CYPRIAN ROUGEMONT

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

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CHAPTER I
THE CELL

Mr. Thorneycroft and his companions had scarcely gained a passage in the deserted house, which they had entered in the manner described in a previous chapter, when they were alarmed by the sudden and furious ringing of a bell overhead. The noise brought them instantly to a halt, and each man grasped his arms in expectation of an attack, but the peal ceasing in a few moments, and all continuing quiet, they moved on as before, and presently reached a large hall with a lofty window over the door, which, being without shutters, afforded light enough to reveal the dilapidated condition of the mansion.

From this hall four side doors opened, apparently communicating with different chambers, three of which were cautiously tried by Reeks, but they proved to be fastened. The fourth, however, yielded to his touch, and admitted them to a chamber, which seemed to have been recently occupied, for a lamp was burning within it. The walls were panelled with dusky oak, and hung at the lower end with tapestry, representing the Assyrian monarch Ninus, and his captive Zoroaster, King of the Bactrians. The chief furniture consisted of three large high-backed and grotesquely-carved arm-chairs, near one of which stood a powerful electrical machine. Squares and circles were traced upon the floor, and here and there were scattered cups and balls, and other matters apparently belonging to a conjuring apparatus.

The room might be the retreat of a man of science, or it might be the repository of a juggler. But whoever its occupant was, and whatsoever his pursuits, the good things of the world were not altogether neglected by him, as was proved by a table spread with viands, and furnished with glasses, together with a couple of taper-necked bottles.

While glancing upwards, Mr. Thorneycroft remarked that just above each chair the ceiling was pierced with a round hole, the meaning of which he could not at the time comprehend, though after circumstances sufficiently explained it to him.

"A singular room," he observed to Reeks, on concluding his survey. "Did you expect to find any one here?"

"I hardly know," replied the other. "That bell may have given the alarm. But I will soon ascertain the point. Remain here till I return."

"You are not going to leave us?" rejoined Mr. Thorneycroft uneasily.

"Only for a moment," said Reeks. "Keep quiet, and no harm will befall you. Whatever you may hear without, do not stir."

"What are we likely to hear?" asked Thorneycroft with increasing trepidation.

"That's impossible to say," answered Reeks; "but I warn you not to cry out unnecessarily, as such an imprudence would endanger our safety."

"You are quite sure you don't mean to abandon us?" persisted Thorneycroft.

"Make yourself easy; I have no such intention," rejoined Reeks sternly.

"Oh! ve'll take care on you, don't be afeerd, old gent," said Ginger.

"Yes, ve'll take care on you," added the Tinker and the Sandman.

"You may depend upon them as upon me, sir," said Reeks. "Before we explore the subterranean apartments, I wish to see whether any one is up-stairs."

"Wot's that you say about subterranean apartments, Mr. Reeks?" interposed Ginger. "Ve ain't a-goin' below, eh?"

But without paying any attention to the inquiry, Reeks quitted the room, and closed the door carefully after him. He next crossed the hall, and cautiously ascending a staircase at the farther end of it, reached the landing-place. Beyond it was a gallery, from which several chambers opened.

Advancing a few paces, he listened intently, and hearing a slight sound in an apartment to the right, he stepped softly towards it, and placing his eye to the keyhole, beheld a tall man, dressed in black, pacing to and fro with rapid strides, while three other persons, wrapped in sable gowns, and disguised with hideous masks, stood silent and motionless at a little distance from him. In the tall man he recognised Cyprian Rougemont. Upon a table in the middle of the room was laid a large open volume, bound in black vellum. Near it stood a lamp, which served to illumine the scene.

Suddenly, Rougemont stopped, and turning over several leaves of the book, which were covered with cabalistic characters, appeared in search of some magic formula. Before he could find it, however, a startling interruption occurred. An alarum-bell, fixed against

the wall, began to ring, and at the same moment the doors of a cabinet flew open, and a large ape (for such it seemed to Reeks), clothed in a woollen shirt and drawers, sprang forth, and bounding upon the table beside Rougemont, placed its mouth to his ear. The communication thus strangely made seemed highly displeasing to Rougemont, who knitted his brows, and delivered some instructions in an undertone to the monkey. The animal nodded its head in token of obedience, jumped off the table, and bounded back to the cabinet, the doors of which closed as before. Rougemont next took up the lamp, with the evident intention of quitting the room, seeing which, Reeks hastily retreated to an adjoining chamber, the door of which was fortunately open, and had scarcely gained its shelter when the four mysterious personages appeared on the gallery. Reeks heard their footsteps descending the staircase, and then, creeping cautiously after them, watched them across the hall, and pause before the chamber containing Mr. Thorneycroft and his companions. After a moment's deliberation, Rougemont noiselessly locked the door, took out the key, and leaving two of his attendants on guard, returned with the third towards the staircase.

Without tarrying to confront them, Reeks started back, and hurried along the gallery till he came to a back staircase, which conducted him, by various descents, to the basement floor, where, after traversing one or two vaults, he entered a subterranean passage, arched overhead, and having several openings at the sides, apparently communicating with other passages. It was lighted at intervals by lamps, which emitted a feeble radiance.

By the light of one of these, Reeks discovered the door of a cell. It was of iron, and as he struck it with his hand, returned a hollow clangour. On repeating the blow, a hoarse voice from within cried, "Leave me in peace!"

"Is it Auriol Darcy who speaks?" demanded Reeks.

"It is," replied the prisoner. "Who are you that put the question?"

"A friend," replied Reeks.

"I have no friend here," said Auriol.

"You are mistaken," rejoined Reeks. "I have come with Mr. Thorneycroft to deliver you."

"Mr. Thorneycroft has come too late. He has lost his daughter," replied Auriol.

"What has happened to her?" demanded Reeks.

"She is in the power of the Fiend," replied Auriol.

"I know she is detained by Cyprian Rougemont," said Reeks. "But what has befallen her?"

"She has become like his other victims—like my victims!" cried Auriol distractedly.

"Do not despair," rejoined Reeks. "She may yet be saved."

"Saved! how?" cried Auriol. "All is over."

"So it may seem to you," rejoined Reeks; "but you are the victim of delusion."

"Oh that I could think so!" exclaimed Auriol. "But no—I saw her fall into the pit. I beheld her veiled figure rise from it. I witnessed her signature to the fatal scroll. There could be no illusion in what I then beheld."

"Despite all this, you will see her again," said Reeks.

"Who are you who give me this promise?" asked Auriol.

"As I have already declared, a friend," replied Reeks.

"Are you human?"

"As yourself."

"Then you seek in vain to struggle with the powers of darkness," said Auriol.

"I have no fear of Cyprian Rougemont," rejoined Reeks, with a laugh.

"Your voice seems familiar to me," said Auriol. "Tell me who you are?"

"You shall know anon," replied Reeks. "But, hist!—we are interrupted. Some one approaches."

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CHAPTER II

THE ENCHANTED CHAIRS

More than ten minutes had elapsed since Reeks' departure, and Mr. Thorneycroft, who had hitherto had some difficulty in repressing his anger, now began to give vent to it in muttered threats and complaints. His impatience was shared by the Tinker, who, stepping up to Ginger, said—

"Wot the devil can Mr. Reeks be about? I hope nuffin' has happened to him."

"Don't mention a certain gent's name here," remarked Ginger; "or if you do, treat it vith proper respect."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Tinker impatiently; "I don't like a man stayin' avay in this manner. It looks suspicious. I wotes ve goes and sees arter him. Ve can leave the old gent to take a keviet nap by himself. Don't disturb yourself, sir. Ve'll only jist giv' a look about us, and then come back."

"Stay where you are, rascal!" cried Thorneycroft angrily. "I won't be left. Stay where you are, I command you!"

"Vell, ve've got a noo captain, I'm a-thinkin'," said the Tinker, winking at the others. "Ve've no vish to disobleege you, sir. I'll only jist peep out into the hall, and see if Mr. Reeks is anyvhere thereabouts. Vy, zounds!" he added, as he tried the door, "it's locked!"

"What's locked?" cried Thorneycroft in dismay.

"The door, to be sure," replied the Tinker. "Ve're prisoners."

"O Lord, you don't say so!" cried the iron-merchant in an agony of fright. "What will become of us?"

A roar of laughter from the others converted his terror into fury.

"I see how it is," he cried. "You have entrapped me, ruffians. It's all a trick. You mean to murder me. But I'll sell my life dearly. The first who approaches shall have his brains blown out." And as he spoke, he levelled a pistol at the Tinker's head.

"Holloa! wot are you arter, sir?" cried that individual, sheltering his head with his hands. "You're a-labourin' under a mistake—a complete mistake. If it is a trap, ve're catched in it as vell as yourself."

"To be sure ve is," added the Sandman. "Sit down, and vait a bit. I dessay Mr. Reeks'll come back, and it von't do no good gettin' into a passion."

"Well, well, I must resign myself, I suppose," groaned Thorneycroft, sinking into a chair. "It's a terrible situation to be placed in—shut up in a haunted house."

"I've been in many much vurser sitivations," observed Ginger, "and I alvays found the best vay to get out on 'em wos to take things quietly."

"Besides, there's no help for it," said the Tinker, seating himself.

"That remains to be seen," observed the Sandman, taking the chair opposite Thorneycroft. "If Reeks don't come back soon, I'll bust open the door."

"Plenty o' time for that," said Ginger, sauntering towards the table on which the provisions were spread; "wot do you say to a mouthful o' wittles?"

"I wouldn't touch 'em for the world," replied the Sandman.

"Nor I," added the Tinker; "they may be pisoned."

"Pisoned—nonsense!" cried Ginger; "don't you see some von has been a-takin' his supper here? I'll jist finish it for him."

"Vith all my 'art," said the Tinker.

"Don't touch it on any account," cried Mr. Thorneycroft. "I agree with your companions, it may be poisoned."

"Oh! I ain't afeerd," cried Ginger, helping himself to a dish before him. "As good a pigeon-pie as ever I tasted. Your health, Mr. Thorneycroft," he added, filling a goblet from one of the bottles. "My service to you, gents. Famous tipple, by Jove!" drawing a long breath after the draught, and smacking his lips with amazing satisfaction. "Never

tasted sich a glass o' wine in all my born days," he continued, replenishing the goblet: "I wonder wot it's called?"

"Prussic acid," replied Mr. Thorneycroft gruffly.

"Proossic fiddlestick!" cried Ginger; "more likely Tokay. I shall finish the bottle, and never be the vorse for it!"

"He's gettin' svipy," said the Tinker. "I vonder vether it's really Tokay?"

"No such thing," cried Thorneycroft; "let him alone."

"I must taste it," said the Tinker, unable to resist the temptation. "Here, give us a glass, Ginger!"

"Vith pleasure," replied Ginger, filling a goblet to the brim, and handing it to him. "You'd better be perwailed upon, Sandy."

"Vell, I s'pose I must," replied the Sandman, taking the goblet proffered him.

"Here's the beaks' healths!" cried Ginger. "I gives that toast 'cos they're alvays so kind to us dog-fanciers."

"Dog-fanciers—say, rather, dog-stealers; for that's the name such vagabonds deserve to be known by," said Mr. Thorneycroft with some asperity.

"Vell, ve von't quarrel about names," replied Ginger, laughing, "but I'll relate a circumstance to you as'll prove that wotever your opinion of our wocation may be, the beaks upholds it."

"There can be but one opinion as to your nefarious profession," said Mr. Thorneycroft, "and that is, that it's as bad as horse-stealing and sheep-stealing, and should be punished as those offences are punished."

