

THE OATH
BY
WILLIAM HARRISON
AINSWORTH

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CHAPTER I

THE HUT ON THORNE WASTE

The hut on Thorne Waste, to which we have before incidentally alluded, and whither we are now about to repair, was a low, lone hovel, situate on the banks of the deep and oozy Don, at the eastern extremity of that extensive moor. Ostensibly its owner fulfilled the duties of ferryman to that part of the river; but as the road which skirted his tenement was little frequented, his craft was, for the most part, allowed to sleep undisturbed in her moorings.

In reality, however, he was the inland agent of a horde of smugglers who infested the neighboring coast; his cabin was their rendezvous; and not infrequently, it was said, the depository of their contraband goods. Conkey Jem—so was he called by his associates, on account of the Slawkenbergian promontory which decorated his countenance—had been an old hand at the same trade; but having returned from a seven years' leave of absence from his own country, procured by his lawless life, now managed matters with more circumspection and prudence, and had never since been detected in his former illicit traffic; nor, though so marvellously gifted in that particular himself, was he ever known to nose upon any of his accomplices; or, in other words, to betray them. On the contrary, his hut was a sort of asylum for all fugitives from justice; and although the sanctity of his walls would, in all probability, have been little regarded, had any one been, detected within them, yet, strange to say, even if a robber had been tracked—as it often chanced—to Jem's immediate neighborhood, all traces of him were sure to be lost at the ferryman's hut; and further search was useless.

Within, the hut presented such an appearance as might be expected, from its owner's pursuits and its own unpromising exterior. Consisting of little more than a couple of rooms, the rude whitewashed walls exhibited, in lieu of prints of more pretension, a gallery of choicely-illustrated ballads, celebrating the exploits of various highwaymen, renowned in song, amongst which our friend Dick Turpin figured conspicuously upon his sable steed, Bess being represented by a huge rampant black patch, and Dick, with a pistol considerably longer than the arm that sustained it. Next to this curious collection was a drum-net, a fishing-rod, a landing-net, an eel-spear, and other piscatorial apparatus, with a couple of skulls and a boat-hook, indicative of Jem's ferryman's office, suspended by various hooks; the whole blackened and begrimed by peat-smoke, there being no legitimate means of exit permitted to the vapor generated by the turf-covered

hearthstone. The only window, indeed, in the hut, was to the front; the back apartment, which served Jem for dormitory, had no aperture whatever for the admission of light, except such as was afforded through the door of communication between the rooms. A few broken rush-bottomed chairs, with a couple of dirty tables, formed the sum total of the ferryman's furniture.

Notwithstanding the grotesque effect of his exaggerated nasal organ, Jem's aspect was at once savage and repulsive; his lank black hair hung about his inflamed visage in wild elf locks, the animal predominating throughout; his eyes were small, red, and wolfish, and glared suspiciously from beneath his scarred and tufted eyebrows; while certain of his teeth projected, like the tusks of a boar, from out his coarse-lipped, sensual mouth. Dwarfish in stature, and deformed in person, Jem was built for strength; and what with his width of shoulder and shortness of neck, his figure looked as square and as solid as a cube. His throat and hirsute chest, constantly exposed to the weather, had acquired a glowing tan, while his arms, uncovered to the shoulders, and clothed with fur, like a bear's hide, down, almost, to the tips of his fingers, presented a knot of folded muscles, the concentrated force of which few would have desired to encounter in action.

It was now on the stroke of midnight; and Jem, who had been lying extended upon the floor of his hovel, suddenly aroused by that warning impulse which never fails to awaken one of his calling at the exact moment when they require to be upon the alert, now set about fanning into flame the expiring fuel upon his hearth. Having succeeded in igniting further portions of the turf, Jem proceeded to examine the security of his door and window, and satisfied that lock and bolt were shot, and that the shutter was carefully closed, he kindled a light at his fire, and walked towards his bedroom. But it was not to retire for the night that the ferryman entered his dormitory. Beside his crazy couch stood a litter of empty bottles and a beer cask, crowding the chamber. The latter he rolled aside, and pressing his foot upon the plank beneath it, the board gave way, and a trap-door opening, discovered a ladder, conducting, apparently, into the bowels of the earth. Jem leaned over the abyss, and called in hoarse accents to some one below.

An answer was immediately returned, and a light became soon afterwards visible at the foot of the ladder. Two figures next ascended; the first who set foot within the ferryman's chamber was Alan Rookwood: the other, as the reader may perhaps conjecture, was his grandson.

"Is it the hour?" asked Luke, as he sprang from out the trap-door.

"Ay," replied Jem, with a coarse laugh, "or I had not disturbed myself to call you. But, maybe," added he, softening his manner a little, "you'll like some refreshments before you start? A stoup of Nantz will put you in cue for the job, ha, ha!"

"Not I," replied Luke, who could ill tolerate his companion's familiarity.

"Give me to drink," said Alan, walking feebly towards the fire, and extending his skinny fingers before it. "I am chilled by the damps of that swampy cave—the natural heat within me is nigh extinguished."

"Here is that shall put fresh marrow into your old bones," returned Jem, handing him a tumbler of brandy; "never stint it. I'll be sworn you'll be the better on't, for you look desperate queer, man, about the mazard."

Alan was, in sooth, a ghastly spectacle. The events of the last few days had wrought a fearful change. His countenance was almost exanimate; and when, with shaking hand and trembling lips, he had drained the fiery potion to the dregs, a terrible grimace was excited upon his features, such as is produced upon the corpse by the action of the galvanic machine. Even Jem regarded him with a sort of apprehension. After he had taken breath for a moment, Alan broke out into a fit of wild and immoderate laughter.

"Why, ay," said he, "this is indeed to grow young again, and to feel fresh fire within one's veins. Who would have thought so much of life and energy could reside in this little vessel? I am myself once more, and not the same soulless, pulseless lump of clay I was a moment or two back. The damps of that den had destroyed me—and the solitude—the waking dreams I've had—the visions! horrible! I will not think of them. I am better now—ready to execute my plans—your plans I should say, grandson Luke. Are our horses in readiness? Why do we tarry? The hour is arrived, and I would not that my new-blown courage should evaporate ere the great work for which I live be accomplished. That done, I ask no further stimulant. Let us away."

"We tarry but for Turpin," said Luke; "I am as impatient as yourself. I fear some mischance must have befallen him, or he would have been true to his appointment. Do you not think so?" he added, addressing the ferryman.

"Why," replied Jem, reluctantly, "since you put it home to me, and I can't conceal it no longer, I'll tell you what I didn't tell afore, for fear you should be down in the mouth about it. Dick Turpin can do nothing for you—he's grabb'd."

"Turpin apprehended!" ejaculated Luke.

"Ay," returned Jem. "I learnt from a farmer who crossed the ferry at nightfall, that he were grabb'd this morning at York, after having ridden his famous cherry-colored prad

to death—that's what hurts me more not all the rest; though I fear Dick will scarce cheat the nubbing cheat this go. His time's up, I calculate."

"Will you supply his place and accompany us?" asked Luke of the ferryman.

"No, no," replied Jem, shaking his head; "there's too much risk, and too little profit, in the business for me—it won't pay."

"And what might tempt you to undertake the enterprise?" asked Alan.

"More than you have to offer, Master Peter," replied Jem, who had not been enlightened upon the subject of Alan's real name or condition.

"How know you that?" demanded Alan. "Name your demand."

"Well, then, I'll not say but a hundred pounds, if you had it, might bribe me——"

"To part with your soul to the devil, I doubt not," said Luke, fiercely stamping the ground. "Let us be gone. We need not his mercenary aid. We will do without him."

"Stay," said Alan, "you shall have the hundred, provided you will assure us of your services."

"Cut no more blarneyfied whids, Master Sexton," replied Jem, in a gruff tone. "If I'm to go, I must have the chink down, and that's more nor either of you can do, I'm thinking."

"Give me your purse," whispered Alan to his grandson. "Pshaw," continued he, "do you hesitate? This man can do much for us. Think upon Eleanor, and be prudent. You cannot accomplish your task unaided." Taking the amount from the purse, he gave it to the ferryman, adding, "If we succeed, the sum shall be doubled; and now let us set out."

During Alan's speech, Jem's sharp eyes had been fastened upon the purse, while he mechanically clutched the bank-notes which were given to him. He could not remove his gaze, but continued staring at the treasure before him, as if he would willingly, by force, have made it all his own.

Alan saw the error he had committed in exposing the contents of the purse to the avaricious ferryman, and was about to restore it to Luke, when the bag was suddenly snatched from his grasp, and himself levelled by a blow upon the floor. Conkey Jem found the temptation irresistible. Knowing himself to be a match for both his companions, and imagining he was secure from interruption, he conceived the idea of

making away with them, and possessing himself of their wealth. No sooner had he disposed of Alan, than he assailed Luke, who met his charge half way. With the vigor and alacrity of the latter the reader is already acquainted, but he was no match for the herculean strength of the double-jointed ferryman, who, with the ferocity of the boar he so much resembled, thus furiously attacked him. Nevertheless, as may be imagined, he was not disposed to yield up his life tamely. He saw at once the villain's murderous intentions, and, well aware of his prodigious power, would not have risked a close struggle could he have avoided it. Snatching the eel-spear from the wall, he had hurled it at the head of his adversary, but without effect. In the next instant he was locked in a clasp terrible as that of a Polar bear. In spite of all his struggles, Luke was speedily hurled to the ground: and Jem, who had thrown himself upon him, was apparently searching about for some weapon to put a bloody termination to the conflict, when the trampling of a horse was heard at the door, three taps were repeated slowly, one after the other, and a call resounded from a whistle.

"Damnation!" ejaculated Jem, gruffly, "interrupted!" And he seemed irresolute, slightly altering his position on Luke's body.

The moment was fortunate for Luke, and, in all probability, saved his life. He extricated himself from the ferryman's grasp, regained his feet, and, what was of more importance, the weapon he had thrown away.

"Villain!" cried he, about to plunge the spear with all his force into his enemy's side, "you shall——"

The whistle was again heard without.

"Don't you hear that?" cried Jem: "'Tis Turpin's call."

"Turpin!" echoed Luke, dropping the point of his weapon. "Unbar the door, you treacherous rascal, and admit him."

"Well, say no more about it, Sir Luke," said Jem, fawningly; "I knows I owes you my life, and I thank you for it. Take back the lowre. He should not have shown it me—it was that as did all the mischief."

"Unbar the door, and parley not," said Luke contemptuously.

Jem complied with pretended alacrity, but real reluctance, casting suspicious glances at Luke as he withdrew the bolts. The door at length being opened, haggard, exhausted, and covered with dust, Dick Turpin staggered into the hut.

"Well, I am here," said he, with a hollow laugh. "I've kept my word—ha, ha! I've been damnably put to it; but here I am, ha, ha!" And he sank upon one of the stools.

"We heard you were apprehended," said Luke. "I am glad to find the information was false," added he, glancing angrily at the ferryman.

"Whoever told you that, told you a lie, Sir Luke," replied Dick; "but what are you scowling at, old Charon?—and you, Sir Luke? Why do you glower at each other? Make fast the door—bolt it, Cerberus—right! Now give me a glass of brandy, and then I'll talk—a bumper—so—another. What's that I see—a dead man? Old Peter—Alan I mean—has anything happened to him, that he has taken his measure there so quietly?"

