

INTERMEAN  
BY  
WILLIAM  
HARRISON  
AINSWORTH

# **Intermean by William Harrison Ainsworth**

## **CHAPTER I THE TOMB OF THE ROSICRUCIAN**

On the night of the 1st of March 1800, and at a late hour, a man, wrapped in a large horseman's cloak, and of strange and sinister appearance, entered an old deserted house in the neighbourhood of Stepney Green. He was tall, carried himself very erect, and seemed in the full vigour of early manhood; but his features had a worn and ghastly look, as if bearing the stamp of long-indulged and frightful excesses, while his dark gleaming eyes gave him an expression almost diabolical.

This person had gained the house from a garden behind it, and now stood in a large dismantled hall, from which a broad oaken staircase, with curiously-carved banisters, led to a gallery, and thence to the upper chambers of the habitation. Nothing could be more dreary than the aspect of the place. The richly-moulded ceiling was festooned with spiders' webs, and in some places had fallen in heaps upon the floor; the glories of the tapestry upon the walls were obliterated by damp; the squares of black and white marble, with which the hall was paved, were loosened, and quaked beneath the footsteps; the wide and empty fireplace yawned like the mouth of a cavern; the bolts of the closed windows were rusted in their sockets; and the heaps of dust before the outer door proved that long years had elapsed since any one had passed through it.

Taking a dark lantern from beneath his cloak, the individual in question gazed for a moment around him, and then, with a sardonic smile playing upon his features, directed his steps towards a room on the right, the door of which stood open.

This chamber, which was large and cased with oak, was wholly unfurnished, like the hall, and in an equally dilapidated condition. The only decoration remaining on its walls was the portrait of a venerable personage in the cap and gown of Henry the Eighth's time, painted against a panel—a circumstance which had probably saved it from destruction—and beneath it, fixed in another panel, a plate of brass, covered with mystical characters and symbols, and inscribed with the name "Cyprianus de Rougemont, Fra. R.C." The same name likewise appeared upon a label beneath the portrait, with the date 1550.

Pausing before the portrait, the young man threw the light of the lantern full upon it, and revealed features somewhat resembling his own in form, but of a severe and

philosophic cast. In the eyes alone could be discerned the peculiar and terrible glimmer which distinguished his own glances.

After regarding the portrait for some time fixedly, he thus addressed it:

"Dost hear me, old ancestor?" he cried. "I, thy descendant, Cyprian de Rougemont, call upon thee to point out where thy gold is hidden? I know that thou wert a brother of the Rosy Cross—one of the illuminati—and didst penetrate the mysteries of nature, and enter the region of light. I know, also, that thou wert buried in this house with a vast treasure; but though I have made diligent search for it, and others have searched before me, thy grave has never yet been discovered! Listen to me! Methought Satan appeared to me in a dream last night, and bade me come hither, and I should find what I sought. The conditions he proposed were, that I should either give him my own soul, or win him that of Auriol Darcy. I assented. I am here. Where is thy treasure?"

After a pause, he struck the portrait with his clenched hand, exclaiming in a loud voice:

"Dost hear me, I say, old ancestor? I call on thee to give me thy treasure. Dost hear, I say?"

And he repeated the blow with greater violence.

Disturbed by the shock, the brass plate beneath the picture started from its place, and fell to the ground.

"What is this?" cried Rougemont, gazing into the aperture left by the plate. "Ha!—my invocation has been heard!"

And, snatching up the lantern, he discovered, at the bottom of a little recess, about two feet deep, a stone, with an iron ring in the centre of it. Uttering a joyful cry, he seized the ring, and drew the stone forward without difficulty, disclosing an open space beyond it.

"This, then, is the entrance to my ancestor's tomb," cried Rougemont; "there can be no doubt of it. The old Rosicrucian has kept his secret well; but the devil has helped me to wrest it from him. And now to procure the necessary implements, in case, as is not unlikely, I should experience further difficulty."

With this he hastily quitted the room, but returned almost immediately with a mallet, a lever, and a pitchfork; armed with which and the lantern, he crept through the aperture. This done, he found himself at the head of a stone staircase, which he descended, and

came to the arched entrance of a vault. The door, which was of stout oak, was locked, but holding up the light towards it, he read the following inscription:

"POST C.C.L. ANNOS PATEBO, 1550."