"So I think, sir," said Ginger, winking at the others; "but to my story, and don't interrupt me, or I can't get through vith it properly. There's a gent livin' not a hundred miles from Pall Mall, as the noospapers says, as had a favourite Scotch terrier, not worth more nor half-a-crown to any one but hisself, but highly wallerable to him, 'cos it wos a favourite. Vell, the dog is lost. A pal of mine gets hold on it, and the gent soon offers a reward for its recovery. This don't bring it back quite so soon as he expects, 'cos he don't offer enough; so he goes to an agent, Mr. Simpkins, in the Edger Road, and Mr. Simpkins says

to him—says he, 'How are you, sir? I expected you some days ago. You've com'd about that ere Scotch terrier. You've got a wallable greyhound, I understand. A man told me he'd have that afore long.' Seein' the gent stare, Mr. S. adds, 'Vel, I'll tell you wot you must give for your dog. The party von't take less than six guineas. He knows it ain't vorth six shillin', but it's a great favourite, and has given him a precious sight o' trouble in gettin' it.' 'Give him trouble!' cries the gent angrily—'and what has it given me? I hope to see the rascal hanged! I shall pay no such money.' 'Werry vell,' replies Mr. Simpkins coolly, 'then your dog'll be bled to death, as the nobleman's wos, and thrown down a breathless carkis afore your door.'"

"You don't mean to say that such a horrid circumstance as that really took place?" cried Thorneycroft, who was much interested in the relation.

"Only t'other day, I assure you," replied Ginger.

"I'd shoot the ruffian who treated a dog of mine so, if I caught him!" cried Mr. Thorneycroft indignantly.

"And sarve him right, too," said Ginger. "I discourages all cruelty to hanimals. But don't interrupt me again. Arter a bit more chafferin' vith Mr. Simpkins, the gent offers three pound for his dog, and then goes avay. Next day he reads a report i' the Times noospaper that a man has been taken up for dog-stealin', and that a lot o' dogs is shut up in the green-yard behind the police-office in Bow Street. So he goes there in search o' his favourite, and sure enough he finds it, but the inspector von't give it up to him, 'cos the superintendent is out o' the vay."

"Shameful!" cried Mr. Thorneycroft.

"Shameful, indeed, sir," echoed Ginger, laughing. "Thinkin' his dog safe enough in the hands o' the police, the gent sleeps soundly that night, but ven he goes back next mornin' he finds it has disappeared. The green-yard has been broken into overnight, and all the dogs stolen from it."

"Under the noses of the police?" cried Thorneycroft.

"Under their werry noses," replied Ginger. "But now comes the cream o' the jest. You shall hear wot the beak says to him ven the gent craves his assistance. 'I can't interfere in the matter,' says he, a-bendin' of his brows in a majestic manner. 'Parties don't ought to come here vith complaints of vhich I can't take notice. This place ain't an advertisin' office, and I sha'n't suffer it to be made von. I von't listen to statements affectin' the characters of absent parties.' Statements affectin' our characters,—do you tvig that, sir?"

"I do, indeed," said Thorneycroft, sighing; "and I am sorry to think such a remark should have dropped from the bench."

"You're right to say dropped from it, sir," laughed Ginger. "I told you the beaks vos our best friends; they alvays takes our parts. Ven the gent urges that it was a subject of ser'ous importance to all dog-owners, the magistrit angrily interrupts him, sayin'—'Then let there be a meetin' of dog-owners to discuss their grievances. Don't come to me. I can't help you.' And he vouldn't if he could, 'cos he's the dog-fancier's friend."

"It looks like it, I must own," replied Thorneycroft. "Such reprehensible indifference gives encouragement to people of your profession. Government itself is to blame. As all persons who keep dogs pay a tax for them, their property ought to be protected."

"I'm quite satisfied vith the present state of the law," said Ginger; "here's the vorthy beak! I'll drink his health a second time."

"Halloa! wot's that?" cried the Tinker; "I thought I heerd a noise."

"So did I," rejoined the Sandman; "a strange sort o' rumblin' sound overhead."

"There it goes again!" cried Ginger; "wot an awful din!"

"Now it's underneath," said Mr. Thorneycroft, turning pale, and trembling. "It sounds as if some hidden machinery were at work."

The noise, which up to this moment had borne an indistinct resemblance to the creaking of wheels and pulleys, now increased to a violent clatter, while the house was shaken as if by the explosion of a mine beneath it.

At the same time, the occupants of the chairs received a sharp electrical shock, that agitated every limb, and caused Mr. Thorneycroft to let fall his pistol, which went off as it reached the ground. At the same time, the Sandman dropped his goblet, and the Tinker relinquished his grasp of the cutlass. Before they could recover from the shock, all three were caught by stout wooden hooks, which, detaching themselves from the back of the chairs, pinioned their arms, while their legs were restrained by fetters, which sprang from the ground and clasped round their ankles. Thus fixed, they struggled vainly to get free. The chairs seemed nailed to the ground, so that all efforts to move them proved futile.

But the worst was to come. From the holes in the ceiling already alluded to, descended three heavy bell-shaped helmets, fashioned like those worn by divers at the bottom of the sea, and having round eyelet-holes of glass. It was evident, from the manner of their descent, that these helmets must drop on the heads of the sitters—a conviction that filled them with inexpressible terror. They shouted, and swore frightfully; but their vociferations availed them nothing. Down came the helmets, and the same moment the monkey, which had been seen by Reeks, issued from a cupboard at the top of a cabinet, and grinned and gibbered at them.

Down came the first helmet, and covered the Tinker to the shoulders. His appearance was at once ludicrous and terrible, and his roaring within the casque sounded like the bellowing of a baited bull.

Down came the second helmet, though rather more slowly, and the Sandman was eclipsed in the same manner as the Tinker, and roared as loudly.

In both these instances the helmets had dropped without guidance, but in the case of Mr. Thorneycroft, a hand, thrust out of the hole in the ceiling, held the helmet suspended over his head, like the sword of Damocles. While the poor iron-merchant momentarily expected the same doom as his companions, his attention was attracted towards the monkey, which, clinging with one hand to the side of the cabinet, extended the other skinny arm towards him, and exclaimed—"Will you swear to go hence if you are spared?"

"No, I will not," replied the iron-merchant. He had scarcely spoken, when the helmet fell with a jerk, and extinguished him like the others.

Ginger alone remained. During the whole of this strange scene, he had stood with the bottle in hand, transfixed with terror and astonishment, and wholly unable to move or cry out. A climax was put to his fright, by the descent of the three chairs, with their occupants, through the floor into a vault beneath; and as the helmets were whisked up again to the ceiling, and the trap-doors closed upon the chairs, he dropped the bottle, and fell with his face upon the table. He was, however, soon roused by a pull at his hair, while a shrill voice called him by his name.

"Who is it?" groaned the dog-fancier.

"Look up!" cried the speaker, again plucking his hair.

Ginger complied, and beheld the monkey seated beside him.

"Vy, it can't be, surely," he cried. "And yet I could almost svear it was Old Parr."

"You're near the mark," replied the other, with a shrill laugh. "It is your venerable friend."

"Vot the deuce are you doing here, and in this dress, or rayther undress?" inquired Ginger. "Ven I see you this mornin', you wos in the serwice of Mr. Loftus."

"I've got a new master since then," replied the dwarf.

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Ginger, shaking his head. "You haven't sold yourself, like Doctor Forster—eh?"

"Faustus, my dear Ginger—not Forster," corrected Old Parr. "No, no, I've made no bargain. And to be plain with you, I've no desire to remain long in my present master's service."

"I don't like to ask the question too directly, wenerable," said Ginger, in a deprecatory tone—"but is your master—hem!—is he—hem!—the—the——"

"The devil, you would say," supplied Old Parr. "Between ourselves, I'm afraid there's no denying it."

"La! wot a horrible idea!" exclaimed Ginger, with a shudder; "it makes the flesh creep on one's bones. Then we're in your master's power?"

"Very like it," replied Old Parr.

"And there ain't no chance o' deliverance?"

"None that occurs to me."

"O Lord! O Lord!" groaned Ginger; "I'll repent. I'll become a reformed character. I'll never steal dogs no more."

"In that case, there may be some chance for you," said Old Parr. "I think I could help you to escape. Come with me, and I'll try and get you out."

"But wot is to become of the others?" demanded Ginger.

"Oh, leave them to their fate," replied Old Parr.

"No, that'll never do," cried Ginger. "Ve're all in the same boat, and must row out together the best vay ve can. I tell you wot it is, wenerable," he added, seizing him by the throat—"your master may be the devil, but you're mortal; and if you don't help me to deliver my companions, I'll squeege your windpipe for you."

"That's not the way to induce me to help you," said Old Parr, twisting himself like an eel out of the other's gripe. "Now get out, if you can."

"Don't be angry," cried Ginger, seeing the mistake he had committed, and trying to conciliate him; "I only meant to frighten you a bit. Can you tell me if Mr. Auriol Darcy is here?"

"Yes, he is, and a close prisoner," replied Old Parr.

"And the girl—Miss Ebber, wot of her?"

"I can't say," rejoined Old Parr. "I can only speak to the living."

"Then she's dead!" cried Ginger, with a look of horror.

"That's a secret," replied the dwarf mysteriously; "and I'm bound by a terrible oath not to disclose it."

"I'll have it out of you notvithstandin'," muttered Ginger. "I vish you would lend me a knock on the head, old feller. I can't help thinkin' I've got a terrible fit o' the nightmare."

"Let this waken you, then," said Old Parr, giving him a sound buffet on the ear.

"Holloa, wenerable! not so hard!" cried Ginger.

"Ha! ha! ha!" screamed the dwarf. "You know what you're about now."

"Not exactly," said Ginger. "I vish I wos fairly out o' this cursed place!"

"You shouldn't have ventured into the lion's den," said Old Parr, in a taunting tone. "But come with me, and perhaps I may be able to do something towards your liberation."

So saying, he drew aside the tapestry, and opened a panel behind it, through which he passed, and beckoned Ginger to follow him. Taking a pistol from his pocket, the latter complied.

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CHAPTER III

GERARD PASTON

Before the chair, in which Mr. Thorneycroft was fixed, reached the ground, terror had taken away his senses. A bottle of salts, placed to his nose, revived him after a time; but he had nearly relapsed into insensibility on seeing two strange figures, in hideous masks and sable cloaks, standing on either side of him, while at a little distance was a third, who carried a strangely-fashioned lantern. He looked round for his companions in misfortune, but, though the chairs were there, they were unoccupied.

The masked attendants paid no attention to the iron-merchant's cries and entreaties; but as soon as they thought him able to move, they touched a spring, which freed his arms and legs from their bondage, and raising him, dragged him out of the vault, and along a narrow passage, till they came to a large sepulchral-looking chamber, cased with black marble, in the midst of which, on a velvet fauteuil of the same hue as the walls, sat Cyprian Rougemont. It was, in fact, the chamber where Ebba had been subject to her terrible trial.

Bewildered with terror, the poor iron-merchant threw himself at the feet of Rougemont, who, eyeing him with a look of malignant triumph, cried—

"You have come to seek your daughter. Behold her!"

And at the words, the large black curtains at the farther end of the room were suddenly withdrawn, and discovered the figure of Ebba Thorneycroft standing at the foot of the marble staircase. Her features were as pale as death; her limbs rigid and motionless; but her eyes blazed with preternatural light. On beholding her, Mr. Thorneycroft uttered a loud cry, and, springing to his feet, would have rushed towards her, but he was held back by the two masked attendants, who seized each arm, and detained him by main force.

"Ebba!" he cried—"Ebba!"

But she appeared wholly insensible to his cries, and remained in the same attitude, with her eyes turned away from him.

"What ails her?" cried the agonised father. "Ebba! Ebba!"

"Call louder," said Rougemont, with a jeering laugh.

