

AURIOL
BY
WILLIAM
HARRISON
AINSWORTH

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER I

THE RUINED HOUSE IN THE VAUXHALL ROAD

Late one night, in the spring of 1830, two men issued from a low, obscurely situated public-house, near Millbank, and shaped their course apparently in the direction of Vauxhall Bridge. Avoiding the footpath near the river, they moved stealthily along the farther side of the road, where the open ground offered them an easy means of flight, in case such a course should be found expedient. So far as it could be discerned by the glimpses of the moon, which occasionally shone forth from a rack of heavy clouds, the appearance of these personages was not much in their favour. Haggard features, stamped deeply with the characters of crime and debauchery; fierce, restless eyes; beards of several days' growth; wild, unkempt heads of hair, formed their chief personal characteristics; while sordid and ragged clothes, shoes without soles, and old hats without crowns, constituted the sum of their apparel.

One of them was tall and gaunt, with large hands and feet; but despite his meagreness, he evidently possessed great strength: the other was considerably shorter, but broad-shouldered, bow-legged, long-armed, and altogether a most formidable ruffian. This fellow had high cheek-bones, a long aquiline nose, and a coarse mouth and chin, in which the animal greatly predominated. He had a stubby red beard, with sandy hair, white brows and eyelashes. The countenance of the other was dark and repulsive, and covered with blotches, the result of habitual intemperance. His eyes had a leering and malignant look. A handkerchief spotted with blood, and tied across his brow, contrasted strongly with his matted black hair, and increased his natural appearance of ferocity. The shorter ruffian carried a mallet upon his shoulder, and his companion concealed something beneath the breast of his coat, which afterwards proved to be a dark lantern.

Not a word passed between them; but keeping a vigilant look-out, they trudged on with quick, shambling steps. A few sounds arose from the banks of the river, and there was now and then a splash in the water, or a distant cry, betokening some passing craft; but generally all was profoundly still. The quaint, Dutch-looking structures on the opposite bank, the line of coal-barges and lighters moored to the strand, the great timber-yards and coal-yards, the brewhouses, gasworks, and waterworks, could only be imperfectly discerned; but the moonlight fell clear upon the ancient towers of Lambeth Palace, and on the neighbouring church. The same glimmer also ran like a silver belt across the stream, and revealed the great, stern, fortress-like pile of the Penitentiary—perhaps the most dismal-looking structure in the whole metropolis. The world of habitations beyond

this melancholy prison was buried in darkness. The two men, however, thought nothing of these things, and saw nothing of them; but, on arriving within a couple of hundred yards of the bridge, suddenly, as if by previous concert, quitted the road, and, leaping a rail, ran across a field, and plunged into a hollow formed by a dried pit, where they came to a momentary halt.

"You ain't a-been a-gammonin' me in this matter, Tinker?" observed the shorter individual. "The cove's sure to come?"

"Why, you can't expect me to answer for another as I can for myself, Sandman," replied the other; "but if his own word's to be taken for it, he's sartin to be there. I heerd him say, as plainly as I'm a speakin' to you—I'll be here to-morrow night—at the same hour—"

"And that wos one o'clock?" said the Sandman.

"Thereabouts," replied the other.

"And who did he say that to?" demanded the Sandman.

"To hisself, I s'pose," answered the Tinker; "for, as I told you afore, I could see no one vith him."

"Do you think he's one of our perfession?" inquired the Sandman.

"Bless you! no—that he ain't," returned the Tinker. "He's a reg'lar slap-up svell."

"That's no reason at all," said the Sandman. "Many a first-rate svell practises in our line. But he can't be in his right mind to come to such a ken as that, and go on as you mentions."

"As to that I can't say," replied the Tinker; "and it don't much matter, as far as ve're consarned."

"Devil a bit," rejoined the Sandman, "except—you're sure it worn't a sperrit, Tinker. I've heerd say that this crib is haanted, and though I don't fear no livin' man, a ghost's a different sort of customer."

"Vell, you'll find our svell raal flesh and blood, you may depend upon it," replied the Tinker. "So come along, and don't let's be frightenin' ourselves vith ould vimen's tales."

With this they emerged from the pit, crossed the lower part of the field, and entered a narrow thoroughfare, skirted by a few detached houses, which brought them into the Vauxhall Bridge Road.

Here they kept on the side of the street most in shadow, and crossed over whenever they came to a lamp. By-and-by, two watchmen were seen advancing from Belvoir Terrace, and, as the guardians of the night drew near, the ruffians crept into an alley to let them pass. As soon as the coast was clear, they ventured forth, and quickening their pace, came to a row of deserted and dilapidated houses. This was their destination.

The range of habitations in question, more than a dozen in number, were, in all probability, what is vulgarly called "in Chancery," and shared the fate of most property similarly circumstanced. They were in a sad ruinous state—unroofed, without windows and floors. The bare walls were alone left standing, and these were in a very tumble-down condition. These neglected dwellings served as receptacles for old iron, blocks of stone and wood, and other ponderous matters. The aspect of the whole place was so dismal and suspicious, that it was generally avoided by passengers after nightfall.

Skulking along the blank and dreary walls, the Tinker, who was now a little in advance, stopped before a door, and pushing it open, entered the dwelling. His companion followed him.

The extraordinary and incongruous assemblage of objects which met the gaze of the Sandman, coupled with the deserted appearance of the place, produced an effect upon his hardy but superstitious nature.

Looking round, he beheld huge mill-stones, enormous water-wheels, boilers of steam-engines, iron vats, cylinders, cranes, iron pumps of the strangest fashion, a gigantic pair of wooden scales, old iron safes, old boilers, old gas-pipes, old water-pipes, cracked old bells, old bird-cages, old plates of iron, old pulleys, ropes, and rusty chains, huddled and heaped together in the most fantastic disorder. In the midst of the chaotic mass frowned the bearded and colossal head of Neptune, which had once decorated the forepart of a man-of-war. Above it, on a sort of framework, lay the prostrate statue of a nymph, together with a bust of Fox, the nose of the latter being partly demolished, and the eyes knocked in. Above these, three garden divinities laid their heads amicably together. On the left stood a tall Grecian warrior, minus the head and right hand. The whole was surmounted by an immense ventilator, stuck on the end of an iron rod, ascending, like a lightning-conductor, from the steam-engine pump.

Seen by the transient light of the moon, the various objects above enumerated produced a strange effect upon the beholder's imagination. There was a mixture of the grotesque

and terrible about them. Nor was the building itself devoid of a certain influence upon his mind. The ragged brickwork, overgrown with weeds, took with him the semblance of a human face, and seemed to keep a wary eye on what was going forward below.

A means of crossing from one side of the building to the other, without descending into the vault beneath, was afforded by a couple of planks; though as the wall on the farther side was some feet higher than that near at hand, and the planks were considerably bent, the passage appeared hazardous.

Glancing round for a moment, the Tinker leaped into the cellar, and, unmasking his lantern, showed a sort of hiding-place, between a bulk of timber and a boiler, to which he invited his companion.

The Sandman jumped down.

"The ale I drank at the 'Two Fighting Cocks' has made me feel drowsy, Tinker," he remarked, stretching himself on the bulk; "I'll just take a snooze. Wake me up if I snore—or ven our sperrit appears."

The Tinker replied in the affirmative; and the other had just become lost to consciousness, when he received a nudge in the side, and his companion whispered—"He's here!"

"Where—where?" demanded the Sandman, in some trepidation.

"Look up, and you'll see him," replied the other.

Slightly altering his position, the Sandman caught sight of a figure standing upon the planks above them. It was that of a young man. His hat was off, and his features, exposed to the full radiance of the moon, looked deathly pale, and though handsome, had a strange sinister expression. He was tall, slight, and well-proportioned; and the general cut of his attire, the tightly-buttoned, single-breasted coat, together with the moustache upon his lip, gave him a military air.

"He seems a-valkin' in his sleep," muttered the Sandman. "He's a-speakin' to some von unwisible."

"Hush—hush!" whispered the other. "Let's hear wot he's a-sayin'."

"Why have you brought me here?" cried the young man, in a voice so hollow that it thrilled his auditors. "What is to be done?"

"It makes my blood run cold to hear him," whispered the Sandman. "Vot d'ye think he sees?"

"Why do you not speak to me?" cried the young man—"why do you beckon me forward? Well, I obey. I will follow you."

And he moved slowly across the plank.

"See, he's a-goin' through that door," cried the Tinker. "Let's foller him."

"I don't half like it," replied the Sandman, his teeth chattering with apprehension. "We shall see summat as'll take away our senses."

"Tut!" cried the Tinker; "it's only a sleepy-valker. Wot are you afeerd on?"

With this he vaulted upon the planks, and peeping cautiously out of the open door to which they led, saw the object of his scrutiny enter the adjoining house through a broken window.

Making a sign to the Sandman, who was close at his heels, the Tinker crept forward on all fours, and, on reaching the window, raised himself just sufficiently to command the interior of the dwelling. Unfortunately for him, the moon was at this moment obscured, and he could distinguish nothing except the dusky outline of the various objects with which the place was filled, and which were nearly of the same kind as those of the neighbouring habitation. He listened intently, but not the slightest sound reached his ears.

After some time spent in this way, he began to fear the young man must have departed, when all at once a piercing scream resounded through the dwelling. Some heavy matter was dislodged, with a thundering crash, and footsteps were heard approaching the window.

Hastily retreating to their former hiding-place, the Tinker and his companion had scarcely regained it, when the young man again appeared on the plank. His demeanour had undergone a fearful change. He staggered rather than walked, and his countenance was even paler than before. Having crossed the plank, he took his way along the top of the broken wall towards the door.

"Now, then, Sandman!" cried the Tinker; "now's your time!"

The other nodded, and, grasping his mallet with a deadly and determined purpose, sprang noiselessly upon the wall, and overtook his intended victim just before he gained the door.

Hearing a sound behind him, the young man turned, and only just became conscious of the presence of the Sandman, when the mallet descended upon his head, and he fell crushed and senseless to the ground.

The Ruined house in the Vauxhall Road

"The work's done!" cried the Sandman to his companion, who instantly came up with the dark lantern; "let's take him below, and strip him."

"Agreed," replied the Tinker; "but first let's see wot he has got in his pockets."

"Vith all my 'art," replied the Sandman, searching the clothes of the victim. "A reader!—I hope it's well lined. Ve'll examine it below. The body 'ud tell awkward tales if any von should chance to peep in."

"Shall we strip him here?" said the Tinker. "Now the darkey shines on 'em, you see what famous togs the cull has on."

"Do you vant to have us scragged, fool?" cried the Sandman, springing into the vault. "Hoist him down here."

With this, he placed the wounded man's legs over his own shoulders, and, aided by his comrade, was in the act of heaving down the body, when the street-door suddenly flew open, and a stout individual, attended by a couple of watchmen, appeared at it.

"There the villains are!" shouted the new-comer. "They have been murderin' a gentleman. Seize 'em—seize 'em!"

And, as he spoke, he discharged a pistol, the ball from which whistled past the ears of the Tinker.

Without waiting for another salute of the same kind, which might possibly be nearer its mark, the ruffian kicked the lantern into the vault, and sprang after the Sandman, who had already disappeared.

Acquainted with the intricacies of the place, the Tinker guided his companion through a hole into an adjoining vault, whence they scaled a wall, got into the next house, and passing through an open window, made good their retreat, while the watchmen were vainly searching for them under every bulk and piece of iron.

"Here, watchmen!" cried the stout individual, who had acted as leader; "never mind the villains just now, but help me to convey this poor young gentleman to my house, where proper assistance can be rendered him. He still breathes; but he has received a terrible blow on the head. I hope his skull ain't broken."

"It is to be hoped it ain't, Mr. Thorneycroft," replied the foremost watchman; "but them was two desperate characters as ever I see, and capable of any hatterosity."

"What a frightful scream I heard to be sure!" cried Mr. Thorneycroft. "I was certain somethin' dreadful was goin' on. It was fortunate I wasn't gone to bed; and still more fortunate you happened to be comin' up at the time. But we mustn't stand chatterin' here. Bring the poor young gentleman along."

Preceded by Mr. Thorneycroft, the watchmen carried the wounded man across the road towards a small house, the door of which was held open by a female servant, with a candle in her hand. The poor woman uttered a cry of horror as the body was brought in.

"Don't be cryin' out in that way, Peggy," cried Mr. Thorneycroft, "but go and get me some brandy. Here, watchmen, lay the poor young gentleman down on the sofa—there, gently, gently. And now, one of you run to Wheeler Street, and fetch Mr. Howell, the surgeon. Less noise, Peggy—less noise, or you'll waken Miss Ebba, and I wouldn't have her disturbed for the world."

With this, he snatched the bottle of brandy from the maid, filled a wine-glass with the spirit, and poured it down the throat of the wounded man. A stifling sound followed, and after struggling violently for respiration for a few seconds, the patient opened his eyes.

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CHAPTER II

THE DOG-FANCIER

The Rookery! Who that has passed Saint Giles's, on the way to the city, or coming from it, but has caught a glimpse, through some narrow opening, of its squalid habitations, and wretched and ruffianly occupants! Who but must have been struck with amazement, that such a huge receptacle of vice and crime should be allowed to exist in the very heart of the metropolis, like an ulcerated spot, capable of tainting the whole system! Of late, the progress of improvement has caused its removal; but whether any less cogent motive would have abated the nuisance may be questioned. For years the evil was felt and complained of, but no effort was made to remedy it, or to cleanse these worse than Augean stables. As the place is now partially, if not altogether, swept away, and a wide and airy street passes through the midst of its foul recesses, a slight sketch may be given of its former appearance.

Entering a narrow street, guarded by posts and cross-bars, a few steps from the crowded thoroughfare brought you into a frightful region, the refuge, it was easy to perceive, of half the lawless characters infesting the metropolis. The coarsest ribaldry assailed your ears, and noisome odours afflicted your sense of smell. As you advanced, picking your way through kennels flowing with filth, or over putrescent heaps of rubbish and oyster-shells, all the repulsive and hideous features of the place were displayed before you. There was something savagely picturesque in the aspect of the place, but its features were too loathsome to be regarded with any other feeling than disgust. The houses looked as sordid, and as thickly crusted with the leprosy of vice, as their tenants. Horrible habitations they were, in truth. Many of them were without windows, and where the frames were left, brown paper or tin supplied the place of glass; some even wanted doors, and no effort was made to conceal the squalor within. On the contrary, it seemed to be intruded on observation. Miserable rooms, almost destitute of furniture; floors and walls caked with dirt, or decked with coarse flaring prints; shameless and abandoned-looking women; children without shoes and stockings, and with scarcely a rag to their backs: these were the chief objects that met the view. Of men, few were visible—the majority being out on business, it is to be presumed; but where a solitary straggler was seen, his sinister looks and mean attire were in perfect keeping with the spot. So thickly inhabited were these wretched dwellings, that every chamber, from garret to cellar, swarmed with inmates. As to the cellars, they looked like dismal caverns, which a wild beast would shun. Clothes-lines were hung from house to house, festooned with every kind of garment. Out of the main street branched several alleys and passages,

all displaying the same degree of misery, or, if possible, worse, and teeming with occupants. Personal security, however, forbade any attempt to track these labyrinths; but imagination, after the specimen afforded, could easily picture them. It was impossible to move a step without insult or annoyance. Every human being seemed brutalised and degraded; and the women appeared utterly lost to decency, and made the street ring with their cries, their quarrels, and their imprecations. It was a positive relief to escape from this hotbed of crime to the world without, and breathe a purer atmosphere.