"In two hundred and fifty years I shall open!" cried Rougemont, "and the date 1550—why, the exact time is arrived. Old Cyprian must have foreseen what would happen, and evidently intended to make me his heir. There was no occasion for the devil's interference. And see, the key is in the lock. So!" And he turned it, and pushing against the door with some force, the rusty hinges gave way, and it fell inwards.

### The Tomb of the Rosicrucian.

From the aperture left by the fallen door, a soft and silvery light streamed forth, and, stepping forward, Rougemont found himself in a spacious vault, from the ceiling of which hung a large globe of crystal, containing in its heart a little flame, which diffused a radiance, gentle as that of the moon, around. This, then, was the ever-burning lamp of the Rosicrucians, and Rougemont gazed at it with astonishment. Two hundred and fifty years had elapsed since that wondrous flame had been lighted, and yet it burnt on brightly as ever. Hooped round the globe was a serpent with its tail in its mouth—an emblem of eternity—wrought in purest gold; while above it were a pair of silver wings, in allusion to the soul. Massive chains of the more costly metal, fashioned like twisted snakes, served as suspenders to the lamp.

But Rougemont's astonishment at this marvel quickly gave way to other feelings, and he gazed around the vault with greedy eyes.

It was a septiliteral chamber, about eight feet high, built of stone, and supported by beautifully groined arches. The surface of the masonry was as smooth and fresh as if the chisel had only just left it.

In six of the corners were placed large chests, ornamented with ironwork of the most exquisite workmanship, and these Rougemont's imagination pictured as filled with inexhaustible treasure; while in the seventh corner, near the door, was a beautiful little piece of monumental sculpture in white marble, representing two kneeling and hooded figures, holding a veil between them, which partly concealed the entrance to a small recess. On one of the chests opposite the monument just described stood a strangely-formed bottle and a cup of antique workmanship, both encrusted with gems.

The walls were covered with circles, squares, and diagrams, and in some places were ornamented with grotesque carvings. In the centre of the vault was a round altar, of

black marble, covered with a plate of gold, on which Rougemont read the following inscription:

"Hoc universi compendium unius mihi sepulcrum feci."

"Here, then, old Cyprian lies," he cried.

And, prompted by some irresistible impulse, he seized the altar by the upper rim, and overthrew it. The heavy mass of marble fell with a thundering crash, breaking asunder the flag beneath it. It might be the reverberation of the vaulted roof, but a deep groan seemed to reproach the young man for his sacrilege. Undeterred, however, by this warning, Rougemont placed the point of the lever between the interstices of the broken stone, and, exerting all his strength, speedily raised the fragments, and laid open the grave.

Within it, in the garb he wore in life, with his white beard streaming to his waist, lay the uncoffined body of his ancestor, Cyprian de Rougemont. The corpse had evidently been carefully embalmed, and the features were unchanged by decay. Upon the breast, with the hands placed over it, lay a large book, bound in black vellum, and fastened with brazen clasps. Instantly possessing himself of this mysterious-looking volume, Rougemont knelt upon the nearest chest, and opened it. But he was disappointed in his expectation. All the pages he examined were filled with cabalistic characters, which he was totally unable to decipher.

At length, however, he chanced upon one page the import of which he comprehended, and he remained for some time absorbed in its contemplation, while an almost fiendish smile played upon his features.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, closing the volume, "I see now the cause of my extraordinary dream. My ancestor's wondrous power was of infernal origin—the result, in fact, of a compact with the Prince of Darkness. But what care I for that? Give me wealth—no matter what source it comes from!—ha! ha!"

And seizing the lever, he broke open the chest beside him. It was filled with bars of silver. The next he visited in the same way was full of gold. The third was laden with pearls and precious stones; and the rest contained treasure to an incalculable amount. Rougemont gazed at them in transports of joy.

