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EUGENE ARAM

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

FRAUD AND VIOLENCE ENTER EVEN GRASSDALE.—PETER'S NEWS. —THE LOVERS' WALK.—THE REAPPEARANCE.

AUF.—"Whence comest thou—what wouldst thou?"
—Coriolanus.

One evening Aram and Madeline were passing through the village in their accustomed walk, when Peter Dealtry sallied forth from The Spotted Dog, and hurried up to the lovers with a countenance full of importance, and a little ruffled by fear.

"Oh, Sir, Sir,—(Miss, your servant!)—have you heard the news? Two houses at Checkington, (a small town some miles distant from Grassdale,) were forcibly entered last night,—robbed, your honour, robbed. Squire Tibson was tied to his bed, his bureau rifled, himself shockingly confused on the head; and the maidservant Sally—her sister lived with me, a very good girl she was,—was locked up in the—the—the—I beg pardon, Miss—was locked up in the cupboard. As to the other house, they carried off all the plate. There were no less than four men, all masked, your honour, and armed with pistols. What if they should come here! such a thing was never heard of before in these parts. But, Sir,—but, Miss,—do not be afraid, do not ye now, for I may say with the Psalmist,

'But wicked men shall drink the dregs

Which they in wrath shall wring,
For I will lift my voice, and make
Them flee while I do sing!"

"You could not find a more effectual method of putting them to flight, Peter," said Madeline smiling; "but go and talk to my uncle. I know we have a whole magazine of blunderbusses and guns at home: they may be useful now. But you are well provided in case of attack. Have you not the Corporal's famous cat Jacobina,—surely a match for fifty robbers?"

"Ay, Miss, on the principle of set a thief to catch a thief, perhaps she may; but really it is no jesting matter. Them ere robbers flourish like a green bay tree, for a space at least, and it is 'nation bad sport for us poor lambs till they be cut down and withered like grass. But your house, Mr. Aram, is very lonesome like; it is out of reach of all your neighbours. Hadn't you better, Sir, take up your lodgings at the Squire's for the present?"

Madeline pressed Aram's arm, and looked up fearfully in his face. "Why, my good friend," said he to Dealtry, "robbers will have little to gain in my house, unless they are given to learned pursuits. It would be something new, Peter, to see a gang of housebreakers making off with a telescope, or a pair of globes, or a great folio covered with dust."

"Ay, your honour, but they may be the more savage for being disappointed."

"Well, well, Peter, we will see," replied Aram impatiently; "meanwhile we may meet you again at the hall. Good evening for the present."

"Do, dearest Eugene, do, for Heaven's sake," said Madeline, with tears in her eyes, as they, now turning from Dealtry, directed their steps towards the quiet valley, at the end of which the Student's house was situated, and which was now more than ever Madeline's favourite walk, "do, dearest Eugene, come up to the Manor-house till these wretches are apprehended. Consider how open your house is to attack; and surely there can be no necessity to remain in it now."

Aram's calm brow darkened for a moment. "What! dearest," said he, "can you be affected by the foolish fears of yon dotard? How do we know as yet, whether this improbable story have any foundation in truth. At all events, it is evidently exaggerated. Perhaps an invasion of the poultry-yard, in which some hungry fox was the real offender, may be the true origin of this terrible tale. Nay, love, nay, do not look thus reproachfully; it will be time enough for us when we have sifted the grounds of alarm to take our precautions; meanwhile, do not blame me if in your presence I cannot admit fear. Oh Madeline, dear, dear Madeline, could you know, could you dream, how different life has become to me since I knew you! Formerly, I will frankly own to you, that dark and boding apprehensions were wont to lie heavy at my heart; the cloud was more familiar to me than the sunshine. But now I have grown a child, and can see around me nothing but hope; my life was winter—your love has breathed it into spring."

"And yet, Eugene—yet—" "Yet what, my Madeline?"

"There are still moments when I have no power over your thoughts; moments when you break away from me; when you mutter to yourself feelings in which I have no share, and which seem to steal the consciousness from your eye and the colour from your lip."

"Ah, indeed!" said Aram quickly; "what! you watch me so closely?"

"Can you wonder that I do?" said Madeline, with an earnest tenderness in her voice.

"You must not then, you must not," returned her lover, almost fiercely; "I cannot bear too nice and sudden a scrutiny; consider how long I have clung to a stern and solitary independence of thought, which allows no watch, and forbids account of itself to any one. Leave it to time and your love to win their inevitable way. Ask not too much from me now. And mark, mark, I pray you, whenever, in spite of myself, these moods you refer to darken over me, heed not, listen not—Leave me! solitude is their only cure! promise me this, love—promise."

"It is a harsh request, Eugene, and I do not think I will grant you so complete a monopoly of thought;" answered Madeline, playfully, yet half in earnest.

"Madeline," said Aram, with a deep solemnity of manner, "I ask a request on which my very love for you depends. From the depths of my soul, I implore you to grant it; yea, to the very letter."

"Why, why, this is—" began Madeline, when encountering the full, the dark, the inscrutable gaze of her strange lover, she broke off in a sudden fear, which she could not analyse; and only added in a low

and subdued voice, "I promise to obey you."

As if a weight were lifted from his heart, Aram now brightened at once into himself in his happiest mood. He poured forth a torrent of grateful confidence, of buoyant love, that soon swept from the remembrance of the blushing and enchanted Madeline, the momentary fear, the sudden chillness, which his look had involuntarily stricken into her mind. And as they now wound along the most lonely part of that wild valley, his arm twined round her waist, and his low but silver voice pouring magic into the very air she breathed—she felt perhaps a more entire and unruffled sentiment of present, and a more credulous persuasion of future, happiness, than she had ever experienced before. And Aram himself dwelt with a more lively and detailed fulness, than he was wont, on the prospects they were to share, and the security and peace which retirement would instill into their mode of life.

"Is it not," said he, with a lofty triumph that we shall look from our retreat upon the shifting passions, and the hollow loves of the distant world? We can have no petty object, no vain allurements to distract the unity of our affection: we must be all in all to each other; for what else can there be to engross our thoughts, and occupy our feelings here?

"If, my beautiful love, you have selected one whom the world might deem a strange choice for youth and loveliness like yours; you have, at least, selected one who can have no idol but yourself. The poets tell you, and rightly, that solitude is the fit sphere for love; but how few are the lovers whom solitude does not fatigue! they rush into retirement, with souls unprepared for its stern joys and its unvarying tranquillity: they weary of each other, because the solitude itself to which they fled, palls upon and oppresses them. But to me, the freedom which low minds call obscurity, is the aliment of life; I do not enter the temples of Nature as the stranger, but the priest: nothing can ever tire me of the lone and august altars, on which I sacrificed my youth: and now, what Nature, what Wisdom once were to me—no, no, more, immeasurably more than these, you are! Oh, Madeline! methinks there is nothing under Heaven like the feeling which puts us apart from all that agitates, and fevers, and degrades the herd of men; which grants us to control the tenour of our future life, because it annihilates our dependence upon others, and, while the rest of earth are hurried on, blind and unconscious, by the hand of Fate, leaves us the sole lords of our destiny; and able, from the Past, which we have governed, to become the Prophets of our Future!"

At this moment Madeline uttered a faint shriek, and clung trembling to Aram's arm. Amazed, and roused from his enthusiasm, he looked up, and on seeing the cause of her alarm, seemed himself transfixed, as by a sudden terror, to the earth.

But a few paces distant, standing amidst the long and rank fern that grew on either side of their path, quite motionless, and looking on the pair with a sarcastic smile, stood the ominous stranger, whom the second chapter of our first volume introduced to the reader.

For one instant Aram seemed utterly appalled and overcome; his cheek grew the colour of death; and Madeline felt his heart beat with a loud, a fearful force beneath the breast to which she clung. But his was not the nature any earthly dread could long abash. He whispered to Madeline to come on; and slowly, and with his usual firm but gliding step, continued his way.

"Good evening, Eugene Aram," said the stranger; and as he spoke, he touched his hat slightly to Madeline.

"I thank you," replied the Student, in a calm voice; "do you want aught with me?"

"Humph!—yes, if it so please you?"

"Pardon me, dear Madeline," said Aram softly, and disengaging himself from her, "but for one moment."

He advanced to the stranger, and Madeline could not but note that, as Aram accosted him, his brow fell, and his manner seemed violent and agitated; but she could not hear the words of either; nor did the conference last above a minute. The stranger bowed, and turning away, soon vanished among the shrubs. Aram regained the side of his mistress.

"Who," cried she eagerly, "is that fearful man? What is his business? What his name?"

"He is a man whom I knew well some fourteen years ago," replied Aram coldly, and with ease; "I did not then lead quite so lonely a life, and we were thrown much together. Since that time, he has been in unfortunate circumstances—rejoined the army—he was in early life a soldier, and had been disbanded—entered into business, and failed; in short, he has partaken of those vicissitudes inseparable from the life of one driven to seek the world. When he travelled this road some months ago, he accidentally

heard of my residence in the neighbourhood, and naturally sought me. Poor as I am, I was of some assistance to him. His route brings him hither again, and he again seeks me: I suppose too that I must again aid him."

"And is that indeed all," said Madeline, breathing more freely; "well, poor man, if he be your friend, he must be inoffensive—I have done him wrong. And does he want money? I have some to give him—here Eugene!" And the simple-hearted girl put her purse into Aram's hand.

"No, dearest," said he, shrinking back; "no, we shall not require your contribution; I can easily spare him enough for the present. But let us turn back, it grows chill."

"And why did he leave us, Eugene?"

"Because I desired him to visit me at home an hour hence."

"An hour! then you will not sup with us to-night?"

"No, not this night, dearest."

The conversation now ceased; Madeline in vain endeavoured to renew it. Aram, though without relapsing into any of his absorbed reveries, answered her only in monosyllables. They arrived at the Manor-house, and Aram at the garden gate took leave of her for the night, and hastened backward towards his home. Madeline, after watching his form through the deepening shadows until it disappeared, entered the house with a listless step; a nameless and thrilling presentiment crept to her heart; and she could have sate down and wept, though without a cause.

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN ARAM AND THE STRANGER.

The spirits I have raised abandon me,
The spells which I have studied baffle me.
—Manfred.

Meanwhile Aram strode rapidly through the village, and not till he had regained the solitary valley did he relax his step.

The evening had already deepened into night. Along the sere and melancholy wood, the autumnal winds crept, with a lowly, but gathering moan. Where the water held its course, a damp and ghostly mist clogged the air, but the skies were calm, and chequered only by a few clouds, that swept in long, white, spectral streaks, over the solemn stars. Now and then, the bat wheeled swiftly round, almost touching the figure of the Student, as he walked musingly onward. And the owl [Note: That species called the short-eared owl.] that before the month waned many days, would be seen no more in that region, came heavily from the trees, like a guilty thought that deserts its shade. It was one of those nights, half dim, half glorious, which mark the early decline of the year. Nature seemed restless and instinct with change; there were those signs in the atmosphere which leave the most experienced in doubt, whether the morning may rise in storm or sunshine. And in this particular period, the skiey influences seem to tincture the animal life with their own mysterious and wayward spirit of change. The birds desert their summer haunts; an unaccountable inquietude pervades the brute creation; even men in this unsettled season have considered themselves, more (than at others) stirred by the motion and whisperings of their genius. And every creature that flows upon the tide of the Universal Life of Things, feels upon the ruffled surface, the mighty and solemn change, which is at work within its depths.