"Nothing, I trust," said Luke, stooping to raise up his grandsire. "The blow has stunned him."

"The blow?" repeated Turpin. "What! there has been a quarrel then? I thought as much from your amiable looks at each other. Come, come, we must have no differences. Give the old earthworm a taste of this—I'll engage it will bring him to fast enough. Ay, rub his temples with it if you'd rather; but it's a better remedy down the gullet—the natural course; and hark ye, Jem, search your crib quickly, and see if you have any grub within it, and any more bub in the cellar: I'm as hungry as a hunter, and as thirsty as a camel."

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CHAPTER II

MAJOR MOWBRAY

Mephistopheles. Out with your toasting iron! Thrust away!

Hayward's Translation of Faust.

Conkey Jem went in search of such provisions as his hovel afforded. Turpin, meantime, lent his assistance towards the revival of Alan Rookwood; and it was not long before his efforts, united with those of Luke, were successful, and Alan restored to consciousness. He was greatly surprised to find the highwayman had joined them, and expressed an earnest desire to quit the hut as speedily as possible.

"That shall be done forthwith, my dear fellow," said Dick. "But if you had fasted as long as I have done, and gone through a few of my fatigues into the bargain, you would perceive, without difficulty, the propriety of supping before you started. Here comes Old Nosey, with a flitch of bacon and a loaf. Egad, I can scarce wait for the toasting. In my present mood, I could almost devour a grunter in the sty." Whereupon he applied himself to the loaf, and to a bottle of stout March ale, which Jem placed upon the table, quaffing copious draughts of the latter, while the ferryman employed himself in toasting certain rashers of the flitch upon the hissing embers.

Luke, meanwhile, stalked impatiently about the room. He had laid aside his trident spear, having first, however, placed a pistol within his breast to be ready for instant service, should occasion demand it, as he could now put little reliance upon the ferryman's fidelity. He glanced with impatience at Turpin, who pursued his meal with steady voracity, worthy of a half-famished soldier; but the highwayman returned no answer to his looks, except such as was conveyed by the incessant clatter of his masticating jaws, during the progress of his, apparently, interminable repast.

"Ready for you in a second, Sir Luke," said Dick; "all right now—capital ale, Charon—strong as Styx—ha, ha!—one other rasher, and I've done. Sorry to keep you—can't conceive how cleverly I put the winkers upon 'em at York, in the dress of a countryman; all owing to old Balty, the patrico, an old pal—ha, ha! My old pals never nose upon me—eh, Nosey—always help one out of the water—always staunch. Here's health to you, old crony."

Jem returned a sulky response, as he placed the last rasher on the table, which was speedily discussed.

"Poor Bess!" muttered Dick, as he quaffed off the final glass of ale. "Poor lass! we buried her by the roadside, beneath the trees—deep—deep. Her remains shall never be disturbed. Alas! alas! my bonny Black Bess! But no matter, her name is yet alive—her deeds will survive her—the trial is over. And now," continued he, rising from his seat, "I'm with you. Where are the tits?"

"In the stable, under ground," growled Jem.

Alan Rookwood, in the mean time, had joined his grandson, and they conversed an instant or two apart.

"My strength will not bear me through the night," said he. "That fellow has thoroughly disabled me. You must go without me to the hall. Here is the key of the secret passage. You know the entrance. I will await you in the tomb."

"The tomb!" echoed Luke.

"Ay, our family vault," returned Alan, with a ghastly grin—"it is the only place of security for me now. Let me see her there. Let me know that my vengeance is complete, that I triumph in my death over him, the accursed brother, through you, my grandson. You have a rival brother—a successful one; you know now what hatred is."

"I do," returned Luke, fiercely.

"But not such hate as mine, which, through a life, a long life, hath endured, intense as when 'twas first engendered in my bosom; which from one hath spread o'er all my race—o'er all save you—and which even now, when death stares me in the face—when the spirit pants to fly from its prison-house, burns fiercely as ever. You cannot know what hate like that may be. You must have wrongs—such wrongs as mine first."

"My hate to Ranulph is bitter as your own to Sir Reginald."

"Name him not," shrieked Alan. "But, oh! to think upon the bride he robbed me of—the young—the beautiful!—whom I loved to madness; whose memory is a barbed shaft, yet rankling keen as ever at my heart. God of Justice! how is it that I have thus long survived? But some men die by inches. My dying lips shall name him once again, and then 'twill be but to blend his name with curses."

"I speak of him no more," said Luke. "I will meet you in the vault."

"Remember, to-morrow is her wedding day with Ranulph."

"Think you I forget it?"

"Bear it constantly in mind. To-morrow's dawn must see her yours or his. You have her oath. To you or to death she is affianced. If she should hesitate in her election, do not you hesitate. Woman's will is fickle; her scruples of conscience will be readily overcome; she will not heed her vows—but let her not escape you. Cast off all your weakness. You are young, and not as I am, age-enfeebled. Be firm, and," added he, with a look of terrible meaning, "if all else should fail—if you are surrounded—if you cannot bear her off—use this," and he placed a dagger in Luke's hands. "It has avenged me, ere now, on a perjured wife, it will avenge you of a forsworn mistress, and remove all obstacle to Rookwood."

Luke took the weapon.

"Would you have me kill her?" demanded he.

"Sooner than she should be Ranulph's."

"Ay, aught sooner than that. But I would not murder both."

"Both!" echoed Alan. "I understand you not."

"Sybil and Eleanor," replied Luke; "for, as surely as I live, Sybil's death will lie at my door."

"How so?" asked Alan; "the poison was self-ministered."

"True," replied Luke, with terrible emphasis, "but I spoke daggers. Harken to me," said he, hollowly whispering in his grandsire's ears. "Methinks I am not long for this world. I have seen her since her death!"

"Tut, tut," replied Alan. "'Tis not for you—a man—to talk thus. A truce to these womanish fancies."

"Womanish or not," returned Luke; "either my fancy has deceived me, or I beheld her, distinctly as I now behold you, within yon cave, while you were sleeping by my side."

"It is disordered fancy," said Alan Rookwood. "You will live—live to inherit Rookwood—live to see them fall crushed beneath your feet. For myself, if I but see you master of Eleanor's hand, or know that she no longer lives to bless your rival, or to mar your prospects, I care not how soon I brave my threatened doom."

"Of one or other you shall be resolved to-night," said Luke, placing the dagger within his vest.

At this moment a trampling of a horse was heard before the hovel, and in another instant a loud knocking resounded from the door. The ferryman instantly extinguished the light, motioning his companions to remain silent.

"What, ho!" shouted a voice. "Ferry wanted."

"Gad zooks!" exclaimed Dick. "As I live, 'tis Major Mowbray!"

"Major Mowbray!" echoed Alan, in amazement "What doth he here?"

"He must be on his way from York to Rookwood, I conclude," said Dick. "If he's here, I'll engage the others are not far off."

Scarcely were the words out of Dick's mouth, when further clatter was heard at the door, and the tones of Coates were heard, in altissimo key, demanding admittance.

"Let us retire into the next room," whispered Turpin, "and then admit them by all means, Conkey. And, hark ye, manage to detain them a few seconds."

"I'll do it," said Jem. "There's a bit of a hole you can peep through."

Another loud rat-tat was heard at the door, threatening to burst it from its hinges.

"Well, I be coming," said Jem, seeing the coast was clear, in a drowsy, yawning tone, as if just awakened from sleep. "You'll cross the river none the faster for making so much noise."

With these words he unbarred the door, and Coates and Paterson, who, it appeared, were proceeding to Rookwood, entered the hovel. Major Mowbray remained on horseback at the door.

"Can you find us a glass of brandy to keep out the fog?" said Coates, who knew something of our ferryman's vocations. "I know you are a lad of amazing spirit."

"May be I can, master, if I choose. But won't the other gemman walk in-doors likewise?"

"No, no," said Coates; "Major Mowbray don't choose to dismount."

"Well, as you please," said Jem. "It'll take me a minute or two to get the punt in order for all them prads."

"The brandy in the first place," said Coates. "What's here?" added the loquacious attorney, noticing the remnants of Turpin's repast. "But that we're hurried, I should like a little frizzled bacon myself."

Jem opened the door of his dormitory with the greatest caution, though apparent indifference, and almost instantly returned with the brandy. Coates filled a glass for Paterson, and then another for himself. The ferryman left the house apparently to prepare his boat, half closing the door after him.

"By my faith! this is the right thing, Paterson," said the attorney. "We may be sure the strength of this was never tested by a gauger's proof. Take another thimbleful. We've twelve miles and a heavy pull to go through ere we reach Rookwood. After all, we made but a poor night's work of it, Master Constable. Cursed stupid in us to let him escape. I only wish we had such another chance. Ah, if we had him within reach now, how we would spring upon him—secure him in an instant. I should glory in the encounter. I tell you what, Paterson, if ever he is taken, I shall make a point of attending his execution, and see whether he dies game. Ha, ha! You think he's sure to swing, Paterson, eh?"

"Why, yes," replied the chief constable. "I wish I was as certain of my reward as that Turpin will eventually figure at the scragging-post."

"Your reward!" replied Coates. "Make yourself easy on that score, my boy; you shall have your dues, depend upon it. Nay, for the matter of that, I'll give you the money now, if you think proper."

"Nothing like time present," said Paterson. "We'll make all square at once."

"Well, then," said Coates, taking out a pocket-book, "you shall have the hundred I promised. You won't get Turpin's reward, the three hundred pounds; but that can't be helped. You shall have mine—always a man of my word, Paterson," continued the attorney, counting out the money. "My father, the thief-taker, was a man of his word before me."

"No doubt," said the chief constable; "I shall always be happy to serve you."

"And then there's that other affair," said the attorney, mysteriously, still occupied in doling out his bank-notes, "that Luke Bradley's case; the fellow, I mean, who calls himself Sir Luke Rookwood—ha, ha! A rank impostor! Two fives, that makes fifty: you want another fifty, Paterson. As I was saying, we may make a good job of that—we must ferret him out. I know who will come down properly for that; and if we could only tuck him up with his brother blade, why it would be worth double. He's all along been a thorn in my Lady Rookwood's side; he's an artful scoundrel."

"Leave him to me," said Paterson; "I'll have him in less than a week. What's your charge against him?"

"Felony, burglary, murder, every description of crime under the heavens," said Coates. "He's a very devil incarnate. Dick Turpin is as mild as milk compared with him. By-the-by, now I think of it, this Jem, Conkey Jem, as folks call him, may know something about him; he's a keen file; I'll sound him. Thirty, forty, fifty—there's the exact amount. So much for Dick Turpin."

"Dick Turpin thanks you for it in person," said Dick, suddenly snatching the whole sum from Paterson's hands, and felling the chief constable with a blow of one of his pistols. "I wish I was as sure of escaping the gallows as I am certain that Paterson has got his reward. You stare, sir. You are once more in the hands of the Philistines. See who is at your elbow."