"At length I have my wish," he cried. "Boundless wealth, and therefore boundless power, is mine. I can riot in pleasure—riot in vengeance. As to my soul, I will run the risk of its perdition; but it shall go hard if I destroy not that of Auriol. His love of play and his passion for Edith Talbot shall be the means by which I will work. But I must not neglect

another agent which is offered me. That bottle, I have learnt from yon volume, contains an infernal potion, which, without destroying life, shatters the brain, and creates maddening fancies. It will well serve my purpose; and I thank thee, Satan, for the gift."

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## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE COMPACT**

About two months after this occurrence, and near midnight, a young man was hurrying along Pall Mall, with a look of the wildest despair, when his headlong course was suddenly arrested by a strong grasp, while a familiar voice sounded in his ear.

"It is useless to meditate self-destruction, Auriol Darcy," cried the person who had checked him. "If you find life a burden, I can make it tolerable to you."

Turning round at the appeal, Auriol beheld a tall man, wrapped in a long black cloak, whose sinister features were well known to him.

"Leave me, Rougemont!" he cried fiercely. "I want no society—above all, not yours. You know very well that you have ruined me, and that nothing more is to be got from me. Leave me, I say, or I may do you a mischief."

"Tut, tut, Auriol, I am your friend!" replied Rougemont. "I purpose to relieve your distress."

"Will you give me back the money you have won from me?" cried Auriol. "Will you pay my inexorable creditors? Will you save me from a prison?"

"I will do all this, and more," replied Rougemont. "I will make you one of the richest men in London."

"Spare your insulting jests, sir," cried Auriol. "I am in no mood to bear them."

"I am not jesting," rejoined Rougemont. "Come with me, and you shall be convinced of my sincerity."

Auriol at length assented, and they turned into Saint James's Square, and paused before a magnificent house. Rougemont ascended the steps. Auriol, who had accompanied him almost mechanically, gazed at him with astonishment.

"Do you live here?" he inquired.

"Ask no questions," replied Rougemont, knocking at the door, which was instantly opened by a hall porter, while other servants in rich liveries appeared at a distance. Rougemont addressed a few words in an undertone to them, and they instantly bowed respectfully to Auriol, while the foremost of them led the way up a magnificent staircase.

All this was a mystery to the young man, but he followed his conductor without a word, and was presently ushered into a gorgeously-furnished and brilliantly-illuminated apartment.

The servant then left them; and as soon as he was gone Auriol exclaimed, "Is it to mock me that you have brought me hither?"

"To mock you—no," replied Rougemont. "I have told you that I mean to make you rich. But you look greatly exhausted. A glass of wine will revive you."

And as he spoke, he stepped towards a small cabinet, and took from it a curiously-shaped bottle and a goblet.

"Taste this wine—it has been long in our family," he added, filling the cup.

"It is a strange, bewildering drink," cried Auriol, setting down the empty goblet, and passing his hand before his eyes.

"You have taken it upon an empty stomach—that is all," said Rougemont. "You will be better anon."

"I feel as if I were going mad," cried Auriol. "It is some damnable potion you have given me."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Rougemont. "It reminds you of the elixir you once quaffed—eh?"

"A truce to this raillery!" cried Auriol angrily. "I have said I am in no mood to bear it."

"Pshaw! I mean no offence," rejoined the other, changing his manner. "What think you of this house?"

"That it is magnificent," replied Auriol, gazing around. "I envy you its possession."

"It shall be yours, if you please," replied Rougemont.

"Mine! you are mocking me again."



"Not in the least. You shall buy it from me, if you please."

"At what price?" asked Auriol bitterly.

"At a price you can easily pay," replied the other. "Come this way, and we will conclude the bargain."

Proceeding towards the farther end of the room, they entered a small exquisitely-furnished chamber, surrounded with sofas of the most luxurious description. In the midst was a table, on which writing materials were placed.

"It were a fruitless boon to give you this house without the means of living in it," said Rougemont, carefully closing the door. "This pocket-book will furnish you with them."

The Compact.

"Notes to an immense amount!" cried Auriol, opening the pocket-book, and glancing at its contents.

"They are yours, together with the house," cried Rougemont, "if you will but sign a compact with me."

"A compact!" cried Auriol, regarding him with a look of undefinable terror. "Who and what are you?"

"Some men would call me the devil!" replied Rougemont carelessly. "But you know me too well to suppose that I merit such a designation. I offer you wealth. What more could you require?"