And now Aram had nearly threaded the valley, and his own abode became visible on the opening plain, when the stranger emerged from the trees to the right, and suddenly stood before the Student. "I tarried for you here, Aram," said he, "instead of seeking you at home, at the time you fixed; for there are certain private reasons which make it prudent I should keep as much as possible among the owls, and it was therefore safer, if not more pleasant, to lie here amidst the fern, than to make myself merry in the village yonder."

"And what," said Aram, "again brings you hither? Did you not say, when you visited me some months since, that you were about to settle in a different part of the country, with a relation?"

"And so I intended; but Fate, as you would say, or the Devil, as I should, ordered it otherwise. I had not long left you, when I fell in with some old friends, bold spirits and true; the brave outlaws of the road and the field. Shall I have any shame in confessing that I preferred their society, a society not unfamiliar to me, to the dull and solitary life that I might have led in tending my old bed-ridden relation in Wales, who after all, may live these twenty years, and at the end can scarce leave me enough for a week's ill luck at the hazard-table? In a word, I joined my gallant friends, and entrusted myself to their guidance. Since then, we have cruised around the country, regaled ourselves cheerily, frightened the timid, silenced the fractious, and by the help of your fate, or my devil, have found ourselves by accident, brought to exhibit our valour in this very district, honoured by the dwelling-place of my learned friend, Eugene Aram."

"Trifle not with me, Houseman," said Aram sternly; "I scarcely yet understand you. Do you mean to imply, that yourself, and the lawless associates you say you have joined, are lying out now for plunder in these parts?"

"You say it: perhaps you heard of our exploits last night, some four miles hence?"

"Ha! was that villainy yours?"

"Villainy!" repeated Houseman, in a tone of sullen offence. "Come, Master Aram, these words must not pass between you and me, friends of such date, and on such a footing."

"Talk not of the past," replied Aram with a livid lip, "and call not those whom Destiny once, in despite of Nature, drove down her dark tide in a momentary companionship, by the name of friends. Friends we are not; but while we live, there is a tie between us stronger than that of friendship."

"You speak truth and wisdom," said Houseman, sneeringly; "for my part, I care not what you call us, friends or foes."

"Foes, foes!" exclaimed Aram abruptly, "not that. Has life no medium in its ties?—pooh—pooh! not foes; we may not be foes to each other."

"It were foolish, at least at present," said Houseman carelessly.

"Look you, Houseman," continued Aram drawing his comrade from the path into a wilder part of the scene, and, as he spoke, his words were couched in a more low and inward voice than heretofore. "Look you, I cannot live and have my life darkened thus by your presence. Is not the world wide enough for us both? Why haunt each other? what have you to gain from me? Can the thoughts that my sight recalls to you be brighter, or more peaceful, than those which start upon me, when I gaze on you? Does not a ghastly air, a charnel breath, hover about us both? Why perversely incur a torture it is so easy to avoid? Leave me—leave these scenes. All earth spreads before you—choose your pursuits, and your resting place elsewhere, but grudge me not this little spot."

"I have no wish to disturb you, Eugene Aram, but I must live; and in order to live I must obey my companions; if I deserted them, it would be to starve. They will not linger long in this district; a week, it may be; a fortnight, at most; then, like the Indian animal, they will strip the leaves, and desert the tree. In a word, after we have swept the country, we are gone."

"Houseman, Houseman!" said Aram passionately, and frowning till his brows almost hid his eyes, but that part of the orb which they did not hide, seemed as living fire; "I now implore, but I can threaten—beware!—silence, I say;" (and he stamped his foot violently on the ground, as he saw Houseman about to interrupt him;) "listen to me throughout—Speak not to me of tarrying here—speak not of days, of weeks—every hour of which would sound upon my ear like a death-knell. Dream not of a sojourn in these tranquil shades, upon an errand of dread and violence—the minions of the law aroused against you, girt with the chances of apprehension and a shameful death—" "And a full confession of my past sins," interrupted Houseman, laughing wildly.

"Fiend! devil!" cried Aram, grasping his comrade by the throat, and shaking him with a vehemence that Houseman, though a man of great strength and sinew, impotently attempted to resist.

"Breathe but another word of such import; dare to menace me with the vengeance of such a thing as thou, and, by the God above us, I will lay thee dead at my feet!"

"Release my throat, or you will commit murder," gasped Houseman with difficulty, and growing already black in the face.

Aram suddenly relinquished his gripe, and walked away with a hurried step, muttering to himself. He then returned to the side of Houseman, whose flesh still quivered either with rage or fear, and, his own self-possession completely restored, stood gazing upon him with folded arms, and his usual deep and passionless composure of countenance; and Houseman, if he could not boldly confront, did not altogether shrink from, his eye. So there and thus they stood, at a little distance from each other, both silent, and yet with something unutterably fearful in their silence.

"Houseman," said Aram at length, in a calm, yet a hollow voice, "it may be that I was wrong; but there lives no man on earth, save you, who could thus stir my blood,—nor you with ease. And know, when you menace me, that it is not your menace that subdues or shakes my spirit; but that which robs my veins of their even tenor is that you should deem your menace could have such power, or that you,—that any man,—should arrogate to himself the thought that he could, by the prospect of whatsoever danger, humble the soul and curb the will of Eugene Aram. And now I am calm; say what you will, I cannot be vexed again."

"I have done," replied Houseman coldly; "I have nothing to say; farewell!" and he moved away among the trees.

"Stay," cried Aram in some agitation; "stay; we must not part thus. Look you, Houseman, you say you would starve should you leave your present associates. That may not be; quit them this night,—this moment: leave the neighbourhood, and the little in my power is at your will."

"As to that," said Houseman drily, "what is in your power is, I fear me, so little as not to counterbalance the advantages I should lose in quitting my companions. I expect to net some three hundreds before I leave these parts."

"Some three hundreds!" repeated Aram recoiling; "that were indeed beyond me. I told you when we last met that it is only by an annual payment I draw the little wealth I have."

"I remember it. I do not ask you for money, Eugene Aram; these hands can maintain me," replied Houseman, smiling grimly. "I told you at once the sum I expected to receive somewhere, in order to prove that you need not vex your benevolent heart to afford me relief. I knew well the sum I named was out of your power, unless indeed it be part of the marriage portion you are about to receive with your bride. Fie, Aram! what, secrets from your old friend! You see I pick up the news of the place without your confidence."

Again Aram's face worked, and his lip quivered; but he conquered his passion with a surprising self-command, and answered mildly, "I do not know, Houseman, whether I shall receive any marriage portion whatsoever: If I do, I am willing to make some arrangement by which I could engage you to molest me no more. But it yet wants several days to my marriage; quit the neighbourhood now, and a month hence let us meet again. Whatever at that time may be my resources, you shall frankly know them."

"It cannot be," said Houseman; "I quit not these districts without a certain sum, not in hope, but possession. But why interfere with me? I seek not my hoards in your coffer. Why so anxious that I should not breathe the same air as yourself?"

"It matters not," replied Aram, with a deep and ghastly voice; "but when you are near me, I feel as if I were with the dead; it is a spectre that I would exorcise in ridding me of your presence. Yet this is not what I now speak of. You are engaged, according to your own lips, in lawless and midnight schemes, in which you may, (and the tide of chances runs towards that bourne,) be seized by the hand of Justice."

"Ho," said Houseman, sullenly, "and was it not for saying that you feared this, and its probable consequences, that you well-nigh stifled me, but now?—so truth may be said one moment with impunity, and the next at peril of life! These are the subtleties of you wise schoolmen, I suppose. Your Aristotles, and your Zenos, your Platos, and your Epicurus's, teach you notable distinctions, truly!"

"Peace!" said Aram; "are we at all times ourselves? Are the passions never our masters? You maddened me into anger; behold, I am now calm: the subjects discussed between myself and you, are of life and death; let us approach them with our senses collected and prepared. What, Houseman, are you bent upon your own destruction, as well as mine, that you persevere in courses which must end in a death of shame?"

"What else can I do? I will not work, and I cannot live like you in a lone wilderness on a crust of bread. Nor is my name like yours, mouthed by the praise of honest men: my character is marked; those who once knew me, shun now. I have no resource for society, (for I cannot face myself alone,) but in the fellowship of men like myself, whom the world has thrust from its pale. I have no resource for bread, save in the pursuits that are branded by justice, and accompanied with snares and danger. What would

you have me do?"

"Is it not better," said Aram, "to enjoy peace and safety upon a small but certain pittance, than to live thus from hand to mouth? vibrating from wealth to famine, and the rope around your neck, sleeping and awake? Seek your relation; in that quarter, you yourself said your character was not branded: live with him, and know the quiet of easy days, and I promise you, that if aught be in my power to make your lot more suitable to your wants, so long as you lead the life of honest men, it shall be freely yours. Is not this better, Houseman, than a short and sleepless career of dread?"

"Aram," answered Houseman, "are you, in truth, calm enough to hear me speak? I warn you, that if again you forget yourself, and lay hands on me—" "Threaten not, threaten not," interrupted Aram, "but proceed; all within me is now still and cold as ice. Proceed without fear of scruple."

"Be it so; we do not love one another: you have affected contempt for me— and I—I—no matter—I am not a stone or stick, that I should not feel. You have scorned me—you have outraged me—you have not assumed towards me even the decent hypocrisies of prudence—yet now you would ask of me, the conduct, the sympathy, the forbearance, the concession of friendship. You wish that I should quit these scenes, where, to my judgment, a certain advantage waits me, solely that I may lighten your breast of its selfish fears. You dread the dangers that await me on your own account. And in my apprehension, you forebode your own doom. You ask me, nay, not ask, you would command, you would awe me to sacrifice my will and wishes, in order to soothe your anxieties, and strengthen your own safety. Mark me! Eugene Aram, I have been treated as a tool, and I will not be governed as a friend. I will not stir from the vicinity of your home, till my designs be fulfilled,—I enjoy, I hug myself in your torments. I exult in the terror with which you will hear of each new enterprise, each new daring, each new triumph of myself and my gallant comrades. And now I am avenged for the affront you put upon me."

Though Aram trembled, with suppressed passions, from limb to limb, his voice was still calm, and his lip even wore a smile as he answered,—"I was prepared for this, Houseman, you utter nothing that surprises or appalls me. You hate me; it is natural; men united as we are, rarely look on each other with a friendly or a pitying eye. But Houseman; I know you!—you are a man of vehement passions, but interest with you is yet stronger than passion. If not, our conference is over. Go—and do your worst."

"You are right, most learned scholar; I can fetter the tiger within, in his deadliest rage, by a golden chain."