"Do you not know me? do you not hear me?" shrieked Mr. Thorneycroft.

Still the figure remained immovable.

"I told you you should see her," replied Rougemont, in a taunting tone; "but she is beyond your reach."

"Not so, not so!" cried Thorneycroft. "Come to me, Ebba!—come to your father. O Heaven! she hears me not! she heeds me not! Her senses are gone."

"She is fast bound by a spell," said Rougemont. "Take a last look of her. You will see her no more."

And, stretching out his hand, the curtains slowly descended, and shrouded the figure from view.

Thorneycroft groaned aloud.

"Are you not content?" cried Rougemont. "Will you depart in peace, and swear never to come here more? If so, I will liberate you and your companions."

"So far from complying with your request, I swear never to rest till I have rescued my child from you, accursed being!" cried Thorneycroft energetically.

"You have sealed your doom, then," replied Rougemont. "But before you are yourself immured, you shall see how Auriol Darcy is circumstanced. Bring him along."

And, followed by the attendants, who dragged Mr. Thorneycroft after him, he plunged into an opening on the right. A few steps brought him to the entrance of the cell. Touching the heavy iron door, it instantly swung open, and disclosed Auriol chained to a stone at the farther corner of the narrow chamber.

Not a word was spoken for some minutes, but the captives regarded each other piteously.

"Oh, Mr. Thorneycroft," cried Auriol, at length, "I beseech you forgive me. I have destroyed your daughter."

"You!" exclaimed the iron-merchant in astonishment.

"It is true," said Rougemont.

"I would have saved her if it had been possible!" cried Auriol. "I warned her that to love me would be fatal to her. I told her I was linked to an inexorable destiny, which would involve her in its meshes—but in vain."

"Oh!" ejaculated Thorneycroft.

"You see you ought to blame him, not me," said Rougemont, with a derisive laugh.

"I would have given my life, my soul, to preserve her, had it been possible!" cried Auriol.

"Horrors crowd so thick upon me that my brain reels," cried Thorneycroft. "Merciless wretch!" he added, to Rougemont, "fiend—whatever you are, complete your work of ruin by my destruction. I have nothing left to tie me to life."

"I would have the miserable live," said Rougemont, with a diabolical laugh. "It is only the happy I seek to destroy. But you have to thank your own obstinacy for your present distress. Bid a lasting farewell to Auriol. You will see him no more."

"Hold!" exclaimed Auriol. "A word before we part."

"Ay, hold!" echoed a loud and imperious voice from the depths of the passage.

"Ha!—who speaks?" demanded Rougemont, a shade passing over his countenance.

"I, Gerard Paston!" exclaimed Reeks, stepping forward.

The crape was gone from his brow, and in its place was seen the handsome and resolute features of a man of middle life. He held a pistol in either hand.

"Is it you, Gerard Paston?" cried Auriol, regarding him; "the brother of Clara, my second victim!"

"It is," replied the other. "Your deliverance is at hand, Auriol."

"And you have dared to penetrate here, Gerard?" cried Rougemont, stamping the ground with rage. "Recollect, you are bound to me by the same ties as Auriol, and you shall share his fate."

"I am not to be intimidated by threats," replied Paston, with a scornful laugh. "You have employed your arts too long. Deliver up Auriol and this gentleman at once, or——" And he levelled the pistols at him.

"Fire!" cried Rougemont, drawing himself up to his towering height. "No earthly bullets can injure me."

"Ve'll try that!" cried Ginger, coming up at the moment behind Paston.

And he discharged a pistol, with a deliberate aim, at the breast of Rougemont. The latter remained erect, and apparently uninjured.

"You see how ineffectual your weapons are," said Rougemont, with a derisive laugh.

"It must be the devil!" cried Ginger, running off.

"I will try mine," said Paston.

But before he could draw the triggers, the pistols were wrested from his grasp by the two attendants, who had quitted Thorneycroft, and stolen upon him unperceived, and who next pinioned his arms.

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CHAPTER IV

THE PIT

So bewildered was the poor iron-merchant by the strange and terrible events that had befallen him, that, though released by the two masked attendants, who left him, as before related, to seize Gerard Paston, he felt utterly incapable of exertion, and would probably have made no effort to regain his freedom, if his coat had not been vigorously plucked behind, while a low voice urged him to fly. Glancing in the direction of the friendly speaker, he could just discern a diminutive object standing within the entrance of a side-passage, and reared up against the wall so as to be out of sight of Rougemont and his attendants. It was the monkey—or rather Old Parr—who, continuing to tug violently at his coat, at last succeeded in drawing him backwards into the passage, and then grasping his hand tightly, hurried him along it. The passage was wholly unlighted, but Mr. Thorneycroft could perceive that it was exceedingly circuitous, and winded round like a maze.

"Where are you taking me?" he inquired, attempting to stop.

"Ask no questions," rejoined the dwarf, pulling him along. "Do you want to be captured, and shut up in a cell for the rest of your life?"

"Certainly not," replied Thorneycroft, accelerating his movements; "I hope there's no chance of it."

"There's every chance of it," rejoined Old Parr. "If you're taken, you'll share Auriol's fate."

"O Lord! I hope not," groaned the iron-merchant. "I declare, you frighten me so much that you take away all power of movement. I shall drop in a minute."

"Come along, I say," screamed the dwarf. "I hear them close behind us."

And as he spoke, shouts, and the noise of rapidly-approaching footsteps, resounded along the passage.

"I can't stir another step," gasped the iron-merchant. "I'm completely done. Better yield at once."

"What, without a struggle?" cried the dwarf tauntingly. "Think of your daughter, and let the thought of her nerve your heart. She is lost for ever, if you don't get out of this accursed place."

"She is lost for ever as it is," cried the iron-merchant despairingly.

"No—she may yet be saved," rejoined the dwarf. "Come on—come on—they are close behind us."

And it was evident, from the increased clamour, that their pursuers were upon them.

Roused by the imminence of the danger, and by the hope of rescuing his daughter, Mr. Thorneycroft exerted all his energies, and sprang forward. A little farther on, they were stopped by a door. It was closed; and venting his disappointment in a scream, the dwarf searched for the handle, but could not find it.

"We are entrapped—we shall be caught," he cried, "and then woe to both of us. Fool that I was to attempt your preservation. Better I had left you to rot in a dungeon than have incurred Rougemont's displeasure."

The iron-merchant replied by a groan.

"It's all over with me," he said. "I give it up—I'll die here!"

"No—we are saved," cried the dwarf, as the light, now flashing strongly upon the door, revealed a small iron button within it,—"saved—saved!"

As he spoke, he pressed against the button, which moved a spring, and the door flew open. Just as they passed through it, the two masked attendants came in sight. The dwarf instantly shut the door, and finding a bolt on the side next him, shot it into the socket. Scarcely had he accomplished this, when the pursuers came up, and dashed themselves against the door; but finding it bolted, presently ceased their efforts, and apparently withdrew.

"They are gone by some other way to intercept us," cried Old Parr, who had paused for a moment to listen; "come on, Mr. Thorneycroft."

"I'll try," replied the iron-merchant, with a subdued groan, "but I'm completely spent. Oh that I ever ventured into this place!"

"It's too late to think of that now; besides, you came here to rescue your daughter," rejoined Old Parr. "Take care and keep near me. I wonder where this passage leads to?"

"Don't you know?" inquired the iron-merchant.

"Not in the least," returned the dwarf. "This is the first time I've been here—and it shall be the last, if I'm allowed any choice in the matter."

"You haven't told me how you came here at all," observed Thorneycroft.

"I hardly know myself," replied the dwarf; "but I find it more difficult to get out than I did to get in. How this passage twists about! I declare we seem to be returning to the point we started from."

"I think we are turning round ourselves," cried Thorneycroft, in an agony of fright. "My head is going. Oh dear! oh dear!"

"Why, it does seem very strange, I must say," remarked the dwarf, coming to a halt. "I could almost fancy that the solid stone walls were moving around us."

"They are moving," cried Thorneycroft, stretching out his hand. "I feel 'em. Lord have mercy upon us, and deliver us from the power of the Evil One!"

"The place seems on fire," cried the dwarf. "A thick smoke fills the passage. Don't you perceive it, Mr. Thorneycroft?"

"Don't I!—to be sure I do," cried the iron-merchant, coughing and sneezing. "I feel as if I were in a room with a smoky chimney, and no window open. Oh!—oh!—I'm choking!"

"Don't mind it," cried the dwarf, who seemed quite at his ease. "We shall soon be out of the smoke."

"I can't stand it," cried Mr. Thorneycroft; "I shall die. Oh! poah—pish—puff!"

"Come on, I tell you—you'll get some fresh air in a minute," rejoined Old Parr. "Halloa! how's this? No outlet. We're come to a dead stop."

"Dead stop, indeed!" echoed the iron-merchant. "We've come to that long ago. But what new difficulty has arisen?"

"Merely that the road's blocked up by a solid wall—that's all," replied Old Parr.

"Blocked up!" exclaimed Thorneycroft. "Then we're entombed alive."

"I am," said the dwarf, with affected nonchalance. "As to you, you've the comfort of knowing it'll soon be over with you. But for me, nothing can harm me."

"Don't be too sure of that," cried a voice above them.

"Did you speak, Mr. Thorneycroft?" asked the dwarf.

"N-o-o—not I," gasped the iron-merchant. "I'm suffocating—help to drag me out."

"Get out if you can," cried the voice that had just spoken.

"It's Rougemont himself," cried the dwarf in alarm. "Then there's no escape."

"None whatever, rascal," replied the unseen speaker. "I want you. I have more work for you to do."

"I won't leave Mr. Thorneycroft," cried the dwarf resolutely. "I've promised to preserve him, and I'll keep my word."

"Fool!" cried the other. "You must obey when I command."

And as the words were uttered, a hand was thrust down from above, which, grasping the dwarf by the nape of the neck, drew him upwards.

"Lay hold of me, Mr. Thorneycroft," screamed Old Parr. "I'm going up again—lay hold of me—pull me down."

Well-nigh stifled by the thickening and pungent vapour, the poor iron-merchant found compliance impossible. Before he could reach the dwarf, the little fellow was carried off. Left to himself, Mr. Thorneycroft staggered along the passage, expecting every moment to drop, until at length a current of fresh air blew in his face, and enabled him to breathe more freely. Somewhat revived, he went on, but with great deliberation, and it was well he did so, for he suddenly arrived at the brink of a pit about eight feet in depth, into which, if he had approached it incautiously, he must infallibly have stumbled, and in all

probability have broken his neck. This pit evidently communicated with a lower range of chambers, as was shown by a brazen lamp burning under an archway. A ladder was planted at one side, and by this Mr. Thorneycroft descended, but scarcely had he set foot on the ground, than he felt himself rudely grasped by a man who stepped from under the archway. The next moment, however, he was released, while the familiar voice of the Tinker exclaimed—

"Vy, bless my 'art, if it ain't Mister Thorneycroft."

"Yes, it's me, certainly, Mr. Tinker," replied the iron-merchant. "Who's that you've got with you?"

"Vy, who should it be but the Sandman," rejoined the other gruffly. "Ve've set ourselves free at last, and have made some nice diskiveries into the bargin."

"Yes, ve've found it all out," added the Tinker.

"What have you discovered—what have you found out?" cried the iron-merchant breathlessly. "Have you found my daughter? Where is she? Take me to her."

"Not so fast, old gent, not so fast," rejoined the Tinker. "Ve ain't sure as 'ow ve've found your darter, but ve've catched a peep of a nice young 'ooman."

"Oh! it must be her—no doubt of it," cried the iron-merchant. "Where is she? Take me to her without a moment's delay."