"But upon what terms?" demanded Auriol.

"The easiest imaginable," replied the other. "You shall judge for yourself."

And as he spoke, he opened a writing-desk upon the table, and took from it a parchment.

"Sit down," he added, "and read this."

Auriol complied, and as he scanned the writing he became transfixed with fear and astonishment, while the pocket-book dropped from his grasp.

After a while he looked up at Rougemont, who was leaning over his shoulder, and whose features were wrinkled with a derisive smile.

"Then you are the Fiend?" he cried.

"If you will have it so—certainly," replied the other.

"You are Satan in the form of the man I once knew," cried Auriol. "Avaunt! I will have no dealings with you."

"I thought you wiser than to indulge in such idle fears, Darcy," rejoined the other. "Granting even your silly notion of me to be correct, why need you be alarmed? You are immortal."

"True," rejoined Auriol thoughtfully; "but yet——"

"Pshaw!" rejoined the other, "sign, and have done with the matter."

"By this compact I am bound to deliver a victim—a female victim—whenever you shall require it," cried Auriol.

"Precisely," replied the other; "you can have no difficulty in fulfilling that condition."

"But if I fail in doing so, I am doomed——"

"But you will not fail," interrupted the other, lighting a taper and sealing the parchment. "Now sign it."

Auriol mechanically took the pen, and gazed fixedly on the document.

"I shall bring eternal destruction on myself if I sign it," he muttered.

"A stroke of the pen will rescue you from utter ruin," said Rougemont, leaning over his shoulder. "Riches and happiness are yours. You will not have such another chance."

"Tempter!" cried Auriol, hastily attaching his signature to the paper. But he instantly started back aghast at the fiendish laugh that rang in his ears.

"I repent—give it me back!" he cried, endeavouring to snatch the parchment, which Rougemont thrust into his bosom.

"It is too late!" cried the latter, in a triumphant tone. "You are mine—irredeemably mine."

"Ha!" exclaimed Auriol, sinking back on the couch.

"I leave you in possession of your house," pursued Rougemont; "but I shall return in a week, when I shall require my first victim."

"Your first victim! oh, Heaven!" exclaimed Auriol.

"Ay, and my choice falls on Edith Talbot!" replied Rougemont.

"Edith Talbot!" exclaimed Auriol; "she your victim! Think you I would resign her I love better than life to you?"

"It is because she loves you that I have chosen her," rejoined Rougemont, with a bitter laugh. "And such will ever be the case with you. Seek not to love again, for your passion will be fatal to the object of it. When the week has elapsed, I shall require Edith at your hands. Till then, farewell!"

"Stay!" cried Auriol. "I break the bargain with thee, fiend. I will have none of it. I abjure thee."

And he rushed wildly after Rougemont, who had already gained the larger chamber; but, ere he could reach him, the mysterious individual had passed through the outer door, and when Auriol emerged upon the gallery, he was nowhere to be seen.

Several servants immediately answered the frantic shouts of the young man, and informed him that Mr. Rougemont had quitted the house some moments ago, telling them that their master was perfectly satisfied with the arrangements he had made for him.

"And we hope nothing has occurred to alter your opinion, sir?" said the hall porter.

"You are sure Mr. Rougemont is gone?" cried Auriol.

"Oh, quite sure, sir," cried the hall porter. "I helped him on with his cloak myself. He said he should return this day week."

"If he comes I will not see him," cried Auriol sharply; "mind that. Deny me to him; and on no account whatever let him enter the house."

"Your orders shall be strictly obeyed," replied the porter, staring with surprise.

"Now leave me," cried Auriol.

And as they quitted him, he added, in a tone and with a gesture of the deepest despair, "All precautions are useless. I am indeed lost!"