Coates, who was terrified almost out of his senses at the sight of Turpin, scarcely ventured to turn his head; but when he did so, he was perfectly horror-stricken at the threatening aspect of Luke, who held a cutlass in his hand, which he had picked up in the ferryman's bedroom.

"So you would condemn me for crimes I have never committed," said Luke. "I am tempted, I own, to add the destruction of your worthless existence to their number."

"Mercy, for God's sake, mercy!" cried Coates, throwing himself at Luke's feet. "I meant not what I said."

"Hence, reptile," said Luke, pushing him aside; "I leave you to be dealt upon by others."

At this juncture, the door of the hut was flung open, and in rushed Major Mowbray, sword in hand, followed by Conkey Jem.

"There he stands, sir," cried the latter; "upon him!"

"What! Conkey Jem turned snitch upon his pals?" cried Dick; "I scarce believe my own ears."

"Make yourself scarce, Dick," growled Jem; "the jigger's open, and the boat loose. Leave Luke to his fate. He's sold."

"Never! vile traitor," shouted Dick; "'tis thou art sold, not he;" and, almost ere the words were spoken, a ball was lodged in the brain of the treacherous ferryman.

Major Mowbray, meanwhile, had rushed furiously upon Luke, who met his assault with determined calmness. The strife was sharp, and threatened a speedy and fatal issue. On the Major's side it was a desperate attack of cut and thrust, which Luke had some difficulty in parrying; but as yet no wounds were inflicted. Soldier as was the Major, Luke was not a whit inferior to him in his knowledge of the science of defence, and in the exercise of the broadsword he was perhaps the more skilful of the two: upon the present occasion his coolness stood him in admirable stead. Seeing him hard pressed, Turpin would have come to his assistance; but Luke shouted to him to stand aside, and all that Dick could do, amid the terrific clash of steel, was to kick the tables out of the way of the combatants. Luke's aim was now slightly grazed by a cut made by the Major, which he had parried. The smart of the wound roused his ire. He attacked his adversary in his turn, with so much vigor and good will, that, driven backwards by the irresistible assault, Major Mowbray stumbled over the ferryman's body, which happened to lie in his way; and his sword being struck from his grasp, his life became at once at his assailant's disposal.

Luke sheathed his sword. "Major Mowbray," said he, sternly, "your life is in my power. I spare it for the blood that is between us—for your sister's sake. I would not raise my hand against her brother."

"I disclaim your kindred with me, villain!" wrathfully exclaimed the Major. "I hold you no otherwise than as a wretched impostor, who has set up claims he cannot justify; and as to my sister, if you dare to couple her name——" and the Major made an ineffectual attempt to raise himself, and to regain his sword, which Turpin, however, removed.

"Dare!" echoed Luke, scornfully; "hereafter, you may learn to fear my threats, and acknowledge the extent of my daring; and in that confidence I give you life. Listen to me, sir. I am bound for Rookwood. I have private access to the house—to your sister's chamber—her chamber—mark you that! I shall go armed—attended. This night she shall

be mine. From you—from Ranulph—from Lady Rookwood, from all will I bear her off. She shall be mine, and you, before the dawn, my brother, or——" And Luke paused.

"What further villainy remains untold?" inquired the Major, fiercely.

"You shall bewail your sister's memory," replied Luke, gloomily.

"I embrace the latter alternative with rapture," replied the Major—"God grant her firmness to resist you. But I tremble for her." And the stern soldier groaned aloud in his agony.

"Here is a cord to bind him," said Turpin; "he must remain a prisoner here."

"Right," said Alan Rookwood, "unless—but enough blood has been shed already."

"Ay, marry has there," said Dick, "and I had rather not have given Conkey Jem a taste of blue plumb, had there been any other mode of silencing the snitching scoundrel, which there was not. As to the Major, he's a gallant enemy, and shall have fair play as long as Dick Turpin stands by. Come, sir," added he, to the Major, as he bound him hand and foot with the rope, "I'll do it as gently as I can. You had better submit with a good grace. There's no help for it. And now for my friend Paterson, who was so anxious to furnish me with a hempen cravat, before my neck was in order, he shall have an extra twist of the rope himself, to teach him the inconvenience of a tight neckcloth when he recovers." Saying which, he bound Paterson in such a manner, that any attempt at liberation on the chief constable's part would infallibly strangle him. "As to you, Mr. Coates," said he, addressing the trembling man of law, "you shall proceed to Rookwood with us. You may yet be useful, and I'll accommodate you with a seat behind my own saddle—a distinction I never yet conferred upon any of your tribe. Recollect the countryman at the Bowling-green at York—ha, ha! Come along, sir." And having kicked out the turf fire, Dick prepared to depart.

It would be vain to describe the feelings of rage and despair which agitated the major's bosom, as he saw the party quit the hovel, accompanied by Coates. Aware as he was of their destination, after one or two desperate but ineffectual attempts to liberate himself, by which he only increased the painful constriction of his bonds, without in the slightest degree ameliorating his condition, he resigned himself, with bitterest forebodings, to his fate. There was no one even to sympathize with his sufferings. Beside him lay the gory corpse of the ferryman, and, at a little distance, the scarcely more animate frame of the chief constable. And here we must leave him, to follow, for a short space, the course of Luke and his companions.

Concerning themselves little about their own steeds, the party took those which first offered, and embarking man and horse in the boat, soon pushed across the waters of the lutulent Don. Arrived at the opposite banks of the river, they mounted, and, guided by Luke, after half an hour's sharp riding, arrived at the skirts of Rookwood Park. Entering this beautiful sylvan domain, they rode for some time silently among the trees, till they reached the knoll whence Luke beheld the hall on the eventful night of his discovery of his mother's wedding ring. A few days only had elapsed, but during that brief space what storms had swept over his bosom—what ravages had they not made! He was then all ardor—all impetuosity—all independence. The future presented a bright unclouded prospect. Wealth, honors, and happiness apparently awaited him. It was still the same exquisite scene, hushed, holy, tranquil—even solemn, as upon that glorious night. The moon was out, silvering wood and water, and shining on the white walls of the tranquil mansion. Nature was calm, serene, peaceful as ever. Beneath the trees, he saw the bounding deer—upon the water, the misty wreaths of vapor—all, all was dreamy, delightful, soothing, all save his heart—there was the conflict—there the change. Was it a troubled dream, with the dark oppression of which he was struggling, or was it stern, waking, actual life? That moment's review of his wild career was terrible. He saw to what extremes his ungovernable passions had hurried him; he saw their inevitable consequences; he saw also his own fate; but he rushed madly on.

He swept round the park, keeping under the covert of the wood, till he arrived at the avenue leading to the mansion. The stems of the aged limes gleamed silvery white in the moonshine. Luke drew in the rein beneath one of the largest of the trees.

"A branch has fallen," said he, as his grandsire joined him.

"Ha!" exclaimed Alan, "a branch from that tree?"

"It bodes ill to Ranulph," whispered Luke, "does it not?"

"Perchance," muttered Alan. "'Tis a vast bough!"

"We meet within an hour," said Luke, abruptly.

"Within the tomb of our ancestry," replied Alan; "I will await you there."

And as he rode away, Alan murmured to himself the following verse from one of his own ballads:

But whether gale or calm prevail, or threatening cloud hath fled,
By hand of Fate, predestinate, a limb that tree will shed—

A verdant bough, untouched, I trow, by axe or tempest's breath—
To Rookwood's head an omen dread of fast approaching death.

The Oath by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER III

HANDASSAH

I have heard it rumored for these many years,
None of our family dies but there is seen
The shape of an old woman, which is given
By tradition to us to have been murdered
By her nephews for her riches. Such a figure
One night, as the prince sat up late at 's book,
Appeared to him; when, crying out for help,
The gentleman of his chamber found his Grace
All in a cold sweat, altered much in face
And language, since which apparition
He hath grown worse and worse, and much I fear
He cannot live.
Duchess of Malfy.

In one of those large antique rooms, belonging to the suite of apartments constituting the eastern wing of Rookwood Place—upon the same night as that in which the events just detailed took place, and it might be about the same time, sat Eleanor, and her new attendant, the gipsy Handassah. The eyes of the former were fixed, with a mixture of tenderness and pity, upon the lineaments of another lovely female countenance, bearing a striking resemblance to her own, though evidently, from its attire, and bygone costume, not intended for her, depicted upon a tablet, and placed upon a raised frame. It was nigh the witching hour of night. The room was sombre and dusky, partially dismantled of its once flowing arras, and the lights set upon the table feebly illumined its dreary extent. Tradition marked it out as the chamber in which many of the hapless dames of Rookwood had expired; and hence Superstition claimed it as her peculiar domain. The room was reputed to be haunted, and had for a long space shared the fate of haunted rooms—complete desertion. It was now tenanted by one too young, too pure, to fear aught unearthly. Eleanor seemed, nevertheless, affected by the profound melancholy of the picture upon which she gazed. At length, Handassah observed her start, and avert her eye shudderingly from the picture.

"Take it hence," exclaimed Eleanor; "I have looked at that image of my ancestors, till it has seemed endowed with life—till its eyes have appeared to return my gaze, and weep. Remove it, Handassah."

Handassah silently withdrew the tablet, placing it against the wall of the chamber.

"Not there—not there," cried Eleanor; "turn it with its face to the wall. I cannot bear those eyes. And now come hither, girl—draw nearer—for I know not what of sudden dread has crossed me. This was her room, Handassah—the chamber of my ancestress—of all the Ladies Rookwood—where they say—Ha! did you not hear a noise?—a rustle in the tapestry—a footstep near the wall? Why, you look as startled as I look, wench; stay by me—I will not have you stir from my side—'twas mere fancy."

"No doubt, lady," said Handassah, with her eyes fixed upon the arras.

"Hist!" exclaimed Eleanor, "there 'tis again."

"'Tis nothing," replied Handassah. But her looks belied her words.

"Well, I will command myself," said Eleanor, endeavoring to regain her calmness; "but the thoughts of the Lady Eleanor—for she was an Eleanor like to me, Handassah—and ah! even more ill-fated and unhappy—have brought a whole train of melancholy fancies into my mind. I cannot banish them: nay, though painful to me, I recur to these images of dread with a species of fascination, as if in their fate I contemplated mine own. Not one, who hath wedded a Rookwood, but hath rued it."

"Yet you will wed one," said Handassah.

"He is not like the rest," said Eleanor.

"How know you that, lady?" asked Handassah. "His time may not yet be come. See what to-morrow will bring forth."

"You are averse to my marriage with Ranulph, Handassah."

"I was Sybil's handmaid ere I was yours, lady. I bear in mind a solemn compact with the dead, which this marriage will violate. You are plighted by oath to another, if he should demand your hand."

"But he has not demanded it."

"Would you accept him were he to do so?" asked Handassah, suddenly.

"I meant not that," replied Eleanor. "My oath is annulled."

"Say not so, lady," cried Handassah—"twas not for this that Sybil spared your life. I love you, but I loved Sybil, and I would see her dying behests complied with."