Such being the aspect of the Rookery in the daytime, what must it have been when crowded with its denizens at night! Yet at such an hour it will now be necessary to enter its penetralia.

After escaping from the ruined house in the Vauxhall Road, the two ruffians shaped their course towards Saint Giles's, running the greater part of the way, and reaching the Broadway just as the church clock struck two. Darting into a narrow alley, and heedless of any obstructions they encountered in their path, they entered a somewhat wider cross-street, which they pursued for a short distance, and then struck into an entry, at the bottom of which was a swing-door that admitted them into a small court, where they found a dwarfish person wrapped in a tattered watchman's greatcoat, seated on a stool with a horn lantern in his hand and a cutty in his mouth, the glow of which lighted up his hard, withered features. This was the deputy-porter of the lodging-house they were about to enter. Addressing him by the name of Old Parr, the ruffians passed on, and lifting the latch of another door, entered a sort of kitchen, at the farther end of which blazed a cheerful fire, with a large copper kettle boiling upon it. On one side of the room was a deal table, round which several men of sinister aspect and sordid attire were collected, playing, at cards. A smaller table of the same material stood near the fire, and opposite it was a staircase leading to the upper rooms. The place was dingy and dirty in the extreme, the floors could not have been scoured for years, and the walls were begrimed with filth. In one corner, with his head resting on a heap of coals and coke, lay a boy almost as black as a chimney-sweep, fast asleep. He was the waiter. The principal light was afforded by a candle stuck against the wall, with a tin reflector behind it. Before the fire, with his back turned towards it, stood a noticeable individual, clad in a velveteen jacket with ivory buttons, a striped waistcoat, drab knees, a faded black silk neckcloth tied in a great bow, and a pair of ancient Wellingtons ascending half-way up his legs, which looked disproportionately thin when compared with the upper part of his square, robustious, and somewhat puffy frame. His face was broad, jolly, and good-humoured, with a bottle-shaped nose, fleshy lips, and light grey eyes, glistening with cunning and roguery. His hair, which dangled in long flakes over his ears and neck, was of a dunnish red, as were also his whiskers and beard. A superannuated white castor, with a black hat-band round it, was cocked knowingly on one side of his head, and gave

him a flashy and sporting look. His particular vocation was made manifest by the number of dogs he had about him. A beautiful black-and-tan spaniel, of Charles the Second's breed, popped its short snubby nose and long silken ears out of each coat-pocket. A pug was thrust into his breast, and he carried an exquisite Blenheim under either arm. At his feet reposed an Isle of Skye terrier, and a partly cropped French poodle, of snowy whiteness, with a red worsted riband round his throat. This person, it need scarcely be said, was a dog-fancier, or, in other words, a dealer in, and a stealer of, dogs, as well as a practiser of all the tricks connected with that nefarious trade. His self-satisfied air made it evident he thought himself a smart, clever fellow,—and adroit and knavish he was, no doubt,—while his droll, plausible, and rather winning manners helped him materially to impose upon his customers. His real name was Taylor, but he was known among his companions by the appellation of Ginger. On the entrance of the Sandman and the Tinker, he nodded familiarly to them, and with a sly look inquired—"Vell, my 'arties—wot luck?"

"Oh, pretty middlin'," replied the Sandman gruffly.

And seating himself at the table, near the fire, he kicked up the lad, who was lying fast asleep on the coals, and bade him fetch a pot of half-and-half. The Tinker took a place beside him, and they waited in silence the arrival of the liquor, which, when it came, was disposed of at a couple of pulls; while Mr. Ginger, seeing they were engaged, sauntered towards the card-table, attended by his four-footed companions.

"And now," said the Sandman, unable to control his curiosity longer, and taking out his pocket-book, "we'll see what fortun' has given us."

The Dog-fancier.

So saying, he unclasped the pocket-book, while the Tinker bent over him in eager curiosity. But their search for money was fruitless. Not a single bank-note was forthcoming. There were several memoranda and slips of paper, a few cards, and an almanac for the year—that was all. It was a great disappointment.

"So we've had all this trouble for nuffin', and nearly got shot into the bargain," cried the Sandman, slapping down the book on the table with an oath. "I vish I'd never undertaken the job."

"Don't let's give it up in sich an 'urry," replied the Tinker; "summat may be made on it yet. Let's look over them papers."

"Look 'em over yourself," rejoined the Sandman, pushing the book towards him. "I've done wi' 'em. Here, lazy-bones, bring two glasses o' rum-and-water—stiff, d'ye hear?"

While the sleepy youth bestirred himself to obey these injunctions, the Tinker read over every memorandum in the pocket-book, and then proceeded carefully to examine the different scraps of paper with which it was filled. Not content with one perusal, he looked them all over again, and then began to rub his hands with great glee.

"Wot's the matter?" cried the Sandman, who had lighted a cutty, and was quietly smoking it. "Wot's the row, eh?"

"Vy, this is it," replied the Tinker, unable to contain his satisfaction; "there's secrets contained in this here pocket-book as'll be worth a hundred pound and better to us. We ha'n't had our trouble for nuffin'."

"Glad to hear it!" said the Sandman, looking hard at him. "Wot kind o' secrets are they?"

"Vy, hangin' secrets," replied the Tinker, with mysterious emphasis. "He seems to be a terrible chap, and to have committed murder wholesale."

"Wholesale!" echoed the Sandman, removing the pipe from his lips. "That sounds awful. But what a precious donkey he must be to register his crimes i' that way."

"He didn't expect the pocket-book to fall into our hands," said the Tinker.

"Werry likely not," replied the Sandman; "but somebody else might see it. I repeat, he must be a fool. S'pose we wos to make a entry of everythin' we does. Wot a nice balance there'd be agin us ven our accounts comed to be wound up!"

"Ourn is a different bus'ness altogether," replied the Tinker. "This seems a werry mysterious sort o' person. Wot age should you take him to be?"

"Vy, five-an'-twenty at the outside," replied the Sandman.

"Five-an'-sixty 'ud be nearer the mark," replied the Tinker. "There's dates as far back as that."

"Five-an'-sixty devils!" cried the Sandman; "there must be some mistake i' the reckonin' there."

"No, it's all clear an' reg'lar," rejoined the other; "and that doesn't seem to be the end of it neither. I looked over the papers twice, and one, dated 1780, refers to some other dokuments."

"They must relate to his granddad, then," said the Sandman; "it's impossible they can refer to him."

"But I tell 'ee they do refer to him," said the Tinker, somewhat angrily, at having his assertion denied; "at least, if his own word's to be taken. Anyhow, these papers is valuable to us. If no one else believes in 'em, it's clear he believes in 'em hisself, and will be glad to buy 'em from us."

"That's a view o' the case worthy of an Old Bailey lawyer," replied the Sandman. "Wot's the gemman's name?"

"The name on the card is Auriol Darcy," replied the Tinker.

"Any address?" asked the Sandman.

The Tinker shook his head.

"That's unlucky agin," said the Sandman. "Ain't there no sort o' clue?"

"None votiver, as I can perceive," said the Tinker.

"Vy, zounds, then, ve're jist vere ve started from," cried the Sandman. "But it don't matter. There's not much chance o' makin' a bargain vith him. The crack o' the skull I gave him has done his bus'ness."

"Nuffin' o' the kind," replied the Tinker. "He always recovers from every kind of accident."

"Always recovers!" exclaimed the Sandman, in amazement. "Wot a constitootion he must have!"

"Surprisin'!" replied the Tinker; "he never suffers from injuries—at least, not much; never grows old; and never expects to die; for he mentions wot he intends doin' a hundred years hence."

"Oh, he's a lu-nattic!" exclaimed the Sandman, "a downright lu-nattic; and that accounts for his wisitin' that 'ere ruined house, and a-fancyin' he heerd some one talk to him. He's mad, depend upon it. That is, if I ain't cured him."

"I'm of a different opinion," said the Tinker.

"And so am I," said Mr. Ginger, who had approached unobserved, and overheard the greater part of their discourse.

"Vy, vot can you know about it, Ginger?" said the Sandman, looking up, evidently rather annoyed.

"I only know this," replied Ginger, "that you've got a good case, and if you'll let me into it, I'll engage to make summat of it."

"Vell, I'm agreeable," said the Sandman.

"And so am I," added the Tinker.

"Not that I pays much regard to wot you've bin a readin' in his papers," pursued Ginger; "the gemman's evidently half-cracked, if he ain't cracked altogether—but he's jist the person to work upon. He fancies hisself immortal—eh?"

"Exactly so," replied the Tinker.

"And he also fancies he's committed a lot o' murders?" perused Ginger.

"A desperate lot," replied the Tinker.

"Then he'll be glad to buy those papers at any price," said Ginger. "Ve'll deal vith him in regard to the pocket-book, as I deals vith regard to a dog—ask a price for its restitootion."

"We must find him out first," said the Sandman.

"There's no difficulty in that," rejoined Ginger. "You must be constantly on the look-out. You're sure to meet him some time or other."

"That's true," replied the Sandman; "and there's no fear of his knowin' us, for the werry moment he looked round I knocked him on the head."

"Arter all," said the Tinker, "there's no branch o' the perfession so safe as yours, Ginger. The law is favourable to you, and the beaks is afeerd to touch you. I think I shall turn dog-fancier myself."

"It's a good business," replied Ginger, "but it requires a hedication. As I was sayin', we gets a high price sometimes for restorin' a favourite, especially ven ve've a soft-hearted lady to deal vith. There's some vimen as fond o' dogs as o' their own childer, and ven ve gets one o' their precious pets, ve makes 'em ransom it as the brigands you see at the Adelphi or the Surrey sarves their prisoners, threatenin' to send first an ear, and then a paw, or a tail, and so on. I'll tell you wot happened t'other day. There was a lady—a Miss Vite—as was desperate fond of her dog. It was a ugly warmint, but no matter for that—the creater had gained her heart. Vell, she lost it; and, somehow or other, I found it. She vos in great trouble, and a friend o' mine calls to say she can have the dog agin, but she must pay eight pound for it. She thinks this dear, and a friend o' her own advises her to wait, sayin' better terms will be offered; so I sends vord by my friend that if she don't come down at once the poor animal's throat vill be cut that werry night."

"Ha!—ha!—ha!" laughed the others.

"Vell, she sent four pound, and I put up with it," pursued Ginger; "but about a month arterwards she loses her favourite agin, and, strange to say, I finds it. The same game is played over agin, and she comes down with another four pound. But she takes care this time that I shan't repeat the trick; for no sooner does she obtain persession of her favourite than she embarks in the steamer for France, in the hope of keeping her dog safe there."

"Oh! Miss Bailey, unfortinate Miss Bailey!—Fol-de-riddle-tol-ol-lol—unfortinate Miss Bailey!" sang the Tinker.

"But there's dog-fanciers in France, ain't there?" asked the Sandman.

"Lor' bless 'ee, yes," replied Ginger; "there's as many fanciers i' France as here. Vy, ve drives a smartish trade wi' them through them foreign steamers. There's scarcely a steamer as leaves the port o' London but takes out a cargo o' dogs. Ve sells 'em to the stewards, stokers, and sailors—cheap—and no questins asked. They goes to Ostend, Antverp, Rotterdam, Hamburg, and sometimes to Havre. There's a Mounseer Coquiquu as comes over to buy dogs, and ve takes 'em to him at a house near Billinsgit market."

"Then you're always sure o' a ready market somehow," observed the Sandman.

"Sartin," replied Ginger, "cos the law's so kind to us. Vy, bless you, a perliceman can't detain us, even if he knows ve've a stolen dog in our persession, and ve svears it's our own; and yet he'd stop you in a minnit if he seed you with a suspicious-lookin' bundle under your arm. Now, jist to show you the difference atwixt the two perfessions:—I steals a dog—value, maybe, fifty pound, or p'raps more. Even if I'm caught i' the fact I may get fined twenty pound, or have six months' imprisonment; vile, if you steals an old fogle, value three fardens, you'll get seven years abroad, to a dead certainty."

"That seems hard on us," observed the Sandman reflectively.

"It's the law!" exclaimed Ginger triumphantly. "Now, ve generally escapes by payin' the fine, 'cos our pals goes and steals more dogs to raise the money. Ve always stands by each other. There's a reg'lar horganisation among us; so ve can always bring vitnesses to swear vot ve likes, and ve so puzzles the beaks, that the case gets dismissed, and the constable says, 'Vich party shall I give the dog to, your vorship?' Upon vich, the beak replies, a-shakin' of his vise noddle, 'Give it to the person in whose persession it was found. I have nuffin' more to do with it.' In course the dog is delivered up to us."

"The law seems made for dog-fanciers," remarked the Tinker.

"Wot d'ye think o' this?" pursued Ginger. "I was a-standin' at the corner o' Gray's Inn Lane vith some o' my pals near a coach-stand, ven a lady passes by vith this here dog—an' a beauty it is, a real long-eared Charley—a follerin' of her. Vell, the moment I spies it, I unties my apron, whips up the dog, and covers it up in a trice. Vell, the lady sees me, an' gives me in charge to a perliceman. But that si'nifies nuffin'. I brings six vitnesses to swear the dog vos mine, and I actually had it since it vos a blind little puppy; and, wot's more, I brings its mother, and that settles the pint. So in course I'm discharged; the dog is given up to me; and the lady goes away lamentin'. I then plays the amiable, an' offers to sell it her for twenty guineas, seein' as how she had taken a fancy to it; but she von't bite. So if I don't sell it next week, I shall send it to Mounseer Coquillu. The only vay you can go wrong is to steal a dog wi' a collar on, for if you do, you may get seven years' transportation for a bit o' leather and a brass plate vorth a shillin', vile the animal, though vorth a hundred pound, can't hurt you. There's law again—ha, ha!"

"Dog-fancier's law!" laughed the Sandman.

"Some of the Fancy is given to cruelty," pursued Ginger, "and crops a dog's ears, or pulls out his teeth to disguise him; but I'm too fond o' the animal for that. I may frighten old ladies sometimes, as I told you afore, but I never seriously hurts their pets. Nor did I ever kill a dog for his skin, as some on 'em does."

"And you're always sure o' gettin' a dog, if you wants it, I s'pose?" inquired the Tinker.

"Always," replied Ginger. "No man's dog is safe. I don't care how he's kept, ve're sure to have him at last. Ve feels our vay with the sarvents, and finds out from them the walley the master or missis sets on the dog, and soon after that the animal's gone. With a bit o' liver, prepared in my partic'lar vay, I can tame the fiercest dog as ever barked, take him off his chain, an' bring him arter me at a gallop."

"And do respectable parties ever buy dogs knowin' they're stolen?" inquired the Tinker.

"Ay, to be sure," replied Ginger; "sometimes first-rate nobbs. They put us up to it themselves; they'll say, 'I've jist left my Lord So-and-So's, and there I seed a couple o' the finest pointers I ever clapped eyes on. I vant you to get me jist sich another couple.' Vell, ve understands in a minnit, an' in doo time the identicle dogs finds their vay to our customer."

"Oh! that's how it's done?" remarked the Sandman.