"Well, then, Houseman, it is not your interest to betray me—my destruction is your own."

"I grant it; but if I am apprehended, and to be hung for robbery?"

"It will be no longer an object to you, to care for my safety. Assuredly, I comprehend this. But my interest induces me to wish that you be removed from the peril of apprehension, and your interest replies, that if you can obtain equal advantages in security, you would forego advantages accompanied by peril. Say what we will, wander as we will, it is to this point that we must return at last."

"Nothing can be clearer; and were you a rich man, Eugene Aram, or could you obtain your bride's dowry (no doubt a respectable sum) in advance, the arrangement might at once be settled."

Aram gasped for breath, and as usual with him in emotion, made several strides forward, muttering rapidly, and indistinctly to himself, and then returned.

"Even were this possible, it would be but a short reprieve; I could not trust you; the sum would be spent, and I again in the state to which you have compelled me now; but without the means again to relieve myself. No, no! if the blow must fall, be it so one day as another."

"As you will," said Houseman; 'but—' Just at that moment, a long shrill whistle sounded below, as from the water. Houseman paused abruptly—"That signal is from my comrades; I must away. Hark, again! Farewell, Aram."

"Farewell, if it must be so," said Aram, in a tone of dogged sullenness; "but to-morrow, should you know of any means by which I could feel secure, beyond the security of your own word, from your future molestation, I might—yet how?"

"To-morrow," said Houseman, "I cannot answer for myself; it is not always that I can leave my comrades; a natural jealousy makes them suspicious of the absence of their friends. Yet hold; the night after to-morrow, the Sabbath night, most virtuous Aram, I can meet you—but not here—some miles hence. You know the foot of the Devil's Crag, by the waterfall; it is a spot quiet and shaded enough in all conscience for our interview; and I will tell you a secret I would trust to no other man—(hark, again!)—it is close by our present lurking-place. Meet me there!—it would, indeed, be pleasanter to

hold our conference under shelter—but just at present, I would rather not trust myself beneath any honest man's roof in this neighbourhood. Adieu! on Sunday night, one hour before mid- night."

The robber, for such then he was, waved his hand, and hurried away in the direction from which the signal seemed to come.

Aram gazed after him, but with vacant eyes; and remained for several minutes rooted to the spot, as if the very life had left him.

"The Sabbath night!" said he, at length, moving slowly on; "and I must spin forth my existence in trouble and fear till then—till then! what remedy can I then invent? It is clear that I can have no dependance on his word, if won; and I have not even aught wherewith to buy it. But courage, courage, my heart; and work thou, my busy brain! Ye have never failed me yet!"

CHAPTER III.

FRESH ALARM IN THE VILLAGE.—LESTER'S VISIT TO ARAM.—A TRAIT OF DELICATE KINDNESS IN THE STUDENT.—MADELINE.—HER PRONENESS TO CONFIDE.—THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN LESTER AND ARAM.—THE PERSONS BY WHOM IT IS INTERRUPTED.

Not my own fears, nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world, dreaming on things to come,
Can yet the lease of my true love controul.

—Shakspeare: Sonnets.

Commend me to their love, and I am proud, say,
That my occasions have found time to use them
Toward a supply of money; let the request
Be fifty talents.

—Timon Of Athens.

The next morning the whole village was alive and bustling with terror and consternation. Another, and a yet more daring robbery, had been committed in the neighbourhood, and the police of the county town had been summoned, and were now busy in search of the offenders. Aram had been early disturbed by the officious anxiety of some of his neighbours; and it wanted yet some hours of noon, when Lester himself came to seek and consult with the Student.

Aram was alone in his large and gloomy chamber, surrounded, as usual, by his books, but not as usual engaged in their contents. With his face leaning on his hand, and his eyes gazing on a dull fire, that crept heavily upward through the damp fuel, he sate by his hearth, listless, but wrapt in thought.

"Well, my friend," said Lester, displacing the books from one of the chairs, and drawing the seat near the Student's—"you have ere this heard the news, and indeed in a county so quiet as ours, these outrages appear the more fearful, from their being so unlooked for. We must set a guard in the village, Aram, and you must leave this defenceless hermitage and come down to us; not for your own sake,—but consider you will be an additional safeguard to Madeline. You will lock up the house, dismiss your poor old governante to her friends in the village, and walk back with me at once to the hall."

Aram turned uneasily in his chair.

"I feel your kindness," said he after a pause, "but I cannot accept it— Madeline," he stopped short at that name, and added in an altered voice; "no, I will be one of the watch, Lester; I will look to her—to your— safety; but I cannot sleep under another roof. I am superstitious, Lester —superstitious. I have made a vow, a foolish one perhaps, but I dare not break it. And my vow binds me, save on indispensable and urgent necessity, not to pass a night any where but in my own home."

"But there is necessity."

"My conscience says not," said Aram smiling: "peace, my good friend, we cannot conquer men's foibles, or wrestle with men's scruples."

Lester in vain attempted to shake Aram's resolution on this head; he found him immoveable, and gave up the effort in despair.

"Well," said he, "at all events we have set up a watch, and can spare you a couple of defenders. They shall reconnoitre in the neighbourhood of your house, if you persevere in your determination, and this will serve in some slight measure to satisfy poor Madeline."

"Be it so," replied Aram; "and dear Madeline herself, is she so alarmed?"

And now in spite of all the more wearing and haggard thoughts that preyed upon his breast, and the dangers by which he conceived himself beset, the Student's face, as he listened with eager attention to every word that Lester uttered concerning his niece, testified how alive he yet was to the least incident that related to Madeline, and how easily her innocent and peaceful remembrance could allure him from himself.

"This room," said Lester, looking round, "will be, I conclude, after Madeline's own heart; but will you always suffer her here? students do not sometimes like even the gentlest interruption."

"I have not forgotten that Madeline's comfort requires some more cheerful retreat than this," said Aram, with a melancholy expression of countenance. "Follow me, Lester; I meant this for a little surprise to her. But Heaven only knows if I shall ever show it to herself?"

"Why? what doubt of that can even your boding temper discover?"

"We are as the wanderers in the desert," answered Aram, "who are taught wisely to distrust their own senses: that which they gaze upon as the waters of existence, is often but a faithless vapour that would lure them to destruction."

In thus speaking he had traversed the room, and, opening a door, showed a small chamber with which it communicated, and which Aram had fitted up with evident, and not ungraceful care. Every article of furniture that Madeline might most fancy, he had sent for from the neighbouring town. And some of the lighter and more attractive books that he possessed, were ranged around on shelves, above which were vases, intended for flowers; the window opened upon a little plot that had been lately broken up into a small garden, and was already intersected with walks, and rich with shrubs.

There was something in this chamber that so entirely contrasted the one it adjoined, something so light, and cheerful, and even gay in its decoration and its tout ensemble, that Lester uttered an exclamation of delight and surprise. And indeed it did appear to him touching, that this austere scholar, so wrapt in thought, and so inattentive to the common forms of life, should have manifested this tender and delicate consideration. In another it would have been nothing, but in Aram, it was a trait, that brought involuntary tears to the eyes of the good Lester. Aram observed them: he walked hastily away to the window, and sighed heavily; this did not escape his friend's notice, and after commenting on the attractions of the little room—Lester said: "You seem oppressed in spirits, Eugene: can any thing have chanced to disturb you, beyond, at least, these alarms which are enough to agitate the nerves of the hardiest of us?"

"No," said Aram; "I had no sleep last night, and my health is easily affected, and with my health my mind; but let us go to Madeline; the sight of her will revive me."

They then strolled down to the Manor-house, and met by the way a band of the younger heroes of the village, who had volunteered to act as a patrol, and who were now marshalled by Peter Dealtry, in a fit of heroic enthusiasm.

Although it was broad daylight, and, consequently, there was little cause of immediate alarm, the worthy publican carried on his shoulder a musket on full cock; and each moment he kept peeping about, as if not only every bush, but every blade of grass contained an ambuscade, ready to spring up the instant he was off his guard. By his side the redoubted Jacobina, who had transferred to her new master, the attachment she had originally possessed for the Corporal, trotted peeringly along, her tail perpendicularly cocked, and her ears moving to and fro, with a most incomparable air of vigilant sagacity. The cautious Peter every now and then checked her ardour, as she was about to quicken her step, and enliven the march by the gambols better adapted to serenest times.

"Soho, Jacobina, soho! gently, girl, gently; thou little knowest the dangers that may beset thee. Come up, my good fellows, come to the Spotted Dog; I will tap a barrel on purpose for you; and we will settle the plan of defence for the night. Jacobina, come in, I say, come in,—

"'Lest, like a lion, they thee tear,
And rend in pieces small;
While there is none to succour thee,
And rid thee out of thrall.'

What ho, there! Oh! I beg your honour's pardon! Your servant, Mr. Aram."

"What, patrolling already?" said the squire; "your men will be tired before they are wanted; reserve their ardour for the night."

"Oh, your Honour, I have only been beating up for recruits; and we are going to consult a bit at home. Ah! what a pity the Corporal isn't here: he would have been a tower of strength unto the righteous. But howsomever, I do my best to supply his place—Jacobina, child, be still: I can't say as I knows the musket-sarvice, your honour; but I fancy's as how, like Joe Roarjug, the Methodist, we can do it extemporaneous-like at a pinch."

"A bold heart, Peter, is the best preparation," said the squire.

"And," quoth Peter quickly, "what saith the worshipful Mister Sternhold, in the 45th psalm, 5th verse,

—
'Go forth with godly speed, in meekness, truth, and might,
And thy right hand shall thee instruct in works of dreadful might.'"

Peter quoted these verses, especially the last, with a truculent frown, and a brandishing of the musket, that surprisingly encouraged the hearts of his little armament; and with a general murmur of enthusiasm, the warlike band marched off to The Spotted Dog.

Lester and his companion found Madeline and Ellinor standing at the window of the hall; and Madeline's light step was the first that sprang forward to welcome their return: even the face of the Student brightened, when he saw the kindling eye, the parted lip, the buoyant form, from which the pure and innocent gladness she felt on seeing him broke forth.

There was a remarkable trustingness, if I may so speak, in Madeline's disposition. Thoughtful and grave as she was, by nature, she was yet ever inclined to the more sanguine colourings of life; she never turned to the future with fear—a placid sentiment of Hope slept at her heart—she was one who surrendered herself with a fond and implicit faith to the guidance of all she loved; and to the chances of life. It was a sweet indolence of the mind, which made one of her most beautiful traits of character; there is something so unselfish in tempers reluctant to despond. You see that such persons are not occupied with their own existence; they are not fretting the calm of the present life, with the egotisms of care, and conjecture, and calculation: if they learn anxiety, it is for another; but in the heart of that other, how entire is their trust!