"It may not be, Handassah," replied Eleanor. "Why, from a phantom sense of honor, am I to sacrifice my whole existence to one who neither can love me, nor whom I myself could love? Am I to wed this man because, in her blind idolatry of him, Sybil enforced an oath upon me which I had no power to resist, and which was mentally cancelled while taken? Recall not the horrors of that dreadful cell—urge not the subject more. 'Tis in the hope that I may be freed for ever from this persecution that I have consented thus early to wed with Ranulph. This will set Luke's fancied claims at rest for ever."

Handassah answered not, but bent her head, as if in acquiescence.

Steps were now heard near the door, and a servant ushered in Dr. Small and Mrs. Mowbray.

"I am come to take leave of you for the night, my dear young lady," said the doctor; "but before I start for the Vicarage, I have a word or two to say, in addition to the advice you were so obliging as to receive from me this morning. Suppose you allow your attendant to retire for a few minutes. What I have got to say concerns yourself solely. Your mother will bear us company. There," continued the doctor, as Handassah was dismissed—"I am glad that dark-faced gipsy has taken her departure. I can't say I like her sharp suspicious manner, and the first exercise I should make at my powers, were I to be your husband, should be to discharge the handmaiden. To the point of my visit. We are alone, I think. This is a queer old house, Miss Mowbray; and this is the queerest part of it. Walls have ears, they say; and there are so many holes and corners in this mansion, that one ought never to talk secrets above one's breath."

"I am yet to learn, sir," said Eleanor, "that there is any secret to be communicated."

"Why, not much, I own," replied the doctor; "at least what has occurred is no secret in the house by this time. What do you think has happened?"

"It is impossible for me to conjecture. Nothing to Ranulph, I hope."

"Nothing of consequence, I trust,—though he is part concerned with it."

"What is it?" asked Eleanor.

"Pray satisfy her curiosity, doctor," interposed Mrs. Mowbray.

"Well, then," said Small, rather more gravely, "the fact of the matter stands thus:—Lady Rookwood, who, as you know, was not the meekest wife in the world, now turns out by no means the gentlest mother, and has within this hour found out that she has some objection to your union with her son."

"You alarm me, doctor."

"Don't alarm yourself at all. It will be got over without difficulty, and only requires a little management. Ranulph is with her now, and I doubt not will arrange all to her satisfaction."

"What was her objection?" asked Eleanor; "was it any one founded upon my obligation to Luke—my oath?"

"Tut, tut! dismiss that subject from your mind entirely," said the doctor. "That oath is no more binding on your conscience than would have been the ties of marriage had you been wedded by yon recusant Romish priest, Father Checkley, upon whose guilty head the Lord be merciful! Bestow not a thought upon it. My anxiety, together with that of your mother, is to see you now, as speedily as may be, wedded to Ranulph, and then that idle question is set at rest for ever; and therefore, even if such a thing were to occur as that Lady Rookwood should not yield her consent to your marriage, as that consent is totally unnecessary, we must go through the ceremonial without it."

"The grounds of Lady Rookwood's objections——" said Mrs. Mowbray.

"Ay, the grounds of her ladyship's objections," interposed Small, who, when he had once got the lead, liked nobody to talk but himself, "are simply these, and exactly the sort of objections one would expect her to raise. She cannot bear the idea of abandoning the control of the house and estates to other hands. She cannot, and will not relinquish her station, as head of the establishment, which Ranulph has insisted upon as your right. I thought, when I conversed with her on this subject, that she was changed, but

Naturam expellas furcâ, tamen usque recurret.

"I beg your pardon. She is, and always will be, the same."

"Why did not Ranulph concede the point to her? I wish not to dwell here. I care not for these domains—for this mansion. They have no charms for me. I could be happy with Ranulph anywhere—happier anywhere than here."

The kind-hearted doctor squeezed her hand in reply, brushing a tear from his eyes.

"Why did he not concede it?" said Mrs. Mowbray, proudly. "Because the choice remained not with him. It was not his to concede. This house—these lands—all—all are yours; and it were poor requital, indeed, if, after they have so long been wrongfully withheld from us, you should be a dependant on Lady Rookwood."

"Without going quite so far as that, madam," said the doctor, "it is but justice to your daughter that she should be put in full possession of her rights; nor should I for one instant advise, or even allow her to inhabit the same house with Lady Rookwood. Her ladyship's peculiarities of temper are such as to preclude all possibility of happiness. At the same time, I trust by management—always by management, madam—that her ladyship's quiet departure may be ensured. I understand that all such legal arrangements in the way of settlements as could be entered into between your daughter and her future husband are completed. I have only to regret the absence of my friend, Mr. Coates, at this momentous conjuncture. It will be a loss to him. But he inherits from his father a taste for thief-taking, which he is at present indulging, to the manifest injury of his legitimate practice. Hark! I hear Ranulph's step in the gallery. He will tell us the result of his final interview. I came to give you advice, my dear," added the doctor in a low tone to Eleanor; "but I find you need it not. 'Whoso humbleth himself, shall be exalted.' I am glad you do not split upon the rock which has stranded half your generation."

At this moment Ranulph Rookwood entered the room, followed by Handassah, who took her station at the back of the room, unperceived by the rest of the party, whose attention was attracted by Ranulph's agitated manner.

"What has happened?" asked Dr. Small and Mrs. Mowbray in the same breath.

Ranulph hesitated for a moment in his answer, during which space he regarded Eleanor with the deepest anxiety, and seemed revolving within himself how he could frame his reply in such way as should be least painful to her feelings; while, with instinctive apprehension of coming misfortune, Miss Mowbray eagerly seconded the inquiries of her friends.

"It is with great pain," said he, at length, in a tone of despondency, not unmingled with displeasure, "that I am obliged to descant upon the infirmities of a parent, and to censure her conduct as severely as I may do now. I feel the impropriety of such a step, and I would willingly avoid it, could I do so in justice to my own feelings—and especially at a moment like the present—when every hope of my life is fixed upon uniting myself to you, dear Eleanor, by ties as near as my own to that parent. But the interview which I

have just had with Lady Rookwood—bitter and heart-breaking as it has been—compels me to reprobate her conduct in the strongest terms, as harsh, unjust, and dishonorable; and if I could wholly throw off the son, as she avows she has thrown off the mother, I should unhesitatingly pronounce it as little short of——"

"Dear Ranulph," said Eleanor, palpitating with apprehension, "I never saw you so much moved."

"Nor with so much reason," rejoined Ranulph. "For myself, I could endure anything—but for you——"

"And does your dispute relate to me?" asked Eleanor. "Is it for my sake you have braved your mother's displeasure? Is it because Lady Rookwood is unwilling to resign the control of this house and these lands to me, that you have parted in anger with her? Was this the cause of your quarrel?"

"It was the origin of it," replied Ranulph.

"Mother," said Eleanor, firmly, to Mrs. Mowbray, "go with me to Lady Rookwood's chamber."

"Wherefore?" demanded Mrs. Mowbray.

"Question me not, dear mother, or let me go alone."

"Daughter, I guess your meaning," said Mrs. Mowbray, sternly. "You would relinquish your claims in favor of Lady Rookwood. Is it not so?"

"Since you oblige me to answer you, mother," said Eleanor, crimsoning, "I must admit that you have guessed my meaning. To Lady Rookwood, as to yourself, I would be a daughter as far as is consistent with my duty," added she, blushing still more deeply, "but my first consideration shall be my husband. And if Lady Rookwood can be content——But pray question me not further—accompany me to her chamber."

"Eleanor," interposed Ranulph, "dearest Eleanor, the sacrifice you would make is unnecessary—uncalled for. You do not know my mother. She would not, I grieve to say, appreciate the generosity of your motives. She would not give you credit for your feelings. She would only resent your visit as an intrusion."

"My daughter comprehends you, sir," said Mrs. Mowbray, haughtily. "I will take care that, in her own house, Miss Mowbray shall remain free from insult."

"Mother, dear mother," said Eleanor, "do not wilfully misunderstand him."

"You can be little aware, madam," said Ranulph, calmly, yet sadly, "how much I have recently endured—how much of parental anger—how much of parental malediction I have incurred, to save you and your daughter from the indignity you apprehend. As I before said, you do not know my mother; nor could it enter into any well-regulated imagination to conceive the extremities to which the violence of her passion will, when her schemes are thwarted, hurry her. The terms upon which you met together will not escape your recollection; nor shall I need to recall to your mind her haughtiness, her coldness. That coldness has since ripened into distrust; and the match which she was at first all anxiety to promote, she would now utterly set aside, were it in her power to do so. Whence this alteration in her views has arisen, I have no means of ascertaining; it is not my mother's custom to give a reason for her actions, or her wishes: it is all-sufficient to express them. I have perceived, as the time has drawn nigh for the fulfilment of my dearest hopes, that her unwillingness has increased; until to-day, what had hitherto been confined to hints, has been openly expressed, and absolute objections raised. Such, however, is the peculiarity of her temper, that I trusted, even at the eleventh hour, I should be able to work a change. Alas! our last meeting was decisive. She commanded me to break off the match. At once, and peremptorily, I refused. Pardon me, madam, pardon me, dearest Eleanor, if I thus enter into particulars; it is absolutely necessary I should be explicit. Enraged at my opposition to her wishes, her fury became ungovernable. With appalling imprecations upon the memory of my poor father, and upon your father, madam, whose chief offence in her eyes was, it seems, the disposition of his property to Eleanor, she bade me be gone, and take her curses as my wedding portion. Beneath this roof—beneath her roof, she added—no marriage of mine should e'er take place. I might go hence, or might stay, as I thought fitting; but you and your daughter, whom she characterized as intruders, should not remain another hour within her house. To this wild raving I answered, with as much composure as I could command, that she entirely mistook her own position, and that, so far from the odium of intrusion resting with you, if applicable to any one, the term must necessarily affix itself on those who, through ignorance, had for years unjustly deprived the rightful owners of this place of their inheritance. Upon this her wrath was boundless. She disowned me as her son; disclaimed all maternal regard, and heaped upon my head a frightful malediction, at the recollection of which I still tremble. I will spare you further details of this dreadful scene. To me it is most distressing; for, however firmly resolved I may be to pursue a line of conduct which every sound principle within me dictates as the correct one, yet I cannot be insensible to the awful responsibility I shall incur in bringing down a mother's curse upon my head, nor to the jeopardy in which her own excessive violence may place her."

Mrs. Mowbray listened to Ranulph's explanation in haughty displeasure; Eleanor with throbbing, tearful interest; Dr. Small, with mixed feelings of anger and astonishment.

"Lady Rookwood's conduct," said the doctor, "is—you must forgive me, my dear Sir Ranulph, for using strong expressions—outrageous beyond all precedent, and only excusable on the ground of insanity, to which I wish it were possible we could attribute it. There is, however, too much method in her madness to allow us to indulge any such notion; she is shrewd, dangerous, and designing; and, since she has resolved to oppose this match, she will leave no means untried to do so. I scarcely know how to advise you under the circumstances—that is, if my advice were asked."

"Which I scarcely think it likely to be, sir," said Mrs. Mowbray, coldly. "After what has occurred, I shall think it my duty to break off this alliance, which I have never considered to be so desirable that its rupture will occasion me an instant's uneasiness."