"Yes, that's the vay," replied Ginger. "Sometimes a party'll vant a couple o' dogs for the shootin' season; and then ve asks, 'Vich vay are you a-goin'—into Surrey or Kent?' And accordin' as the answer is given ve arranges our plans."

"Vell, yourn appears a profitable and safe employment, I must say," remarked the Sandman.

"Perfectly so," replied Ginger. "Nothin' can touch us till dogs is declared by statute to be property, and stealin' 'em a misdemeanour. And that won't occur in my time."

"Let's hope not," rejoined the other two.

"To come back to the pint from vich we started," said the Tinker; "our gemman's case is not so surprisin' as it at first appears. There are some persons as believe they never will die—and I myself am of the same opinion. There's our old deputy here—him as ve calls Old Parr—vy, he declares he lived in Queen Bess's time, recollects King Charles bein' beheaded perfectly vell, and remembers the Great Fire o' London, as if it only occurred yesterday."

"Walker!" exclaimed Ginger, putting his finger to his nose.

"You may larf, but it's true," replied the Tinker. "I recollect an old man tellin' me that he knew the deputy sixty years ago, and he looked jist the same then as now,—neither older nor younger."

"Humph!" exclaimed Ginger. "He don't look so old now."

"That's the cur'ousest part of it," said the Tinker. "He don't like to talk of his age unless you can get him i' the humour; but he once told me he didn't know why he lived so long, unless it were owin' to a potion he'd swallowed, vich his master, who was a great conjurer in Queen Bess's days, had brew'd."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Ginger. "I thought you too knowin' a cove, Tinker, to be gulled by such an old vife's story as that."

"Let's have the old fellow in and talk to him," replied the Tinker. "Here, lazy-bones," he added, rousing the sleeping youth, "go an' tell Old Parr ve wants his company over a glass o' rum-an'-vater."

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER III

THE HAND AND THE CLOAK

A furious barking from Mr. Ginger's dogs, shortly after the departure of the drowsy youth, announced the approach of a grotesque-looking little personage, whose shoulders barely reached to a level with the top of the table. This was Old Parr. The dwarf's head was much too large for his body, as is mostly the case with undersized persons, and was covered with a forest of rusty black hair, protected by a strangely shaped seal-skin cap. His hands and feet were equally disproportioned to his frame, and his arms were so long that he could touch his ankles while standing upright. His spine was crooked, and his head appeared buried in his breast. The general character of his face seemed to appertain to the middle period of life; but a closer inspection enabled the beholder to detect in it marks of extreme old age. The nose was broad and flat, like that of an ourang-outang; the resemblance to which animal was heightened by a very long upper lip, projecting jaws, almost total absence of chin, and a retreating forehead. The little old man's complexion was dull and swarthy, but his eyes were keen and sparkling.

His attire was as singular as his person. Having recently served as double to a famous demon-dwarf at the Surrey Theatre, he had become possessed of a cast-off pair of tawny tights, an elastic shirt of the same material and complexion, to the arms of which little green bat-like wings were attached, while a blood-red tunic with vandyke points was girded round his waist. In this strange apparel his diminutive limbs were encased, while additional warmth was afforded by the greatcoat already mentioned, the tails of which swept the floor after him like a train.

Having silenced his dogs with some difficulty, Mr. Ginger burst into a roar of laughter, excited by the little old man's grotesque appearance, in which he was joined by the Tinker; but the Sandman never relaxed a muscle of his sullen countenance.

Their hilarity, however, was suddenly checked by an inquiry from the dwarf, in a shrill, odd tone, "Whether they had sent for him only to laugh at him?"

"Sartainly not, deputy," replied the Tinker. "Here, lazy-bones, glasses o' rum-an'-vater, all round."

The drowsy youth bestirred himself to execute the command. The spirit was brought; water was procured from the boiling copper; and the Tinker handed his guest a smoking rummer, accompanied with a polite request to make himself comfortable.

Opposite the table at which the party were seated, it has been said, was a staircase—old and crazy, and but imperfectly protected by a broken hand-rail. Midway up it stood a door equally dilapidated, but secured by a chain and lock, of which Old Parr, as deputy-chamberlain, kept the key. Beyond this point the staircase branched off on the right, and a row of stout wooden banisters, ranged like the feet of so many cattle, was visible from beneath. Ultimately, the staircase reached a small gallery, if such a name can be applied to a narrow passage communicating with the bedrooms, the doors of which, as a matter of needful precaution, were locked outside; and as the windows were grated, no one could leave his chamber without the knowledge of the landlord or his representative. No lights were allowed in the bedrooms, nor in the passage adjoining them.

Conciliated by the Tinker's offering, Old Parr mounted the staircase, and planting himself near the door, took off his greatcoat, and sat down upon it. His impish garb being thus more fully displayed, he looked so unearthly and extraordinary that the dogs began to howl fearfully, and Ginger had enough to do to quiet them.

Silence being at length restored, the Tinker, winking slyly at his companions, opened the conversation.

"I say, deputy," he observed, "ve've bin havin' a bit o' a dispute vich you can settle for us."

"Well, let's see," squeaked the dwarf. "What is it?"

"Vy, it's relative to your age," rejoined the Tinker. "Ven was you born?"

"It's so long ago, I can't recollect," returned Old Parr rather sulkily.

"You must ha' seen some changes in your time?" resumed the Tinker, waiting till the little old man had made some progress with his grog.

"I rayther think I have—a few," replied Old Parr, whose tongue the generous liquid had loosened. "I've seen this great city of London pulled down, and built up again—if that's anything. I've seen it grow, and grow, till it has reached its present size. You'll scarcely believe me, when I tell you, that I recollect this Rookery of ours—this foul vagabond neighbourhood—an open country field, with hedges round it, and trees. And a lovely spot it was. Broad Saint Giles's, at the time I speak of, was a little country village,

consisting of a few straggling houses standing by the roadside, and there wasn't a single habitation between it and Convent Garden (for so the present market was once called); while that garden, which was fenced round with pales, like a park, extended from Saint Martin's Lane to Drury House, a great mansion situated on the easterly side of Drury Lane, amid a grove of beautiful timber."

"My eyes!" cried Ginger, with a prolonged whistle; "the place must be preciously transmogrified indeed!"

"If I were to describe the changes that have taken place in London since I've known it, I might go on talking for a month," pursued Old Parr. "The whole aspect of the place is altered. The Thames itself is unlike the Thames of old. Its waters were once as clear and bright above London Bridge as they are now at Kew or Richmond; and its banks, from Whitefriars to Scotland Yard, were edged with gardens. And then the thousand gay wherries and gilded barges that covered its bosom—all are gone—all are gone!"

"Those must ha' been nice times for the jolly young vatermen vich at Black friars was used for to ply," chanted the Tinker; "but the steamers has put their noses out o' joint."

"True," replied Old Parr; "and I, for one, am sorry for it. Remembering, as I do, what the river used to be when enlightened by gay craft and merry company, I can't help wishing its waters less muddy, and those ugly coal-barges, lighters, and steamers away. London is a mighty city, wonderful to behold and examine, inexhaustible in its wealth and power; but in point of beauty it is not to be compared with the city of Queen Bess's days. You should have seen the Strand then—a line of noblemen's houses—and as to Lombard Street and Gracechurch Street, with their wealthy goldsmiths' shops—but I don't like to think of 'em."

"Vell, I'm content vith Lunnun as it is," replied the Tinker, "'specially as there ain't much chance o' the ould city bein' rewived."

"Not much," replied the dwarf, finishing his glass, which was replenished at a sign from the Tinker.

"I s'pose, my wenerable, you've seen the king as bequeathed his name to these pretty creators," said Ginger, raising his coat-pockets, so as to exhibit the heads of the two little black-and-tan spaniels.

"What! old Rowley?" cried the dwarf—"often. I was page to his favourite mistress, the Duchess of Cleveland, and I have seen him a hundred times with a pack of dogs of that description at his heels."

"Old Rowley was a king arter my own 'art," said Ginger, rising and lighting a pipe at the fire. "He loved the femi-nine specious as well as the ca-nine specious. Can you tell us anythin' more about him?"

"Not now," replied Old Parr. "I've seen so much, and heard so much, that my brain is quite addled. My memory sometimes deserts me altogether, and my past life appears like a dream. Imagine what my feelings must be, to walk through streets, still called by the old names, but in other respects wholly changed. Oh! if you could but have a glimpse of Old London, you would not be able to endure the modern city. The very atmosphere was different from that which we now breathe, charged with the smoke of myriads of sea-coal fires; and the old picturesque houses had a charm about them, which the present habitations, however commodious, altogether want."

"You talk like one o' them smart chaps they calls, and werry properly, penny-a-liars," observed Ginger. "But you make me long to ha' lived i' those times."

"If you had lived in them, you would have belonged to Paris Garden, or the bull-baiting and bear-baiting houses in Southwark," replied Old Parr. "I've seen fellows just like you at each of those places. Strange, though times and fashions change, men continue the same. I often meet a face that I can remember in James the First's time. But the old places are gone—clean gone!"

"Accordin' to your own showin', my venerable friend, you must ha' lived uppards o' two hundred and seventy year," said Ginger, assuming a consequential manner. "Now, doorin' all that time, have you never felt inclined to kick the bucket?"

"Not the least," replied Old Parr. "My bodily health has been excellent. But, as I have just said, my intellects are a little impaired."

"Not a little, I should think," replied Ginger, hemming significantly. "I don't know vether you're a deceivin' of us or yourself, my venerable; but von thing's quite clear—you can't have lived all that time. It's not in nater."

"Very well, then—I haven't," said Old Parr.

And he finished his rum-and-water, and set down the glass, which was instantly filled again by the drowsy youth.

"You've seen some picters o' Old Lunnon, and they've haanted you in your dreams, till you've begun to fancy you lived in those times," said Ginger.

"Very likely," replied Old Parr—"very likely."

There was something, however, in his manner calculated to pique the dog-fancier's curiosity.

"How comes it," he said, stretching out his legs, and arranging his neckcloth,— "how comes it, if you've lived so long, that you ain't higher up in the stirrups—better off, as folks say?"

The dwarf made no reply, but covering his face with his hands, seemed a prey to deep emotion. After a few moments' pause, Ginger repeated the question.

"If you won't believe what I tell you, it's useless to give an answer," said Old Parr, somewhat gruffly.

"Oh yes, I believe you, deputy," observed the Tinker, "and so does the Sandman."

"Well, then," replied the dwarf, "I'll tell you how it comes to pass. Fate has been against me. I've had plenty of chances, but I never could get on. I've been in a hundred different walks of life, but they always led down hill. It's my destiny."

"That's hard," rejoined the Tinker—"werry hard. But how d'ye account for livin' so long?" he added, winking as he spoke to the others.

"I've already given you an explanation," replied the dwarf.

"Av, but it's a cur'ous story, and I vants my friends to hear it," said the Tinker, in a coaxing tone.

"Well then, to oblige you, I'll go through it again," rejoined the dwarf. "You must know I was for some time servant to Doctor Lamb, an old alchemist, who lived during the reign of good Queen Bess, and who used to pass all his time in trying to find out the secret of changing lead and copper into gold."

"I've known several individuals as has found out that secret, venerable," observed Ginger. "And ve calls 'em smashers, nowadays—not halchemists."

"Doctor Lamb's object was actually to turn base metal into gold," rejoined Old Parr, in a tone of slight contempt. "But his chief aim was to produce the elixir of long life. Night and day he worked at the operation;—night and day I laboured with him, until at last we

were both brought to the verge of the grave in our search after immortality. One night—I remember it well,—it was the last night of the sixteenth century,—a young man, severely wounded, was brought to my master's dwelling on London Bridge. I helped to convey him to the laboratory, where I left him with the doctor, who was busy with his experiments. My curiosity being aroused, I listened at the door, and though I could not distinguish much that passed inside, I heard sufficient to convince me that Doctor Lamb had made the grand discovery, and succeeded in distilling the elixir. Having learnt this, I went down-stairs, wondering what would next ensue. Half-an-hour elapsed, and while the bells were ringing in the new year joyfully, the young man whom I had assisted to carry up-stairs, and whom I supposed at death's door, marched down as firmly as if nothing had happened, passed by me, and disappeared, before I could shake off my astonishment. I saw at once he had drunk the elixir."

"Ah!—ah!" exclaimed the Tinker, with a knowing glance at his companions, who returned it with gestures of equal significance.

"As soon as he was gone," pursued the dwarf, "I flew to the laboratory, and there, extended on the floor, I found the dead body of Doctor Lamb. I debated with myself what to do—whether to pursue his murderer, for such I accounted the young man; but, on reflection, I thought the course useless. I next looked round to see whether the precious elixir was gone. On the table stood a phial, from which a strong spirituous odour exhaled; but it was empty. I then turned my attention to a receiver, connected by a worm with an alembic on the furnace. On examining it, I found it contained a small quantity of a bright transparent liquid, which, poured forth into a glass, emitted precisely the same odour as the phial. Persuaded this must be the draught of immortality, I raised it to my lips; but apprehension lest it might be poison stayed my hand. Reassured, however, by the thought of the young man's miraculous recovery, I quaffed the potion. It was as if I had swallowed fire, and at first I thought all was over with me. I shrieked out; but there was no one to heed my cries, unless it were my dead master, and two or three skeletons with which the walls were garnished. And these, in truth, did seem to hear me; for the dead corpse opened its glassy orbs, and eyed me reproachfully; the skeletons shook their fleshless arms and gibbered; and the various strange objects, with which the chamber was filled, seemed to deride and menace me. The terror occasioned by these fantasies, combined with the potency of the draught, took away my senses. When I recovered, I found all tranquil. Doctor Lamb was lying stark and stiff at my feet, with an expression of reproach on his fixed countenance; and the skeletons were hanging quietly in their places. Convinced that I was proof against death, I went forth. But a curse went with me! From that day to this I have lived, but it has been in such poverty and distress, that I had better far have died. Besides, I am constantly haunted by visions of my old master. He seems to hold converse with me—to lead me into strange places."

"Exactly the case with the t'other," whispered the Tinker to the Sandman. "Have you ever, in the coorse o' your long life, met the young man as drank the 'lixir?" he inquired of the dwarf.

"Never."

"Do you happen to rekilect his name?"

"No; it has quite escaped my memory," answered Old Parr.

"Should you rekilect it, if you heerd it?" asked the Tinker.

"Perhaps I might," returned the dwarf; "but I can't say."

"Wos it Auriol Darcy?" demanded the other.

"That was the name," cried Old Parr, starting up in extreme surprise. "I heard Doctor Lamb call him so. But how, in the name of wonder, do you come to know it?"

"Ve've got summat, at last," said the Tinker, with a self-applauding glance at his friends.

"How do you come to know it, I say?" repeated the dwarf, in extreme agitation.

"Never mind," rejoined the Tinker, with a cunning look; "you see I does know some cur'ous matters as veil as you, my old file. Yo'll be good evidence, in case ve vishes to prove the fact agin him."

"Prove what?—and against whom?" cried the dwarf.

"One more questin, and I've done," pursued the Tinker. "Should you know this young man agin, in case you chanced to come across him?"

"No doubt of it," replied Old Parr; "his figure often flits before me in dreams."

"Shall ve let him into it?" said the Tinker, consulting his companions in a low tone.