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## **CHAPTER III**

### **IRRESOLUTION**

On returning to the cabinet, where his fatal compact with Rougemont had been signed, Auriol perceived the pocket-book lying on the floor near the table, and, taking it up, he was about to deposit it in the writing-desk, when an irresistible impulse prompted him once more to examine its contents. Unfolding the roll of notes, he counted them, and found they amounted to more than a hundred thousand pounds. The sight of so much wealth, and the thought of the pleasure and the power it would procure him, gradually dispelled his fears, and arising in a transport of delight, he exclaimed—"Yes, yes—all obstacles are now removed! When Mr. Talbot finds I am become thus wealthy, he will no longer refuse me his daughter. But I am mad," he added, suddenly checking himself—"worse than mad, to indulge such hopes. If it be indeed the Fiend to whom I have sold myself, I have no help from perdition! If it be man, I am scarcely less terribly fettered. In either case, I will not remain here longer; nor will I avail myself of this accursed money, which has tempted me to my undoing."

And, hurling the pocket-book to the farther end of the room, he was about to pass through the door, when a mocking laugh arrested him. He looked round with astonishment and dread, but could see no one. After a while, he again moved forward, but a voice, which he recognised as that of Rougemont, called upon him to stay.

"It will be in vain to fly," said the unseen speaker. "You cannot escape me. Whether you remain here or not—whether you use the wealth I have given you, or leave it behind you—you cannot annul your bargain. With this knowledge, you are at liberty to go. But remember, on the seventh night from this I shall require Edith Talbot from you!"

"Where are you, fiend?" demanded Auriol, gazing around furiously. "Show yourself, that I may confront you."

A mocking laugh was the only response deigned to this injunction.

"Give me back the compact," cried Auriol imploringly. "It was signed in ignorance. I knew not the price I was to pay for your assistance. Wealth is of no value to me without Edith."

"Without wealth you could not obtain her," replied the voice. "You are only, therefore, where you were. But you will think better of the bargain to-morrow. Meanwhile, I counsel you to place the money you have so unwisely cast from you safely under lock and key, and to seek repose. You will awaken with very different thoughts in the morning."

"How am I to account for my sudden accession of wealth?" inquired Auriol, after a pause.

"You a gambler, and ask that question!" returned the unseen stranger, with a bitter laugh. "But I will make your mind easy on that score. As regards the house, you will find a regular conveyance of it within that writing-desk, while the note lying on the table, which bears your address, comes from me, and announces the payment of a hundred and twenty thousand pounds to you, as a debt of honour. You see I have provided against every difficulty. And now, farewell!"

The voice was then hushed; and though Auriol addressed several other questions to the unseen speaker, no answer was returned him.

After some moments of irresolution, Auriol once more took up the pocket-book, and deposited it in the writing-desk, in which he found, as he had been led to expect, a deed conveying the house to him. He then opened the note lying upon the table, and found its contents accorded with what had just been told him. Placing it with the pocket-book, he locked the writing-desk, exclaiming, "It is useless to struggle further—I must yield to fate!"

This done, he went into the adjoining room, and, casting his eyes about, remarked the antique bottle and flagon. The latter was filled to the brim—how or with what, Auriol paused not to examine; but seizing the cup with desperation, he placed it to his lips, and emptied it at a draught.

A species of intoxication, but pleasing as that produced by opium, presently succeeded. All his fears left him, and in their place the gentlest and most delicious fancies arose. Surrendering himself delightedly to their influence, he sank upon a couch, and for some time was wrapped in a dreamy elysium, imagining himself wandering with Edith Talbot in a lovely garden, redolent of sweets, and vocal with the melody of birds. Their path led through a grove, in the midst of which was a fountain; and they were hastening towards its marble brink, when all at once Edith uttered a scream, and, starting back, pointed to a large black snake lying before her, and upon which she would have trodden the next moment. Auriol sprang forward and tried to crush the reptile with his heel; but, avoiding the blow, it coiled around his leg, and plunged its venom teeth into his flesh.

The anguish occasioned by the imaginary wound roused him from his slumber, and looking up, he perceived that a servant was in attendance.

Bowing obsequiously, the man inquired whether he had occasion for anything.

"Show me to my bedroom—that is all I require," replied Auriol, scarcely able to shake off the effect of the vision.

And, getting up, he followed the man, almost mechanically, out of the room.

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## **CHAPTER IV**

### **EDITH TALBOT**

It was late when Auriol arose on the following morning. At first, finding himself in a large and most luxuriantly-furnished chamber, he was at a loss to conceive how he came there, and it was some time before he could fully recall the mysterious events of the previous night. As had been foretold, however, by Rougemont, his position did not cause him so much anxiety as before.