It was this disposition in Madeline which perpetually charmed, and yet perpetually wrung, the soul of her wild lover; and as she now delightedly hung upon his arm, uttering her joy at seeing him safe, and presently forgetting that there ever had been cause for alarm, his heart was filled with the most gloomy sense of horror and desolation. "What," thought he, "if this poor, unconscious girl could dream that at this moment I am girded with peril, from which I see no ultimate escape? Delay it as I will, it seems as if the blow must come at last. What, if she could think how fearful is my interest in these outrages, that in all probability, if their authors are detected, there is one who will drag me into their ruin; that I am given over, bound and blinded, into the hands of another; and that other, a man steeled to mercy, and withheld from my destruction by a thread—a thread that a blow on himself would snap. Great God! wherever I turn, I see despair! And she—she clings to me; and beholding me, thinks the whole earth is filled with hope!"

While these thoughts darkened his mind, Madeline drew him onward into the more sequestered walks of the garden, to show him some flowers she had transplanted. And when an hour afterwards he returned to the hall, so soothing had been the influence of her looks and words upon Aram, that if he had not forgotten the situation in which he stood, he had at least calmed himself to regard with a steady eye the chances of escape.

The meal of the day passed as cheerfully as usual, and when Aram and his host were left over their abstemious potations, the former proposed a walk before the evening deepened. Lester readily consented, and they sauntered into the fields. The Squire soon perceived that something was on Aram's mind, of which he felt evident embarrassment in ridding himself: at length the Student said rather abruptly: "My dear friend, I am but a bad beggar, and therefore let me get over my request as expeditiously as possible. You said to me once that you intended bestowing some dowry upon Madeline; a dowry I would and could willingly dispense with; but should you of that sum be now able to spare me some portion as a loan,—should you have some three hundred pounds with which you could accommodate me.—" "Say no more, Eugene, say no more," interrupted the Squire,—"you can have double that amount. Your preparations for your approaching marriage, I ought to have foreseen, must have occasioned you some inconvenience; you can have six hundred pounds from me to-morrow."

Aram's eyes brightened. "It is too much, too much, my generous friend," said he; "the half suffices—but, but, a debt of old standing presses me urgently, and to-morrow, or rather Monday morning, is the time fixed for payment."

"Consider it arranged," said Lester, putting his hand on Aram's arm, and then leaning on it gently, he added, "And now that we are on this subject, let me tell you what I intended as a gift to you, and my dear Madeline; it is but small, but my estates are rigidly entailed on Walter, and of poor value in themselves, and it is half the savings of many years."

The Squire then named a sum, which, however small it may seem to our reader, was not considered a despicable portion for the daughter of a small country squire at that day, and was in reality, a generous sacrifice for one whose whole income was scarcely, at the most, seven hundred a year. The sum mentioned doubled that now to be lent, and which was of course a part of it; an equal portion was reserved for Ellinor.

"And to tell you the truth," said the Squire, "you must give me some little time for the remainder—for not thinking some months ago it would be so soon wanted, I laid out eighteen hundred pounds, in the purchase of Winclose Farm, six of which, (the remainder of your share,) I can pay off at the end of the year; the other twelve, Ellinor's portion, will remain a mortgage on the farm itself. And between us," added the Squire, "I do hope that I need be in no hurry respecting her, dear girl. When Walter returns, I trust matters may be arranged, in a manner, and through a channel, that would gratify the most cherished wish of my heart. I am convinced that Ellinor is exactly suited to him; and, unless he should lose his senses for some one else in the course of his travels, I trust that he will not be long returned before he will make the same discovery. I think of writing to him very shortly after your marriage, and making him promise, at all events, to revisit us at Christmas. Ah! Eugene, we shall be a happy party, then, I trust. And be assured, that we shall beat up your quarters, and put your hospitality, and Madeline's housewifery to the test."

Therewith the good Squire ran on for some minutes in the warmth of his heart, dilating on the fireside prospects before them, and rallying the Student on those secluded habits, which he promised him he should no longer indulge with impunity.

"But it is growing dark," said he, awakening from the theme which had carried him away, "and by this time Peter and our patrol will be at the hall. I told them to look up in the evening, in order to appoint their several duties and stations—let us turn back. Indeed, Aram, I can assure you, that I, for my own part, have some strong reasons to take precautions against any attack; for besides the old family plate, (though that's not much,) I have,—you know the bureau in the parlour to the left of the hall—well, I have in that bureau three hundred guineas, which I have not as yet been able to take to safe hands at—, and which, by the way, will be your's to-morrow. So, you see, it would be no light misfortune to me to be robbed."

"Hist!" said Aram, stopping short, "I think I heard steps on the other side of the hedge."

The Squire listened, but heard nothing; the senses of his companion were, however, remarkably acute, more especially that of hearing.

"There is certainly some one; nay, I catch the steps of two persons," whispered he to Lester. "Let us come round the hedge by the gap below."

They both quickened their pace, and gaining the other side of the hedge, did indeed perceive two men in carters' frocks, strolling on towards the village.

"They are strangers too," said the Squire suspiciously, "not Grassdale men. Humph! could they have overheard us, think you?"

"If men whose business it is to overhear their neighbours—yes; but not if they be honest men," answered Aram, in one of those shrewd remarks which he often uttered, and which seemed almost incompatible with the tenor of the quiet and abstruse pursuits that he had adopted, and that generally deaden the mind to worldly wisdom.

They had now approached the strangers, who, however, appeared mere rustic clowns, and who pulled off their hats with the wonted obeisance of their tribe.

"Hollo, my men," said the Squire, assuming his magisterial air, for the mildest Squire in Christendom can play the Bashaw, when he remembers he is a Justice of the Peace. "Hollo! what are you doing here this time of day? you are not after any good, I fear."

"We ax pardon, your honour," said the elder clown, in the peculiar accent of the country, "but we be

come from Gladsmuir; and be going to work at Squire Nixon's at Mow-hall, on Monday; so as I has a brother living on the green afore the Squire's, we be a-going to sleep there to-night and spend the Sunday, your honour."

"Humph! humph! What's your name?"

"Joe Wood, your honour, and this here chap is, Will Hutchings."

"Well, well, go along with you," said the Squire: "And mind what you are about. I should not be surprised if you snare one of Squire Nixon's hares by the way."

"Oh, well and indeed, your honour."—"Go along, go along," said the Squire, and away went the men.

"They seem honest bumpkins enough," observed Lester.

"It would have pleased me better," said Aram, "had the speaker of the two particularized less; and you observed that he seemed eager not to let his companion speak; that is a little suspicious."

"Shall I call them back?" asked the Squire.

"Why it is scarcely worth while," said Aram; "perhaps I over refine. And now I look again at them, they seem really what they affect to be. No, it is useless to molest the poor wretches any more. There is something, Lester, humbling to human pride in a rustic's life. It grates against the heart to think of the tone in which we unconsciously permit ourselves to address him. We see in him humanity in its simple state; it is a sad thought to feel that we despise it; that all we respect in our species is what has been created by art; the gaudy dress, the glittering equipage, or even the cultivated intellect; the mere and naked material of Nature, we eye with indifference or trample on with disdain. Poor child of toil, from the grey dawn to the setting sun, one long task!—no idea elicited— no thought awakened beyond those that suffice to make him the machine of others—the serf of the hard soil! And then too, mark how we scowl upon his scanty holidays, how we hedge in his mirth with laws, and turn his hilarity into crime! We make the whole of the gay world, wherein we walk and take our pleasure, to him a place of snares and perils. If he leave his labour for an instant, in that instant how many temptations spring up to him! And yet we have no mercy for his errors; the gaol—the transport- ship—the gallows; those are our sole lecture-books, and our only methods of expostulation—ah, fie on the disparities of the world! They cripple the heart, they blind the sense, they concentrate the thousand links between man and man, into the two basest of earthly ties— servility, and pride. Methinks the devils laugh out when they hear us tell the boor that his soul is as glorious and eternal as our own; and yet when in the grinding drudgery of his life, not a spark of that soul can be called forth; when it sleeps, walled around in its lumpish clay, from the cradle to the grave, without a dream to stir the deadness of its torpor."

"And yet, Aram," said Lester, "the Lords of science have their ills. Exalt the soul as you will, you cannot raise it above pain. Better, perhaps, to let it sleep, when in waking it looks only upon a world of trial."

"You say well, you say well," said Aram smiting his heart, "and I suffered a foolish sentiment to carry me beyond the sober boundaries of our daily sense."

CHAPTER IV.

MILITARY PREPARATIONS.—THE COMMANDER AND HIS MAN.—ARAM IS PERSUADED TO PASS THE NIGHT AT THE MANOR-HOUSE.

Falstaff.—"Bid my Lieutenant Peto meet me at the town's end.

. . I pressed me none but such toasts and butter, with hearts
in their bellies no bigger than pins' heads."

—Henry IV.

They had scarcely reached the Manor-house, before the rain, which the clouds had portended throughout the whole day, began to descend in torrents, and to use the strong expression of the Roman poet—the night rushed down, black and sudden, over the face of the earth.

The new watch were not by any means the hardy and experienced soldiery, by whom rain and

darkness are unheeded. They looked with great dismay upon the character of the night in which their campaign was to commence. The valorous Peter, who had sustained his own courage by repeated applications to a little bottle, which he never failed to carry about him in all the more bustling and enterprising occasions of life, endeavoured, but with partial success, to maintain the ardour of his band. Seated in the servants' hall of the Manor-house, in a large arm-chair, Jacobina on his knee, and his trusty musket, which, to the great terror of the womankind, had never been uncocked throughout the day, still grasped in his right hand, while the stock was grounded on the floor; he indulged in martial harangues, plentifully interlarded with plagiarisms from the worshipful translations of Messrs. Sternhold and Hopkins, and psalmodic versions of a more doubtful authorship. And when at the hour of ten, which was the appointed time, he led his warlike force, which consisted of six rustics, armed with sticks of incredible thickness, three guns, one pistol, a broadsword, and a pitchfork, (a weapon likely to be more effectively used than all the rest put together;) when at the hour of ten he led them up to the room above, where they were to be passed in review before the critical eye of the Squire, with Jacobina leading the on-guard, you could not fancy a prettier picture for a hero in a little way, than mine host of the Spotted Dog.

His hat was fastened tight on his brows by a blue pocket-handkerchief; he wore a spencer of a light brown drugget, a world too loose, above a leather jerkin; his breeches of corduroy, were met all of a sudden half way up the thigh, by a detachment of Hessians, formerly in the service of the Corporal, and bought some time since by Peter Dealtry to wear when employed in shooting snipes for the Squire, to whom he occasionally performed the office of game-keeper; suspended round his wrist by a bit of black ribbon, was his constable's baton; he shouldered his musket gallantly, and he carried his person as erect as if the least deflexion from its perpendicularity were to cost him his life. One may judge of the revolution that had taken place in the village, when so peaceable a man as Peter Dealtry was thus metamorphosed into a commander-in-chief. The rest of the regiment hung sheepishly back; each trying to get as near to the door, and as far from the ladies, as possible. But Peter having made up his mind, that a hero should only look straight forward, did not condescend to turn round, to perceive the irregularity of his line. Secure in his own existence, he stood truculently forth, facing the Squire, and prepared to receive his plaudits.