"Ay—ay," replied the Sandman.

"Better vait a bit," remarked Ginger, shaking his head dubiously. "There's no hurry."

"No; ve must decide at vonce," said the Tinker. "Jist examine them papers," he added, handing the pocket-book to Old Parr, "and favour us vith your opinion on 'em."

The dwarf was about to unclasp the book committed to his charge, when a hand was suddenly thrust through the banisters of the upper part of the staircase, which, as has been already stated, was divided from the lower by the door. A piece of heavy black drapery next descended like a cloud, concealing all behind it except the hand, with which the dwarf was suddenly seized by the nape of the neck, lifted up in the air, and, notwithstanding his shrieks and struggles, carried clean off.

Great confusion attended his disappearance. The dogs set up a prodigious barking, and flew to the rescue—one of the largest of them passing over the body of the drowsy waiter, who had sought his customary couch upon the coals, and rousing him from his slumbers; while the Tinker, uttering a fierce imprecation, upset his chair in his haste to catch hold of the dwarf's legs; but the latter was already out of reach, and the next moment had vanished entirely.

"My eyes! here's a pretty go!" cried Ginger, who, with his back to the fire, had witnessed the occurrence in open-mouthed astonishment. "Vy, curse it! if the wenerable ain't a-taken the pocket-book with him! It's my opinion the devil has flown away with the old feller. His time wos nearer at 'and than he expected."

"Devil or not, I'll have him back agin, or at all events the pocket-book!" cried the Tinker. And, dashing up the stairs, he caught hold of the railing above, and swinging himself up by a powerful effort, passed through an opening, occasioned by the removal of one of the banisters.

The Hand and the Cloak.

Groping along the gallery, which was buried in profound darkness, he shouted to the dwarf, but received no answer to his vociferations; neither could he discover any one, though he felt on either side of the passage with outstretched hands. The occupants of the different chambers, alarmed by the noise, called out to know what was going forward; but being locked in their rooms, they could render no assistance.

While the Tinker was thus pursuing his search in the dark, venting his rage and disappointment in the most dreadful imprecations, the staircase door was opened by the landlord, who had found the key in the greatcoat left behind by the dwarf. With the landlord came the Sandman and Ginger, the latter of whom was attended by all his dogs,

still barking furiously; while the rear of the party was brought up by the drowsy waiter, now wide awake with fright, and carrying a candle.

But though every nook and corner of the place was visited—though the attics were searched, and all the windows examined—not a trace of the dwarf could be discovered, nor any clue to his mysterious disappearance detected. Astonishment and alarm sat on every countenance.

"What the devil can have become of him?" cried the landlord, with a look of dismay.

"Ay, that's the questin!" rejoined the Tinker. "I begin to be of Ginger's opinion, that the devil himself must have flown away vith him. No von else could ha' taken a fancy to him."

"I only saw a hand and a black cloak," said the Sandman.

"I thought I seed a pair o' hoofs," cried the waiter; "and I'm quite sure I seed a pair o' great glitterin' eyes," he added, opening his own lacklustre orbs to their widest extent.

"It's a strange affair," observed the landlord gravely. "It's certain that no one has entered the house wearing a cloak such as you describe; nor could any of the lodgers, to my knowledge, get out of their rooms. It was Old Parr's business, as you know, to lock 'em up carefully for the night."

"Vell, all's over vith him now," said the Tinker; "and vith our affair, too, I'm afeerd."

"Don't say die jist yet," rejoined Ginger. "The wenerable's gone, to be sure; and the only thing he has left behind him, barrin' his topcoat, is this here bit o' paper vich dropped out o' the pocket-book as he wos a-takin' flight, and vich I picked from the floor. It may be o' some use to us. But come, let's go down-stairs. There's no good in stayin' here any longer."

Concurring in which sentiment, they all descended to the lower room.

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IV

THE IRON-MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER

A week had elapsed since Auriol Darcy was conveyed to the iron-merchant's dwelling, after the attack made upon him by the ruffians in the ruined house; and though almost recovered from the serious injuries he had received, he still remained the guest of his preserver.

It was a bright spring morning, when a door leading to the yard in front of the house opened, and a young girl, bright and fresh as the morning's self, issued from it.

A lovelier creature than Ebba Thorneycroft cannot be imagined. Her figure was perfection—slight, tall, and ravishingly proportioned, with a slender waist, little limbs, and fairy feet that would have made the fortune of an opera-dancer. Her features were almost angelic in expression, with an outline of the utmost delicacy and precision—not cold, classical regularity—but that softer and incomparably more lovely mould peculiar to our own clime. Ebba's countenance was a type of Saxon beauty. Her complexion was pure white, tinged with a slight bloom. Her eyes were of a serene summer blue, arched over by brows some shades darker than the radiant tresses that fell on either cheek, and were parted over a brow smoother than alabaster. Her attire was simple but tasteful, and by its dark colour threw into relief the exceeding fairness of her skin.

Ebba's first care was to feed her favourite linnet, placed in a cage over the door. Having next patted the head of a huge bulldog who came out of his kennel to greet her, and exchanged a few words with two men employed at a forge in the inner part of the building on the right, she advanced farther into the yard.

This part of the premises, being strewn with ironwork of every possible shape, presented a very singular appearance, and may merit some description. There were heaps of rusty iron chains flung together like fishermen's nets, old iron area-guards, iron kitchen-fenders, old grates, safes, piles of old iron bowls, a large assortment of old iron pans and dishes, a ditto of old ovens, kettles without number, sledge-hammers, anvils, braziers, chimney-cowls, and smoke-jacks.

Stout upright posts, supporting cross-beams on the top, were placed at intervals on either side of the yard, and these were decorated, in the most artistic style, with rat-traps, man-traps, iron lanterns, pulleys, padlocks, chains, trivets, triangles, iron rods,

disused street lamps, dismantled cannon, and anchors. Attached to hooks in the cross-beam nearest the house hung a row of old horse-shoes, while from the centre depended a large rusty bell. Near the dog's kennel was a tool-box, likewise garnished with horse-shoes, and containing pincers, files, hammers, and other implements proper to the smith. Beyond this was an open doorway leading to the workshop, where the two men before mentioned were busy at the forge.

Though it was still early, the road was astir with passengers; and many waggons and carts, laden with hay, straw, and vegetables, were passing. Ebba, however, had been solely drawn forth by the beauty of the morning, and she stopped for a moment at the street gate, to breathe the balmy air. As she inhaled the gentle breeze, and felt the warm sunshine upon her cheek, her thoughts wandered away into the green meadows in which she had strayed as a child, and she longed to ramble amid them again. Perhaps she scarcely desired a solitary stroll; but however this might be, she was too much engrossed by the reverie to notice a tall man, wrapped in a long black cloak, who regarded her with the most fixed attention, as he passed on the opposite side of the road.

Proceeding to a short distance, this personage crossed over, and returned slowly towards the iron-merchant's dwelling. Ebba then, for the first time, remarked him, and was startled by his strange, sinister appearance. His features were handsome, but so malignant and fierce in expression, that they inspired only aversion. A sardonic grin curled his thin lips, and his short, crisply curled hair, raven-black in hue, contrasted forcibly and disagreeably with his cadaverous complexion. An attraction like that of the snake seemed to reside in his dark blazing eyes, for Ebba trembled like a bird beneath their influence, and could not remove her gaze from them. A vague presentiment of coming ill smote her, and she dreaded lest the mysterious being before her might be connected in some inexplicable way with her future destiny.

On his part, the stranger was not insensible to the impression he had produced, and suddenly halting, he kept his eyes riveted on those of the girl, who, after remaining spell-bound, as it were, for a few moments, precipitately retreated towards the house.

Just as she reached the door, and was about to pass through it, Auriol came forth. He was pale, as if from recent suffering, and bore his left arm in a sling.

"You look agitated," he said, noticing Ebba's uneasiness. "What has happened?"

"Not much," she replied, a deep blush mantling her cheeks. "But I have been somewhat alarmed by the person near the gate."

"Indeed!" cried Auriol, darting forward. "Where is he? I see no one."

"Not a tall man, wrapped in a long black cloak?" rejoined Ebba, following him cautiously.

"Ha!" cried Auriol. "Has he been here?"

"Then you know the person I allude to?" she rejoined.

"I know some one answering his description," he replied, with a forced smile.

"Once beheld, the man I mean is not to be forgotten," said Ebba. "He has a countenance such as I never saw before. If I could believe in the 'evil eye,' I should be sure he possessed it."

"'Tis he, there can be no doubt," rejoined Auriol, in a sombre tone.

"Who and what is he, then?" demanded Ebba.

"He is a messenger of ill," replied Auriol, "and I am thankful he is gone."

The Iron-merchant's Daughter.

"Are you quite sure of it?" she asked, glancing timorously up and down the road. But the mysterious individual could no longer be seen.

"And so, after exciting my curiosity in this manner, you will not satisfy it?" she said.

"I cannot," rejoined Auriol, somewhat sternly.

"Nay, then, since you are so ungracious, I shall go and prepare breakfast," she replied. "My father must be down by this time."

"Stay!" cried Auriol, arresting her, as she was about to pass through the door. "I wish to have a word with you."

Ebba stopped, and the bloom suddenly forsook her cheeks.

But Auriol seemed unable to proceed. Neither dared to regard the other; and a profound silence prevailed between them for a few moments.

"Ebba," said Auriol at length, "I am about to leave your father's house to-day."

"Why so soon?" she exclaimed, looking up into his face. "You are not entirely recovered yet."

"I dare not stay longer," he said.

"Dare not!" cried Ebba. And she again cast down her eyes; but Auriol made no reply.

Fortunately the silence was broken by the clinking of the smiths' hammers upon the anvil.

"If you must really go," said Ebba, looking up, after a long pause, "I hope we shall see you again?"

"Most assuredly," replied Auriol. "I owe your worthy father a deep debt of gratitude—a debt which, I fear, I shall never be able to repay."

"My father is more than repaid in saving your life," she replied. "I am sure he will be sorry to learn you are going so soon."

"I have been here a week," said Auriol. "If I remained longer, I might not be able to go at all."

There was another pause, during which a stout old fellow in the workshop quitted the anvil for a moment, and, catching a glimpse of the young couple, muttered to his helpmate—

"I say, Ned, I'm a-thinkin' our master'll soon have a son-in-law. There's pretty plain signs on it at yonder door."

"So there be, John," replied Ned, peeping round. "He's a good-lookin' young feller that. I wish ve could hear their discourse."

"No, that ain't fair," replied John, raking some small coal upon the fire, and working away at the bellows.

"I would not for the world ask a disagreeable question," said Ebba, again raising her eyes, "but since you are about to quit us, I must confess I should like to know something of your history."

"Forgive me if I decline to comply with your desire," replied Auriol. "You would not believe me, were I to relate my history. But this I may say, that it is stranger and wilder than any you ever heard. The prisoner in his cell is not restrained by more terrible fetters than those which bind me to silence."

Ebba gazed at him as if she feared his reasoning were wandering.

"You think me mad," said Auriol; "would I were so! But I shall never lose the clear perception of my woes. Hear me, Ebba! Fate has brought me into this house. I have seen you, and experienced your gentle ministry; and it is impossible, so circumstanced, to be blind to your attractions. I have only been too sensible to them—but I will not dwell on that theme, nor run the risk of exciting a passion which must destroy you. I will ask you to hate me—to regard me as a monster whom you ought to shun rather than as a being for whom you should entertain the slightest sympathy."

"You have some motive in saying this to me," cried the terrified girl.

"My motive is to warn you," said Auriol. "If you love me, you are lost—utterly lost!"

She was so startled, that she could make no reply, but burst into tears. Auriol took her hand, which she unresistingly yielded.

"A terrible fatality attaches to me, in which you must have no share," he said, in a solemn tone.

"Would you had never come to my father's house!" she exclaimed, in a voice of anguish.

"Is it, then, too late?" cried Auriol despairingly.

"It is—if to love you be fatal," she rejoined.

"Ha!" exclaimed Auriol, striking his forehead with his clenched hand. "Recall your words—Ebba—recall them—but no, once uttered—it is impossible. You are bound to me for ever. I must fulfil my destiny."

At this juncture a low growl broke from the dog, and, guided by the sound, the youthful couple beheld, standing near the gate, the tall dark man in the black cloak. A fiendish smile sat upon his countenance.

"That is the man who frightened me!" cried Ebba.

"It is the person I supposed!" ejaculated Auriol. "I must speak to him. Leave me, Ebba. I will join you presently."

And as the girl, half sinking with apprehension, withdrew, he advanced quickly towards the intruder.

"I have sought you for some days," said the tall man, in a stern, commanding voice. "You have not kept your appointment with me."

"I could not," replied Auriol—"an accident has befallen me."

"I know it," rejoined the other. "I am aware you were assailed by ruffians in the ruined house over the way. But you are recovered now, and can go forth. You ought to have communicated with me."

"It was my intention to do so," said Auriol.

"Our meeting cannot be delayed much longer," pursued the stranger. "I will give you three more days. On the evening of the last day, at the hour of seven, I shall look for you at the foot of the statue in Hyde Park."

"I will be there," replied Auriol.

"That girl must be the next victim," said the stranger, with a grim smile.

"Peace!" thundered Auriol.

"Nay, I need not remind you of the tenure by which you maintain your power," rejoined the stranger. "But I will not trouble you further now."

And, wrapping his cloak more closely round him, he disappeared.

"Fate has once more involved me in its net," cried Auriol bitterly. "But I will save Ebba, whatever it may cost me. I will see her no more."

And instead of returning to the house, he hurried away in the opposite direction of the stranger.

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER V

THE MEETING NEAR THE STATUE

The evening of the third day arrived, and Auriol entered Hyde Park by Stanhope Gate. Glancing at his watch, and finding it wanted nearly three-quarters of an hour of the time appointed for his meeting with the mysterious stranger, he struck across the park, in the direction of the Serpentine River. Apparently he was now perfectly recovered, for his arm was without the support of the sling, and he walked with great swiftness. But his countenance was deathly pale, and his looks were so wild and disordered, that the few persons he encountered shrank from him aghast.

A few minutes' rapid walking brought him to the eastern extremity of the Serpentine, and advancing close to the edge of the embankment, he gazed at the waters beneath his feet.

"I would plunge into them, if I could find repose," he murmured. "But it would avail nothing. I should only add to my sufferings. No; I must continue to endure the weight of a life burdened by crime and remorse, till I can find out the means of freeing myself from it. Once I dreaded this unknown danger, but now I seek for it in vain."

The current of his thoughts was here interrupted by the sudden appearance of a dark object on the surface of the water, which he at first took to be a huge fish, with a pair of green fins springing from its back; but after watching it more closely for a few moments, he became convinced that it was a human being, tricked out in some masquerade attire, while the slight struggles which it made proved that life was not entirely extinct.

Though, the moment before, he had contemplated self-destruction, and had only been restrained from the attempt by the certainty of failing in his purpose, instinct prompted him to rescue the perishing creature before him. Without hesitation, therefore, and without tarrying to divest himself of his clothes, he dashed into the water, and striking out, instantly reached the object of his quest, which still continued to float, and turning it over, for the face was downwards, he perceived it was an old man, of exceedingly small size, habited in a pantomimic garb. He also remarked that a rope was twisted round the neck of the unfortunate being, making it evident that some violent attempt had been made upon his life.