"A plague on all these Rookwoods!" muttered Small. "One would think all the pride of the Prince of Darkness were centered in their bosoms. But, madam," continued the benevolent doctor, "have you no consideration for the feelings of your daughter, or for those of one who is no distant relation to you—your nephew? Your son, Major Mowbray, is, if I mistake not, most eager for this union to take place between his sister and his friend."

"My children have been accustomed to yield implicit obedience to my wishes," said Mrs. Mowbray, "and Major Mowbray, I am sure, will see the propriety of the step I am about to take. I am content, at least, to abide by his opinion."

"Snubbed again!" mentally ejaculated the doctor, with a shrug of despair. "It is useless attempting to work upon such impracticable material."

Ranulph remained mute, in an attitude of profound melancholy. An eloquent interchange of glances had passed between him and Eleanor, communicating to each the anxious state of the other's feelings.

At this crisis the door was suddenly opened, and old Agnes, Lady Rookwood's aged attendant, rushed into the room, and sank upon her knees on the floor, her limbs shaking, her teeth chattering, and every feature expressive of intense terror. Ranulph went instantly towards her to demand the cause of her alarm.

"No, let me pray," cried Agnes, as he took her hand in the attempt to raise her; "let me pray while there is yet time—let the worthy doctor pray beside me. Pray for an overlaiden soul, sir; pray heartily, as you would hope for mercy yourself. Ah! little know the

righteous of the terrors of those that are beyond the pale of mercy. The Lord pardon me my iniquities, and absolve her."

"Whom do you mean?" asked Ranulph, in agitation. "You do not allude to my mother?"

"You have no longer a mother, young man," said Agnes, solemnly.

"What!" exclaimed Ranulph, terror-stricken; "is she dead?"

"She is gone."

"Gone! How? Whither?" exclaimed all, their amazement increasing each instant at the terror of the old woman, and the apparently terrible occasion of it.

"Speak!" exclaimed Ranulph; "but why do I loiter? my mother, perchance, is dying—let me go."

The old woman maintained her clutching grasp, which was strong and convulsive as that of one struggling betwixt life and death. "It's of no use, I tell you; it's all over," said she—"the dead are come—the dead are come—and she is gone."

"Whither?—whither?"

"To the grave—to the tomb," said Agnes, in a deep and hollow tone, and with a look that froze Ranulph's soul. "Listen to me, Ranulph Rookwood, my child, my nursling—listen while I can speak. We were alone, your mother and I, after that scene between you; after the dark denunciations she had heaped upon the dead, when I heard a low and gasping kind of sob, and there I saw your mother staring wildly upon the vacancy, as if she saw that of which I dare not think."

"What think you she beheld?" asked Ranulph, quaking with apprehension.

"That which had been your father," returned Agnes, in a hollow tone. "Don't doubt me, sir—you'll find the truth of what I say anon. I am sure he was there. There was a thrilling, speechless horror in the very sight of her countenance that froze my old blood to ice—to the ice in which 'tis now—ough! ough! Well, at length she arose, with her eyes still fixed, and passed through the paneled door without a word. She is gone!"

"What madness is this?" cried Ranulph. "Let me go, woman—'tis that ruffian in disguise—she may be murdered."

"No, no," shrieked Agnes; "it was no disguise. She is gone, I tell you—the room was empty, all the rooms were empty—the passage was void—through the door they went together—silently, silently—ghostlike, slow. Ha! that tomb—they are there together now—he has her in his arms—see, they are here—they glide through the door—do you not see them now? Did I not speak the truth? She is dead—ha, ha!" And with a frantic and bewildering laugh the old woman fell upon her face.

Ranulph raised her from the floor; but the shock of what she had beheld had been too much for her. She was dead!

The Oath by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IV

THE DOWER OF SYBIL

Card. Now art thou come? Thou look'st ghastly;
There sits in thy face some great determination,
Mixed with some fear.

Bos. Thus it lightens into action:
I am come to kill thee.
Duchess of Malfy.

Ranulph Rookwood was for some moments so much stunned by the ghastly fate of Agnes, connected, as it appeared to be, with a supernatural summons similar to that which he imagined he had himself received, that he was incapable of stirring from the spot, or removing his gaze from the rigid features of the corpse, which, even in death, wore the strong impress of horror and despair. Through life he knew that Agnes, his own nurse, had been his mother's constant and faithful attendant; the unhesitating agent of her schemes, and it was to be feared, from the remorse she had exhibited, the participator of her crimes; and Ranulph felt, he knew not why, that in having witnessed her terrible end, he beheld the ultimate condition of his own parent. Conquering, not without great effort, the horror which had riveted him to the spot, he turned to look towards Eleanor. She had sunk upon a chair, a silent witness of the scene, Mrs. Mowbray and Dr. Small having, upon the first alarm given by Agnes respecting Lady Rookwood's departure from the house quitted the room to ascertain the truth of her statement. Ranulph immediately flew to Eleanor.

"Ranulph," said she, though almost overcome by her alarm, "stay not an instant here with me. I am sure, from that poor woman's dreadful death, that something terrible has occurred, perhaps to Lady Rookwood. Go to her chamber. Tarry not, I entreat of you."

"But will you, can you remain here alone with that body?" asked Ranulph.

"I shall not be alone. Handassah is within call—nay, she is here. Oh, what an eve of our espousals has this been, dear Ranulph. Our whole life is a troubled volume, of which each successive leaf grows darker. Fate is opposed to us. It is useless to contend with our destiny. I fear we shall never be united."

"Dismiss me not with words like those, dear Eleanor," returned Ranulph. "Fate cannot have greater woes in store for us than those by which we are now opposed. Let us hope that we are now at that point whence all must brighten. Once possessed of you, assured of thus much happiness, I would set even fate at defiance. And you will be mine to-morrow."

"Ranulph, dear Ranulph, your suit at this moment is desperate. I dare not, cannot pledge myself. You yourself heard, even now, my mother's sentiments, and I cannot marry without her consent."

"Your mother, like my own, regards not the feelings of her children. Forgive my boldness, Eleanor; forgive me if I linger now, when duty calls me hence; but I cannot tear myself away. Your mother may return—my hopes be crushed; for even your love for me seems annihilated in her presence."

"Ranulph, your vehemence terrifies me," rejoined Eleanor. "I implore you, by the tender affection which you know I bear you, not to urge me further at this moment. Recall your firmer feelings, and obtain some mastery over yourself. I repeat, I am yours only, if I am bride of any one. But when our union can take place rests not with myself. And now, I entreat of you, leave me."

"You are mine," said Ranulph, with fervor; "mine only."

"Yours only," replied Eleanor.

"Be this the earnest of my happiness!" exclaimed Ranulph, imprinting a long and impassioned kiss upon her lips.

The lovers were startled from their embrace by a profound sigh; it proceeded from Handassah, who, unbidden, had replaced the picture of the Lady Eleanor upon its frame. The augury seemed sinister. Every one who has gazed steadfastly upon a portrait must have noticed the peculiar and lifelike character which, under certain aspects, the eyes will assume. Seen by the imperfect light upon the table, the whole character of the countenance of the Lady Eleanor seemed changed; the features appeared to be stamped with melancholy, and the eyes to be fixed with pitying tenderness upon her descendants. Both gazed at each other and at the picture, struck with the same sentiment of undefined awe. Beside them stood the dark figure of the gipsy girl, watching, with ill-concealed satisfaction, the effect of her handiwork. Ranulph was aroused from his abstraction by hearing a loud outcry in Mrs. Mowbray's voice. Hastily committing Eleanor to the care of her attendant, he left the room. Handassah followed him to the door, closed it after him, and then locked it within side. This done, she walked back

hastily towards Eleanor, exclaiming, in a tone of exultation, "You have parted with him forever."

"What mean you, girl?" cried Eleanor, alarmed at her manner. "Why have you fastened the door? Open it, I command you."

"Command me!" laughed Handassah, scornfully. "What if I refuse your mandate? What, if, in my turn, I bid you obey me? I never owned but one mistress. If I have bowed my neck to you for a time, 'twas to fulfil her dying wishes. If I have submitted to your control, it was to accomplish what I have now accomplished. Your oath! Remember your oath. The hour is come for its fulfilment."

With these words Handassah clapped her hands. A panel in the wall opened, and Luke stood suddenly before them. Silently and with stern deliberation he strode towards Eleanor, and seizing one of her hands, drew her forcibly towards him. Eleanor resisted not; she had not the power; neither did she scream, for so paralyzing was her terror, that for the moment it took away all power of utterance. Luke neither stirred nor spoke, but, still maintaining his hold, gazed searchingly upon her features, while Eleanor, as if spell-bound, could not withdraw her eyes from him. Nothing more terribly impressive could be conceived than Luke's whole appearance. Harassed and exhausted by the life he had recently led; deprived almost of natural rest; goaded by remorse, his frame was almost worn to the bone, while his countenance, once dark and swarthy, was now blanched and colorless as marble. This pallid and deathlike hue was, in all probability, owing to the loss of blood he had sustained from the wound inflicted by Major Mowbray, with the stains of which his apparel was dyed; for, though staunched, the effusion had been sufficient to cause great faintness. His dark eyes blazed with their wonted fire—nay, they looked darker and larger from his exceeding paleness, and such intense mental and bodily suffering was imprinted upon his countenance, that, despite its fierceness and desperation, few could have regarded him without sympathy. Real desperation has so much of agony in its character, that no one can witness it unmoved. His garb was not that in which the reader first beheld him, but a rich, dark, simple suit of velvet, corresponding more with his real rank in life than his former peasant's attire; but it was disordered by his recent conflict, and stained with bloody testimonials of the fray; while his long, sable curls, once his pride and ornament, now hung in intertangled elf-locks, like a coil of wreathed water-snakes. Even in her terror, as she dwelt upon his noble features, Eleanor could not help admitting that she beheld the undoubted descendant, and the living likeness of the handsomest and most distinguished of her house—the profligate and criminal Sir Reginald. As her eye, mechanically following this train of thought, wandered for an instant to the haughty portraiture of Sir Reginald, which formed part of the family pictures, and thence to those of his unfortunate lady, she was struck with the fancy that, by some terrible fatality, the tragic horrors of bygone days

were to be again enacted in their persons, and that they were in some way strangely identified with their unfortunate progenitors. So forcibly was this idea impressed upon her features that Luke, who had followed the direction of her glances, became instantly aware of it. Drawing her nearer to the portrait of the Lady Eleanor, he traced the resemblance in mute wonder; thence, turning towards that of Sir Reginald, he proudly exclaimed: "You doubted once my lineage, maiden—can you gaze on those features, which would almost seem to be a reflection of mine own, and longer hesitate whose descendant I am? I glory in my likeness. There is a wild delight in setting human emotions at naught, which he was said to feel—which I feel now. Within these halls I seem to breathe an atmosphere congenial to me. I visit what I oft have visited in my dreams; or as in a state of pre-existence. Methinks, as I gaze on you, I could almost deem myself Sir Reginald, and you his bride, the Lady Eleanor. Our fates were parallel: she was united to her lord by ties of hatred—by a vow—a bridal vow! So are you to me. And she could ne'er escape him—could ne'er throw off her bondage—nor shall you. I claim the fulfilment of your oath; you are mine."

"Never, never!" shrieked Eleanor, struggling to disengage herself. But Luke laughed at her feeble efforts. Handassah stood by, a passive spectatress of the scene, with her arms folded upon her bosom.