After attiring himself, he descended to the lower apartments, in one of which a sumptuous breakfast awaited him; and having partaken of it, he took a complete survey of the house, and found it larger and more magnificent even than he had supposed it. He next supplied himself from the pocket-book with a certain sum, for which he fancied he might have occasion in the course of the day, and sallied forth. His first business was to procure a splendid carriage and horses, and to order some new and rich habiliments to be made with the utmost expedition.

He then proceeded towards May Fair, and knocked at the door of a large house at the upper end of Curzon Street. His heart beat violently as he was shown into an elegant drawing-room, and his trepidation momentarily increased, until the servant reappeared and expressed his regret that he had misinformed him in stating that Miss Talbot was at home. Both she and Mr. Talbot, he said, had gone out about half-an-hour ago. Auriol looked incredulous, but without making any remark, departed. Hurrying home, he wrote a few lines to Mr. Talbot, announcing the sudden and extraordinary change in his fortune, and formally demanding the hand of Edith. He was about to despatch this letter, when a note was brought him by his servant. It was from Edith. Having ascertained his new address from his card, she wrote to assure him of her constant attachment. Transported by this proof of her affection, Auriol half devoured the note with kisses, and instantly sent off his own letter to her father—merely adding a few words to say that he would call for an answer on the morrow. But he had not to wait thus long for a reply. Ere an hour had elapsed, Mr. Talbot brought it in person.

Mr. Talbot was a man of about sixty—tall, thin, and gentlemanlike in deportment, with grey hair, and black eyebrows, which lent considerable expression to the orbs beneath them. His complexion was a bilious brown, and he possessed none of the good looks which in his daughter had so captivated Auriol, and which it is to be presumed, therefore, she inherited from her mother.



A thorough man of the world, though not an unamiable person, Mr. Talbot was entirely influenced by selfish considerations. He had hitherto looked with an unfavourable eye upon Auriol's attentions to his daughter, from a notion that the connection would be very undesirable in a pecuniary point of view; but the magnificence of the house in Saint James's Square, which fully bore out Auriol's account of his newly-acquired wealth, wrought a complete change in his opinions, and he soon gave the young man to understand that he should be delighted to have him for a son-in-law. Finding him so favourably disposed, Auriol entreated him to let the marriage take place—within three days, if possible.

Mr. Talbot was greatly grieved that he could not comply with his young friend's request, but he was obliged to start the next morning for Nottingham, and could not possibly return under three days.

"But we can be married before you go?" cried Auriol.

"Scarcely, I fear," replied Mr. Talbot, smiling blandly. "You must control your impatience, my dear young friend. On the sixth day from this—that is, on Wednesday in next week—we are now at Friday—you shall be made happy."

The coincidence between this appointment, and the time fixed by Rougemont for the delivery of his victim, struck Auriol forcibly. His emotion, however, escaped Mr. Talbot, who soon after departed, having engaged his future son-in-law to dine with him at seven o'clock.

Auriol, it need scarcely be said, was punctual to the hour, or, rather, he anticipated it. He found Edith alone in the drawing-room, and seated near the window, which was filled with choicest flowers. On seeing him, she uttered an exclamation of joy, and sprang to meet him. The young man pressed his lips fervently to the little hand extended to him.

Edith Talbot was a lovely brunette. Her features were regular, and her eyes, which were perfectly splendid, were dark, almond-shaped, and of almost Oriental languor. Her hair, which she wore braided over her brow and gathered behind in a massive roll, was black and glossy as a raven's wing. Her cheeks were dimpled, her lips of velvet softness, and her teeth like ranges of pearls. Perfect grace accompanied all her movements, and one only wondered that feet so small as those she possessed should have the power of sustaining a form which, though lightsome, was yet rounded in its proportions.

"You have heard, dear Edith, that your father has consented to our union?" said Auriol, after gazing at her for a few moments in silent admiration.

Edith murmured an affirmative, and blushed deeply.

"He has fixed Wednesday next," pursued Auriol; "but I wish an earlier day could have been named. I have a presentiment that if our marriage is so long delayed, it will not take place at all."

"You are full of misgivings, Auriol," she replied.