Without pausing for further investigation, he took firm hold of the leathern wings of the dwarf, and with his disengaged hand propelled himself towards the shore, dragging the other after him. The next instant he reached the bank, clambered up the low brickwork, and placed his burden in safety.

The noise of the plunge had attracted attention, and several persons now hurried to the spot. On coming up, and finding Auriol bending over a water-sprite—for such, at first sight, the dwarf appeared—they could not repress their astonishment. Wholly insensible to the presence of those around him, Auriol endeavoured to recall where he had seen the dwarf before. All at once, the recollection flashed upon him, and he cried aloud, "Why, it is my poor murdered grandfather's attendant, Flapdragon! But no! no!—he must be dead ages ago! Yet the resemblance is singularly striking!"

Auriol's exclamations, coupled with his wild demeanour, surprised the bystanders, and they came to the conclusion that he must be a travelling showman, who had attempted to drown his dwarf—the grotesque, impish garb of the latter convincing them that he had been exhibited at a booth. They made signs, therefore, to each other not to let Auriol escape, and one of them, raising the dwarf's head on his knee, produced a flask, and poured some brandy from it down his throat, while others chafed his hands. These efforts were attended with much speedier success than might have been anticipated. After a struggle or two for respiration, the dwarf opened his eyes, and gazed at the group around him.

"It must be Flapdragon!" exclaimed Auriol.

"Ah! who calls me?" cried the dwarf.

"I!" rejoined Auriol. "Do you not recollect me?"

"To be sure!" exclaimed the dwarf, gazing at him fixedly; "you are—" and he stopped.

"You have been thrown into the water, Master Flapdragon?" cried a bystander, noticing the cord round the dwarf's throat.

"I have," replied the little old man.

"By your governor—that is, by this person?" cried another, laying hold of Auriol.

"By him—no," said the dwarf; "I have not seen that gentleman for nearly three centuries."

"Three centuries, my little patriarch?" said the man who had given him the brandy. "That's a long time. Think again."

"It's perfectly true, nevertheless," replied the dwarf.

"His wits have been washed away by the water," said the first speaker. "Give him a drop more brandy."

"Not a bit of it," rejoined the dwarf; "my senses were never clearer than at this moment. At last we have met," he continued, addressing Auriol, "and I hope we shall not speedily part again. We hold life by the same tie."

"How came you in the desperate condition in which I found you?" demanded Auriol evasively.

"I was thrown into the canal with a stone to my neck, like a dog about to be drowned," replied the dwarf. "But, as you are aware, I'm not so easily disposed of."

Again the bystanders exchanged significant looks.

"By whom was the attempt made?" inquired Auriol.

"I don't know the villain's name," rejoined the dwarf, "but he's a very tall, dark man, and is generally wrapped in a long black cloak."

"Ha!" exclaimed Auriol. "When was it done?"

"Some nights ago, I should fancy," replied the dwarf, "for I've been a terrible long time under water. I have only just managed to shake off the stone."

At this speech there was a titter of incredulity among the bystanders.

"You may laugh, but it's true!" cried the dwarf angrily.

"We must speak of this anon," said Auriol. "Will you convey him to the nearest tavern?" he added, placing money in the hands of the man who held the dwarf in his arms.

"Willingly, sir," replied the man. "I'll take him to the Life Guardsman, near the barracks—that's the nearest public."

"I'll join him there in an hour," replied Auriol, moving away.

And as he disappeared, the man took up his little burden, and bent his steps towards the barracks.

Utterly disregarding the dripping state of his habiliments, Auriol proceeded quickly to the place of rendezvous. Arrived there, he looked around, and not seeing any one, flung himself upon a bench at the foot of the gentle eminence on which the gigantic statue of Achilles is placed.

It was becoming rapidly dark, and heavy clouds, portending speedy rain, increased the gloom. Auriol's thoughts were sombre as the weather and the hour, and he fell into a deep fit of abstraction, from which he was roused by a hand laid on his shoulder.

Recoiling at the touch, he raised his eyes, and beheld the stranger leaning over him, and gazing at him with a look of diabolical exultation. The cloak was thrown partly aside, so as to display the tall, gaunt figure of its wearer; while the large collar of sable fur with which it was decorated stood out like the wings of a demon. The stranger's hat was off, and his high broad forehead, white as marble, was fully revealed.

"Our meeting must be brief," he said. "Are you prepared to fulfil the compact?"

"What do you require?" replied Auriol.

"Possession of the girl I saw three days ago," said the other; "the iron-merchant's daughter, Ebba. She must be mine."

"Never!" cried Auriol firmly—"never!"

"Beware how you tempt me to exert my power," said the stranger; "she must be mine—or——"

"I defy you!" rejoined Auriol; "I will never consent."

"Fool!" cried the other, seizing him by the arm, and fixing a withering glance upon him. "Bring her to me ere the week be out, or dread my vengeance!"

And, enveloping himself in his cloak, he retreated behind the statue, and was lost to view.

As he disappeared, a moaning wind arose, and heavy rain descended. Still Auriol did not quit the bench.

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VI

THE CHARLES THE SECOND SPANIEL

It was about two o'clock, on a charming spring day, that a stout middle-aged man, accompanied by a young person of extraordinary beauty, took up his station in front of Langham Church. Just as the clock struck the hour, a young man issued at a quick pace from a cross-street, and came upon the couple before he was aware of it. He was evidently greatly embarrassed, and would have beaten a retreat, but that was impossible. His embarrassment was in some degree shared by the young lady; she blushed deeply, but could not conceal her satisfaction at the encounter. The elder individual, who did not appear to notice the confusion of either party, immediately extended his hand to the young man, and exclaimed:

"What! Mr. Darcy, is it you? Why, we thought we had lost you, sir! What took you off so suddenly? We have been expecting you these four days, and were now walking about to try and find you. My daughter has been terribly uneasy. Haven't you, Ebba?"

The young lady made no answer to this appeal, but cast down her eyes.

"It was my intention to call, and give you an explanation of my strange conduct, to-day," replied Auriol. "I hope you received my letter, stating that my sudden departure was unavoidable."

"To be sure; and I also received the valuable snuffbox you were so good as to send me," replied Mr. Thorneycroft. "But you neglected to tell me how to acknowledge the gift."

"I could not give an address at the moment," said Auriol.

"Well, I am glad to find you have got the use of your arm again," observed the iron-merchant; "but I can't say you look so well as when you left us. You seem paler—eh? what do you think, Ebba?"

"Mr. Darcy looks as if he were suffering from mental anxiety rather than from bodily ailment," she replied timidly.

"I am so," replied Auriol, regarding her fixedly. "A very disastrous circumstance has happened to me. But answer me one question: Has the mysterious person in the black cloak troubled you again?"

"What mysterious person?" demanded Mr. Thorneycroft, opening his eyes.

"Never mind, father," replied Ebba. "I saw him last night," she added to Auriol. "I was sitting in the back room alone, wondering what had become of you, when I heard a tap against the window, which was partly open, and, looking up, I beheld the tall stranger. It was nearly dark, but the light of the fire revealed his malignant countenance. I don't exaggerate, when I say his eyes gleamed like those of a tiger. I was terribly frightened, but something prevented me from crying out. After gazing at me for a few moments, with a look that seemed to fascinate while it frightened me, he said—'You desire to see Auriol Darcy. I have just quitted him. Go to Langham Place to-morrow, and, as the clock strikes two, you will behold him.' Without waiting for any reply on my part, he disappeared."

"Ah, you never told me this, you little rogue!" cried Mr. Thorneycroft. "You persuaded me to come out with you, in the hope of meeting Mr. Darcy; but you did not say you were sure to find him. So you sent this mysterious gentleman to her, eh?" he added to Auriol.

"No, I did not," replied the other gloomily.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the iron-merchant, with a puzzled look.

"Oh, then I suppose he thought it might relieve her anxiety. However, since we have met, I hope you'll walk home and dine with us."

Auriol was about to decline the invitation, but Ebba glanced at him entreatingly.

"I have an engagement, but I will forego it," he said, offering his arm to her.

And they walked along towards Oxford Street, while Mr. Thorneycroft followed, a few paces behind them.

"This is very kind of you, Mr. Darcy," said Ebba. "Oh, I have been so wretched!"

"I grieve to hear it," he rejoined. "I hoped you had forgotten me."

"I am sure you did not think so," she cried.

As she spoke, she felt a shudder pass through Auriol's frame.

"What ails you?" she anxiously inquired.

"I would have shunned you, if I could, Ebba," he replied; "but a fate, against which it is vain to contend, has brought us together again."

"I am glad of it," she replied; "because, ever since our last interview, I have been reflecting on what you then said to me, and am persuaded you are labouring under some strange delusion, occasioned by your recent accident."

"Be not deceived, Ebba," cried Auriol. "I am under a terrible influence. I need not remind you of the mysterious individual who tapped at your window last night."

"What of him?" demanded Ebba, with a thrill of apprehension.

"He it is who controls my destiny," replied Auriol.

"But what has he to do with me?" asked Ebba.

"Much, much," he replied, with a perceptible shudder.

"You terrify me, Auriol," she rejoined. "Tell me what you mean—in pity, tell me?"

Before Auriol could reply, Mr. Thorneycroft stepped forward, and turned the conversation into another channel.

Soon after this, they reached the Quadrant, and were passing beneath the eastern colonnade, when Ebba's attention was attracted towards a man who was leading a couple of dogs by a string, while he had others under his arm, others again in his pocket, and another in his breast. It was Mr. Ginger.

"What a pretty little dog!" cried Ebba, remarking the Charles the Second spaniel.

"Allow me to present you with it?" said Auriol.

"You know I should value it, as coming from you," she replied, blushing deeply; "but I cannot accept it; so I will not look at it again, for fear I should be tempted."

The dog-fancier, however, noticing Ebba's admiration, held forward the spaniel, and said, "Do jist look at the pretty little creater, miss. It han't its equil for beauty. Don't be afeerd on it, miss. It's as gentle as a lamb."

"Oh you little darling!" Ebba said, patting its sleek head and long silken ears, while it fixed its large black eyes upon her, as if entreating her to become its purchaser.

"Fairy seems to have taken quite a fancy to you, miss," observed Ginger; "and she ain't i' the habit o' fallin' i' love at first sight. I don't wonder at it, though, for my part. I should do jist the same, if I wos in her place. Vell, now, miss, as she seems to like you, and you seem to like her, I won't copy the manners o' them 'ere fathers as has stony 'arts, and part two true lovyers. You shall have her a bargain."

"What do you call a bargain, my good man?" inquired Ebba, smiling.

"I wish I could afford to give her to you, miss," replied Ginger; "you should have her, and welcome. But I must airn a livelihood, and Fairy is the most wallerable part o' my stock. I'll tell you wot I give for her myself, and you shall have her at a trifle beyond it. I'd scorn to take adwantage o' the likes o' you."

"I hope you didn't give too much, then, friend," replied Ebba.

"I didn't give hayf her wally—not hayf," said Ginger; "and if so be you don't like her in a month's time, I'll buy her back again from you. You'll always find me here—always. Everybody knows Mr. Ginger—that's my name, miss. I'm the only honest man in the dog-fancyin' line. Ask Mr. Bishop, the great gunmaker o' Bond Street, about me—him as the nobs calls the Bishop o' Bond Street—an' he'll tell you."

"But you haven't answered the lady's question," said Auriol. "What do you ask for the dog?"

"Do you want it for yourself, sir, or for her?" inquired Ginger.

"What does it matter?" cried Auriol angrily.

"A great deal, sir," replied Ginger; "it'll make a mater'al difference in the price. To you she'll be five-an'-twenty guineas. To the young lady, twenty."

"But suppose I buy her for the young lady?" said Auriol.

"Oh, then, in coorse, you'll get her at the lower figure!" replied Ginger.

"I hope you don't mean to buy the dog?" interposed Mr. Thorneycroft. "The price is monstrous—preposterous."

"It may appear so to you, sir," said Ginger, "because you're ignorant o' the wally of sich a hanimal; but I can tell you, it's cheap—dirt cheap. Vy, his Excellency the Prooshan Ambassador bought a Charley from me, t'other week, to present to a certain duchess of his acquaintance, and wot d'ye think he give for it?"

"I don't know, and I don't want to know," replied Mr. Thorneycroft gruffly.

"Eighty guineas," said Ginger. "Eighty guineas, as I'm a livin' man, and made no bones about it neither. The dog I sold him warn't to be compared wi' Fairy."

"Stuff—stuff!" cried Mr. Thorneycroft; "I ain't to be gammoned in that way."

"It's no gammon," said Ginger. "Look at them ears, miss—vy, they're as long as your own ringlets—and them pads—an' I'm sure you von't say she's dear at twenty pound."

"She's a lovely little creature, indeed," returned Ebba, again patting the animal's head.

While this was passing, two men of very suspicious mien, ensconced behind a pillar adjoining the group, were reconnoitring Auriol.

"It's him!" whispered the taller and darker of the two to his companion—"it's the young man ve've been lookin' for—Auriol Darcy."

"It seems like him," said the other, edging round the pillar as far as he could without exposure. "I vish he'd turn his face a leetle more this vay."

"It's him, I tell you, Sandman," said the Tinker. "Ve must give the signal to our comrade."

"Vell, I'll tell you wot it is, miss," said Ginger coaxingly, "your sveet'art—I'm sure he's your sveet'art—I can tell these things in a minnit—your sveet'art, I say, shall give me fifteen pound, and the dog's yourn. I shall lose five pound by the transaction; but I don't mind it for sich a customer as you. Fairy desarnes a kind missus."

Auriol, who had fallen into a fit of abstraction, here remarked:

"What's that you are saying, fellow?"

"I vos a-sayin', sir, the young lady shall have the dog for fifteen pound, and a precious bargain it is," replied Ginger.

"Well, then, I close with you. Here's the money," said Auriol, taking out his purse.

"On no account, Auriol," cried Ebba quickly. "It's too much."

"A great deal too much, Mr. Darcy," said Thorneycroft.

"Auriol and Darcy!" muttered Ginger. "Can this be the gemman ve're a-lookin' for. Vere's my two pals, I vonder? Oh, it's all right!" he added, receiving a signal from behind the pillar. "They're on the look-out, I see."

"Give the lady the dog, and take the money, man," said Auriol sharply.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Ginger, "but hadn't I better carry the dog home for the young lady? It might meet with some accident in the vay."

"Accident!—stuff and nonsense!" cried Mr. Thorneycroft. "The rascal only wants to follow you home, that he may know where you live, and steal the dog back again. Take my advice, Mr. Darcy, and don't buy it."

"The bargain's concluded," said Ginger, delivering the dog to Ebba, and taking the money from Auriol, which, having counted, he thrust into his capacious breeches pocket.

"How shall I thank you for this treasure, Auriol?" exclaimed Ebba, in an ecstasy of delight.

"By transferring to it all regard you may entertain for me," he replied, in a low tone.

"That is impossible," she answered.

"Well, I vote we drive away at once," said Mr. Thorneycroft. "Halloa! jarvey!" he cried, hailing a coach that was passing; adding, as the vehicle stopped, "Now get in, Ebba. By this means we shall avoid being followed by the rascal."