Madeline and Aram sat apart at one corner of the hearth, and Ellinor leaned over the chair of the former; the mirth that she struggled to suppress from being audible, mantling over her arch face and laughing eyes; while the Squire, taking the pipe from his mouth, turned round on his easy chair, and nodded complacently to the little corps, and the great commander.

"We are all ready now, your honour," said Peter, in a voice that did not seem to belong to his body, so big did it sound, "all hot, all eager."

"Why you yourself are a host, Peter," said Ellinor with affected gravity; "your sight alone would frighten an army of robbers: who could have thought you could assume so military an air? The Corporal himself was never so upright!"

"I have practised my present attitude all the day, Miss," said Peter, proudly, "and I believe I may now say as Mr. Sternhold says or sings, in the twenty-sixth Psalm, verse twelfth.

'My foot is stayed for all assays,
It standeth well and right,
Wherefore to God—will I give praise
In all the people's sight!'

Jacobina, behave yourself, child. I don't think, your honour, that we miss the Corporal so much as I fancied at first, for we all does very well without him."

"Indeed you are a most worthy substitute, Peter; and now, Nell, just reach me my hat and cloak; I will set you at your posts: you will have an ugly night of it."

"Very indeed, your honour," cried all the army, speaking for the first time.

"Silence—order—discipline," said Peter gruffly. "March!"

But instead of marching across the hall, the recruits huddled up one after the other, like a flock of geese, whom Jacobina might be supposed to have set in motion, and each scraping to the ladies, as they shuffled, sneaked, bundled, and hustled out at the door.

"We are well guarded now, Madeline," said Ellinor; "I fancy we may go to sleep as safely as if there were not a housebreaker in the world."

"Why," said Madeline, "let us trust they will be more efficient than they seem, though I cannot

persuade myself that we shall really need them. One might almost as well conceive a tiger in our arbour, as a robber in Grassdale. But dear, dear Eugene, do not—do not leave us this night; Walter's room is ready for you, and if it were only to walk across that valley in such weather, it would be cruel to leave us. Let me beseech you; come, you cannot, you dare not refuse me such a favour."

Aram pleaded his vow, but it was overruled; Madeline proved herself a most exquisite casuist in setting it aside. One by one his objections were broken down; and how, as he gazed into those eyes, could he keep any resolution, that Madeline wished him to break! The power she possessed over him seemed exactly in proportion to his impregnability to every one else. The surface on which the diamond cuts its easy way, will yield to no more ignoble instrument; it is easy to shatter it, but by only one substance can it be impressed. And in this instance Aram had but one secret and strong cause to prevent his yielding to Madeline's wishes;—if he remained at the house this night, how could he well avoid a similar compliance the next? And on the next was his interview with Houseman. This reason was not, however, strong enough to enable him to resist Madeline's soft entreaties; he trusted to the time to furnish him with excuses, and when Lester returned, Madeline with a triumphant air informed him that Aram had consented to be their guest for the night."

"Your influence is indeed greater than mine," said Lester, wringing his hat as the delicate fingers of Ellinor loosened his cloak; "yet one can scarcely think our friend sacrifices much in concession, after proving the weather without. I should pity our poor patrol most exceedingly, if I were not thoroughly assured that within two hours every one of them will have quietly slunk home; and even Peter himself, when he has exhausted his bottle, will be the first to set the example. However, I have stationed two of the men near our house, and the rest at equal distances along the village."

"Do you really think they will go home, Sir?" said Ellinor, in a little alarm; "why they would be worse than I thought them, if they were driven to bed by the rain. I knew they could not stand a pistol, but a shower, however hard, I did imagine would scarcely quench their valour."

"Never mind, girl," said Lester, gaily chucking her under the chin, "we are quite strong enough now to resist them. You see Madeline has grown as brave as a lioness—Come, girls, come, let's have supper, and stir up the fire. And, Nell, where are my slippers?"

And thus on the little family scene, the cheerful wood fire flickering against the polished wainscot; the supper table arranged, the Squire drawing his oak chair towards it, Ellinor mixing his negus; and Aram and Madeline, though three times summoned to the table, and having three times answered to the summons, still lingering apart by the hearth—let us drop the curtain.

We have only, ere we close our chapter, to observe, that when Lester conducted Aram to his chamber he placed in his hands an order payable at the county town, for three hundred pounds. "The rest," he said in a whisper, "is below, where I mentioned; and there in my secret drawer it had better rest till the morning."

The good Squire then, putting his finger to his lip, hurried away, to avoid the thanks, which, indeed, however he might feel them, Aram was no dexterous adept in expressing.

CHAPTER V.

THE SISTERS ALONE.—THE GOSSIP OF LOVE.—AN ALARM —AND AN EVENT.

Juliet.—My true love is grown to such excess,
I cannot sum up half my sum of wealth.
—Romeo and Juliet.

Eros.—Oh, a man in arms;
His weapon drawn, too!
—The False One.

It was a custom with the two sisters, when they repaired to their chamber for the night, to sit conversing, sometimes even for hours, before they finally retired to bed. This indeed was the usual time for their little confidences, and their mutual dilations over those hopes and plans for the future, which always occupy the larger share of the thoughts and conversation of the young. I do not know any thing in the world more lovely than such conferences between two beings who have no secrets to relate but

what arise, all fresh, from the springs of a guiltless heart,- -those pure and beautiful mysteries of an unsullied nature which warm us to hear; and we think with a sort of wonder when we feel how arid experience has made ourselves, that so much of the dew and sparkle of existence still linger in the nooks and valleys, which are as yet virgin of the sun and of mankind.

The sisters this night were more than commonly indifferent to sleep. Madeline sat by the small but bright hearth of the chamber, in her night dress, and Ellinor, who was much prouder of her sister's beauty than her own, was employed in knotting up the long and lustrous hair which fell in rich luxuriance over Madeline's throat and shoulders.

"There certainly never was such beautiful hair!" said Ellinor admiringly; "and, let me see,—yes,—on Thursday fortnight I may be dressing it, perhaps, for the last time—heigho!"

"Don't flatter yourself that you are so near the end of your troublesome duties," said Madeline, with her pretty smile, which had been much brighter and more frequent of late than it was formerly wont to be, so that Lester had remarked "That Madeline really appeared to have become the lighter and gayer of the two."

"You will often come to stay with us for weeks together, at least till— till you have a double right to be mistress here. Ah! my poor hair,—you need not pull it so hard."

"Be quiet, then," said Ellinor, half laughing, and wholly blushing.

"Trust me, I have not been in love myself without learning its signs; and I venture to prophesy that within six months you will come to consult me whether or not,—for there is a great deal to be said on both sides of the question,—you can make up your mind to sacrifice your own wishes, and marry Walter Lester. Ah!—gently, gently. Nell—" "Promise to be quiet."

"I will—I will; but you began it."

As Ellinor now finished her task, and kissed her sister's forehead, she sighed deeply.

"Happy Walter!" said Madeline.

"I was not sighing for Walter, but for you."

"For me?—impossible! I cannot imagine any part of my future life that can cost you a sigh. Ah! that I were more worthy of my happiness."

"Well, then," said Ellinor, "I sighed for myself;—I sighed to think we should so soon be parted, and that the continuance of your society would then depend not on our mutual love, but the will of another."

"What, Ellinor, and can you suppose that Eugene,—my Eugene,—would not welcome you as warmly as myself? Ah! you misjudge him; I know you have not yet perceived how tender a heart lies beneath all that melancholy and reserve."

"I feel, indeed," said Ellinor warmly, "as if it were impossible that one whom you love should not be all that is good and noble; yet if this reserve of his should increase, as is at least possible, with increasing years; if our society should become again, as it once was, distasteful to him, should I not lose you, Madeline?"

"But his reserve cannot increase: do you not perceive how much it is softened already? Ah! be assured that I will charm it away."

"But what is the cause of the melancholy that even now, at times, evidently preys upon him?—has he never revealed it to you?"

"It is merely the early and long habit of solitude and study, Ellinor," replied Madeline; "and shall I own to you I would scarcely wish that away; his tenderness itself seems linked with his melancholy. It is like a sad but gentle music, that brings tears into our eyes, but which we would not change for gayer airs for the world."

"Well, I must own," said Ellinor, reluctantly, "that I no longer wonder at your infatuation; I can no longer chide you as I once did; there is, assuredly, something in his voice, his look, which irresistibly sinks into the heart. And there are moments when, what with his eyes and forehead, his countenance seems more beautiful, more impressive, than any I ever beheld. Perhaps, too, for you, it is better, that your lover should be no longer in the first flush of youth. Your nature seems to require something to venerate, as well as to love. And I have ever observed at prayers, that you seem more especially rapt and carried beyond yourself, in those passages which call peculiarly for worship and adoration."

"Yes, dearest," said Madeline fervently, "I own that Eugene is of all beings, not only of all whom I ever knew, but of whom I ever dreamed, or imagined, the one that I am most fitted to love and to appreciate. His wisdom, but more than that, the lofty tenor of his mind, calls forth all that is highest and best in my own nature. I feel exalted when I listen to him;—and yet, how gentle, with all that nobleness! And to think that he should descend to love me, and so to love me. It is as if a star were to leave its sphere!"

"Hark! one o'clock," said Ellinor, as the deep voice of the clock told the first hour of morning. "Heavens! how much louder the winds rave. And how the heavy sleet drives against the window! Our poor watch without! but you may be sure my uncle was right, and they are safe at home by this time; nor is it likely, I should think, that even robbers would be abroad in such weather!"

"I have heard," said Madeline, "that robbers generally choose these dark, stormy nights for their designs, but I confess I don't feel much alarm, and he is in the house. Draw nearer to the fire, Ellinor; is it not pleasant to see how serenely it burns, while the storm howls without! it is like my Eugene's soul, luminous, and lone, amidst the roar and darkness of this unquiet world!"

"There spoke himself," said Ellinor smiling to perceive how invariably women, who love, imitate the tone of the beloved one. And Madeline felt it, and smiled too.

"Hist!" said Ellinor abruptly, "did you not hear a low, grating noise below? Ah! the winds now prevent your catching the sound; but hush, hush!—now the wind pauses,—there it is again!"

"Yes, I hear it," said Madeline, turning pale, "it seems in the little parlour; a continued, harsh, but very low, noise. Good heavens! it seems at the window below."

"It is like a file," whispered Ellinor: "perhaps—" "You are right," said Madeline, suddenly rising, "it is a file, and at the bars my father had fixed against the window yesterday. Let us go down, and alarm the house."

"No, no; for God's sake, don't be so rash," cried Ellinor, losing all presence of mind: "hark! the sound ceases, there is a louder noise below, —and steps. Let us lock the door."