"You refuse compliance," said Luke, scornfully. "Have you no hopes of Heaven, no fears of perdition, that you dare to violate your vow? Bethink you of the awful nature of that obligation; of the life that was laid down to purchase it; of the blood which will cry out for vengeance 'gainst the murderess, should you hesitate. By that blood-cemented sacrament, I claim you as my own. You are mine." And he dragged her towards the opening.

Eleanor uttered a long and terrific scream.

"Be silent, on your life," added he, searching for the dagger given to him by Alan Rookwood, when, as his hand sought the weapon, Eleanor escaped from his grasp, and fled towards the door. But Handassah had anticipated her intention. The key was withdrawn from the lock, and the wretched maiden vainly tried to open it.

At this instant Turpin appeared at the sliding panel.

"Quick, quick!" cried he, impatiently—"despatch, in the devil's name. The house is alarmed. I hear young Ranulph's voice in the gallery."

"Ranulph!" shrieked Eleanor—"then I am saved," and she redoubled her outcries for assistance.

Luke again seized his victim. Her hands clutched so convulsively fast in her despairing energy against the handle of the door that he could not tear her thence. By this time Ranulph Rookwood, who had caught her reiterated screams for help, was at the entrance. He heard her struggles; he heard Luke's threats—his mockery—his derisive laughter—but vainly, vainly did he attempt to force it open. It was of the strongest oak, and the bolts resisted all his efforts. A board alone divided him from his mistress. He could hear her sobs and gasps. He saw, from the action of the handle, with what tenacity she clung to it; and, stung to frenzy by the sight, he hurled himself against the sturdy plank, but all in vain. At length the handle was still. There was a heavy fall upon the floor—a stifled scream—and a sound as of a body being dragged along. The thought was madness.

"To the panel! to the panel!" cried a voice—it was that of Turpin—from within.

"The panel!—ha!" echoed Ranulph, with a sudden gleam of hope. "I may yet save her." And he darted along the corridor with the swiftness of thought.

Luke, meanwhile, had for some minutes fruitlessly exhausted all his force to drag Eleanor from the door. Despair gave her strength; she clutched at the door; but she felt her strength failing her—her grasp was relaxing. And then the maddening thought that she would be shortly his—that he would slay her—while the idea that Ranulph was so near, and yet unable to protect her, added gall even to her bitterness. With savage delight Luke exulted in the lovers' tortures. He heard Ranulph's ineffectual attempts; he heard his groans; he heard their mutual cries. Inflamed by jealousy, he triumphed in his power of vengeance, and even prolonged the torture which accident had given him the means of inflicting. He stood like the inquisitor who marks his victim's anguish on the rack, and calculates his powers of further endurance. But he could no longer dally, even with this horrible gratification. His companion grew impatient. Eleanor's fair long tresses had escaped from their confinement in the struggle, and fell down her neck in disorder. Twining his fingers amidst its folds, Luke dragged her backwards from her hold, and, incapable of further resistance, her strength completely exhausted, the wretched girl fell to the ground.

Luke now raised her almost inanimate form in his arms, and had nigh reached the aperture, when a crash was heard in the panel opposite to that by which he was about to escape, and communicating with a further apartment. It was thrown open, and Ranulph Rookwood presented himself at the narrow partition. An exclamation of joy, that he was yet in time, escaped his lips; and he was about to clear the partition at a bound, and to precipitate himself upon Luke, when, as suddenly as his own action, was the person of the unfortunate Mr. Coates wedged into the aperture.

"Traitor!" cried Ranulph, regarding Coates with concentrated fury, "dare you to oppose me?—hence! or, by Heaven, I will cut you down!"

"'Tis impossible," ejaculated the attorney. "For your own sake, Sir Ranulph—for my sake—I entreat—implore of you—not to attempt to pass this way. Try the other door."

Ranulph said no more. He passed his sword through the body of the miserable attorney, who, with a deep groan, fell. The only obstacle to his passage being thus removed, he at once leaped into the room.

The brothers were now confronted, together, but little of brotherly love mingled with the glances which they threw upon each other. Ranulph's gentle, but withal enthusiastic temperament, had kindled, under his present excitement, like flax at the sudden approach of flame. He was wild with frenzy. Luke was calmer, but his fury was deadly and inextinguishable. The meeting was terrible on both sides.

With one arm Luke enfolded Eleanor, with the other he uplifted the dagger. Its point was towards her bosom. Scowling grim defiance at Ranulph, he exclaimed, in a determined tone, "Advance a footstep, and my dagger descends into her heart."

Ranulph hesitated, uncertain how to act; foaming with rage, yet trembling with apprehension.

"Ranulph," gasped Eleanor, "life without you were valueless. Advance—avenge me!"

Ranulph still hesitated. He could not, by any act of his own, compromise Eleanor's safety.

Luke saw his advantage, and was not slow to profit by it. "You seal her destruction if you stir," said he.

"Villain," returned Ranulph, between his ground teeth, and with difficulty commanding sufficient coolness to speak with deliberation, "you perceive your power. Injure her, and nothing earthly shall protect you. Free her, and take your life and liberty; nay, reward if you will. You cannot otherwise escape me."

"Escape you!" laughed Luke, disdainfully. "Stand aside, and let me pass. Beware," added he, sternly, "how you oppose me. I would not have a brother's blood upon my soul."

"Nor I," cried Ranulph; "but you pass not." And he placed himself full in Luke's path.

Luke, however, steadily moved forward, holding Eleanor between himself and Ranulph, so as to shield his own person; but, fancying he saw an opportunity of dealing a blow without injury to his mistress, the latter was about to hazard the thrust, when his arms were seized behind, and he was rendered powerless.

"Lost, lost," groaned he; "she is lost to me forever!"

"I fear that's but too true," said Turpin, for it was the highwayman whose grasp confined Ranulph.

"Must I see her borne away before my eyes?" cried Ranulph. "Release me—set me free!"

"Quite impossible at present," returned Dick. "Mount and away, Sir Luke," continued he; "never mind me. Leave me to shift for myself."

"Eleanor!" cried Ranulph, as she passed close by his side.

"Ranulph!" shrieked Eleanor, with a loud scream, recalled to consciousness by his voice, "farewell for ever."

"Ay, for ever," responded Luke, triumphantly. "You meet no more on earth."

He was about to pass through the panel, when Eleanor exerted all her remaining strength in a last futile attempt at liberation. In the struggle, a packet fell from Luke's bosom.

Handassah stooped to pick it up.

"From Sybil!" exclaimed she, glancing at the superscription.

"Remember my promise to old Barbara," roared Dick, who had some curiosity, as the reader knows, to learn what the package contained. "The time is arrived. Eleanor is in your power—in your presence."

"Give me the packet," said Luke, resigning Eleanor for the instant to Handassah's custody—"take the steel, and grasp her firmly."

Handassah, who, though slight of figure, was of singular personal strength, twined her arms about Miss Mowbray in such a manner as to preclude all possibility of motion.

Luke tore open the package. It was a box carefully enclosed in several folds of linen, and lastly within a sheet of paper, on which were inscribed these words:

The Dower of Sybil

Hastily, and with much curiosity, Luke raised the lid of the box. It contained one long silken tress of blackest hair enviously braided. It was Sybil's. His first impulse was to cast it from him; his next, reproachfully to raise it to his lips. He started as if a snake had stung him.

At this moment a loud clamor was heard in the gallery. In the next, the door was assailed by violent strokes, evidently proceeding from some weighty instrument, impelled by the united strength of several assailants.

The voice of Turpin rose above the deafening din. "A bullet for the first who enters," shouted he. "Quick, Sir Luke, and the prize is safe—away, and——"

But as he seconded his exhortation with a glance at Luke, he broke off the half-uttered sentence, and started with horror and amazement. Ere the cause of his alarm could be expressed, the door was burst open, and a crowd of domestics, headed by Major Mowbray and Titus Tyrconnel, rushed into the room.

"Nay, then, the game's up!" exclaimed Dick; "I have done with Rookwood." And, springing through the panel, he was seen no more.

When the newcomers first looked round, they could perceive only two figures besides themselves—those of the two lovers—Eleanor having sunk pale, exhausted, and almost senseless, into the arms of Ranulph. Presently, however, a ghastly object attracted their attention. All rushed towards it—all recoiled, as soon as they discovered that it was the lifeless body of Luke Rookwood. His limbs were stiff, like those of a corpse which has for hours been such; his eyes protruded from their sockets; his face was livid and blotched. All bespoke, with terrible certainty, the efficacy of the poison, and the full accomplishment of Barbara's revenge.

Handassah was gone. Probably she had escaped ere Turpin fled. At all events, she was heard of no more at Rookwood.

It required little to recall the senses of Eleanor. Shortly she revived, and as she gazed around, and became conscious of her escape, she uttered exclamations of thanksgiving, and sank into the embraces of her brother.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Mowbray and Dr. Small had joined the assemblage.

The worthy doctor had been full of alarm; but his meditated condolences were now changed to congratulations, as he heard the particulars of the terrible scene that had occurred, and of Eleanor's singular and almost providential deliverance.

"After what has befallen, madam," said the doctor to Mrs. Mowbray, slightly coughing, "you can no longer raise any objection to a certain union, eh?"

"I will answer for my mother in that particular," said Major Mowbray, stepping forward.

"She will answer for herself, my son," said Mrs. Mowbray. "The match has her full and entire consent. But to what am I to attribute the unexpected happiness of your return?"

"To a chain of singular circumstances," replied the Major, "which I will hereafter detail to you. Suffice it to say, that but for this gentleman's fortunate arrival," added he, looking at Titus Tyrconnel, "at the hut on Thorne Waste, I might have been detained a prisoner, without parole, and, what is worse, without provision perhaps for days; and to add to my distress, fully acquainted with the meditated abduction of my sister. It was excessively lucky for me, Mr. Tyrconnel, that you happened to pass that way, and for poor Paterson likewise."

"Arrah, by my sowl, major, and you may say that with safety; and it was particularly fortunate that we stumbled upon the tits in the cellar, or we'd never have been here just in the nick of it. I begin to think we've lost all chance of taking Dick Turpin this time. He's got clean away."

"I am not sorry for his escape," said the major. "He's a brave fellow; and I respect courage wherever I find it, even in a highwayman. I should be sorry to appear as a witness against him; and I trust it will never be my fate to do so."

We shall not pause to describe the affectionate meeting which now ensued between the brother and sister—the congratulations upon Eleanor's escape from peril, intermingled with the tenderest embraces, and the warmest thanks offered to Ranulph for his gallant service. "She is yours, my dear boy," said the major; "and though you are a Rookwood, and she bears the ill-fated name of Eleanor, I predict that, contrary to the usual custom of our families in such cases, all your misfortunes will have occurred before marriage."

"There is only one thing," said Small, with a very peculiar expression, which might almost be construed into serio-comic, could we suspect the benevolent doctor of any

such waggery, "that can possibly throw a shade over our present felicity. Lady Rookwood is not to be found."

"My poor mother," said Ranulph, starting.