So saying, he got into the coach. As Auriol was about to follow him, he felt a slight touch on his arm, and, turning, beheld a tall and very forbidding man by his side.

"Beg pardin, sir," said the fellow, touching his hat, "but ain't your name Mr. Auriol Darcy?"

"It is," replied Auriol, regarding him fixedly. "Why do you ask?"

"I wants a vord or two vith you in private—that's all, sir," replied the Tinker.

"Say what you have to say at once," rejoined Auriol. "I know nothing of you."

"You'll know me better by-and-by, sir," said the Tinker, in a significant tone. "I must speak to you, and alone."

"If you don't go about your business, fellow, instantly, I'll give you in charge of the police," cried Auriol.

"No, you von't, sir—no, you von't," replied the Tinker, shaking his head. And then, lowering his voice, he added, "You'll be glad to purchase my silence ven you larns wot secrets o' yourn has come to my knowledge."

"Won't you get in, Mr. Darcy?" cried Thorneycroft, whose back was towards the Tinker.

"I must speak to this man," replied Auriol. "I'll come to you in the evening. Till then, farewell, Ebba." And, as the coach drove away, he added to the Tinker, "Now, rascal, what have you to say?"

"Step this vay, sir," replied the Tinker. "There's two friends o' mine as vishes to be present at our conference. Ve'd better valk into a back street."

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VII

THE HAND AGAIN!

Followed by Auriol, who, in his turn, was followed by Ginger and the Sandman, the Tinker directed his steps to Great Windmill Street, where he entered a public-house, called the Black Lion. Leaving his four-footed attendants with the landlord, with whom he was acquainted, Ginger caused the party to be shown into a private room, and, on entering it, Auriol flung himself into a chair, while the dog-fancier stationed himself near the door.

"Now, what do you want with me?" demanded Auriol.

"You shall learn presently," replied the Tinker; "but first, it may be as vell to state, that a certain pocket-book has been found."

"Ah!" exclaimed Auriol. "You are the villains who beset me in the ruined house in the Vauxhall Road."

"Your pocket-book has been found, I tell you," replied the Tinker, "and from it ve have made the most awful diskiveries. Our werry 'air stood on end ven ve first read the shockin' particulars. What a bloodthirsty ruffian you must be! Vy, ve finds you've been i' the habit o' makin' away with a young ooman vonce every ten years. Your last wictim wos in 1820—the last but one, in 1810—and the one before her, in 1800."

"Hangin's too good for you!" cried the Sandman; "but if ve peaches you're sartin to sving."

"I hope that pretty creater I jist see ain't to be the next wictim?" said Ginger.

"Peace!" thundered Auriol. "What do you require?"

"A hundred pound each'll buy our silence," replied the Tinker.

"Ve ought to have double that," said the Sandman, "for screenin' sich atterocious crimes as he has perpetrated. Ve're not werry partic'lar ourselves, but ve don't commit murder wholesale."

"Ve don't commit murder at all," said Ginger.

"You may fancy," pursued the Tinker, "that ve ain't perfectly acvainted with your history, but to prove that ve are, I'll just rub up your memory. Did you ever hear tell of a gemman as murdered Doctor Lamb, the famous halchemist o' Queen Bess's time, and, havin' drank the 'lixir vich the doctor had made for hisself, has lived ever since? Did you ever hear tell of such a person, I say?"

Auriol gazed at him in astonishment.

"What idle tale are you inventing?" he said at length.

"It is no idle tale," replied the Tinker boldly. "Ve can bring a vitness as'll prove the fact—a livin' vitness."

"What vitness?" cried Auriol.

"Don't you reckilect the dwarf as used to serve Doctor Lamb?" rejoined the Tinker. "He's alive still; and ve calls him Old Parr, on account of his great age."

"Where is he?—what has become of him?" demanded Auriol.

"Oh, ve'll perduce him in doo time," replied the Tinker cunningly.

"But tell me where the poor fellow is?" cried Auriol. "Have you seen him since last night? I sent him to a public-house at Kensington, but he has disappeared from it, and I can discover no traces of him."

"He'll turn up somewhere—never fear," rejoined the Tinker. "But now, sir, that ve fairly understands each other, are you agreeable to our terms? You shall give us an order for the money, and ve'll undertake, on our parts, not to mislest you more."

"The pocket-book must be delivered up to me if I assent," said Auriol, "and the poor dwarf must be found."

"Vy, as to that, I can scarcely promise," replied the Tinker; "there's a difficulty in the case, you see. But the pocket-book'll never be brought against you—you may rest assured o' that."

"I must have it, or you get nothing from me," cried Auriol.

"Here's a bit o' paper as come from the pocket-book," said Ginger. "Would you like to hear wot's written upon it? Here are the words: 'How many crimes have I to reproach myself with! How many innocents have I destroyed! And all owing to my fatal compact with——'"

"Give me that paper," cried Auriol, rising, and attempting to snatch it from the dog-fancier.

Just as this moment, and while Ginger retreated from Auriol, the door behind him was noiselessly opened—a hand was thrust through the chink—and the paper was snatched from his grasp. Before Ginger could turn round, the door was closed again.

"Halloa! What's that?" he cried. "The paper's gone!"

"The hand again!" cried the Sandman, in alarm. "See who's in the passage—open the door—quick!"

Ginger cautiously complied, and, peeping forth, said—

"There's no one there. It must be the devil. I'll have nuffin' more to do wi' the matter."

"Poh! poh! don't be so chicken-'arted!" cried the Tinker. "But come what may, the gemman shan't stir till he undertakes to pay us three hundred pounds."

"You seek to frighten me in vain, villain," cried Auriol, upon whom the recent occurrence had not been lost. "I have but to stamp my foot, and I can instantly bring assistance that shall overpower you."

"Don't provoke him," whispered Ginger, plucking the Tinker's sleeve. "For my part, I shan't stay any longer. I wouldn't take his money." And he quitted the room.

"I'll go and see wot's the matter wi' Ginger," said the Sandman, slinking after him.

The Tinker looked nervously round. He was not proof against his superstitious fears.

"Here, take this purse, and trouble me no more!" cried Auriol.

The Tinker's hands clutched the purse mechanically, but he instantly laid it down again.

"I'm bad enough—but I won't sell myself to the devil," he said.

And he followed his companions.

Left alone, Auriol groaned aloud, and covered his face with his hands. When he looked up, he found the tall man in the black cloak standing beside him. A demoniacal smile played upon his features.

"You here?" cried Auriol.

"Of course," replied the stranger. "I came to watch over your safety. You were in danger from those men. But you need not concern yourself more about them. I have your pocket-book, and the slip of paper that dropped from it. Here are both. Now let us talk on other matters. You have just parted from Ebba, and will see her again this evening."

"Perchance," replied Auriol.

"You will," rejoined the stranger peremptorily. "Remember, your ten years' limit draws to a close. In a few days it will be at an end; and if you renew it not, you will incur the penalty, and you know it to be terrible. With the means of renewal in your hands, why hesitate?"

"Because I will not sacrifice the girl," replied Auriol.

"You cannot help yourself," cried the stranger scornfully. "I command you to bring her to me."

"I persist in my refusal," replied Auriol.

"It is useless to brave my power," said the stranger. "A moon is just born. When it has attained its first quarter, Ebba shall be mine. Till then, farewell."

And as the words were uttered, he passed through the door.

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VIII

THE BARBER OF LONDON

Who has not heard of the Barber of London? His dwelling is in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn. It is needless to particularise the street, for everybody knows the shop; that is to say, every member of the legal profession, high or low. All, to the very judges themselves, have their hair cut, or their wigs dressed, by him. A pleasant fellow is Mr. Tuffnell Trigge—Figaro himself not pleasanter—and if you do not shave yourself—if you want a becoming flow imparted to your stubborn locks, or if you require a wig, I recommend you to the care of Mr. Tuffnell Trigge. Not only will he treat you well, but he will regale you with all the gossip of the court; he will give you the last funny thing of Mr. Serjeant Larkins; he will tell you how many briefs the great Mr. Skinner Fyne receives—what the Vice-Chancellor is doing; and you will own, on rising, that you have never spent a five minutes more agreeably. Besides, you are likely to see some noticeable characters, for Mr. Trigge's shop is quite a lounge. Perhaps you may find a young barrister who has just been "called," ordering his "first wig," and you may hear the prognostications of Mr. Trigge as to his future distinction. "Ah, sir," he will say, glancing at the stolid features of the young man, "you have quite the face of the Chief Justice—quite the face of the chief—I don't recollect him ordering his first wig—that was a little before my time; but I hope to live to see you chief, sir. Quite within your reach, if you choose to apply. Sure of it, sir—quite sure." Or you may see him attending to some grave master in Chancery, and listening with profound attention to his remarks; or screaming with laughter at the jokes of some smart special pleader; or talking of the theatres, the actors and actresses, to some young attorneys, or pupils in conveyancers' chambers; for those are the sort of customers in whom Mr. Trigge chiefly delights; with them, indeed, he is great, for it is by them he has been dubbed the Barber of London. His shop is also frequented by managing clerks, barristers' clerks, engrossing clerks, and others; but these are, for the most part, his private friends.

Mr. Trigge's shop is none of your spruce West End hair-cutting establishments, with magnificent mirrors on every side, in which you may see the back of your head, the front, and the side, all at once, with walls bedizened with glazed French paper, and with an ante-room full of bears'-grease, oils, creams, tooth-powders, and cut glass. No, it is a real barber's and hairdresser's shop, of the good old stamp, where you may get cut and curled for a shilling, and shaved for half the price.

True, the floor is not covered with a carpet. But what of that? It bears the imprint of innumerable customers, and is scattered over with their hair. In the window, there is an assortment of busts moulded in wax, exhibiting the triumphs of Mr. Trigge's art; and above these are several specimens of legal wigs. On the little counter behind the window, amid large pots of pomade and bears'-grease, and the irons and brushes in constant use by the barber, are other bustos, done to the life, and for ever glancing amiably into the room. On the block is a judge's wig, which Mr. Trigge has just been dressing, and a little farther, on a higher block, is that of a counsel. On either side of the fireplace are portraits of Lord Eldon and Lord Lyndhurst. Some other portraits of pretty actresses are likewise to be seen. Against the counter rests a board, displaying the playbill of the evening; and near it is a large piece of emblematical crockery, indicating that bears'-grease may be had on the premises. Amongst Mr. Trigge's live-stock may be enumerated his favourite magpie, placed in a wicker cage in the window, which chatters incessantly, and knows everything, its master avouches, "as well as a Christian."

And now as to Mr. Tuffnell Trigge himself. He is very tall and very thin, and holds himself so upright that he loses not an inch of his stature. His head is large and his face long, with marked, if not very striking features, charged, it must be admitted, with a very self-satisfied expression. One cannot earn the appellation of the Barber of London without talent; and it is the consciousness of this talent that lends to Mr. Trigge's features their apparently conceited expression. A fringe of black whisker adorns his cheek and chin, and his black bristly hair is brushed back, so as to exhibit the prodigious expanse of his forehead. His eyebrows are elevated, as if in constant scorn.

The attire in which Mr. Trigge is ordinarily seen, consists of a black velvet waistcoat, and tight black continuations. These are protected by a white apron tied round his waist, with pockets to hold his scissors and combs; over all, he wears a short nankeen jacket, into the pockets of which his hands are constantly thrust when not otherwise employed. A black satin stock with a large bow encircles his throat, and his shirt is fastened by black enamel studs. Such is Mr. Tuffnell Trigge, yclept the Barber of London.

At the time of his introduction to the reader, Mr. Trigge had just advertised for an assistant, his present young man, Rutherford Watts, being about to leave him, and set up for himself in Canterbury. It was about two o'clock, and Mr. Trigge had just withdrawn into an inner room to take some refection, when, on returning, he found Watts occupied in cutting the hair of a middle-aged, sour-looking gentleman, who was seated before the fire. Mr. Trigge bowed to the sour-looking gentleman, and appeared ready to enter into conversation with him, but no notice being taken of his advances, he went and talked to his magpie.

While he was chattering to it, the sagacious bird screamed forth: "Pretty dear!—pretty dear!"

"Ah! what's that? Who is it?" cried Trigge.

"Pretty dear!—pretty dear!" reiterated the magpie.

Upon this, Trigge looked around, and saw a very singular little man enter the shop. He had somewhat the appearance of a groom, being clothed in a long grey coat, drab knees, and small top-boots. He had a large and remarkably projecting mouth, like that of a baboon, and a great shock head of black hair.

"Pretty dear!—pretty dear!" screamed the magpie.

"I see nothing pretty about him," thought Mr. Trigge. "What a strange little fellow! It would puzzle the Lord Chancellor himself to say what his age might be."

The little man took off his hat, and making a profound bow to the barber, unfolded the Times newspaper, which he carried under his arm, and held it up to Trigge.

"What do you want, my little friend, eh?" said the barber.

"High wages!—high wages!" screamed the magpie.

"Is this yours, sir?" replied the little man, pointing to an advertisement in the newspaper.

"Yes, yes, that's my advertisement, friend," replied Mr. Trigge. "But what of it?"

Before the little man could answer, a slight interruption occurred. While eyeing the newcomer, Watts neglected to draw forth the hot curling-irons, in consequence of which he burnt the sour-looking gentleman's forehead, and singed his hair.

"Take care, sir!" cried the gentleman furiously. "What the devil are you about?"

"Yes! take care, sir, as Judge Learmouth observes to a saucy witness," cried Trigge—"take care, or I'll commit you!"

"D—n Judge Learmouth!" cried the gentleman angrily. "If I were a judge, I'd hang such a careless fellow."

"Sarve him right!" screamed Mag—"sarve him right!"

The Barber of London.

"Beg pardon, sir," cried Watts. "I'll rectify you in a minute."

"Well, my little friend," observed Trigge, "and what may be your object in coming to me? as the great conveyancer, Mr. Plodwell, observes to his clients—what may be your object?"

"You want an assistant, don't you, sir?" rejoined the little man humbly.

"Do you apply on your own account, or on behalf of a friend?" asked Trigge.

"On my own," replied the little man.

"What are your qualifications?" demanded Trigge—"what are your qualifications?"

"I fancy I understand something of the business," replied the little man. "I was a perruquier myself, when wigs were more in fashion than they are now."

"Ha! indeed!" said Trigge, laughing. "That must have been in the last century—in Queen Anne's time—eh?"

"You have hit it exactly, sir," replied the little man. "It was in Queen Anne's time."

"Perhaps you recollect when wigs were first worn, my little Nestor?" cried Mr. Trigge.

"Perfectly," replied the little man. "French periwigs were first worn in Charles the Second's time."

"You saw 'em, of course?" cried the barber, with a sneer.

"I did," replied the little man quietly.

"Oh, he must be out of his mind," cried Trigge. "We shall have a commission de lunatico to issue here, as the Master of the Rolls would observe."

"I hope I may suit you, sir," said the little man.

"I don't think you will, my friend," replied Mr. Trigge; "I don't think you will. You don't seem to have a hand for hairdressing. Are you aware of the talent the art requires? Are you aware what it has cost me to earn the enviable title of the Barber of London? I'm as proud of that title as if I were——"

"Lord Chancellor!—Lord Chancellor!" screamed Mag.

"Precisely, Mag," said Mr. Trigge; "as if I were Lord Chancellor."

"Well, I'm sorry for it," said the little man disconsolately.