But Madeline was of that fine and high order of spirit which rises in proportion to danger, and calming her sister as well as she could, till she found her attempts wholly ineffectual, she seized the light with a steady hand, opened the door, and Ellinor still clinging to her, passed the landing-place, and hastened to her father's room; he slept at the opposite corner of the staircase. Aram's chamber was at the extreme end of the house. Before she reached the door of Lester's apartment, the noise below grew loud and distinct—a scuffle—voices—curses—and now—the sound of a pistol!—in a moment more the whole house was stirring. Lester in his night robe, his broadsword in his hand, and his long grey hair floating behind, was the first to appear; the servants, old and young, male and female, now came thronging simultaneously round; and in a general body, Lester several paces at their head, his daughters following next to him, they rushed to the apartment whence the noise, now suddenly stilled, had proceeded.

The window was opened, evidently by force; an instrument like a wedge was fixed in the bureau containing Lester's money, and seemed to have been left there, as if the person using it had been disturbed before the design for which it was introduced had been accomplished, and, (the only evidence of life,) Aram stood, dressed, in the centre of the room, a pistol in his left hand, a sword in his right; a bludgeon severed in two lay at his feet, and on the floor within two yards of him, towards the window, drops of blood yet warm, showed that the pistol had not been discharged in vain.

"And is it you, my brave friend, that I have to thank for our safety?" cried Lester in great emotion.

"You, Eugene!" repeated Madeline, sinking on his breast.

"But thanks hereafter," continued Lester; "let us now to the pursuit,— perhaps the villain may have perished beneath your bullet?"

"Ha!" muttered Aram, who had hitherto seemed unconscious of all around him; so fixed had been his eye, so colourless his cheek, so motionless his posture. "Ha! say you so?—think you I have slain him?—no, it cannot be—the ball did not slay, I saw him stagger; but he rallied—not so one who receives a mortal wound!—ha! ha!—there is blood, you say, that is true; but what then!—it is not the first wound that kills, you must strike again—pooh, pooh, what is a little blood!"

While he was thus muttering, Lester and the more active of the servants had already sallied through the window, but the night was so intensely dark that they could not penetrate a step beyond them. Lester returned, therefore, in a few moments; and met Aram's dark eye fixed upon him with an

unutterable expression of anxiety.

"You have found no one," said he, "no dying man?—Ha!—well—well—well! they must both have escaped; the night must favour them."

"Do you fancy the villain was severely wounded?"

"Not so—I trust not so; he seemed able to—But stop—oh God!—stop!— your foot is dabbling in blood—blood shed by me,—off! off!"

Lester moved aside with a quick abhorrence, as he saw that his feet were indeed smearing the blood over the polished and slippery surface of the oak boards, and in moving he stumbled against a dark lantern in which the light still burnt, and which the robbers in their flight had left.

"Yes," said Aram observing it. "It was by that—their own light that I saw them—saw their faces—and—and—(bursting into a loud, wild laugh) they were both strangers!"

"Ah, I thought so, I knew so," said Lester plucking the instrument from the bureau. "I knew they could be no Grassdale men. What, did you fancy, they could be? But—bless me, Madeline—what ho! help!—Aram, she has fainted at your feet."

And it was indeed true and remarkable, that so utter had been the absorption of Aram's mind, that he had been insensible not only to the entrance of Madeline, but even that she had thrown herself on his breast. And she, overcome by her feelings, had slid to the ground from that momentary resting-place, in a swoon which Lester, in the general tumult and confusion, was now the first to perceive.

At this exclamation, at the sound of Madeline's name, the blood rushed back from Aram's heart, where it had gathered, icy and curdling; and, awakened thoroughly and at once to himself, he knelt down, and weaving his arms around her, supported her head on his breast, and called upon her with the most passionate and moving exclamations.

But when the faint bloom retinged her cheek, and her lips stirred, he printed a long kiss on that cheek—on those lips, and surrendered his post to Ellinor; who, blushing gathering the robe over the beautiful breast from which it had been slightly drawn; now entreated all, save the women of the house, to withdraw till her sister was restored.

Lester, eager to hear what his guest could relate, therefore took Aram to his own apartment, where the particulars were briefly told.

Suspecting, which indeed was the chief reason that excused him to himself in yielding to Madeline's request, that the men Lester and himself had encountered in their evening walk, might be other than they seemed, and that they might have well overheard Lester's communication, as to the sum in his house, and the place where it was stored; he had not undressed himself, but kept the door of his room open to listen if any thing stirred. The keen sense of hearing, which we have before remarked him to possess, enabled him to catch the sound of the file at the bars, even before Ellinor, notwithstanding the distance of his own chamber from the place, and seizing the sword which had been left in his room, (the pistol was his own) he had descended to the room below.

"What!" said Lester, "and without a light?"

"The darkness is familiar to me," said Aram. "I could walk by the edge of a precipice in the darkest night without one false step, if I had but once passed it before. I did not gain the room, however, till the window had been forced; and by the light of a dark lantern which one of them held, I perceived two men standing by the bureau—the rest you can imagine; my victory was easy, for the bludgeon, with which one of them aimed at me, gave way at once to the edge of your good sword, and my pistol delivered me of the other.—There ends the history."

Lester overwhelmed him with thanks and praises, but Aram, glad to escape them, hurried away to see after Madeline, whom he now met on the landing- place, leaning on Ellinor's arm and still pale.

She gave him her hand, which he for one moment pressed passionately to his lips, but dropped, the next, with an altered and chilled air. And hastily observing he would not now detain her from a rest which she must so much require, he turned away and descended the stairs. Some of the servants were grouped around the place of encounter; he entered the room, and again started at the sight of the blood.

"Bring water," said he fiercely: "will you let the stagnant gore ooze and rot into the boards, to startle the eye, and still the heart with its filthy, and unutterable stain—water, I say! water!"

They hurried to obey him, and Lester coming into the room to see the window reclosed by the help of boards found the Student bending over the servants as they performed their reluctant task, and rating them with a raised and harsh voice for the hastiness with which he accused them of seeking to slur it over.

CHAPTER VI.

ARAM ALONE AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.—HIS SOLILOQUY AND PROJECT.— SCENE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND MADELINE.

Luce non grata fruor;
Trepidante semper corde, non mortis metu
Sed—

—Seneca: Octavia, act i.

The two men servants of the house remained up the rest of the night; but it was not till the morning had progressed far beyond the usual time of rising in the fresh shades of Grassdale, that Madeline and Ellinor became visible; even Lester left his bed an hour later than his wont; and knocking at Aram's door, found the Student was already abroad, while it was evident that his bed had not been pressed during the whole of the night. Lester descended into the garden, and was there met by Peter Dealtry, and a detachment of the band; who, as common sense and Lester had predicted, were indeed, at a very early period of the watch, driven to their respective homes. They were now seriously concerned for their unmanliness, which they passed off as well as they could upon their conviction "that nobody at Grassdale could ever really be robbed;" and promised with sincere contrition, that they would be most excellent guards for the future. Peter was, in sooth, singularly chop-fallen; and could only defend himself by an incoherent mutter, from which the Squire turned somewhat impatiently, when he heard, louder than the rest, the words "seventy-seventh psalm, seventeenth verse,

"The clouds that were both thick and black,

Did rain full plenteously."

Leaving the Squire to the edification of the pious host, let us follow the steps of Aram, who at the early dawn had quitted his sleepless chamber, and, though the clouds at that time still poured down in a dull and heavy sleet, wandered away, whither he neither knew, nor heeded. He was now hurrying, with unabated speed, though with no purposed bourne or object, over the chain of mountains that backed the green and lovely valleys, among which his home was cast.

"Yes!" said he, at last halting abruptly, with a desperate resolution stamped on his countenance, "yes! I will so determine. If, after this interview, I feel that I cannot command and bind Houseman's perpetual secrecy, I will surrender Madeline at once. She has loved me generously and trustingly. I will not link her life with one that may be called hence in any hour, and to so dread an account. Neither shall the grey hairs of Lester be brought with the sorrow of my shame, to a dishonoured and untimely grave. And after the outrage of last night, the daring outrage, how can I calculate on the safety of a day? though Houseman was not present, though I can scarce believe that he knew or at least abetted the attack; yet they were assuredly of his gang: had one been seized, the clue might have traced to his detection—and he detected, what should I have to dread! No, Madeline! no; not while this sword hangs over me, will I subject thee to share the horror of my fate!"

This resolution, which was certainly generous, and yet no more than honest, Aram had no sooner arrived at, than he dismissed, at once, by one of those efforts which powerful minds can command, all the weak and vacillating thoughts that might interfere with the sternness of his determination. He seemed to breathe more freely, and the haggard wanness of his brow, relaxed at least from the workings that, but the moment before, distorted its wonted serenity, with a maniac wildness.

He pursued his desultory way now with a calmer step.

"What a night!" said he, again breaking into the low murmur in which he was accustomed to hold commune with himself. "Had Houseman been one of the ruffians! a shot might have freed me, and without a crime, for ever! And till the light flashed on their brows, I thought the smaller man bore his aspect. Ha, out, tempting thought! out on thee!" he cried aloud, and stamping with his foot, then

recalled by his own vehemence, he cast a jealous and hurried glance round him, though at that moment his step was on the very height of the mountains, where not even the solitary shepherd, save in search of some more daring straggler of the flock, ever brushed the dew from the cragged, yet fragrant soil. "Yet," he said, in a lower voice, and again sinking into the sombre depths of his reverie, "it is a tempting, a wondrously tempting thought. And it struck athwart me, like a flash of lightning when this hand was at his throat—a tighter strain, another moment, and Eugene Aram had not had an enemy, a witness against him left in the world. Ha! are the dead no foes then? Are the dead no witnesses?" Here he relapsed into utter silence, but his gestures continued wild, and his eyes wandered round, with a bloodshot and unquiet glare. "Enough," at length he said calmly; and with the manner of one 'who has rolled a stone from his heart;' [Note: Eastern saying.] "enough! I will not so sully myself; unless all other hope of self-preservation be extinct. And why despond? the plan I have thought of seems well-laid, wise, consummate at all points. Let me consider—*forfeited the moment he enters England—not given till he has left it—paid periodically, and of such extent as to supply his wants, preserve him from crime, and forbid the possibility of extorting more: all this sounds well; and if not feasible at last, why farewell Madeline, and I myself leave this land for ever. Come what will to me—death in its vilest shape—let not the stroke fall on that breast. And if it be,*" he continued, his face lighting up, "if it be, as it may yet, that I can chain this hell-hound, why, even then, the instant that Madeline is mine, I will fly these scenes; I will seek a yet obscurer and remoter corner of earth: I will choose another name—Fool! why did I not so before? But matters it? What is writ is writ. Who can struggle with the invisible and giant hand, that launched the world itself into motion; and at whose predecree we hold the dark boon of life and death?"

It was not till evening that Aram, utterly worn out and exhausted, found himself in the neighbourhood of Lester's house. The sun had only broken forth at its setting; and it now glittered from its western pyre over the dripping hedges, and spread a brief, but magic glow along the rich landscape around; the changing woods clad in the thousand dyes of Autumn; the scattered and peaceful cottages, with their long wreaths of smoke curling upward, and the grey and venerable walls of the Manor-house, with the Church hard by, and the delicate spire, which, mixing itself with heaven, is at once the most touching and solemn emblem of the Faith to which it is devoted. It was a sabbath eve; and from the spot on which Aram stood, he might discern many a rustic train trooping slowly up the green village lane towards the Church; and the deep bell which summoned to the last service of the day now swung its voice far over the sunlit and tranquil scene.

