall look for me in the morning, and I shall not be here.'

Sir Richard was sure that the words were again about the ash-tree - the Bible was trying to give him some advice! He ordered some of his servants to cut it down the next day.