"But ve can't get to her, I tell 'ee," replied the Tinker. "Ve knows the place vere she's a-shut up,—that's all."

"Take me to it," cried Mr. Thorneycroft eagerly.

"Vell, if you must go, step this vay, then," rejoined the Tinker, proceeding towards the archway. "Halloa, Sandy, did you shut the door arter you?"

"Not I," replied the other; "open it."

"Easily said," rejoined the Tinker, "but not quevite so easily done. Vy, zounds, it's shut of itself and bolted itself on t'other side!"

"Some one must have followed you," groaned Thorneycroft. "We're watched on all sides."

"Ay, and from above, too," cried the Sandman. "Look up there!" he added, in accents of alarm.

"What's the matter? What new danger is at hand?" inquired the iron-merchant.

"Look up, I say," cried the Sandman. "Don't ye see, Tinker?"

"Ay, ay, I see," replied the other. "The roof's a-comin' in upon us. Let's get out o' this as fast as ve can." And he kicked and pushed against the door, but all his efforts were unavailing to burst it open.

At the same time the Sandman rushed towards the ladder, but before he could mount it all egress by that means was cut off. An immense iron cover worked in a groove was pushed by some unseen machinery over the top of the pit, and enclosed them in it.

Cyprian Rougemont By William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER V

NEW PERPLEXITIES

For several hours deep sleep, occasioned by some potent medicaments, had bound up the senses of Auriol. On awaking, he found himself within a cell, the walls, the floor, and the ceiling of which were of solid stone masonry. In the midst of this chamber, and supporting the ponderous roof, stood a massive granite pillar, the capital of which was grotesquely ornamented with death's-heads and cross-bones, and against this pillar leaned Auriol, with his left arm chained by heavy links of iron to a ring in the adjoining wall. Beside him stood a pitcher of water, and near him lay an antique-looking book, bound in black vellum. The dungeon in which he was confined was circular in form, with a coved roof, sustained by the pillar before mentioned, and was approached by a steep flight of steps rising from a doorway, placed some six feet below the level of the chamber, and surmounted by a pointed arch. A stream of light, descending from a narrow aperture in the roof, fell upon his wasted and haggard features. His dark-brown hair hung about his face in elf-locks, his beard was untrimmed, and a fixed and stony glare like that of insanity sat in his eye. He was seated on the ground—neither bench nor stool being allowed him—with his hand supporting his chin. His gaze was fixed upon vacancy—if that can he called vacancy which to him was filled with vivid images. His garb was not that of modern times, but consisted of a doublet and hose of rich material, wrought in the fashion of Elizabeth's days.

After remaining for some time in this musing attitude, Auriol opened the old tome before him, and began to turn over its leaves. It was full of magical disquisitions and mysterious characters, and he found inscribed on one of its earlier pages a name which instantly riveted his attention. Having vainly sought some explanation of this name in the after contents of the book, he laid it aside, and became lost in meditation. His reverie ended, he heaved a deep sigh, and turned again to the open volume lying before him, and in doing so his eye rested for the first time on his habiliments. On beholding them he started, and held out his arm to examine his sleeve more narrowly. Satisfied that he was not deceived, he arose and examined himself from head to foot. He found himself, as has been stated, attired in the garb of a gentleman of Elizabeth's time.

"What can this mean?" he cried. "Have I endured a long and troubled dream, during which I have fancied myself living through more than two centuries? O Heaven, that it may be so! Oh that the fearful crimes I suppose I have committed have only been

enacted in a dream! Oh that my victims are imaginary! Oh that Ebba should only prove a lovely phantom of the night! And yet, I could almost wish the rest were real—so that she might exist. I cannot bear to think that she is nothing more than a vision. But it must be so—I have been dreaming—and what a dream it has been!—what strange glimpses it has afforded me into futurity! Methought I lived in the reigns of many sovereigns—beheld one of them carried to the block—saw revolutions convulse the kingdom—old dynasties shaken down, and new ones spring up. Fashions seem to me to have so changed, that I had clean forgotten the old ones; while my fellow-men scarcely appeared the same as heretofore. Can I be the same myself? Is this the dress I once wore? Let me seek for some proof."

And thrusting his hand into his doublet, he drew forth some tablets, and hastily examined them. They bore his name, and contained some writing, and he exclaimed aloud with joy, "This is proof enough—I have been dreaming all this while."

"The scheme works to a miracle," muttered a personage stationed at the foot of the steps springing from the doorway, and who, though concealed from view himself, was watching the prisoner with a malignant and exulting gaze.

"And yet, why am I here?" pursued Auriol, looking around. "Ah! I see how it is," he added, with a shudder; "I have been mad—perhaps am mad still. That will account for the strange delusion under which I have laboured."

"I will act upon that hint," muttered the listener.

"Of what use is memory," continued Auriol musingly, "if things that are not, seem as if they were? If joys and sorrows which we have never endured are stamped upon the brain—if visions of scenes, and faces and events which we have never witnessed, never known, haunt us, as if they had once been familiar? But I am mad—mad!"

The listener laughed to himself.

"How else, if I were not mad, could I have believed that I had swallowed the fabled elixir vitæ? And yet, is it a fable? for I am puzzled still. Methinks I am old—old—old—though I feel young, and look young. All this is madness. Yet how clear and distinct it seems! I can call to mind events in Charles the Second's time. Ha!—who told me of Charles the Second? How know I there was such a king? The reigning sovereign should be James, and yet I fancy it is George the Fourth. Oh! I am mad—clean mad!"

There was another pause, during which the listener indulged in a suppressed fit of laughter.

"Would I could look forth from this dungeon," pursued Auriol, again breaking silence, "and satisfy myself of the truth or falsehood of my doubts by a view of the external world, for I am so perplexed in mind, that if I were not distracted already, they would be enough to drive me so. What dismal, terrible fancies have possessed me, and weigh upon me still—the compact with Rougemont—ha!"

"Now it comes," cried the listener.

"Oh, that I could shake off the conviction that this were not so—that my soul, though heavily laden, might still be saved! Oh, that I dared to hope this!"

"I must interrupt him if he pursues this strain," said the listener.

Rougemont's device to perplex Auriol.

"Whether my crimes are real or imaginary—whether I snatched the cup of immortality from my grandsire's dying lips—whether I signed a compact with the Fiend, and delivered him a victim on each tenth year—I cannot now know; but if it is so, I deeply, bitterly regret them, and would expiate my offences by a life of penance."

At this moment Rougemont, attired in a dress similar to that of the prisoner, marched up the steps, and cried, "What ho, Auriol!—Auriol Darcy!"

"Who speaks?" demanded Auriol. "Ah! is it you, Fiend?"

"What, you are still in your old fancies," rejoined Rougemont. "I thought the draught I gave you last night would have amended you."

"Tell me who and what I am," cried Auriol, stupefied with astonishment; "in what age I am living; and whether I am in my right mind or not?"

"For the first, you are called Auriol Darcy," replied Rougemont; "for the second, you are living in the reign of his most Catholic Majesty James I. of England, and Sixth of Scotland; and for the third, I trust you will soon recover your reason."

"Amazement!" cried Auriol, striking his brow with his clenched hand. "Then I am mad."

"It's plain your reason is returning, since you are conscious of your condition," replied Rougemont; "but calm yourself, you have been subject to raging frenzies."

"And I have been shut up here for safety?" demanded Auriol.

"Precisely," observed the other.

"And you are——"

"Your keeper," replied Rougemont.

"My God! what a brain mine must be!" cried Auriol. "Answer me one question—Is there such a person as Ebba Thorneycroft?"

"You have often raved about her," replied Rougemont. "But she is a mere creature of the imagination."

Auriol groaned, and sank against the wall.

"Since you have become so reasonable, you shall again go forth into the world," said Rougemont; "but the first essay must be made at night, for fear of attracting observation. I will come to you again a few hours hence. Farewell for the present."

And casting a sinister glance at his captive, he turned upon his heel, descended the steps, and quitted the cell.

Cyprian Rougemont By William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VI

DOCTOR LAMB AGAIN

Night came, and the cell grew profoundly dark. Auriol became impatient for the appearance of his keeper, but hour after hour passed and he did not arrive. Worn out, at length, with doubt and bewildering speculations, the miserable captive was beset with the desire to put an end to his torments by suicide, and he determined to execute his fell purpose without delay. An evil chance seemed also to befriend him, for scarcely was the idea formed, than his foot encountered something on the ground, the rattling of which attracted his attention, and stooping to take it up, he grasped the bare blade of a knife.

"This will, at all events, solve my doubts," he cried aloud. "I will sheathe this weapon in my heart, and, if I am mortal, my woes will be ended."

As he spoke, he placed the point to his breast with the full intent to strike, but before he could inflict the slightest wound, his arm was forcibly arrested.

"Would you destroy yourself, madman?" roared a voice. "I thought your violence was abated, and that you might go forth in safety. But I find you are worse than ever."

Auriol uttered a groan and let the knife fall to the ground. The new-comer kicked it to a distance with his foot.

"You shall be removed to another chamber," he pursued, "where you can be more strictly watched."

"Take me forth—oh! take me forth," cried Auriol. "It was a mere impulse of desperation, which I now repent."

"I dare not trust you. You will commit some act of insane fury, for which I myself shall have to bear the blame. When I yielded to your entreaties on a former occasion, and took you forth, I narrowly prevented you from doing all we met a mischief."

"I have no recollection of any such circumstance," returned Auriol mournfully. "But it may be true, nevertheless. And if so, it only proves the lamentable condition to which I am reduced—memory and reason gone!"

"Ay, both gone," cried the other, with an irrepressible chuckle.

"Ha!" exclaimed Auriol, starting. "I am not so mad but I recognise in you the Evil Being who tempted me. I am not so oblivious as to forget our terrible interviews."

"What, you are in your lunes again!" cried Rougemont fiercely. "Nay, then I must call my assistants, and bind you."

"Let me be—let me be!" implored Auriol, "and I will offend you no more. Whatever thoughts may arise within me, I will not give utterance to them. Only take me forth."

"I came for that purpose," said Rougemont; "but I repeat, I dare not. You are not sufficiently master of yourself."

"Try me," said Auriol.

"Well," rejoined the other, "I will see what I can do to calm you."

So saying, he disappeared for a few moments, and then returning with a torch, placed it on the ground, and producing a phial, handed it to the captive.

"Drink!" he said.

Without a moment's hesitation Auriol complied.

"It seems to me rather a stimulant than a soothing potion," he remarked, after emptying the phial.

"You are in no condition to judge," rejoined the other.

And he proceeded to unfasten Auriol's chain.

"Now then, come with me," he said, "and do not make any attempt at evasion, or you will rue it."

Like one in a dream, Auriol followed his conductor down the flight of stone steps leading from the dungeon, and along a narrow passage. As he proceeded, he thought he heard stealthy footsteps behind him; but he never turned his head, to see whether he was really followed. In this way they reached a short steep staircase, and mounting it, entered a vault, in which Rougemont paused, and placed the torch he had brought with

him upon the floor. Its lurid glimmer partially illumined the chamber, and showed that it was built of stone. Rude benches of antique form were set about the vault, and motioning Auriol to be seated upon one of them, Rougemont sounded a silver whistle. The summons was shortly afterwards answered by the dwarf, in whose attire a new change had taken place. He was now clothed in a jerkin of grey serge, fashioned like the garments worn by the common people in Elizabeth's reign, and wore a trencher-cap on his head. Auriol watched him as he timidly advanced towards Rougemont, and had an indistinct recollection of having seen him before; but could not call to mind how or where.

"Is your master a-bed?" demanded Rougemont.

"A-bed! Good lack, sir!" exclaimed the dwarf, "little of sleep knows Doctor Lamb. He will toil at the furnace till the stars have set."