"Make yourself easy," said the doctor; "I doubt not we shall hear of her to-morrow. My only apprehension," added he, half aside, "is, that she may be heard of before."

"One other circumstance afflicts me," said Ranulph. "Poor Mr. Coates!"

"What's that you say of Mr. Coates, Sir Ranulph?" exclaimed Titus.

"I fear he was killed in the recent affray," said Ranulph. "Let some one search for the body."

"Kilt!" echoed Titus. "Is it kilt that Mr. Coates is? Ah! ullagone, and is it over with him entirely? Is he gone to rejoin his father, the thief-taker? Bring me to his remains."

"He will bring them to you himself," said the attorney, stepping forward. "Luckily, Sir Ranulph," said the incurable punster, "it was merely the outer coats that your sword passed through; the inner remains uninjured, so that you did not act as my conveyancer to eternity. Body o' me! I've as many lives as a cat—ha, ha!"

Ranulph welcomed the facetious man of law with no little satisfaction.

We think it unnecessary to enter into further detail. Another chamber was prepared for Eleanor's reception, to which she was almost immediately transported. The remains of the once fierce and haughty Luke, now stiff and stark, but still wearing, even in death, their proud character, were placed upon the self-same bier, and covered with the self-same pall which, but a week ago, had furnished forth his father's funeral. And as the domestics crowded round the corpse, there was not one of them but commented upon his startling resemblance to his grandsire, Sir Reginald; nor, amongst the superstitious, was the falling of the fatal bough forgotten.

Tranquillity was at length restored at the hall. Throughout the night and during the next day, Ranulph made every search for his mother, but no tidings could be learned of her. Seriously alarmed, he then caused more strict and general inquiry to be instituted, but with like unsuccessful effect. It was not, indeed, till some years afterwards that her fate was ascertained.

The Oath by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER V

THE SARCOPHAGUS

So now 'tis ended, like an old wife's story.—Webster.

Notwithstanding the obscurity which hung over the fate of Lady Rookwood, the celebration of the nuptials of Sir Ranulph and Eleanor was not long delayed; the ceremony took place at the parish church, and the worthy vicar officiated upon the occasion. It was a joyous sight to all who witnessed it, and not few were they who did so, for the whole neighborhood was bidden to the festival. The old avenue was thronged with bright and beaming faces, rustic maidens decked out in ribbons of many-colored splendor, and stout youths in their best holiday trim; nor was the lusty yeoman and his buxom spouse—nor yet the patriarch of the village, nor prattling child, wanting. Even the ancestral rooks seemed to participate in the universal merriment, and returned, from their eyries, a hoarse greeting, like a lusty chorus of laughter, to the frolic train. The churchyard path was strewn with flowers—the church itself a complete garland. Never was there seen a blither wedding: the sun smiled upon the bride—accounted a fortunate omen, as dark lowering skies and stormy weather had, within the memory of the oldest of the tenantry, inauspiciously ushered in all former espousals. The bride had recovered her bloom and beauty, while the melancholy which had seemingly settled for ever upon the open brow of the bridegroom, had now given place to a pensive shade that only added interest to his expressive features; and, as in simple state, after the completion of the sacred rites, the youthful pair walked, arm in arm, amongst their thronging and admiring tenants towards the Hall, many a fervent prayer was breathed that the curse of the house of Rookwood might be averted from their heads; and, not to leave a doubt upon the subject, we can add that these aspirations were not in vain, but that the day, which dawned so brightly, was one of serene and unclouded happiness to its close.

After the ceremonial, the day was devoted to festivity. Crowded with company, from the ample hall to the kitchen ingle, the old mansion could scarce contain its numerous guests, while the walls resounded with hearty peals of laughter, to which they had been long unaccustomed. The tables groaned beneath the lordly baron of beef, the weighty chine, the castled pasty flanked on the one hand with neat's tongue, and on the other defended by a mountainous ham, an excellent *pièce de résistance*, and every other substantial appliance of ancient hospitality. Barrels of mighty ale were broached, and their nut-brown contents widely distributed, and the health of the bride and bridegroom

was enthusiastically drunk in a brimming wassail cup of spicy wine with floating toast. Titus Tyrconnel acted as master of the ceremonies, and was, Mr. Coates declared, "quite in his element." So much was he elated, that he ventured to cut some of his old jokes upon the vicar, and, strange to say, without incurring the resentment of Small.

To retrace the darker course of our narrative, we must state that some weeks before this happy event the remains of the unfortunate Sir Luke Rookwood had been gathered to those of his fathers. The document that attested his legitimacy being found upon his person, the claims denied to him in life were conceded in death; and he was interred, with all the pomp and peculiar solemnity proper to one of the house, within the tomb of his ancestry.

It was then that a discovery was made respecting Alan Rookwood, in order to explain which we must again revert to the night of the meditated enlèvement of Eleanor.

After quitting his grandson in the avenue, Alan shaped his course among the fields in the direction to the church. He sought his own humble, but now deserted dwelling. The door had been forced; some of its meagre furniture was removed; and the dog, his sole companion, had fled. "Poor Mole!" said he, "thou hast found, I trust, a better master." And having possessed himself of what he came in search—namely, a bunch of keys and his lantern, deposited in an out-of-the-way cupboard, that had escaped notice, he quickly departed.

He was once more within the churchyard; once more upon that awful stage whereon he had chosen to enact, for a long season, his late fantastical character; and he gazed upon the church tower, glistening in the moonshine, the green and undulating hillocks, the "chequered cross-sticks," the clustered headstones, and the black and portentous yew-trees, as upon "old familiar faces." He mused, for a few moments, upon the scene, apparently with deep interest. He then walked beneath the shadows of one of the yews, chanting an odd stanza or so of one of his wild staves, wrapped the while, it would seem, in affectionate contemplation of the subject-matter of his song:

THE CHURCHYARD YEW

— Metuendaque succo

Taxus.

Status.

A noxious tree is the churchyard yew,
As if from the dead its sap it drew;
Dark are its branches, and dismal to see,
Like plumes at Death's latest solemnity.

Spectral and jagged, and black as the wings
Which some spirit of ill o'er a sepulchre flings:
Oh! a terrible tree is the churchyard yew;
Like it is nothing so grimly to view.
Yet this baleful tree hath a core so sound,
Can nought so tough in the grove be found;
From it were fashioned brave English bows,
The boast of our isle, and the dread of its foes.
For our sturdy sires cut their stoutest staves
From the branch that hung o'er their fathers' graves;
And though it be dreary and dismal to view,
Staunch at the heart is the churchyard yew.

His ditty concluded, Alan entered the churchyard, taking care to leave the door slightly ajar, in order to facilitate his grandson's entrance. For an instant he lingered in the chancel. The yellow moonlight fell upon the monuments of his race; and, directed by the instinct of hate, Alan's eye rested upon the gilded entablature of his perfidious brother, Reginald, and, muttering curses, "not loud but deep," he passed on. Having lighted his lantern in no tranquil mood, he descended into the vault, observing a similar caution with respect to the portal of the cemetery, which he left partially unclosed, with the key in the lock. Here he resolved to abide Luke's coming. The reader knows what probability there was of his expectations being realized.

For a while he paced the tomb, wrapped in gloomy meditation, and pondering, it might be, upon the result of Luke's expedition, and the fulfilment of his own dark schemes, scowling from time to time beneath his bent eyebrows, counting the grim array of coffins, and noticing, with something like satisfaction, that the shell which contained the remains of his daughter had been restored to its former position. He then bethought him of Father Checkley's midnight intrusion upon his conference with Luke, and their apprehension of a supernatural visitation, and his curiosity was stimulated to ascertain by what means the priest had gained admission to the spot unperceived and unheard. He resolved to sound the floor, and see whether any secret entrance existed; and hollowly and dully did the hard flagging return the stroke of his heel as he pursued his scrutiny. At length the metallic ringing of an iron plate, immediately behind the marble effigy of Sir Ranulph, resolved the point. There it was that the priest had found access to the vault; but Alan's disappointment was excessive, when he discovered that the plate was fastened on the underside, and all communication thence with the churchyard, or to wherever else it might conduct him, cut off: but the present was not the season for further investigation, and tolerably pleased with the discovery he had already made, he returned to his silent march round the sepulchre.

At length a sound, like the sudden shutting of the church door, broke upon the profound stillness of the holy edifice. In the hush that succeeded, a footstep was distinctly heard threading the aisle.

"He comes—he comes!" exclaimed Alan, joyfully; adding, an instant after, in an altered voice, "but he comes alone."

The footstep drew near to the mouth of the vault—it was upon the stairs. Alan stepped forward to greet, as he supposed, his grandson, but started back in astonishment and dismay as he encountered in his stead Lady Rookwood. Alan retreated, while the lady advanced, swinging the iron door after her, which closed with a tremendous clang. Approaching the statue of the first Sir Ranulph, she paused, and Alan then remarked the singular and terrible expression of her eyes, which appeared to be fixed upon the statue, or upon some invisible object near it. There was something in her whole attitude and manner calculated to impress the deepest terror on the beholder. And Alan gazed upon her with an awe which momentarily increased. Lady Rookwood's bearing was as proud and erect as we have formerly described it to have been—her brow was haughtily bent—her chiselled lip as disdainfully curled; but the staring, changeless eye, and the deep-heaved sob which occasionally escaped her, betrayed how much she was under the influence of mortal terror. Alan watched her in amazement. He knew not how the scene was likely to terminate, nor what could have induced her to visit this ghostly spot at such an hour, and alone; but he resolved to abide the issue in silence—profound as her own. After a time, however, his impatience got the better of his fears and scruples, and he spoke.

"What doth Lady Rookwood in the abode of the dead?" asked he, at length.

She started at the sound of his voice, but still kept her eye fixed upon the vacancy.

"Hast thou not beckoned me hither, and am I not come?" returned she, in a hollow tone.

"And now thou asketh wherefore I am here—I am here because, as in thy life I feared thee not, neither in death do I fear thee. I am here because——"

"What seest thou?" interrupted Peter, with ill-suppressed terror.

"What see I—ha—ha!" shouted Lady Rookwood, amidst discordant laughter; "that which might appal a heart less stout than mine—a figure anguish-writhen, with veins that glow as with a subtle and consuming flame. A substance yet a shadow, in thy living likeness. Ha—frown if thou wilt; I can return thy glances."

"Where dost thou see this vision?" demanded Alan.

"Where!" echoed Lady Rookwood, becoming for the first time sensible of the presence of a stranger. "Ha—who are you that question me?—what are you?—speak!"

"No matter who or what I am," returned Alan, "I ask you what you behold."

"Can you see nothing?"

"Nothing," replied Alan.

"You knew Sir Piers Rookwood?"

"Is it he?" asked Alan, drawing near her.

"It is," replied Lady Rookwood; "I have followed him hither, and I will follow him whithersoever he leads me, were it to——"

"What doth he now?" asked Alan; "do you see him still?"

"The figure points to that sarcophagus," returned Lady Rookwood—"can you raise up the lid?"

"No," replied Alan; "my strength will not avail to lift it."

"Yet let the trial be made," said Lady Rookwood; "the figure points there still—my own arm shall aid you."