"I confess it," he said; "and my apprehensions have risen to such a point, that I feel disposed to urge you to a private marriage, during your father's absence."

"Oh no, Auriol; much as I love you, I could never consent to such a step," she cried. "You cannot urge me to it. I would not abuse my dear father's trusting love. I have never deceived him, and that is the best assurance I can give you that I shall never deceive you."

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Talbot, who held out both his hands to Auriol, and professed the greatest delight to see him. And no doubt he was sincere. The dinner passed off most pleasantly, and so did the evening; for the old gentleman was in high spirits, and his hilarity was communicated to the young couple. When Auriol and Mr. Talbot went up-stairs to tea, they found that Edith's aunt, Mrs. Maitland, had arrived to take charge of her during her father's absence. This lady had always exhibited a partiality for Auriol, and had encouraged his suit to her niece; consequently she was well satisfied with the turn affairs had taken. It was near midnight before Auriol could tear himself away; and when he rose to depart, Mr. Talbot, who had yawned frequently, but fruitlessly, to give him a hint, told him he might depend upon seeing him back on the evening of the third day, and in the meantime he committed him to the care of Mrs. Maitland and Edith.

Three days flew by rapidly and delightfully; and on the evening of the last, just as the little party were assembled in the drawing-room, after dinner, Mr. Talbot returned from this journey.

"Well, here I am!" he cried, clasping Edith to his bosom, "without having encountered any misadventure. On the contrary, I have completed my business to my entire satisfaction."

"Oh, how delighted I am to see you, dear papa!" exclaimed Edith. "Now, Auriol, you can have no more apprehensions."

"Apprehensions of what?" cried Mr. Talbot.

"Of some accident befalling you, which might have interfered with our happiness, sir," replied Auriol.

"Oh, lovers are full of idle fears!" cried Mr. Talbot. "They are unreasonable beings. However, here I am, as I said before, safe and sound. To-morrow we will finish all preliminary arrangements, and the day after you shall be made happy—ha! ha!"

"Do you know, papa, Auriol intends to give a grand ball on our wedding-day, and has invited all his acquaintance to it?" remarked Edith.

"I hope you have not invited Cyprian Rougemont?" said Mr. Talbot, regarding him fixedly.

"I have not, sir," replied Auriol, turning pale. "But why do you particularise him?"

"Because I have heard some things of him not much to his credit," replied Mr. Talbot.

"What—what have you heard, sir?" demanded Auriol.

"Why, one shouldn't believe all the ill one hears of a man; and, indeed, I cannot believe all I have heard of Cyprian Rougemont," replied Mr. Talbot; "but I should be glad if you dropped his acquaintance altogether. And now let us change the subject."

Mr. Talbot seated himself beside Mrs. Maitland, and began to give her some account of his journey, which appeared to have been as pleasant as it had been rapid.

Unable to shake off the gloom which had stolen over him, Auriol took his leave, promising to meet Mr. Talbot at his lawyer's in Lincoln's Inn, at noon on the following day. He was there at the time appointed, and, to Mr. Talbot's great delight, and the no small surprise of the lawyer, paid over a hundred thousand pounds, to be settled on his future wife.

"You are a perfect man of honour, Auriol," said Mr. Talbot, clapping him on the shoulder, "and I hope Edith will make you an excellent wife. Indeed, I have no doubt of it."

"Nor I,—if I ever possess her," mentally ejaculated Auriol.

The morning passed in other preparations. In the evening the lovers met as usual, and separated with the full persuasion, on Edith's part at least, that the next day would make them happy. Since the night of the compact, Auriol had neither seen Rougemont, nor heard from him, and he neglected no precaution to prevent his intrusion.

# **Intermean by William Harrison Ainsworth**

## **CHAPTER V**

### **THE SEVENTH NIGHT**

It was a delicious morning in May, and the sun shone brightly on Auriol's gorgeous equipage, as he drove to St. George's, Hanover Square, where he was united to Edith. Thus far all seemed auspicious, and he thought he could now bill defiance to fate. With the object of his love close beside him, and linked to him by the strongest and holiest ties, it seemed impossible she could be snatched from him. Nothing occurred during the morning to give him uneasiness, and he gave orders that a carriage and four should be ready an hour before midnight, to convey him and his bride to Richmond, where they were to spend their honeymoon.