"Doctor Lamb!" repeated Auriol. "Surely I have heard that name before?"

"Very likely," replied Rougemont, "for it is the name borne by your nearest kinsman."

"How is the poor young gentleman?" asked the dwarf, glancing commiseratingly at Auriol. "My master often makes inquiries after his grandson, and grieves that the state of his mind should render it necessary to confine him."

"His grandson! I—Doctor Lamb's grandson!" cried Auriol.

"In sooth are you, young sir," returned the dwarf. "Were you in your reason, you would be aware that my master's name is the same as your own—Darcy—Reginald Darcy. He assumes the name of Doctor Lamb to delude the multitude. He told you as much yourself, sweet sir, if your poor wits would enable you to recollect it."

"Am I in a dream, good fellow, tell me that?" cried Auriol, lost in amazement.

"Alack, no, sir," replied the dwarf; "to my thinking, you are wide awake. But you know, sir," he added, touching his forehead, "you have been a little wrong here, and your memory and reason are not of the clearest."

"Where does my grandsire dwell?" asked Auriol.

"Why here, sir," replied the dwarf; "and for the matter of locality, the house is situated on the south end of London Bridge."

"On the bridge—did you say on the bridge, friend?" cried Auriol.

"Ay, on the bridge—where else should it be? You would not have your grandsire live under the river?" rejoined the dwarf; "though, for ought I know, some of these vaults may go under it. They are damp enough."

Auriol was lost in reflection, and did not observe a sign that passed between the dwarf and Rougemont.

"Will it disturb Doctor Lamb if his grandson goes up to him?" said the latter, after a brief pause.

"My master does not like to be interrupted in his operations, as you know, sir," replied the dwarf, "and seldom suffers any one, except myself, to enter his laboratory; but I will make so bold as to introduce Master Auriol, if he desires it."

"You will confer the greatest favour on me by doing so," cried Auriol, rising.

"Sit down—sit down!" said Rougemont authoritatively. "You cannot go up till the doctor has been apprised. Remain here, while Flapdragon and I ascertain his wishes." So saying, he quitted the chamber by a farther outlet with the dwarf.

During the short time that Auriol was left alone, he found it vain to attempt to settle his thoughts, or to convince himself that he was not labouring under some strange delusion.

He was aroused at length by the dwarf, who returned alone.

"Your grandsire will see you," said the mannikin.

"One word before we go," cried Auriol, seizing his arm.

"Saints! how you frighten me!" exclaimed the dwarf. "You must keep composed, or I dare not take you to my master."

"Pardon me," replied Auriol; "I meant not to alarm you. Where is the person who brought me hither?"

"What, your keeper?" said the dwarf. "Oh, he is within call. He will come to you anon. Now follow me."

And taking up the torch, he led the way out of the chamber. Mounting a spiral staircase, apparently within a turret, they came to a door, which being opened by Flapdragon, disclosed a scene that well-nigh stupefied Auriol.

It was the laboratory precisely as he had seen it above two centuries ago. The floor was strewn with alchemical implements—the table was covered with mystic parchments inscribed with cabalistic characters—the furnace stood in the corner—crucibles and cucurbites decorated the chimney-board—the sphere and brazen lamp hung from the ceiling—the skeletons grinned from behind the chimney-corner—all was there as he had seen it before! There also was Doctor Lamb, in his loose gown of sable silk, with a square black cap upon his venerable head, and his snowy beard streaming to his girdle.

The old man's gaze was fixed upon a crucible placed upon the furnace, and he was occupied in working the bellows. He moved his head as Auriol entered the chamber, and the features became visible. It was a face never to be forgotten.

"Come in, grandson," said the old man kindly. "Come in, and close the door after you. The draught affects the furnace—my Athanor, as we adepts term it. So you are better, your keeper tells me—much better."

"Are you indeed living?" cried Auriol, rushing wildly towards him, and attempting to take his hand.

"Off—off!" cried the old man, drawing back as if alarmed. "You disturb my operations. Keep him calm, Flapdragon, or take him hence. He may do me a mischief."

"I have no such intention, sir," said Auriol; "indeed I have not. I only wish to be assured that you are my aged relative."

"To be sure he is, young sir," interposed the dwarf. "Why should you doubt it?"

"O sir," cried Auriol, throwing himself at the old man's feet, "pity me if I am mad; but offer me some explanation, which may tend to restore me to my senses. My reason seems gone, yet I appear capable of receiving impressions from external objects. I see you, and appear to know you. I see this chamber—these alchemical implements—that furnace—these different objects—and I appear to recognise them. Am I deceived, or is this real?"

"You are not deceived, my son," replied the old man. "You have been in this room before, and you have seen me before. It would be useless to explain to you now how you

have suffered from fever, and what visions your delirium has produced. When you are perfectly restored, we will talk the matter over."

And, as he said this, he began to blow the fire anew, and watched with great apparent interest the changing colours of the liquid in the cucurbite placed on the furnace.

Auriol looked at him earnestly, but could not catch another glance, so intently was the old man occupied. At length he ventured to break the silence.

"I should feel perfectly convinced, if I might look forth from that window," he said.

"Convinced of what?" rejoined the old man somewhat sharply.

"That I am what I seem," replied Auriol.

"Look forth, then," said the old man. "But do not disturb me by idle talk. There is the rosy colour in the projection for which I have been so long waiting."

Auriol then walked to the window and gazed through the tinted panes. It was very dark, and objects could only be imperfectly distinguished. Still he fancied he could detect the gleam of the river beneath him, and what seemed a long line of houses on the bridge. He also fancied he discerned other buildings, with the high roofs, the gables, and the other architectural peculiarities of the structures of Elizabeth's time. He persuaded himself, also, that he could distinguish through the gloom the venerable Gothic pile of Saint Paul's Cathedral on the other side of the water, and, as if to satisfy him that he was right, a deep solemn bell tolled forth the hour of two. After a while he returned from the window, and said to his supposed grandsire, "I am satisfied. I have lived centuries in a few nights."

THE OLD LONDON MERCHANT

A SKETCH

Flos Mercatorum.—Epitaph on Whittington

At that festive season, when the days are at the shortest, and the nights at the longest, and when, consequently, it is the invariable practice of all sensible people to turn night into day; when the state of the odds between business and pleasure is decidedly in favour of the latter; when high carnival is held in London, and everything betokens the prevalence and influence of good cheer; when pastrycooks are in their glory, and green trays in requisition; when porters groan beneath hampers of game, and huge tubs of

Canterbury brawn; when trains arriving from the eastern counties are heavy laden with turkeys and hares; when agents in town send barrels of oysters to correspondents in the country; when Christmas-box claimants disturb one's equanimity by day, and Waits (those licensed nuisances, to which even our reverence for good old customs cannot reconcile us) break one's first slumber at night; when surly Christians "awake," and salute the band of little carollers with jugs of cold water; when their opposite neighbour, who has poked his nightcapped head from his window, retires with a satisfactory chuckle; when the meat at Mr. Giblett's in Bond Street, which, for the last six weeks, has announced the approach of Christmas by its daily-increasing layers of fat, as correctly as the almanack, has reached the ne-plus-ultra of adiposity; when wondering crowds are collected before the aforesaid Giblett's to gaze upon the yellow carcass of that leviathan prize ox—the fat being rendered more intensely yellow by its contrast with the green holly with which it is garnished—as well as to admire the snowy cakes of suet with which the sides of that Leicestershire sheep are loaded; when the grocer's trade is "in request," and nothing is heard upon his counter but the jingling of scales and the snapping of twine; when the vendor of sweetmeats, as he deals forth his citron and sultanas in the due minced-meat proportions to that pretty housemaid, whispers something in a soft and sugared tone about the misletoe; when "coming Twelfth Nights cast their shadows before," and Mr. Gunter feels doubly important; when pantomimes are about to unfold all their magic charms, and the holidays have fairly commenced; when the meteorological prophet predicts that Thursday the 1st will be fair and frosty, and it turns out to be drizzling rain and a sudden thaw; when intelligence is brought that the ice "bears," the intelligence being confirmed by the appearance of sundry donkey-carts, containing ice an inch thick, and rendered indisputable by the discharge of their crystal loads upon the pavement before Mr. Grove's, the fishmonger's; when crack performers in paletots, or Mackintoshes, with skates in their hands, cigars in their mouths, and tights and fur-topped boots on their lower limbs, are seen hastening up Baker Street in the direction of the Regent's Park; when a marquee is pitched upon the banks of the Serpentine, and a quadrille executed by the before-mentioned crack skaters in tights and fur-topped boots upon its frozen waters; when the functionaries of the Humane Society begin to find some employment for their ropes and punt; when Old Father Thames, who, for a couple of months, appears to have been undecided about the colours of his livery—now inclining to a cloak of greyish dun, now to a mantle of orange tawny—has finally adopted a white transparent robe with facings of silver; when, as you pass down Harley Street, the lights in the drawing-room windows of every third house, the shadows on the blinds, and, above all, the enlivening sound of the harp and piano, satisfy you that its fair inmate is "at home"; when

House-quakes, street-thunders, and door-batteries

are heard from "midnight until morn"; when the knocker at No. 22 Park Street responds to the knocker at No. 25; when a barrel-organ and a popular melody salute your ear as

you enter Oxford Street; when the doors of the gin-palaces seem to be always opening to let people in, but never to let them out, and the roar of boisterous revelry is heard from the bar; when various vociferations arise from various courts and passages; when policemen are less on the alert, though their interference is more requisite than usual; when uproarious jollity prevails; when "universal London getteth drunk"; and, in short, when Christmas is come, and everybody is disposed to enjoy himself in his own way. At this period of wassail and rejoicing it was that a social party, to which I am now about to introduce the reader, was assembled in a snug little dining-room of a snug little house, situated in that snug little pile of building denominated the Sanctuary in Westminster.

When a man has any peculiarity of character, his house is sure to partake of it. The room which he constantly inhabits reflects his image as faithfully as a mirror; nay, more so, for it reflects his mind as well as his person. A glance at No. 22 St. James's Place would satisfy you its owner was a poet. We can judge of the human, as of the brute lion, by the aspect of his den. The room marks the man. Visit it in his absence, and you may paint his portrait better than the limner who has placed his "breathing canvas" on the walls. From that well-worn elbow-chair and the slippers at its feet (the slippers of an old man are never to be mistaken), you can compute his age; from that faded brocade dressing-gown and green velvet cap, you can shape out his figure; from the multiplicity of looking-glasses you at once infer that he has not entirely lost his vanity or his good looks; that gold-headed cane gives you his carriage—it is not a crutch-handled stick, but a cane to flourish jauntily; that shagreen spectacle-case, that chased silver snuffbox with the Jupiter and Leda richly and somewhat luxuriously wrought upon its lid, that fine Sèvres porcelain, that gorgeous Berlin-ware, those rare bronzes half consumed by the true hoary green ærugo, those little Egyptian images, that lachrymatory, that cinerary urn, that brick from the Colosseum, that tesselated pavement from Pompeii, looking like a heap of various-coloured dice, and a world of other rarities, furnish unerring indications of his tastes and habits, and proclaim him a member of the Archæological Society; while that open volume of Sir Thomas Urquhart's "Rabelais" (published by the Abbotsford Club) gives you his course of study; the Morning Post his politics; that flute and those musical notes attest the state of his lungs; and that well-blotted copy of verses, of which the ink is scarcely dry, proclaims his train of thought. The door opens, and an old gentleman enters exactly corresponding to your preconceived notions. You require no introduction. You have made his acquaintance half-an-hour ago.