But it was not the setting sun, nor the autumnal landscape, nor the voice of the holy bell that now arrested the step of Aram. At a little distance before him, leaning over a gate, and seemingly waiting till the ceasing of the bell should announce the time to enter the sacred mansion, he beheld the figure of Madeline Lester. Her head, at the moment, was averted from him, as if she were looking after Ellinor and her uncle, who were in the churchyard among a little group of their homely neighbours; and he was half in doubt whether to shun her presence, when she suddenly turned round, and seeing him, uttered an exclamation of joy. It was now too late for avoidance; and calling to his aid that mastery over his features, which, in ordinary times, few more eminently possessed, he approached his beautiful mistress with a smile as serene, if not as glowing, as her own. But she had already opened the gate, and bounding forward, met him half way.

"Ah, truant, truant," said she, the whole day absent, without inquiry or farewell! After this, when shall I believe that thou really lovest me?

"But," continued Madeline, gazing on his countenance, which bore witness, in its present languor, to the fierce emotions which had lately raged within, "but, heavens! dearest, how pale you look; you are fatigued; give me your hand, Eugene,—it is parched and dry. Come into the house;—you must need rest and refreshment."

"I am better here, my Madeline,—the air and the sun revive me: let us rest by the stile yonder. But you were going to Church? and the bell has ceased."

"I could attend, I fear, little to the prayers now," said Madeline, "unless you feel well enough and will come to Church with me."

"To Church!" said Aram, with a half shudder, "no; my thoughts are in no mood for prayer."

"Then you shall give your thoughts to me and I, in return, will pray for you before I rest."

And so saying, Madeline, with her usual innocent frankness of manner, wound her arm in his, and they walked onward towards the stile Aram had pointed out. It was a little rustic stile, with chesnut-trees hanging over it on either side. It stands to this day, and I have pleased myself with finding Walter Lester's initials, and Madeline's also, with the date of the year, carved in half-worn letters on the wood, probably by the hand of the former.

They now rested at this spot. All around them was still and solitary; the groups of peasants had entered the Church, and nothing of life, save the cattle grazing in the distant fields, or the thrush starting from the wet bushes, was visible. The winds were lulled to rest, and, though somewhat of the chill of autumn floated on the air, it only bore a balm to the harassed brow and fevered veins of the Student; and Madeline!—she felt nothing but his presence. It was exactly what we picture to ourselves of a sabbath eve, unutterably serene and soft, and borrowing from the very melancholy of the declining year an impressive, yet a mild solemnity.

There are seasons, often in the most dark or turbulent periods of our life, when, why we know not, we are suddenly called from ourselves, by the remembrances of early childhood: something touches the electric chain, and, lo! a host of shadowy and sweet recollections steal upon us. The wheel rests, the oar is suspended, we are snatched from the labour and travail of present life; we are born again, and live anew. As the secret page in which the characters once written seem for ever effaced, but which, if breathed upon, gives them again into view; so the memory can revive the images invisible for years: but while we gaze, the breath recedes from the surface, and all one moment so vivid, with the next moment has become once more a blank!

"It is singular," said Aram, "but often as I have paused at this spot, and gazed upon this landscape, a likeness to the scenes of my childish life, which it now seems to me to present, never occurred to me before. Yes, yonder, in that cottage, with the sycamores in front, and the orchard extending behind, till its boundary, as we now stand, seems lost among the woodland, I could fancy that I looked upon my father's home. The clump of trees that lies yonder to the right could cheat me readily to the belief that I saw the little grove in which, enamoured with the first passion of study, I was wont to pore over the thrice-read book through the long summer days;—a boy,—a thoughtful boy; yet, oh! how happy! What worlds appeared then to me, to open in every page! how exhaustless I thought the treasures and the hopes of life! and beautiful on the mountain tops seemed to me the steps of Knowledge! I did not dream of all that the musing and lonely passion that I nursed was to entail upon me. There, in the clefts of the valley, or the ridges of the hill, or the fragrant course of the stream, I began already to win its history from the herb or flower; I saw nothing, that I did not long to unravel its secrets; all that the earth nourished ministered to one desire:—and what of low or sordid did there mingle with that desire? The petty avarice, the mean ambition, the debasing love, even the heat, the anger, the fickleness, the caprice of other men, did they allure or bow down my nature from its steep and solitary eyrie? I lived but to feed my mind; wisdom was my thirst, my dream, my aliment, my sole fount and sustenance of life. And have I not sown the whirlwind and reaped the wind? The glory of my youth is gone, my veins are chilled, my frame is bowed, my heart is gnawed with cares, my nerves are unstrung as a loosened bow: and what, after all, is my gain? Oh, God! what is my gain?"

"Eugene, dear, dear Eugene!" murmured Madeline soothingly, and wrestling with her tears, "is not your gain great? is it no triumph that you stand, while yet young, almost alone in the world, for success in all that you have attempted?"

"And what," exclaimed Aram, breaking in upon her, "what is this world which we ransack, but a stupendous charnel-house? Every thing that we deem most lovely, ask its origin?—Decay! When we rifle nature, and collect wisdom, are we not like the hags of old, culling simples from the rank grave, and extracting sorceries from the rotting bones of the dead? Every thing around us is fathered by corruption, battered by corruption, and into corruption returns at last. Corruption is at once the womb and grave of Nature, and the very beauty on which we gaze and hang,—the cloud, and the tree, and the swarming waters,—all are one vast panorama of death! But it did not always seem to me thus; and even now I speak with a heated pulse and a dizzy brain. Come, Madeline, let us change the theme."

And dismissing at once from his language, and perhaps, as he proceeded, also from his mind, all of its former gloom, except such as might shade, but not embitter, the natural tenderness of remembrance, Aram now related, with that vividness of diction, which, though we feel we can very inadequately convey its effect, characterised his conversation, and gave something of poetic interest to all he uttered; those reminiscences which belong to childhood, and which all of us take delight to hear from the lips of any one we love.

It was while on this theme that the lights which the deepening twilight had now made necessary, became visible in the Church, streaming afar through its large oriel window, and brightening the dark firs that overshadowed the graves around: and just at that moment the organ, (a gift from a rich rector, and the boast of the neighbouring country,) stole upon the silence with its swelling and solemn note. There was something in the strain of this sudden music that was so kindred with the holy repose of the scene, and which chimed so exactly to the chord that now vibrated in Aram's mind, that it struck upon him at once with an irresistible power. He paused abruptly "as if an angel spoke!" that sound so peculiarly adapted to express sacred and unearthly emotion none who have ever mourned or sinned can hear, at an unlooked-for moment, without a certain sentiment, that either subdues, or elevates, or

awes. But he,— he was a boy once more!—he was again in the village church of his native place: his father, with his silver hair, stood again beside him! there was his mother, pointing to him the holy verse; there the half arch, half reverent face of his little sister, (she died young!)—there the upward eye and hushed countenance of the preacher who had first raised his mind to knowledge, and supplied its food,—all, all lived, moved, breathed, again before him,—all, as when he was young and guiltless, and at peace; hope and the future one word!

He bowed his head lower and lower; the hardness and hypocrisies of pride, the sense of danger and of horror, that, in agitating, still supported, the mind of this resolute and scheming man, at once forsook him. Madeline felt his tears drop fast and burning on her hand, and the next moment, overcome by the relief it afforded to a heart preyed upon by fiery and dread secrets, which it could not reveal, and a frame exhausted by the long and extreme tension of all its powers, he laid his head upon that faithful bosom, and wept aloud.

CHAPTER VII.

ARAM'S SECRET EXPEDITION.—A SCENE WORTHY THE ACTORS.—ARAM'S ADDRESS AND POWERS OF PERSUASION OR HYPOCRISY.—THEIR RESULT. —A FEARFUL NIGHT.—ARAM'S SOLITARY RIDE HOMEWARD. — WHOM HE MEETS BY THE WAY, AND WHAT HE SEES.

Macbeth. Now o'er the one half world
Nature seems dead.

Donalbain. Our separated fortune
Shall keep us both the safer.

Old Man. Hours dreadful and things strange.
—Macbeth.

"And you must really go to ____ to pay your importunate creditor this very evening. Sunday is a bad day for such matters; but as you pay him by an order, it does not much signify; and I can well understand your impatience to feel discharged of the debt. But it is already late; and if it must be so, you had better start."

"True," said Aram to the above remark of Lester's, as the two stood together without the door; "but do you feel quite secure and guarded against any renewed attack?"

"Why, unless they bring a regiment, yes! I have put a body of our patrol on a service where they can scarce be inefficient, viz. I have stationed them in the house, instead of without; and I shall myself bear them company through the greater part of the night: to-morrow I shall remove all that I possess of value to—(the county town) including those unlucky guineas, which you will not ease me of."

"The order you have kindly given me will amply satisfy my purpose," answered Aram: "And so, there has been no clue to these robberies discovered throughout the day?"

"None: to-morrow, the magistrates are to meet at—, and concert measures: it is absolutely impossible, but that we should detect the villains in a few days, viz. if they remain in these parts. I hope to heaven you will not meet them this evening."

"I shall go well armed," answered Aram, "and the horse you lend me is fleet and strong. And now farewell for the present; I shall probably not return to Grassdale this night, or if I do, it will be at so late an hour, that I shall seek my own domicile without disturbing you."

"No, no; you had better remain in the town, and not return till morning," said the Squire; "and now let us come to the stables."

To obviate all chance of suspicion as to the real place of his destination, Aram deliberately rode to the town he had mentioned, as the one in which his pretended creditor expected him. He put up at an inn, walked forth as if to visit some one in the town, returned, remounted, and by a circuitous route, came into the neighbourhood of the place in which he was to meet Houseman: then turning into a long and dense chain of wood, he fastened his horse to a tree, and looking to the priming of his pistols, which he carried under his riding-cloak, proceeded to the spot on foot.

The night was still, and not wholly dark; for the clouds lay scattered though dense, and suffered many stars to gleam through the heavy air; the moon herself was abroad, but on her decline, and looked forth with a man and saddened aspect, as she travelled from cloud to cloud. It has been the necessary course of our narrative, to pourtray Aram, more often than to give an exact notion of his character we could have altogether wished, in his weaker moments; but whenever he stood in the actual presence of danger, his whole soul was in arms to cope with it worthily: courage, sagacity, even cunning, all awakened to the encounter; and the mind which his life had so austerey cultivated repaid him in the urgent season, with its acute address, and unswerving hardihood. The Devil's Crag, as it was popularly called, was a spot consecrated by many a wild tradition, which would not, perhaps, be wholly out of character with the dark thread of this tale, were we in accordance with certain of our brethren, who seem to think a novel like a bundle of wood, the more faggots it contains the greater its value, allowed by the rapidity of our narrative to relate them.

