

John Cecil, 3rd Earl Exeter sat up in his huge bed. He dressed and started to descend the stairs when he smelt a disgusting stench. He walked into the great hall to find masses of dirty, foul-mouthed soldiers lounged on the fine oak floor around his feet. He discovered that it was a large group of royalist forces led by Viscount Campbell of Exton, his distant relation. The Viscount had retreated to the Great Hall to try and last out the roundhead's counter-offensive within its hallowed walls. As his father had died earlier in the civil war, John, only a fifteen-year-old, had naturally inherited the earldom, and the family house with it. Built by one of the greatest statesmen of his time, the house had been passed down the generations.

As soon as John could get to talk to the Viscount he told him exactly what he thought of him haughtily barging into his house. Campbell, in an infuriating display of blatant arrogance, ordered two of his brawny, giants of officers to escort John out of the room. As John regained his lost dignity and brushed himself off he looked out of the window over his green, rolling estate, where he saw half-a-dozen great roundhead cannons lumber up from behind a hill. He decided that he needed to save his beautiful house. After deducting, from snatches of foreign talk as he served the soldiers, that more than half the Viscount's forces were Flemish mercenaries, he realised that if he stole the money the Viscount was paying his foreign soldiers, they would instantly desert, and the viscount would be outnumbered and would be forced to surrender. John managed to enter the rooms that the royalists commandeered and saw the big cask that the money was kept in. He traversed the room silently, and after some resistance from the lid, was able to "borrow" the money. As he was about to leave he heard the lilting voice of the viscount, who was assuring one of his lieutenants that his mercenaries were loyal. After hiding under the bed, John hurriedly returned to the kitchen and sent one of his servants to spread the rumour that the mercenaries were not going to be paid. Soon the majority of the royalist forces started to ask to see the money they were going to be paid with. As John watched Campbell open the cask his heart was in his mouth . . .

As soon as the empty cask was discovered, the mercenaries unhesitatingly rebelled. John heard a sharp knock on the entrance doors and opened them to find a delegation of roundheads seeking a surrender. After being assured of payment, the fickle mercenaries instantly switched sides and the bewildered viscount was left with only a handful of his officers, standing in the hall.

As the seething Viscount was led away, John returned the coins he took from the cask. John smiled to himself, for he had successfully saved his hereditary home, the Great Burghley House.