"Pretty dear!" screamed Mag; "pretty dear!"

"What a wonderful bird you have got!" said the sour-looking gentleman, rising and paying Mr. Trigge. "I declare its answers are quite appropriate."

"Ah! Mag is a clever creature, sir—that she is," replied the barber. "I gave a good deal for her."

"Little or nothing!" screamed Mag—"little or nothing!"

"What is your name, friend?" said the gentleman, addressing the little man, who still lingered in the shop.

"Why, sir, I've had many names in my time," he replied. "At one time I was called Flapdragon—at another, Old Parr—but my real name, I believe, is Morse—Gregory Morse."

"An Old Bailey answer," cried Mr. Trigge, shaking his head. "Flapdragon, alias Old Parr—alias Gregory Morse—alias——"

"Pretty dear!" screamed Mag.

"And you want a place?" demanded the sour-looking gentleman, eyeing him narrowly.

"Sadly," replied Morse.

"Well, then, follow me," said the gentleman, "and I'll see what can be done for you."

And they left the shop together.

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IX

THE MOON IN THE FIRST QUARTER

In spite of his resolution to the contrary, Auriol found it impossible to resist the fascination of Ebba's society, and became a daily visitor at her father's house. Mr. Thorneycroft noticed the growing attachment between them with satisfaction. His great wish was to see his daughter united to the husband of her choice, and in the hope of smoothing the way, he let Auriol understand that he should give her a considerable marriage portion.

For the last few days a wonderful alteration had taken place in Auriol's manner, and he seemed to have shaken off altogether the cloud that had hitherto sat upon his spirits. Enchanted by the change, Ebba indulged in the most blissful anticipations of the future.

One evening they walked forth together, and almost unconsciously directed their steps towards the river. Lingered on its banks, they gazed on the full tide, admired the glorious sunset, and breathed over and over again those tender nothings so eloquent in lovers' ears.

"Oh! how different you are from what you were a week ago," said Ebba playfully. "Promise me not to indulge in any more of those gloomy fancies."

"I will not indulge in them if I can help it, rest assured, sweet Ebba," he replied. "But my spirits are not always under my control. I am surprised at my own cheerfulness this evening."

"I never felt so happy," she replied; "and the whole scene is in unison with my feelings. How soothing is the calm river flowing at our feet!—how tender is the warm sky, still flushed with red, though the sun has set!—And see, yonder hangs the crescent moon. She is in her first quarter."

"The moon in her first quarter!" cried Auriol, in a tone of anguish. "All then is over."

"What means this sudden change?" cried Ebba, frightened by his looks.

"Oh, Ebba," he replied, "I must leave you. I have allowed myself to dream of happiness too long. I am an accursed being, doomed only to bring misery upon those who love me."

I warned you on the onset, but you would not believe me. Let me go, and perhaps it may not yet be too late to save you."

"Oh no, do not leave me!" cried Ebba. "I have no fear while you are with me."

"But you do not know the terrible fate I am linked to," he said. "This is the night when it will be accomplished."

"Your moody fancies do not alarm me as they used to do, dear Auriol," she rejoined, "because I know them to be the fruit of a diseased imagination. Come, let us continue our walk," she added, taking his arm kindly.

"Ebba," he cried, "I implore you to let me go! I have not the power to tear myself away unless you aid me."

"I'm glad to hear it," she rejoined, "for then I shall hold you fast."

"You know not what you do!" cried Auriol. "Release me! oh, release me!"

"In a few moments the fit will be passed," she rejoined. "Let us walk towards the abbey."

"It is in vain to struggle against fate," ejaculated Auriol despairingly.

And he suffered himself to be led in the direction proposed.

Ebba continued to talk, but her discourse fell upon a deaf ear, and at last she became silent too. In this way they proceeded along Millbank Street and Abingdon Street, until, turning off on the right, they found themselves before an old and partly-demolished building. By this time it had become quite dark, for the moon was hidden behind a rack of clouds, but a light was seen in the upper storey of the structure, occasioned, no doubt, by a fire within it, which gave a very picturesque effect to the broken outline of the walls.

Pausing for a moment to contemplate the ruin, Ebba expressed a wish to enter it. Auriol offered no opposition, and passing through an arched doorway, and ascending a short, spiral, stone staircase, they presently arrived at a roofless chamber, which it was evident, from the implements and rubbish lying about, was about to be razed to the ground. On one side there was a large arch, partly bricked up, through which opened a narrow doorway, though at some height from the ground. With this a plank communicated, while beneath it lay a great heap of stones, amongst which were some grotesque carved heads. In the centre of the chamber was a large square opening, like the mouth of a trap-door, from which the top of a ladder projected, and near it stood a

flaming brazier, which had cast forth the glare seen from below. Over the ruinous walls on the right hung the crescent moon, now emerged from the cloud, and shedding a ghostly glimmer on the scene.

"What a strange place!" cried Ebba, gazing around with some apprehension. "It looks like a spot one reads of in romance. I wonder where that trap leads to?"

"Into the vault beneath, no doubt," replied Auriol. "But why did we come hither?"

As he spoke, there was a sound like mocking laughter, but whence arising it was difficult to say.

"Did you hear that sound?" cried Auriol.

"It was nothing but the echo of laughter from the street," she replied. "You alarm yourself without reason, Auriol."

"No, not without reason," he cried. "I am in the power of a terrible being, who seeks to destroy you, and I know that he is at hand. Listen to me, Ebba, and however strange my recital may appear, do not suppose it the ravings of a madman, but be assured it is the truth."

"Beware!" cried a deep voice, issuing apparently from the depths of the vault.

"Some one spoke," cried Ebba. "I begin to share your apprehensions. Let us quit this place."

"Come, then," said Auriol.

"Not so fast," cried a deep voice.

And they beheld the mysterious owner of the black cloak barring their passage out.

"Ebba, you are mine," cried the stranger. "Auriol has brought you to me."

"It is false!" cried Auriol. "I never will yield her to you."

"Remember your compact," rejoined the stranger, with a mocking laugh.

"Oh, Auriol!" cried Ebba, "I fear for your soul. You have not made a compact with this fiend?"

"He has," replied the stranger; "and by that compact you are surrendered to me."

And, as he spoke, he advanced towards her, and enveloping her in his cloak, her cries were instantly stifled.

"You shall not go!" cried Auriol, seizing him. "Release her, or I renounce you wholly."

"Fool!" cried the stranger, "since you provoke my wrath, take your doom."

And he stamped on the ground. At this signal an arm was thrust from the trap-door, and Auriol's hand was seized with an iron grasp.

While this took place, the stranger bore his lovely burden swiftly up the plank leading to the narrow doorway in the wall, and just as he was passing through it he pointed towards the sky, and shouted with a mocking smile to Auriol—"Behold! the moon is in her first quarter. My words are fulfilled!"

And he disappeared.

Auriol tried to disengage himself from the grasp imposed upon him in vain. Uttering ejaculations of rage and despair, he was dragged forcibly backwards into the vault.

Seizure of Ebba.

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER X

THE STATUE AT CHARING CROSS

One morning, two persons took their way along Parliament Street and Whitehall, and, chatting as they walked, turned into the entrance of Spring Gardens, for the purpose of looking at the statue at Charing Cross. One of them was remarkable for his dwarfish stature and strange withered features. The other was a man of middle size, thin, rather elderly, and with a sharp countenance, the sourness of which was redeemed by a strong expression of benevolence. He was clad in a black coat, rather rusty, but well brushed, buttoned up to the chin, black tights, short drab gaiters, and wore a white neckcloth and spectacles.

Mr. Loftus (for so he was called) was a retired merchant, of moderate fortune, and lived in Abingdon Street. He was a bachelor, and therefore pleased himself; and being a bit of an antiquary, rambled about all day long in search of some object of interest. His walk, on the present occasion, was taken with that view.

"By Jove! what a noble statue that is, Morse!" cried Loftus, gazing at it. "The horse is magnificent—positively magnificent."

"I recollect when the spot was occupied by a gibbet, and when, in lieu of a statue, an effigy of the martyred monarch was placed there," replied Morse. "That was in the time of the Protectorate."

"You cannot get those dreams out of your head, Morse," said Loftus, smiling. "I wish I could persuade myself I had lived for two centuries and a half."

"Would you could have seen the ancient cross, which once stood there, erected by Edward the First to his beloved wife, 'Eleanor of Castile!'" said Morse, heedless of the other's remark. "It was much mutilated when I remember it; some of the pinnacles were broken, and the foliage defaced, but the statues of the queen were still standing in the recesses; and altogether the effect was beautiful."

"It must have been charming," observed Loftus, rubbing his hands; "and, though I like the statue, I would much rather have had the old Gothic cross. But how fortunate the former escaped destruction in Oliver Cromwell's time!"

"I can tell you how that came to pass, sir," replied Morse, "for I was assistant to John Rivers, the brazier, to whom the statue was sold."

"Ah! indeed!" exclaimed Loftus. "I have heard something of the story, but should like to have full particulars."

"You shall hear them, then," replied Morse. "Yon statue, which, as you know, was cast by Hubert le Sueur, in 1633, was ordered by Parliament to be sold and broken to pieces. Well, my master, John Rivers, being a staunch Royalist, though he did not dare to avow his principles, determined to preserve it from destruction. Accordingly, he offered a good round sum for it, and was declared the purchaser. But how to dispose of it was the difficulty? He could trust none of his men but me, whom he knew to be as hearty a hater of the Roundheads, and as loyal to the memory of our slaughtered sovereign, as himself. Well, we digged a great pit, secretly, in the cellar, whither the statue had been conveyed, and buried it. The job occupied us nearly a month; and during that time, my master collected together all the pieces of old brass he could procure. These he afterwards produced, and declared they were the fragments of the statue. But the cream of the jest was to come. He began to cast handles of knives and forks in brass, giving it out that they were made from the metal of the statue. And plenty of 'em he sold too, for the Cavaliers bought 'em as memorials of their martyred monarch, and the Roundheads as evidences of his fall. In this way he soon got back his outlay."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Loftus.

"Well, in due season came the Restoration," pursued Morse; "and my master made known to King Charles the Second the treasure he had kept concealed for him. It was digged forth, placed in its old position—but I forget whether the brazier was rewarded. I rather think not."

"No matter," cried Loftus; "he was sufficiently rewarded by the consciousness of having done a noble action. But let us go and examine the sculpture on the pedestal more closely."

With this he crossed over the road; and, taking off his hat, thrust his head through the iron railing surrounding the pedestal, while Morse, in order to point out the beauties of the sculpture with greater convenience, mounted upon a stump beside him.

"You are aware that this is the work of Grinling Gibbons, sir?" cried the dwarf.

"To be sure I am," replied Loftus—"to be sure. What fancy and gusto is displayed in the treatment of these trophies!"

"The execution of the royal arms is equally admirable," cried Morse.

"Never saw anything finer," rejoined Loftus—"never, upon my life."

Every one knows how easily a crowd is collected in London, and it cannot be supposed that our two antiquaries would be allowed to pursue their investigations unmolested. Several ragged urchins got round them, and tried to discover what they were looking at, at the same time cutting their jokes upon them. These were speedily joined by a street-sweeper, rather young in the profession, a ticket-porter, a butcher's apprentice, an old Israelitish clothes-man, a coalheaver, and a couple of charity-boys.

"My eyes!" cried the street-sweeper, "only twig these coves. If they ain't green 'uns, I'm done."

"Old Spectacles thinks he has found it all out," remarked the porter; "ve shall hear wot it all means by-and-by."

"Plesh ma 'art," cried the Jew, "vat two funny old genelman. I vonder vat they thinks they sees?"

"I'll tell 'ee, master," rejoined the butcher's apprentice; "they're a tryin' vich on 'em can see farthest into a millstone."

Antiquaries.

"Only think of living all my life in London, and never examining this admirable work of art before!" cried Loftus, quite unconscious that he had become the object of general curiosity.

"Look closer at it, old gem'man," cried the porter. "The nearer you get, the more you'll admire it."

"Quite true," replied Loftus, fancying Morse had spoken; "it'll bear the closest inspection."

"I say, Ned," observed one of the charity-boys to the other, "do you get over the railin'; they must ha' dropped summat inside. See what it is."

"I'm afraid o' spikin' myself, Joe," replied the other; "but just give us a lift, and I'll try."

"Wot are you arter there, you young rascals?" cried the coalheaver; "come down, or I'll send the perlice to you."

"Wot two precious guys these is!" cried a ragamuffin lad, accompanied by a bulldog. "I've a good mind to chuck the little 'un off the post, and set Tartar at him. Here, boy, here!"

"That 'ud be famous fun, indeed, Spicer!" cried another rapsallion behind him.

"Arrah! let 'em alone, will you there, you young divils!" cried an Irish bricklayer; "don't you see they're only two paiceable antiquaries."

"Oh, they're antiquaries, are they?" screamed the little street-sweeper. "Vell, I never see the likes on 'em afore; did you, Sam?"

"Never," replied the porter.

"Och, murther in Irish! ye're upsettin' me, an' all the fruits of my industry," cried an applewoman, against whom the bricklayer had run his barrow. "Divil seize you for a careless wagabone! Why don't you look where ye're goin', and not dhrive into people in that way?"

"Axes pardon, Molly," said the bricklayer; "but I was so interested in them antiquaries, that I didn't obsarve ye."

"Antiquaries be hanged! what's such warmint to me?" cried the applewoman furiously. "You've destroyed my day's market, and bad luck to ye!"

"Well, never heed, Molly," cried the good-natured bricklayer; "I'll make it up t'ye. Pick up your apples, and you shall have a dhrop of the craiter if you'll come along wid me."

While this was passing, a stout gentleman came from the farther side of the statue, and perceiving Loftus, cried—"Why, brother-in-law, is that you?"

But Loftus was too much engrossed to notice him, and continued to expiate upon the beauty of the trophies.

"What are you talking about, brother?" cried the stout gentleman.

"Grinling Gibbons," replied Loftus, without turning round. "Horace Walpole said that no one before him could give to wood the airy lightness of a flower, and here he has given it to a stone."

"This may be all very fine, my good fellow," said the stout gentleman, seizing him by the shoulder; "but don't you see the crowd you're collecting round you? You'll be mobbed presently."

"Why, how the devil did you come here, brother Thorneycroft?" cried Loftus, at last recognising him.

"Come along, and I'll tell you," replied the iron-merchant, dragging him away, while Morse followed closely behind them. "I'm so glad to have met you," pursued Thorneycroft, as soon as they were clear of the mob; "you'll be shocked to hear what has happened to your niece, Ebba."

"Why, what has happened to her?" demanded Loftus. "You alarm me. Out with it at once. I hate to be kept in suspense."

"She has left me," replied Thorneycroft—"left her old indulgent father—run away."

"Run away!" exclaimed Loftus. "Impossible! I'll not believe it—even from your lips."

"Would it were not so!—but it is, alas! too true," replied Thorneycroft mournfully. "And the thing was so unnecessary, for I would gladly have given her to the young man. My sole hope is that she has not utterly disgraced herself."

"No, she is too high principled for that," cried Loftus. "Rest easy on that score. But with whom has she run away?"

"With a young man named Auriol Darcy," replied Thorneycroft. "He was brought to my house under peculiar circumstances."

"I never heard of him," said Loftus.