Night came, and with it began to arrive the guests who were bidden to the ball. No expense had been spared by Auriol to give splendor to his fate. It was in all respects magnificent. The amusements of the evening commenced with a concert, which was performed by the first singers from the Italian Opera; after which, the ball was opened by Auriol and his lovely bride. As soon as the dance was over, Auriol made a sign to an attendant, who instantly disappeared.

"Are you prepared to quit this gay scene with me, Edith?" he asked, with a heart swelling with rapture.

The significant whisper.

"Quite so," she replied, gazing at him with tenderness; "I long to be alone with you."

"Come, then," said Auriol.

Edith arose, and passing her arm under that of her husband, they quitted the ball-room, but in place of descending the principal staircase, they took a more private course. The hall, which they were obliged to cross, and which they entered from a side-door, was spacious and beautifully proportioned, and adorned with numerous statues on pedestals. The ceiling was decorated with fresco paintings, and supported by two stately scagliola pillars. From between these, a broad staircase of white marble ascended to the upper room. As Auriol had foreseen, the staircase was thronged with guests ascending to the ball-room, the doors of which being open, afforded glimpses of the dancers, and

gave forth strains of liveliest music. Anxious to avoid a newly-arrived party in the hall, Auriol and his bride lingered for a moment near a pillar.

"Ha! who is this?" cried Edith, as a tall man, with a sinister countenance, and habited entirely in black, moved from the farther side of the pillar, and planted himself in their path, with his back partly towards them.

A thrill of apprehension passed through Auriol's frame. He looked up and beheld Rougemont, who, glancing over his shoulder, fixed his malignant gaze upon him. Retreat was now impossible.

"You thought to delude me," said Rougemont, in a deep whisper, audible only to Auriol; "but you counted without your host. I am come to claim my victim."

"What is the matter with you, that you tremble so, dear Auriol?" cried Edith. "Who is this strange person?"

But her husband returned no answer. Terror had taken away his power of utterance.

"Your carriage waits for you at the door, madam—all is prepared," said Rougemont, advancing towards her, and taking her hand.

"You are coming, Auriol?" cried Edith, who scarcely knew whether to draw back or go forward.

"Yes—yes," cried Auriol, who fancied he saw a means of escape. "This is my friend, Mr. Rougemont—go with him."

"Mr. Rougemont!" cried Edith. "You told my father he would not be here."

"Your husband did not invite me, madam," said Rougemont, with sarcastic emphasis; "but knowing I should be welcome, I came unasked. But let us avoid those persons."

In another moment they were at the door. The carriage was there with its four horses, and a man-servant, in travelling attire, stood beside the steps. Reassured by the sight, Auriol recovered his courage, and suffered Rougemont to throw a cloak over Edith's shoulders. The next moment she tripped up the steps of the carriage, and was ensconced within it. Auriol was about to follow her, when he received a violent blow on the chest, which stretched him on the pavement. Before he could regain his feet, Rougemont had sprung into the carriage. The steps were instantly put up by the man-servant, who mounted the box with the utmost celerity, while the postillions, plunging spurs into

their horses, dashed off with lightning speed. As the carriage turned the corner of King Street, Auriol, who had just arisen, beheld, by the light of a lamp, Rougemont's face at the window of the carriage, charged with an expression of the most fiendish triumph.

"What is the matter?" cried Mr. Talbot, who had approached Auriol, "I came to bid you good-bye. Why do I find you here alone? Where is the carriage?—what has become of Edith?"

"She is in the power of the Fiend, and I have sold her to him," replied Auriol gloomily.

"What mean you, wretch?" cried Mr. Talbot, in a voice of distraction. "I heard that Cyprian Rougemont was here. Can it be he that has gone off with her?"

"You have hit the truth," replied Auriol. "He bought her with the money I gave you. I have sold her and myself to perdition!"

"Horror!" exclaimed the old man, falling backwards.

"Ay, breathe your last—breathe your last!" cried Auriol wildly. "Would I could yield up my life, likewise!"

And he hurried away, utterly unconscious whither he went.

***Free***editorial 