Alan watched her in dumb wonder. She advanced towards the marble monument, and beckoned him to follow. He reluctantly complied. Without any expectation of being able to move the ponderous lid of the sarcophagus, at Lady Rookwood's renewed request he applied himself to the task. What was his surprise, when, beneath their united efforts, he found the ponderous slab slowly revolve upon its vast hinges, and, with little further difficulty, it was completely elevated; though it still required the exertion of all Alan's strength to prop it open, and prevent its falling back.

"What does it contain?" asked Lady Rookwood.

"A warrior's ashes," returned Alan.

"There is a rusty dagger upon a fold of faded linen," cried Lady Rookwood, holding down the light.

"It is the weapon with which the first dame of the house of Rookwood was stabbed," said Alan, with a grim smile:

"Which whoso findeth in the tomb
Shall clutch until the hour of doom;
And when 'tis grasped by hand of clay,
The curse of blood shall pass away.
So saith the rhyme. Have you seen enough?"

"No," said Lady Rookwood, precipitating herself into the marble coffin. "That weapon shall be mine."

"Come forth—come forth," cried Alan. "My arm trembles—I cannot support the lid."

"I will have it, though I grasp it to eternity," shrieked Lady Rookwood, vainly endeavoring to wrest away the dagger, which was fastened, together with the linen upon which it lay, by some adhesive substance to the bottom of the shell.

At this moment Alan Rookwood happened to cast his eye upward, and he then beheld what filled him with new terror. The axe of the sable statue was poised above its head, as in the act to strike him. Some secret machinery, it was evident, existed between the sarcophagus lid and this mysterious image. But in the first impulse of his alarm Alan abandoned his hold of the slab, and it sunk slowly downwards. He uttered a loud cry as it moved. Lady Rookwood heard this cry. She raised herself at the same moment—the dagger was in her hand—she pressed it against the lid, but its downward force was too great to be withstood. The light was within the sarcophagus, and Alan could discern her features. The expression was terrible. She uttered one shriek and the lid closed for ever.

Alan was in total darkness. The light had been enclosed with Lady Rookwood. There was something so horrible in her probable fate, that even he shuddered as he thought upon it. Exerting all his remaining strength, he essayed to raise the lid, but now it was more firmly closed than ever. It defied all his power. Once, for an instant, he fancied that it yielded to his straining sinews, but it was only his hand that slid upon the surface of the marble. It was fixed—immovable. The sides and lid rang with the strokes which the unfortunate lady bestowed upon them with the dagger's point; but those sounds were not long heard. Presently all was still; the marble ceased to vibrate with her blows. Alan struck the lid with his knuckles, but no response was returned. All was silent.

He now turned his attention to his own situation, which had become sufficiently alarming. An hour must have elapsed, yet Luke had not arrived. The door of the vault was closed—the key was in the lock, and on the outside. He was himself a prisoner

within the tomb. What if Luke should not return? What if he were slain, as it might chance, in the enterprise? That thought flashed across his brain like an electric shock. None knew of his retreat but his grandson. He might perish of famine within this desolate vault.

He checked this notion as soon as it was formed—it was too dreadful to be indulged in. A thousand circumstances might conspire to detain Luke. He was sure to come. Yet the solitude—the darkness was awful, almost intolerable. The dying and the dead were around him. He dared not stir.

Another hour—an age it seemed to him—had passed. Still Luke came not. Horrible forebodings crossed him; but he would not surrender himself to them. He rose, and crawled in the direction, as he supposed, of the door—fearful, even of the stealthy sound of his own footsteps. He reached it, and his heart once more throbbed with hope. He bent his ear to the key; he drew in his breath; he listened for some sound, but nothing was to be heard. A groan would have been almost music in his ears.

Another hour was gone! He was now a prey to the most frightful apprehensions, agitated in turns by the wildest emotions of rage and terror. He at one moment imagined that Luke had abandoned him, and heaped curses upon his head; at the next, convinced that he had fallen, he bewailed with equal bitterness his grandson's fate and his own. He paced the tomb like one distracted; he stamped upon the iron plate; he smote with his hands upon the door; he shouted, and the vault hollowly echoed his lamentations. But Time's sand ran on, and Luke arrived not.

Alan now abandoned himself wholly to despair. He could no longer anticipate his grandson's coming, no longer hope for deliverance. His fate was sealed. Death awaited him. He must anticipate his slow but inevitable stroke, enduring all the grinding horrors of starvation. The contemplation of such an end was madness, but he was forced to contemplate it now; and so appalling did it appear to his imagination, that he half resolved to dash out his brains against the walls of the sepulchre, and put an end at once to his tortures; and nothing, except a doubt whether he might not, by imperfectly accomplishing his purpose, increase his own suffering, prevented him from putting this dreadful idea into execution. His dagger was gone, and he had no other weapon. Terrors of a new kind now assailed him. The dead, he fancied, were bursting from their coffins, and he peopled the darkness with grisly phantoms. They were around about him on each side, whirling and rustling, gibbering, groaning, shrieking, laughing, and lamenting. He was stunned, stifled. The air seemed to grow suffocating, pestilential; the wild laughter was redoubled; the horrible troop assailed him; they dragged him along the tomb, and amid their howls he fell, and became insensible.

When he returned to himself, it was some time before he could collect his scattered faculties; and when the agonizing consciousness of his terrible situation forced itself upon his mind, he had nigh relapsed into oblivion. He arose. He rushed towards the door; he knocked against it with his knuckles till the blood streamed from them; he scratched against it with his nails till they were torn off by the roots. With insane fury he hurled himself against the iron frame; it was in vain. Again he had recourse to the trap-door. He searched for it; he found it. He laid himself upon the ground. There was no interval of space in which he could insert a finger's point. He beat it with his clenched hand; he tore it with his teeth; he jumped upon it; he smote it with his heel. The iron returned a sullen sound.

He again essayed the lid of the sarcophagus. Despair nerved his strength. He raised the slab a few inches. He shouted, screamed, but no answer was returned; and again the lid fell.

"She is dead!" cried Alan. "Why have I not shared her fate? But mine is to come. And such a death!—oh, oh!" And, frenzied at the thought, he again hurried to the door, and renewed his fruitless attempts to escape, till nature gave way, and he sank upon the floor, groaning and exhausted.

Physical suffering now began to take the place of his mental tortures. Parched and consumed with a fierce internal fever, he was tormented by unappeasable thirst—of all human ills the most unendurable. His tongue was dry and dusty, his throat inflamed; his lips had lost all moisture. He licked the humid floor; he sought to imbibe the nitrous drops from the walls; but, instead of allaying his thirst, they increased it. He would have given the world, had he possessed it, for a draught of cold spring-water. Oh, to have died with his lips upon some bubbling fountain's marge! But to perish thus—!

Nor were the pangs of hunger wanting. He had to endure all the horrors of famine, as well as the agonies of quenchless thirst.

In this dreadful state three days and nights passed over Alan's fated head. Nor night nor day had he. Time, with him, was only measured by its duration, and that seemed interminable. Each hour added to his suffering, and brought with it no relief. During this period of prolonged misery reason often tottered on her throne. Sometimes he was under the influence of the wildest passions. He dragged coffins from their recesses, hurled them upon the ground, striving to break them open and drag forth their loathsome contents. Upon other occasions he would weep bitterly and wildly; and once—only once—did he attempt to pray; but he started from his knees with an echo of infernal laughter, as he deemed, ringing in his ears. Then, again, would he call down imprecations upon himself and his whole line, trampling upon the pile of coffins he had

reared; and lastly, more subdued, would creep to the boards that contained the body of his child, kissing them with a frantic outbreak of affection.

At length he became sensible of his approaching dissolution. To him the thought of death might well be terrible, but he quailed not before it, or rather seemed, in his latest moments, to resume all his wonted firmness of character. Gathering together his remaining strength, he dragged himself towards the niche wherein his brother, Sir Reginald Rookwood, was deposited, and placing his hand upon the coffin, solemnly exclaimed, "My curse—my dying curse—be upon thee evermore!"

Falling with his face upon the coffin, Alan instantly expired. In this attitude his remains were discovered.

L'ENVOY

Our tale is told. Yet, perhaps, we may be allowed to add a few words respecting two of the subordinate characters of our drama—melodrama we ought to say—namely Jerry Juniper and the knight of Malta. What became of the Caper Merchant's son after his flight from Kilburn Wells we have never been able distinctly to ascertain. Juniper, however, would seem to be a sort of Wandering Jew, for certain it is, that somebody very like him is extant still, and to be met with at Jerry's old haunts; indeed, we have no doubt of encountering him at the ensuing meetings of Ascot and Hampton.

As regards the knight of Malta—Knight of Roads—"Rhodes"—he should have been—we are sorry to state that the career of the Ruffler terminated in a madhouse, and thus the poor knight became in reality a Hospitaller! According to the custom observed in those establishments, the knight was deprived of his luxuriant locks, and the loss of his beard rendered his case incurable; but, in the mean time, the barber of the place made his fortune by retailing the materials of all the black wigs he could collect to the impostor's dupes.

Such is the latest piece of intelligence that has reached us of the Arch-hoaxer of Canterbury!

Turpin—why disguise it?—was hanged at York in . His firmness deserted him not at the last. When he mounted the fatal tree his left leg trembled; he stamped it impatiently down, and, after a brief chat with the hangman, threw himself suddenly and resolutely from the ladder. His sufferings would appear to have been slight: as he himself sang,

He died, not as other men, by degrees,
But at once, without wincing, and quite at his ease!

We may, in some other place, lay before the reader the particulars—and they are not incurious—of the "night before Larry was stretched."

The remains of the vagrant highwayman found a final resting-place in the desecrated churchyard of Saint George, without the Fishergate postern, a green and grassy cemetery, but withal a melancholy one. A few recent tombs mark out the spots where some of the victims of the pestilence of - have been interred; but we have made vain search for Turpin's grave—unless—as is more than probable—the plain stone with the simple initials R. T. belongs to him.

The gyves by which he was fettered are still shown at York Castle, and are of prodigious weight and strength; and though the herculean robber is said to have moved in them with ease, the present turnkey was scarcely able to lift the ponderous irons. An old woman of the same city has a lock of hair, said to have been Turpin's, which she avouches her grandfather cut off from the body after the execution, and which the believers look upon with great reverence. O rare Dick Turpin!

We shall, perhaps, be accused of dilating too much upon the character of the highwayman, and we plead guilty to the charge. But we found it impossible to avoid running a little into extremes. Our earliest associations are connected with sunny scenes in Cheshire, said to have been haunted by Turpin; and with one very dear to us—from whose lips, now, alas! silent, we have listened to many stories of his exploits—he was a sort of hero. We have had a singular delight in recounting his feats and hairbreadth escapes; and if the reader derives only half as much pleasure from the perusal of his adventures as we have had in narrating them, our satisfaction will be complete. Perhaps, we may have placed him in too favorable a point of view—and yet we know not. As upon those of more important personages, many doubts rest upon his history. Such as we conceive him to have been, we have drawn him—hoping that the benevolent reader, upon finishing our Tale, will arrive at the same conclusion; and, in the words of the quaint old Prologue to the Prince of Prigs' Revels,

—————Thank that man,
Can make each thief a complete Roscian!

Freeeditorial 