The apartment to which we are about to repair was a complete index to the mind and character of its possessor, Sir Lionel Flamstead. I have called it a dining-room, from its ordinary application to the purposes of refection and festivity; but it had much more the air of a library, or study. It was a small comfortable chamber, just large enough to contain half-a-dozen people, though by management double that number had been occasionally squeezed into its narrow limits. The walls were decorated with curious old

prints, maps and plans, set in old black worm-eaten frames, and representing divers personages, places, and structures connected with London and its history.

Over the mantelpiece was stretched Vertue's copy of Ralph Aggas's famous survey of our "great metropolis," made about the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, or perhaps a little earlier, when it was scarcely so great a metropolis as at the present time, and when novelists, gentlemen of the press, cabmen, omnibus cads, and other illustrious personages were unborn and undreamed of; when St. Giles's, in lieu of its mysterious and Dædalian Seven Dials (which should have for their motto Wordsworth's title, "We are Seven"), consisted of a little cluster of country houses, surrounded by a grove of elms; when a turreted wall girded in the City, from Aldgate to Grey Friars; when a pack of staghounds was kept in Finsbury Fields, and archers and cross-bowmen haunted the purlieus of the Spital; when he who strolled westward from Charing Cross (then no misnomer) beheld neither Opera House nor club-house, but a rustic lane, with a barn at one end, and a goodly assortment of hay-carts and hay-stacks at the other; when the Thames was crossed by a single bridge, and that bridge looked like a street, and the street itself like a row of palaces. On the right of this plan hung a sketch of Will Somers, jester to Henry VIII., after the picture by Holbein; on the left an engraving of Geoffrey Hudson, the diminutive attendant of Henrietta Maria. This niche was devoted to portraits of the bluff king before mentioned, and his six spouses; that to the melancholy Charles and his family. Here, the Great Fire of 1666, with its black profiles of houses, relieved by a sheet of "bloody and malicious" flame, formed a pleasant contrast to the icy wonders of the Frost Fair, held on the Thames in 1684, when carriages were driven through the lines of tents, and an ox was roasted on the water, to the infinite delectation of the citizens. There Old Saint Paul's (in the words of Victor Hugo, "one of those Gothic monuments so admirable and so irreparable"), and which is but ill replaced by the modern "bastard counterpart" of the glorious fane of St. Peter at Rome, reared its venerable tower (not dome) and lofty spire to the sky. Next to St. Paul's came the reverend Abbey of Westminster, taken before it had been disfigured by the towers added by Wren; and next to the abbey opened the long and raftered vista of its magnificent neighbouring hall. Several plans and prospects of the Tower of London, as it appeared at different epochs, occupied a corner to themselves: then came a long array of taverns, from the Tabard in Southwark, the Boar's Head in Eastcheap, and the Devil near Temple Bar, embalmed in the odour of poesy, to the Nag's Head in Cheapside, notorious for its legend of the consecration of the Protestant bishops in 1559; there also might you see—

——in Billinsgate the Salutation.
And the Boar's Head near London Stone,
The Swan at Dowgate, a tavern well known;
The Mitre in Cheap, and then the Bull's Head,
And many like places that make noses red;

The Boar's Head in Old Fish Street; Three Crowns in the Vintry;
And, now, of late, Saint Martin's in the Seutree;
The Windmill in Lothbury; the Ship at th' Exchange;
King's Head in New Fish Street, where roysters do range;
The Mermaid in Cornhill; Red Lion in the Strand;
Three Tuns in Newgate Market; in Old Fish Street the Swan.[1]
[1] News from Bartholomew Faire.

Adjoining these places of entertainment were others of a different description, to wit, the Globe, as it stood when Shakspeare (how insufferable is Mr. Knight's orthography of this reverend name—Shakspere!) trod the stage; the king's play-house in Charles the Second's time; the Bear Garden, with its flag streaming to the wind; and the Folly, as it once floated in the river, opposite old Somerset House. Then came the Halls, beginning with Guildhall and ending with Old Skinner's. Next, the Crosses, from Paul's to Charing; then, the churches, gateways, hospitals, colleges, prisons, asylums, inns of court,—in short, for it is needless to particularise further, London and its thousand recollections rose before you, as you gazed around. Scarcely an old edifice, to which an historical tradition could be attached (and what old London edifice is destitute of such traditions?), was wanting. Nor were the great of old—the spirits, who gave interest and endurance to these decayed, or decaying structures, wanting. But I shall not pause to enumerate their portraits, or make out a catalogue as long as the list of Homer's ships, or the gallery of Mr. Lodge. Sufficient has been said, I trust, to give the reader an idea of the physiology of the room. Yet stay! I must not omit to point out the contents of those groaning shelves. In the goodly folios crowded there are contained the chronicles of Holinshed and Hall; of Grafton, Fabian, and Stow; of Matthew of Paris, and his namesake of Westminster. Let him not be terrified at the ponderous size of these admirable old historians, nor be deterred by the black letter, if he should chance to open a volume. Their freshness and picturesque details will surprise as much as they will delight him. From this wealthy mine Shakspeare drew some of his purest ore. The shelves are crowned by a solitary bust. It is that of a modern. It is that of a lover of London, and a character of London. It is Doctor Johnson.

Having completed the survey of the apartment, I shall now proceed to its occupants. These were five in number—jolly fellows all—seated round a circular dining-table covered with glasses and decanters, amidst which a portly magnum of claret, and a deep and capacious china punch-bowl, must not pass unmentioned. They were in the full flow of fun and conviviality; enjoying themselves as good fellows always enjoy themselves at "the season of the year." The port was delectable—old as Saint Paul's, I was going to say—not quite, however—but just "old enough"; the claret was nectar, or what is better, it was Lafitte; the punch was drink for the gods. The jokes of this party would have split your sides—their laughter would have had the same effect on your ears. Never were

heard peals of merriment so hearty and prolonged. You only wondered how they found time to drink, so quick did each roar follow on the heels of its predecessor. That they did drink, however, was clear; that they had drunk was equally certain; and that they intended to continue drinking seemed to come within the limits of probability.

Sir Lionel Flamstead was a retired merchant—one of those high-souled, high-principled traders, of whom our City was once so justly proud, and of whom so few, in these days of railway bubbles, and other harebrained speculations, can be found. His word was his bond—once passed, it was sufficient; his acceptances were accounted safe as the Bank of England. Had Sir Thomas Gresham descended from his niche he could not have been treated with greater consideration than attended Sir Lionel's appearance on 'Change. All eyes followed the movements of his tall and stately figure—all hats were raised to his courteous but ceremonious salutation. Affable, yet precise, and tinctured with something of the punctiliousness of the old school, his manners won him universal respect and regard, even from those unknown to him. By his intimates he was revered. His habits were as regular as clockwork, and the glass of cold punch at Tom's, or the basin of soup at Birch's, wound him up for the day. His attire was as formal as his manners, being a slight modification of the prevalent costume of some five-and-thirty years ago. He had consented, not without extreme reluctance, to clothe his nether limbs in the unmentionable garment of recent introduction; but he resolutely adhered to the pigtail. There is something, by-the-bye, in a pigtail, to which old gentlemen cling in spite of all remonstrance, with lover-like pertinacity. Only hint the propriety of cutting it off to your great-uncle or your grandfather, and you may rely on being cut off with a shilling yourself. Be this as it may, Sir Lionel gathered his locks, once sable as the riband that bound them, but now thickly strewn with the silver "blossoms of the grave," into a knot, and suffered them to dangle a few inches below his collar. His shoes shone with a lustre beyond French polish, and his hat was brushed till not a wind dared to approach it. Sir Lionel wore a white, unstarched cravat, with a thick pad in it, sported a frill over his waistcoat, carried a black ebony cane in his hand, and was generally followed by a pet pug-dog, one of the most sagacious and disagreeable specimens of his species. Sir Lionel Flamstead, I have said, was tall—I might have said he was very tall—somewhat narrower across the shoulders than about the hips—a circumstance which did not materially conduce to his symmetry—with grey, benevolent eyes, shaded by bushy, intelligent brows—a lofty, expansive forehead, in which, in the jargon of phrenology, the organs of locality and ideality were strongly developed, and which was rendered the more remarkable from the flesh having fallen in on either side of the temples—with a nose which had been considered handsome and well proportioned in his youth, but to which good living had imparted a bottle form and a bottle tint—and cheeks from which all encroachment of whiskers was sedulously removed, in order, we conclude, that his rosy complexion might be traced from its point of concentration, upon the prominent feature

before mentioned, to its final disappearance behind his ears. Such was Sir Lionel Flamstead.

Cyprian Rougemont By William Harrison Ainsworth

A NIGHT'S ADVENTURE IN ROME

CHAPTER I
SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE

The Pope was saying the high, high mass,
All on Saint Peter's day;
With the power to him given by the saints in heaven
To wash men's sins away.
The Pope he was saying the blessed mass,
And the people kneel'd around;
And from each man's soul his sins did pass,
As he kissed the holy ground.
—The Grey Brother.

Chancing to be in Rome in the August of 1830, I visited the gorgeous church of Santa Maria Maggiore during the celebration of the anniversary of the Holy Assumption.

It was a glorious sight to one unaccustomed to the imposing religious ceremonials of the Romish Church, to witness all the pomp and splendour displayed at this high solemnity—to gaze down that glittering pile, and mark the various ecclesiastical dignitaries, each in their peculiar and characteristic costume, employed in the ministration of their sacred functions, and surrounded by a wide semicircle of the papal guards, so stationed to keep back the crowd, and who, with their showy scarlet attire and tall halberds, looked like the martial figures we see in the sketches of Callot. Nor was the brilliant effect of this picture diminished by the sumptuous framework in which it was set. Overhead flamed a roof resplendent with burnished gold; before me rose a canopy supported by pillars of porphyry, and shining with many-coloured stones; while on either hand were chapels devoted to some noble house, and boasting each the marble memorial of a pope. Melodious masses proper to the service were ever and anon chanted by the papal choir, and overpowering perfume was diffused around by a hundred censers.

Subdued by the odours, the music, and the spectacle, I sank into a state of dreamy enthusiasm, during a continuance of which I almost fancied myself a convert to the faith of Rome, and surrendered myself unreflectingly to an admiration of its errors. As I gazed among the surrounding crowd, the sight of so many prostrate figures, all in

attitudes of deepest devotion, satisfied me of the profound religious impression of the ceremonial. As elsewhere, this feeling was not universal; and, as elsewhere, likewise, more zeal was exhibited by the lower than the higher classes of society; and I occasionally noted amongst the latter the glitter of an eye or the flutter of a bosom, not altogether agitated, I suspect, by holy aspirations. Yet methought, on the whole, I had never seen such abandonment of soul, such prostration of spirit, in my own colder clime, and during the exercise of my own more chastened creed, as that which in several instances I now beheld; and I almost envied the poor maiden near me, who, abject upon the earth, had washed away her sorrows, and perhaps her sins, in contrite tears.

As such thoughts swept through my mind, I felt a pleasure in singling out particular figures and groups which interested me, from their peculiarity of costume, or from their devotional fervour. Amongst others, a little to my left, I remarked a band of mountaineers from Calabria, for such I judged them to be from their wild and picturesque garb. Deeply was every individual of this little knot of peasantry impressed by the ceremonial. Every eye was humbly cast down; every knee bent; every hand was either occupied in grasping the little crucifix suspended from its owner's neck, in telling the beads of his rosary, or fervently crossed upon his bare and swarthy breast.