"But I have," interposed Morse. "I've known him these two hundred years."

"Eh day! who's this?" cried Thorneycroft.

"A crack-brained little fellow, whom I've engaged as valet," replied Loftus. "He fancies he was born in Queen Elizabeth's time."

"It's no fancy," cried Morse. "I am perfectly acquainted with Auriol Darcy's history. He drank of the same elixir as myself."

"If you know him, can you give us a clue to find him?" asked Thorneycroft.

"I am sorry I cannot," replied Morse. "I only saw him for a few minutes the other night, after I had been thrown into the Serpentine by the tall man in the black cloak."

"What's that you say?" cried Thorneycroft quickly. "I have heard Ebba speak of a tall man in a black cloak having some mysterious connection with Auriol. I hope that person has nothing to do with her disappearance."

"I shouldn't wonder if he had," replied Morse. "I believe that black gentleman to be——"

"What!—who?" demanded Thorneycroft.

"Neither more nor less than the devil," replied Morse mysteriously.

"Pshaw! poh!" cried Loftus. "I told you the poor fellow was half cracked."

At this moment, a roguish-looking fellow, with red whiskers and hair, and clad in a velveteen jacket with ivory buttons, who had been watching the iron-merchant at some distance, came up, and touching his hat, said, "Mr. Thorneycroft, I believe?"

"My name is Thorneycroft, fellow!" cried the iron-merchant, eyeing him askance. "And your name, I fancy, is Ginger?"

"Exactly, sir," replied the dog-fancier, again touching his hat, "ex-actly. I didn't think you would rekilect me, sir. I bring you some news of your darter."

"Of Ebba!" exclaimed Thorneycroft, in a tone of deep emotion. "I hope your news is good."

"I wish it wos better, for her sake as well as yours, sir," replied the dog-fancier gravely; "but I'm afeerd she's in werry bad hands."

"That she is, if she's in the hands o' the black gentleman," observed Morse.

"Vy, Old Parr, that ain't you?" cried Ginger, gazing at him in astonishment. "Vy, 'ow you are transmogrified, to be sure!"

"But what of my daughter?" cried Thorneycroft; "where is she? Take me to her, and you shall be well rewarded."

"I'll do my best to take you to her, and without any reward, sir," replied Ginger, "for my heart bleeds for the poor young creater. As I said afore, she's in dreadful bad hands."

"Do you allude to Mr. Auriol Darcy?" cried Thorneycroft.

"No, he's as much a wictim of this infernal plot as your darter," replied Ginger; "I thought him quite different at first—but I've altered my mind entirely since some matters has come to my knowledge."

"You alarm me greatly by these dark hints," cried Thorneycroft. "What is to be done?"

"I shall know in a few hours," replied Ginger. "I ain't got the exact clue yet. But come to me at eleven o'clock to-night, at the Turk's Head, at the back o' Shoreditch Church, and I'll put you on the right scent. You must come alone."

"I should wish this gentleman, my brother-in-law, to accompany me," said Thorneycroft.

"He couldn't help you," replied Ginger. "I'll take care to have plenty of assistance. It's a dangerous bus'ness, and can only be managed in a sartin way, and by a sartin person, and he'd object to any von but you. To-night, at eleven! Good-bye, Old Parr. Ve shall meet again ere long."

And without a word more, he hurried away.

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XI

PREPARATIONS

On that same night, at the appointed hour, Mr. Thorneycroft repaired to Shoreditch, and entering a narrow street behind the church, speedily discovered the Turk's Head, at the door of which a hackney-coach was standing. He was shown by the landlord into a small back room, in which three men were seated at a small table, smoking, and drinking gin and water, while a fourth was standing near the fire, with his back towards the door. The latter was a tall, powerfully built man, wrapped in a rough greatcoat, and did not turn round on the iron-merchant's entrance.

"You are punctual, Mr. Thorneycroft," said Ginger, who was one of the trio at the table; "and I'm happy to say, I've arranged everythin' for you, sir. My friends are ready to undertake the job. Only they von't do it on quite sich easy terms as mine."

The Tinker and the Sandman coughed slightly, to intimate their entire concurrence in Mr. Ginger's remark.

"As I said to you this mornin', Mr. Thorneycroft," pursued Ginger, "this is a difficult and a dangerous bus'ness, and there's no knowin' wot may come on it. But it's your only chance o' recoverin' your darter."

"Yes, it's your only chance," echoed the Tinker.

"Ve're about to risk our precious lives for you, sir," said the Sandman; "so, in coorse, ve expects a perportionate revard."

"If you enable me to regain my daughter, you shall not find me ungrateful," rejoined the iron-merchant.

"I must have a hundred pounds," said the Tinker—"that's my lowest."

"And mine, too," said the Sandman.

"I shall take nuffin' but the glory, as I said afore," remarked Ginger. "I'm sworn champion o' poor distressed young damsils; but my friends must make their own bargins."

"Well, I assent," returned Mr. Thorneycroft; "and the sooner we set out the better."

"Are you armed?" asked Ginger.

"I have a brace of pistols in my pocket," replied Thorneycroft.

"All right, then—ve've all got pops and cutlashes," said Ginger. "So let's be off."

As he spoke, the Tinker and Sandman arose; and the man in the rough greatcoat, who had hitherto remained with his back to them, turned round. To the iron-merchant's surprise, he perceived that the face of this individual was covered with a piece of black crape.

"Who is this?" he demanded with some misgiving.

"A friend," replied Ginger. "Vithout him ve could do nuffin'. His name is Reeks, and he is the chief man in our enterprise."

"He claims a reward too, I suppose?" said Thorneycroft.

"I will tell you what reward I claim, Mr. Thorneycroft," rejoined Reeks, in a deep stern tone, "when all is over. Meantime, give me your solemn pledge, that whatever you may behold to-night, you will not divulge it."

"I give it," replied the iron-merchant, "provided always——"

"No provision, sir," interrupted the other quickly. "You must swear to keep silence unconditionally, or I will not move a footstep with you; and I alone can guide you where your daughter is detained."

"Svear, sir; it is your only chance," whispered Ginger.

"Well, if it must be, I do swear to keep silence," rejoined Mr. Thorneycroft; "but your proceedings appear very mysterious."

"The whole affair is mysterious," replied Reeks. "You must also consent to have a bandage passed over your eyes when you get into the coach."

"Anything more?" asked the iron-merchant.

"You must engage to obey my orders, without questioning, when we arrive at our destination," rejoined Reeks. "Otherwise, there is no chance of success."

"Be it as you will," returned Thorneycroft, "I must perforce agree."

"All then is clearly understood," said Reeks, "and we can now set out."

Upon this, Ginger conducted Mr. Thorneycroft to the coach, and as soon as the latter got into it, tied a handkerchief tightly over his eyes. In this state Mr. Thorneycroft heard the Tinker and the Sandman take their places near him, but not remarking the voice of Reeks, concluded that he must have got outside.

The next moment, the coach was put in motion, and rattled over the stones at a rapid pace. It made many turns; but at length proceeded steadily onwards, while from the profound silence around, and the greater freshness of the air, Mr. Thorneycroft began to fancy they had gained the country. Not a word was spoken by any one during the ride.

After a while, the coach stopped, the door was opened, and Mr. Thorneycroft was helped out. The iron-merchant expected his bandage would now be removed, but he was mistaken, for Reeks, taking his arm, drew him along at a quick pace. As they advanced, the iron-merchant's conductor whispered him to be cautious, and, at the same time, made him keep close to a wall. A door was presently opened, and as soon as the party had passed through, it closed.

The bandage was then removed from Thorneycroft's eyes, and he found himself in a large and apparently neglected garden. Though the sky was cloudy, there was light enough to enable him to distinguish that they were near an old dilapidated mansion.

"We are now arrived," said Reeks to the iron-merchant, "and you will have need of all your resolution."

"I will deliver her, or perish in the attempt," said Thorneycroft, taking out his pistols.

The others drew their cutlasses.

"Now then, follow me," said Reeks, "and act as I direct."

With this he struck into an alley formed by thick hedges of privet, which brought them to the back part of the house. Passing through a door, he entered the yard, and creeping cautiously along the wall, reached a low window, which he contrived to open without noise. He then passed through it, and was followed by the others.

Auriol by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XII

THE CHAMBER OF MYSTERY

We shall now return to the night of Ebba's seizure by the mysterious stranger. Though almost deprived of consciousness by terror, the poor girl could distinguish, from the movements of her captor, that she was borne down a flight of steps, or some steep descent, and then for a considerable distance along level ground. She was next placed in a carriage, which was driven with great swiftness, and though it was impossible to conjecture in what direction she was conveyed, it seemed to her terrified imagination as if she were hurried down a precipice, and she expected every moment to be dashed in pieces. At length the vehicle stopped, and she was lifted out of it, and carried along a winding passage; after which, the creaking of hinges announced that a door was opened. Having passed through it, she was deposited on a bench, when, fright overmastering her, her senses completely forsook her.

On recovering, she found herself seated on a fauteuil covered with black velvet, in the midst of a gloomy chamber of vast extent, while beside her, and supporting her from falling, stood the mysterious and terrible stranger. He held a large goblet filled with some potent liquid to her lips, and compelled her to swallow a portion of it. The powerful stimulant revived her, but, at the same time, produced a strange excitement, against which she struggled with all her power. Her persecutor again held the goblet towards her, while a sardonic smile played upon his features.

"Drink!" he cried; "it will restore you, and you have much to go through."

Ebba mechanically took the cup, and raised it to her lips, but noticing the stranger's glance of exultation, dashed it to the ground.

"You have acted foolishly," he said sternly; "the potion would have done you good."

Withdrawing her eyes from his gaze, which she felt exercised an irresistible influence over her, Ebba gazed fearfully round the chamber.

It was vast and gloomy, and seemed like the interior of a sepulchre—the walls and ceiling being formed of black marble, while the floor was paved with the same material. Not far from where she sat, on an estrade, approached by a couple of steps, stood a table covered with black velvet, on which was placed an immense lamp, fashioned like an imp supporting a caldron on his outstretched wings. In this lamp were several burners, which cast a lurid light throughout the chamber. Over it hung a cap equally fantastically fashioned. A dagger, with a richly wrought hilt, was stuck into the table; and beside it lay a strangely shaped mask, an open book, an antique inkstand, and a piece of parchment, on which some characters were inscribed. Opposite these stood a curiously carved ebony chair.

At the lower end of the room, which was slightly elevated above the rest, hung a large black curtain; and on the step, in the front of it, were placed two vases of jet.

"What is behind that curtain?" shudderingly demanded Ebba of her companion.

"You will see anon," he replied. "Meanwhile, seat yourself on that chair, and glance at the writing on the scroll."

Ebba did not move, but the stranger took her hand, and drew her to the seat.

"Read what is written on that paper," he cried imperiously.

Ebba glanced at the document, and a shudder passed over her frame. "By this," she cried, "I surrender myself, soul and body, to you?"

"You do," replied the stranger.

"I have committed no crime that can place me within the power of the Fiend," cried Ebba, falling upon her knees. "I call upon Heaven for protection! Avaunt!"

As the words were uttered, the cap suddenly fell upon the lamp, and the chamber was buried in profound darkness. Mocking laughter rang in her ears, succeeded by wailing cries inexpressibly dreadful to hear.

Ebba continued to pray fervently for her own deliverance, and for that of Auriol. In the midst of her supplications she was aroused by strains of music of the most exquisite sweetness, proceeding apparently from behind the curtain, and while listening to these sounds she was startled by a deafening crash as if a large gong had been stricken. The cover of the lamp was then slowly raised, and the burners blazed forth as before, while

from the two vases in front of the curtain arose clouds of incense, filling the chamber with stupefying fragrance.

Again the gong was stricken, and Ebba looked round towards the curtain. Above each vase towered a gigantic figure, wrapped in a long black cloak, the lower part of which was concealed by the thick vapour. Hoods, like the cowls of monks, were drawn over the heads of these grim and motionless figures; mufflers enveloped their chins, and they wore masks, from the holes of which gleamed eyes of unearthly brightness. Their hands were crossed upon their breasts. Between them squatted two other spectral forms, similarly cloaked, hooded, and masked, with their gleaming eyes fixed upon her, and their skinny fingers pointed derisively at her.

Behind the curtain was placed a strong light, which showed a wide staircase of black marble, leading to some upper chamber, and at the same time threw the reflection of a gigantic figure upon the drapery, while a hand, the finger of which pointed towards her, was thrust from an opening between its folds.

Forcibly averting her gaze, Ebba covered her eyes with her hands, but looking up again after a brief space, beheld an ebon door at the side revolve upon its hinges, and give entrance to three female figures, robed in black, hooded and veiled, and having their hands folded, in a melancholy manner, across their breasts. Slowly and noiselessly advancing, they halted within a few paces of her.

"Who and what are ye?" she cried, wild with terror.

"The victims of Auriol!" replied the figure on the right. "As we are, such will you be ere long."

"What crime have you committed?" demanded Ebba.

"We have loved him," replied the second figure.

The Chamber of Mystery.

"Is that a crime?" cried Ebba. "If so, I am equally culpable with you."

"You will share our doom," replied the third figure.

"Heaven have mercy upon me!" exclaimed the agonised girl, dropping upon her knees.

At this moment a terrible voice from behind the curtain exclaimed, "Sign, or Auriol is lost for ever."

"I cannot yield my soul, even to save him," cried Ebba distractedly.

"Witness his chastisement, then," cried the voice.

And as the words were uttered, a side door was opened on the opposite side, and Auriol was dragged forth from it by two masked personages, who looked like familiars of the Inquisition.

"Do not yield to the demands of this fiend, Ebba!" cried Auriol, gazing at her distractedly.

"Will you save him before he is cast, living, into the tomb?" cried the voice.

And at the words, a heavy slab of marble rose slowly from the floor near where Ebba sat, and disclosed a dark pit beneath.

Ebba gazed into the abyss with indescribable terror.

"There he will be immured, unless you sign," cried the voice; "and, as he is immortal, he will endure an eternity of torture."

"I cannot save him so, but I may precede him," cried Ebba. And throwing her hands aloft, she flung herself into the pit.

A fearful cry resounded through the chamber. It broke from Auriol, who vainly strove to burst from those who held him, and precipitate himself after Ebba.

Soon after this, and while Auriol was gazing into the abyss, a tongue of blue flame arose from it, danced for a moment in the air, and then vanished. No sooner was it gone than a figure, shrouded in black habiliments, and hooded and muffled up like the three other female forms, slowly ascended from the vault, apparently without support, and remained motionless at its brink.

"Ebba!" exclaimed Auriol, in a voice of despair. "Is it you?"

The figure bowed its head, but spoke not.

"Sign!" thundered the voice. "Your attempt at self-destruction has placed you wholly in my power. Sign!"

At this injunction, the figure moved slowly towards the table, and to his unspeakable horror, Auriol beheld it take up the pen and write upon the parchment. He bent forward, and saw that the name inscribed thereon was Ebba Thorneycroft.

The groan to which he gave utterance was echoed by a roar of diabolical laughter.

The figure then moved slowly away, and ranged itself with the other veiled forms.

"All is accomplished," cried the voice. "Away with him!"

On this, a terrible clangour was heard; the lights were extinguished; and Auriol was dragged through the doorway from which he had been brought forth.

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