While gazing upon this group, I chanced upon an individual whom I had not hitherto noticed, and who now irresistibly attracted my attention. Though a little removed from the Calabrian mountaineers, and reclining against the marble walls of the church, he evidently belonged to the same company; at least, so his attire seemed to indicate, though the noble cast of his countenance was far superior to that of his comrades. He was an old man, with a face of the fine antique Roman stamp—a bold outline of prominent nose, rugged and imperious brow, and proudly-cut chin. His head and chin, as well as his naked breast, were frosted over with the snowy honours of many winters, and their hoar appearance contrasted strikingly with the tawny hue of a skin almost as dark and as lustrous as polished oak. Peasant as he was, there was something of grandeur and majesty in this old man's demeanour and physiognomy. His head declined backwards, so as completely to expose his long and muscular throat. His arms hung listlessly by his side; one hand drooped upon the pavement, the other was placed within his breast: his eyes were closed. The old man's garb was of the coarsest fabric; he wore little beyond a shirt, a loose vest, a sort of sheep-skin cloak, and canvas leggings bound around with leathern thongs. His appearance, however, was above his condition; he became his rags as proudly as a prince would have become his ermined robe.

The more I scrutinised the rigid lines of this old man's countenance, the more I became satisfied that many singular, and perhaps not wholly guiltless, events were connected with his history. The rosary was in his hand—the cross upon his breast—the beads were untold—the crucifix unclasped—no breath of prayer passed his lips. His face was turned

heavenward, but his eyes were closed,—he dared not open them. Why did he come thither, if he did not venture to pray? Why did he assume a penitential attitude, if he felt no penitence?

So absorbed was I in the perusal of the workings of this old man's countenance, as to be scarcely conscious that the service of high mass was concluded, and the crowd within the holy pile fast dispersing. The music was hushed, the robed prelates and their train had disappeared, joyous dames were hastening along the marble aisles to their equipages; all, save a few kneeling figures near the chapels, were departing; and the old man, aware, from the stir and hum prevailing around, that the ceremonial was at an end, arose, stretched out his arm to one of his comrades, a youth who had joined him, and prepared to follow the concourse.

Was he really blind? Assuredly not. Besides, he did not walk like as one habituated to the direst calamity that can befall our nature. He staggered in his gait, and reeled to and fro. Yet wherefore did he not venture to unclose his eyes within the temple of the Most High? What would I not have given to be made acquainted with his history! For I felt that it must be a singular one.

I might satisfy my curiosity at once. He was moving slowly forward, guided by his comrade. In a few seconds it would be too late—he would have vanished from my sight. With hasty footsteps I followed him down the church, and laid my hand, with some violence, upon his shoulder.

The old man started at the touch, and turned. Now, indeed, his eyes were opened wide, and flashing full upon me,—and such eyes! Heretofore I had only dreamed of such. Age had not quenched their lightning, and I quailed beneath the fierce glances which he threw upon me. But if I was, at first, surprised at the display of anger which I had called forth in him, how much more was I astonished to behold the whole expression of his countenance suddenly change. His eyes continued fixed upon mine as if I had been a basilisk. Apparently he could not avert them; while his whole frame shivered with emotion. I advanced towards him; he shrank backwards, and, but for the timely aid of his companion, would have fallen upon the pavement.

At a loss to conceive in what way I could have occasioned him so much alarm, I rushed forward to the assistance of the old man, when his son—for such it subsequently appeared he was—rudely repelled me, and thrust his hand into his girdle, as if to seek for means to prevent further interference.

Meanwhile the group had been increased by the arrival of a third party, attracted by the cry the old man had uttered in falling. The new-comer was an Italian gentleman,

somewhat stricken in years; of stern and stately deportment, and with something sinister and forbidding in his aspect. He was hastening towards the old man, but he suddenly stopped, and was about to retire when he encountered my gaze. As our eyes met he started; and a terror, as sudden and lively as that exhibited by the old man, was at once depicted in his features.

My surprise was now beyond all bounds, and I continued for some moments speechless with astonishment. Not a little of the inexplicable awe which affected the old man and the stranger was communicated to myself. Altogether, we formed a mysterious and terrible triangle, of which each side bore some strange and unintelligible relation to the other.

The new-comer first recovered his composure, though not without an effort. Coldly turning his heel upon me, he walked towards the old man, and shook him forcibly. The latter shrank from his grasp, and endeavoured to avoid him; but it was impossible. The stranger whispered a few words in his ear, of which, from his gestures being directed towards myself, I could guess the import. The old man replied. His action in doing so was that of supplication and despair. The stranger retorted in a wild and vehement manner, and even stamped upon the ground; but the old man still continued to cling to the knees of his superior.

"Weak, superstitious fool!" at length exclaimed the stranger, "I will waste no more words upon thee. Do, or say, what thou wilt; but beware!" And spurning him haughtily back with his foot, he strode away.

The old man's reverend head struck against the marble floor. His temple was cut open by the fall, and blood gushed in torrents from the wound. Recovering himself, he started to his feet—a knife was instantly in his hand, and he would have pursued and doubtless slain his aggressor, if he had not been forcibly withheld by his son, and by a priest who had joined them.

"Maledizione!" exclaimed the old man—"a blow from him—from that hand! I will stab him, though he were at the altar's foot; though he had a thousand lives, each should pay for it. Release me, Paolo! release me! for, by Heaven, he dies!"

"Peace, father!" cried the son, still struggling with him.

"Thou art not my son, to hinder my revenge!" shouted the enraged father. "Dost not see this blood—my blood—thy father's blood?—and thou holdest me back! Thou shouldst have struck him to the earth for the deed—but he was a noble, and thou daredst not lift thy hand against him!"

"Wouldst thou have had me slay him in this holy place?" exclaimed Paolo, reddening with anger and suppressed emotion.

"No, no," returned the old man, in an altered voice; "not here, not here, though 'twere but just retribution. But I will find other means of vengeance. I will denounce him—I will betray all, though it cost me my own life! He shall die by the hands of the common executioner;—there is one shall testify for me!" And he pointed to me.

Again I advanced towards him.

"If thou hast aught to disclose pertaining to the Holy Church, I am ready to listen to thee, my son," said the priest; "but reflect well ere thou bringest any charge thou mayest not be able to substantiate against one who stands so high in her esteem as him thou wouldst accuse."

The son gave his father a meaning look, and whispered somewhat in his ear. The old man became suddenly still.

"Right, right," said he; "I have bethought me. 'Twas but a blow. He is wealthy, I am poor; there is no justice for the poor in Rome."

"My purse is at your service," said I, interfering; "you shall have my aid."

"Your aid!" echoed the old man, staring at me; "will you assist me, signor?"

"I will."

"Enough. I may claim fulfilment of your promise."

"Stop, old man," I said; "answer me one question ere you depart. Whence arose your recent terrors?"

"You shall know hereafter, signor," he said; "I must now begone. We shall meet again. Follow me not," he continued, seeing I was bent upon obtaining further explanation of the mystery. "You will learn nothing now, and only endanger my safety. Addio, signor." And with hasty steps he quitted the church, accompanied by his son.

"Who is that old man?" I demanded of the priest.

"I am as ignorant as yourself," he replied, "but he must be looked to; he talks threateningly." And he beckoned to an attendant.

"Who was he who struck him?" was my next inquiry.

"One of our wealthiest nobles," he replied, "and an assured friend of the Church. We could ill spare him. Do not lose sight of them," he added to the attendant, "and let the sbirri track them to their haunts. They must not be suffered to go forth to-night. A few hours' restraint will cool their hot Calabrian blood."

"But the name of the noble, father?" I said, renewing my inquiries.

"I must decline further questioning," returned the priest coldly. "I have other occupation; and meanwhile it will be well to have these stains effaced, which may else bring scandal on these holy walls. You will excuse me, my son." So saying, he bowed and retired.

I made fruitless inquiries for the old man at the door of the church. He was gone; none of the bystanders who had seen him go forth knew whither.

Stung by curiosity, I wandered amid the most unfrequented quarters of Rome throughout the day, in the hope of meeting with the old Calabrian, but in vain. As, however, I entered the courtyard of my hotel, I fancied I discovered, amongst the lounging assemblage gathered round the door, the dark eyes of the younger mountaineer. In this I might have been mistaken. No one answering to his description had been seen near the house.

Cyprian Rougemont By William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER II

THE MARCHESA

Une chose ténébreuse fait par des hommes ténébreux.
—Lucrece Borgia.

On the same night I bent my steps towards the Colosseum; and, full of my adventure of the morning, found myself, not without apprehension, involved within its labyrinthine passages. Accompanied by a monk, who, with a small horn lantern in his hand, acted as my guide, I fancied that, by its uncertain light, I could discover stealthy figures lurking within the shades of the ruin.

Whatever suspicions I might entertain, I pursued my course in silence. Emerging from the vomitorio, we stood upon the steps of the colossal amphitheatre. The huge pile was bathed in rosy moonlight, and reared itself in serene majesty before my view.

While indulging in a thousand speculations, occasioned by the hour and the spot, I suddenly perceived a figure on a point of the ruin immediately above me. Nothing but the head was visible; but that was placed in bold relief against the beaming sky of night, and I recognised it at once. No nobler Roman head had ever graced the circus when Rome was in her zenith. I shouted to the old Calabrian, for he it was I beheld. Almost ere the sound had left my lips, he had disappeared. I made known what I had seen to the monk. He was alarmed—urged our instant departure, and advised me to seek the assistance of the sentinel stationed at the entrance to the pile. To this proposal I assented; and, having descended the vasty steps and crossed the open arena, we arrived, without molestation, at the doorway.

The sentinel had allowed no one to pass him. He returned with me to the circus; and, after an ineffectual search amongst the ruins, volunteered his services to accompany me homewards through the Forum. I declined his offer, and shaped my course towards a lonesome vicolo on the right. This was courting danger; but I cared not, and walked slowly forward through the deserted place.

Scarcely had I proceeded many paces, when I heard footsteps swiftly approaching; and, ere I could turn round, my arms were seized from behind, and a bandage was passed across my eyes. All my efforts at liberation were unavailing; and, after a brief struggle, I remained passive.

"Make no noise," said a voice which I knew to be that of the old man, "and no harm shall befall you. You must come with us. Ask no questions, but follow."

I suffered myself to be led, without further opposition, whithersoever they listed. We walked for it might be half-an-hour, much beyond the walls of Rome. I had to scramble through many ruins, and frequently stumbled over inequalities of ground. I now felt the fresh breeze of night blowing over the wide campagna, and my conductors moved swiftly onwards as we trod on its elastic turf.

At length they came to a halt. My bandage was removed, and I beheld myself beneath the arch of an aqueduct, which spanned the moonlit plain. A fire was kindled beneath the arch, and the ruddy flame licked its walls. Around the blaze were grouped the little band of peasantry I had beheld within the church, in various and picturesque attitudes. They greeted my conductors on their arrival, and glanced inquisitively at me, but did not speak to me. The elder Calabrian, whom they addressed as Cristofano, asked for a glass of aqua vitæ, which he handed respectfully to me. I declined the offer, but he pressed it upon me.

"You will need it, signor," he said; "you have much to do to-night. You fear, perhaps, it is drugged. Behold!" And he drank it off.

I could not, after this, refuse his pledge. "And now, signor," said the old man, removing to a little distance from the group, "may I crave a word with you—your name?"

As I had no reason for withholding it, I told him how I was called.

"Hum! Had you no relation of the name of ——?"

"None whatever." And I sighed, for I thought of my desolate condition.

"Strange!" he muttered; adding, with a grim smile, "but, however, likenesses are easily accounted for."

"What likenesses?" I asked. "Whom do I resemble? and what is the motive of your inexplicable conduct?"

"You shall hear," he replied, frowning gloomily. "Step aside, and let us get within the shade of these arches, out of the reach of yonder listeners. The tale I have to tell is for your ears alone."

I obeyed him; and we stood beneath the shadow of the aqueduct.

"Years ago," began the old man, "an Englishman, in all respects resembling yourself, equally well favoured in person, and equally young, came to Rome, and took up his abode within the eternal city. He was of high rank in his own country, and was treated with the distinction due to his exalted station here. At that time I dwelt with the Marchese di ——. I was his confidential servant—his adviser—his friend. I had lived with his father—carried him as an infant—sported with him as a boy—loved and served him as a man. Loved him, I say; for, despite his treatment of me, I loved him then as much as I abhor him now. Well, signor, to my story. If his youth had been profligate, his manhood was not less depraved; it was devoted to cold, calculating libertinism. Soon after he succeeded to the estates and title of his father, he married. That he loved his bride, I can scarcely believe; for, though he was wildly jealous of her, he was himself unfaithful, and she knew it. In Italy, revenge, in such cases, is easily within a woman's power; and, for aught I know, the marchesa might have meditated retaliation. My lord, however, took the alarm, and thought fit to retire to his villa without the city, and for a time remained secluded within its walls. It was at this crisis that the Englishman I have before mentioned arrived in Rome. My lady, who mingled little with the gaieties of the city, had not beheld him; but she could not have been unacquainted with him by report, as every tongue was loud in his praises. A rumour of his successes with other dames had reached my lord; nay, I have reason to believe that he had been thwarted by the handsome Englishman in some other quarter, and he sedulously prevented their meeting. An interview, however, did take place between them, and in an unexpected manner. It was the custom then, as now, upon particular occasions, to drive, during the heats of summer, within the Piazza Navona, which is flooded with water. One evening the marchesa drove thither: she was unattended, except by myself. Our carriage happened to be stationed near that of the young Englishman."

"The marchesa was beautiful, no doubt?" I said, interrupting him.

"Most beautiful!" he replied; "and so your countryman seemed to think, for he was lost in admiration of her. I am not much versed in the language of the eyes, but his were too eloquent and expressive not to be understood. I watched my mistress narrowly. It was evident from her glowing cheek, though her eyes were cast down, that she was not insensible to his regards. She turned to play with her dog, a lovely little greyhound, which was in the carriage beside her, and patted it carelessly with the glove which she held in her hand. The animal snatched the glove from her grasp, and, as he bounded backwards, fell over the carriage side. My lady uttered a scream at the sight, and I was preparing to extricate the struggling dog, when the Englishman plunged into the water. In an instant he had restored her favourite to the marchesa, and received her warmest

acknowledgments. From that moment an intimacy commenced, which was destined to produce the most fatal consequences to both parties."

"Did you betray them?" I asked, somewhat impatiently.

"I was then the blind tool of the marchese. I did so," replied the old man. "I told him all particulars of the interview. He heard me in silence, but grew ashy pale with suppressed rage. Bidding me redouble my vigilance, he left me. My lady was now scarcely ever out of my sight; when one evening, a few days after what had occurred, she walked forth alone upon the garden-terrace of the villa. Her guitar was in her hand, and her favourite dog by her side. I was at a little distance, but wholly unperceived. She struck a few plaintive chords upon her instrument, and then, resting her chin upon her white and rounded arm, seemed lost in tender reverie. Would you had seen her, signor, as I beheld her then, or as one other beheld her! you would acknowledge that you had never met with her equal in beauty. Her raven hair fell in thick tresses over shoulders of dazzling whiteness and the most perfect proportion. Her deep dark eyes were thrown languidly on the ground, and her radiant features were charged with an expression of profound and pensive passion.

"In this musing attitude she continued for some minutes, when she was aroused by the gambols of her dog, who bore in his mouth a glove which he had found. As she took it from him, a letter dropped upon the floor. Had a serpent glided from its folds, it could not have startled her more. She gazed upon the paper, offended, but irresolute. Yes, she was irresolute; and you may conjecture the rest. She paused, and by that pause was lost. With a shrinking grasp she stooped to raise the letter. Her cheeks, which had grown deathly pale, again kindled with blushes as she perused it. She hesitated—cast a bewildering look towards the mansion—placed the note within her bosom—and plunged into the orange-bower."

"Her lover awaited her there?"

"He did. I saw them meet. I heard his frenzied words—his passionate entreaties. He urged her to fly—she resisted. He grew more urgent—more impassioned. She uttered a faint cry, and I stood before them. The Englishman's hand was at my throat, and his sword at my breast, with the swiftness of thought; and but for the screams of my mistress, that instant must have been my last. At her desire he relinquished his hold of me; but her cries had reached other ears, and the marchese arrived to avenge his injured honour. He paused not to inquire the nature of the offence, but, sword in hand, assailed the Englishman, bidding me remove his lady. The clash of their steel was drowned by her shrieks as I bore her away; but I knew the strife was desperate. Before I gained the house my lady had fainted; and committing her to the charge of other attendants, I

returned to the terrace. I met my master slowly walking homewards. His sword was gone—his brow was bent—he shunned my sight. I knew what had happened, and did not approach him. He sought his wife. What passed in that interview was never disclosed, but it may be guessed at from its result. That night the marchesa left her husband's halls—never to return. Next morn I visited the terrace where she had received the token. The glove was still upon the ground. I picked it up and carried it to the marchese, detailing the whole occurrence to him. He took it, and vowed as he took it that his vengeance should never rest satisfied till that glove had been steeped in her blood."

"And he kept his vow?" I asked, shuddering.

"Many months elapsed ere its accomplishment. Italian vengeance is slow, but sure. To all outward appearance, he had forgotten his faithless wife. He had even formed a friendship with her lover, which he did the more effectually to blind his ultimate designs. Meanwhile, time rolled on, and the marchesa gave birth to a child—the offspring of her seducer."

"Great God!" I exclaimed, "was that child a boy?"

"It was—but listen to me. My tale draws to a close. One night, during the absence of the Englishman, by secret means we entered the palazzo where the marchesa resided. We wandered from room to room till we came to her chamber. She was sleeping, with her infant by her side. The sight maddened the marchese. He would have stricken the child, but I held back his hand. He relented. He bade me make fast the door. He approached the bed. I heard a rustle—a scream. A white figure sprang from out the couch. In an instant the light was extinguished—there was a blow—another—and all was over. I threw open the door. The marchese came forth. The corridor in which we stood was flooded with moonlight. A glove was in his hand—it was dripping with blood. His oath was fulfilled—his vengeance complete—no, not complete, for the Englishman yet lived."

"What became of him?" I inquired.

"Ask me not," replied the old man; "you were at the Chiesa Santa Maria Maggiore this morning. If those stones could speak, they might tell a fearful story."

"And that was the reason you did not dare to unclose your eyes within those holy precincts?—a film of blood floated between you and heaven."

The old man shuddered, but replied not.

"And the child?" I asked, after a pause; "what of their wretched offspring?"

"It was conveyed to England by a friend of its dead father. If he were alive, that boy would be about your age, signor."

"Indeed!" I said; a horrible suspicion flashing across my mind.

"After the Englishman's death," continued Cristofano, "my master began to treat me with a coldness and suspicion which increased daily. I was a burden to him, and he was resolved to rid himself of me. I spared him the trouble—quitted Rome—sought the mountains of the Abruzzi—and thence wandered to the fastnesses of Calabria, and became—no matter what. Here I am. Heaven's appointed minister of vengeance. The marchese dies to-night!"

"To-night! old man," I echoed, horror-stricken. "Add not crime to crime. If he has indeed been guilty of the foul offence you have named, let him be dealt with according to the offended laws of the country. Do not pervert the purposes of justice."

"Justice!" echoed Cristofano scornfully.

"Ay, justice. You are poor and powerless, but means may be found to aid you. I will assist the rightful course of vengeance."

"You shall assist it. I have sworn he shall die before dawn, and the hand to strike the blow shall be yours."

"Mine! never!"

"Your own life will be the penalty of your obstinacy, if you refuse; nor will your refusal save him. By the Mother of Heaven, he dies! and by your hand. You saw how he was struck by your resemblance to the young Englishman this morning in the chiesa. It is wonderful! I know not who or what you are; but to me you are an instrument of vengeance, and as such I shall use you. The blow dealt by you will seem the work of retribution; and I care not if you strike twice, and make my heart your second mark."

Ere I could reply he called to his comrades, and in a few moments we were speeding across the campagna.

We arrived at a high wall:—the old man conducted us to a postern-gate, which he opened. We entered a garden filled with orange-trees, the perfume of which loaded the midnight air. We heard the splash of a fountain at a distance, and the thrilling notes of a nightingale amongst some taller trees. The moon hung like a lamp over the belvidere of

the proud villa. We strode along a wide terrace edged by a marble balustrade. The old man pointed to an open summer-house terminating the walk, and gave me a significant look, but he spoke not. A window thrown open admitted us to the house. We were within a hall crowded with statues, and traversed noiselessly its marble floors. Passing through several chambers, we then mounted to a corridor, and entered an apartment which formed the ante-room to another beyond it. Placing his finger upon his lips, and making a sign to his comrades, Cristofano opened a door and disappeared. There was a breathless pause for a few minutes, during which I listened intently, but caught only a faint sound as of the snapping of a lock.

Presently the old man returned.

"He sleeps," he said, in a low deep tone to me; "sleeps as his victim slept—sleeps without a dream of remorse; and he shall awaken, as she awoke, to despair. Come into his chamber!"

We obeyed. The door was made fast within side.

The curtains of the couch were withdrawn, and the moonlight streamed full upon the face of the sleeper. He was hushed in profound repose. No visions seemed to haunt his peaceful slumbers. Could guilt sleep so soundly? I half doubted the old man's story.

Placing us within the shadow of the canopy, Cristofano approached the bed. A stiletto glittered in his hand. "Awake!" he cried, in a voice of thunder.

The sleeper started at the summons.

I watched his countenance. He read Cristofano's errand in his eye. But he quailed not.

"Cowardly assassin!" he cried, "you have well consulted your own safety in stealing on my sleep."

"And who taught me the lesson?" fiercely interrupted the old man. "Am I the first that have stolen on midnight slumber? Gaze upon this? When and how did it acquire its dye?" And he held forth a glove, which looked blackened and stained in the moonlight.

The marchese groaned aloud.

"My cabinet broken open!" at length he exclaimed—"villain! how dare you do this? But why do I rave? I know with whom I have to deal." Uttering these words he sprung from his couch with the intention of grappling with the old man; but Cristofano retreated, and

at that instant the brigands, who rushed to his aid, thrust me forward. I was face to face with the marchese.

The apparition of the murdered man could not have staggered him more. His limbs were stiffened by the shock, and he remained in an attitude of freezing terror.

"Is he come for vengeance?" he ejaculated.

"He is!" cried Cristofano. "Give him the weapon!"

And a stiletto was thrust into my hand. But I heeded not the steel. I tore open my bosom—a small diamond cross was within the folds.

"Do you recollect this?" I demanded of the marchese.

"It was my wife's!" he shrieked in amazement.

"It was upon the infant's bosom as he slept by her side on that fatal night," said Cristofano. "I saw it sparkle there."

"That infant was myself—that wife my mother!" I cried.

"The murderer stands before you! Strike!" exclaimed Cristofano.

I raised the dagger. The marchese stirred not. I could not strike.

"Do you hesitate?" angrily exclaimed Cristofano.

"He has not the courage," returned the younger Calabrian. "You reproached me this morning with want of filial duty. Behold how a son can avenge his father!" And he plunged his stiletto within the bosom of the marchese.

"Your father is not yet avenged, young man!" cried Cristofano, in a terrible tone. "You alone can avenge him!"

Ere I could withdraw its point the old man had rushed upon the dagger which I held extended in my grasp.

He fell without a single groan.

THE END


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