The same stream which lent so soft an attraction to the valleys of Grassdale, here assumed a different character; broad, black, and rushing, it whirled along a course, overhung by shagged and abrupt banks. On the opposite side to that by which Aram now pursued his path, an almost perpendicular mountain was covered with gigantic pine and fir, that might have reminded a German wanderer of the darkest recesses of the Hartz; and seemed, indeed, no unworthy haunt for the weird huntsman, or the forest fiend. Over this wood the moon now shimmered, with the pale and feeble light we have already described; and only threw into a more sombre shade the motionless and gloomy foliage. Of all the offspring of the forest, the Fir bears, perhaps, the most saddening and desolate aspect. Its long branches, without absolute leaf or blossom; its dead, dark, eternal hue, which the winter seems to wither not, nor the spring to revive, have, I know not what of a mystic and unnatural life. Around all woodland, there is that horror umbrarum which becomes more remarkably solemn and awing amidst the silence and depth of night: but this is yet more especially the characteristic of that sullen evergreen. Perhaps, too, this effect is increased by the sterile and dreary soil, on which, when in groves, it is generally found; and its very hardiness, the very pertinacity with which it draws its strange unfluctuating life, from the sternest wastes and most reluctant strata, enhance, unconsciously, the unwelcome effect it is calculated to create upon the mind. At this place, too, the waters that dashed beneath gave yet additional wildness to the rank verdure of the wood, and contributed, by their rushing darkness partially broken by the stars, and the hoarse roar of their chafed course, a yet more grim and savage sublimity to the scene.

Winding a narrow path, (for the whole country was as familiar as a garden to his footstep) that led through the tall wet herbage, almost along the perilous brink of the stream, Aram was now aware, by the increased and deafening sound of the waters, that the appointed spot was nearly gained; and presently the glimmering and imperfect light of the skies, revealed the dim shape of a gigantic rock, that rose abruptly from the middle of the stream; and which, rude, barren, vast, as it really was, seemed now, by the uncertainty of night, like some monstrous and deformed creature of the waters, suddenly emerging from their vexed and dreary depths. This was the far-famed Crag, which had borrowed from tradition its evil and ominous name. And now, the stream, bending round with a broad and sudden swoop, showed at a little distance, ghostly and indistinct through the darkness, the mighty Waterfall, whose roar had been his guide. Only in one streak a-down the giant cataract, the stars were reflected; and this long train of broken light glittered preternaturally forth through the rugged crags and the sombre verdure, that wrapped either side of the waterfall in utter and rayless gloom.

Nothing could exceed the forlorn and terrific grandeur of the spot; the roar of the waters supplied to the ear what the night forbade to the eye. Incessant and eternal they thundered down into the gulf; and then shooting over that fearful basin, and forming another, but a mimic fall, dashed on, till they were opposed by the sullen and abrupt crag below; and besieging its base with a renewed roar, sent their foamy and angry spray half way up the hoar ascent.

At this stern and dreary spot, well suited for such conferences as Aram and Houseman alone could hold; and which, whatever was the original secret that linked the two men thus strangely, seemed of necessity to partake of a desperate and lawless character, with danger for its main topic, and death itself for its colouring, Aram now paused, and with an eye accustomed to the darkness, looked around for his companion.

He did not wait long: from the profound shadow that girded the space immediately around the fall, Houseman now emerged and joined the Student. The stunning noise of the cataract in the place where they met, forbade any attempt to converse; and they walked on by the course of the stream, to gain a spot less in reach of the deafening shout of the mountain giant as he rushed with his banded waters, upon the valley like a foe.

It was noticeable that as they proceeded, Aram walked on with an unsuspecting and careless demeanour; but Houseman pointing out the way with his hand, not leading it, kept a little behind Aram,

and watched his motions with a vigilant and wary eye. The Student, who had diverged from the path at Houseman's direction, now paused at a place where the matted bushes seemed to forbid any farther progress; and said, for the first time breaking the silence, "We cannot proceed; shall this be the place of our conference?"

"No," said Houseman, "we had better pierce the bushes. I know the way, but will not lead it."

"And wherefore?"

"The mark of your gripe is still on my throat," replied Houseman, significantly; "you know as well as I, that it is not always safe to have a friend lagging behind."

"Let us rest here, then," said Aram, calmly, the darkness veiling any alteration of his countenance, which his comrade's suspicion might have created.

"Yet it were much better," said Houseman, doubtingly, "could we gain the cave below."

"The cave!" said Aram, starting, as if the word had a sound of fear.

"Ay, ay: but not St. Robert's," said Houseman; and the grin of his teeth was visible through the dullness of the shade. "But come, give me your hand, and I will venture to conduct you through the thicket:—that is your left hand," observed Houseman with a sharp and angry suspicion in his tone; "give me the right."

"As you will," said Aram in a subdued, yet meaning voice, that seemed to come from his heart; and thrilled, for an instant, to the bones of him who heard it; "as you will; but for fourteen years I have not given this right hand, in pledge of fellowship, to living man; you alone deserve the courtesy—there!"

Houseman hesitated, before he took the hand now extended to him.

"Pshaw!" said he, as if indignant at himself, "what! scruples at a shadow! Come," (grasping the hand) "that's well—so, so; now we are in the thicket—tread firm—this way—hold," continued Houseman, under his breath, as suspicion anew seemed to cross him; "hold! we can see each other's face not even dimly now: but in this hand, my right is free, I have a knife that has done good service ere this; and if I feel cause to suspect that you meditate to play me false, I bury it in your heart; do you heed me?"

"Fool!" said Aram, scornfully, "I should dread you dead yet more than living."

Houseman made no answer; but continued to grope on through the path in the thicket, which he evidently knew well; though even in daylight, so thick were the trees, and so artfully had their boughs been left to cover the track, no path could have been discovered by one unacquainted with the clue.

They had now walked on for some minutes, and of late their steps had been threading a rugged, and somewhat precipitous descent: all this while, the pulse of the hand Houseman held, beat with as steadfast and calm a throb, as in the most quiet mood of learned meditation; although Aram could not but be conscious that a mere accident, a slip of the foot, an entanglement in the briars, might awaken the irritable fears of his ruffian comrade, and bring the knife to his breast. But this was not that form of death that could shake the nerves of Aram; nor, though arming his whole soul to ward off one danger, was he well sensible of another, that might have seemed equally near and probable, to a less collected and energetic nature. Houseman now halted, again put aside the boughs, proceeded a few steps, and by a certain dampness and oppression in the air, Aram rightly conjectured himself in the cavern Houseman had spoken of.

"We are landed now," said Houseman, "but wait, I will strike a light; I do not love darkness, even with another sort of companion than the one I have now the honour to entertain!"

In a few moments a light was produced, and placed aloft on a crag in the cavern; but the ray it gave was feeble and dull, and left all beyond the immediate spot in which they stood, in a darkness little less Cimmerian than before.

"Fore Gad, it is cold," said Houseman shivering, "but I have taken care, you see, to provide for a friend's comfort;" so saying, he approached a bundle of dry sticks and leaves, piled at one corner of the cave, applied the light to the fuel, and presently, the fire rose crackling, breaking into a thousand sparks, and freeing itself gradually from the clouds of smoke in which it was enveloped. It now mounted into a ruddy and cheering flame, and the warm glow played picturesquely upon the grey sides of the cavern, which was of a rugged shape, and small dimensions, and cast its reddening light over the forms of the two men.

Houseman stood close to the flame, spreading his hands over it, and a sort of grim complacency

stealing along features singularly ill-favoured, and sinister in their expression, as he felt the animal luxury of the warmth.

Across his middle was a broad leathern belt, containing a brace of large horse pistols, and the knife, or rather dagger, with which he had menaced Aram, an instrument sharpened on both sides, and nearly a foot in length. Altogether, what with his muscular breadth of figure, his hard and rugged features, his weapons, and a certain reckless, bravo air which indescribably marked his attitude and bearing, it was not well possible to imagine a fitter habitant for that grim cave, or one from whom men of peace, like Eugene Aram, might have seemed to derive more reasonable cause of alarm.

The Scholar stood at a little distance, waiting till his companion was entirely prepared for the conference, and his pale and lofty features, hushed in their usual deep, but at such a moment, almost preternatural repose. He stood leaning with folded arms against the rude wall; the light reflected upon his dark garments, with the graceful riding-cloak of the day half falling from his shoulder, and revealing also the pistols in his belt, and the sword, which, though commonly worn at that time, by all pretending to superiority above the lower and trading orders, Aram usually waived as a distinction, but now carried as a defence. And nothing could be more striking, than the contrast between the ruffian form of his companion, and the delicate and chiselled beauty of the Student's features, with their air of mournful intelligence and serene command, and the slender, though nervous symmetry of his frame.

"Houseman," said Aram, now advancing, as his comrade turned his face from the flame, towards him; "before we enter on the main subject of our proposed commune—tell me, were you engaged on the attempt last night upon Lester's house?"

"By the Fiend, no!" answered Houseman, nor did I learn it till this morning; it was unpremeditated till within a few hours of the time, by the two fools who alone planned it. The fact is, that myself and the greater part of our little band, were engaged some miles off, in the western part of the county. Two—our general—spies, had been, of their own accord, into your neighbourhood, to reconnoitre. They marked Lester's house during the day, and gathered, (as I can say by experience it was easy to do) from unsuspected inquiry in the village, for they wore a clown's dress, several particulars which induced them to think it contained what might repay the trouble of breaking into it. And walking along the fields, they overheard the good master of the house tell one of his neighbours of a large sum at home; nay, even describe the place where it was kept: that determined them;—they feared, (as the old man indeed observed,) that the sum might be removed the next day; they had noted the house sufficiently to profit by the description given: they resolved, then, of themselves, for it was too late to reckon on our assistance, to break into the room in which the money was kept—though from the aroused vigilance of the frightened hamlet and the force within the house, they resolved to attempt no farther booty. They reckoned on the violence of the storm, and the darkness of the night to prevent their being heard or seen; they were mistaken—the house was alarmed, they were no sooner in the luckless room, than—"Well, I know the rest; was the one wounded dangerously hurt?"

"Oh, he will recover, he will recover; our men are no chickens. But I own I thought it natural that you might suspect me of sharing in the attack; and though, as I have said before, I do not love you, I have no wish to embroil matters so far as an outrage on the house of your father-in-law, might be reasonably expected to do:—at all events, while the gate to an amicable compromise between us is still open."

"I am satisfied on this head," said Aram, "and I can now treat with you in a spirit of less distrustful precaution than before. I tell you, Houseman, that the terms are no longer at your control; you must leave this part of the country, and that forthwith, or you inevitably perish. The whole population is alarmed, and the most vigilant of the London Police have been already sent for. Life is sweet to you, as to us all, and I cannot imagine you so mad, as to incur not the risk, but the certainty, of losing it. You can no longer therefore, hold the threat of your presence over my head. Besides, were you able to do so, I at least have the power, which you seem to have forgotten, of freeing myself from it. Am I chained to yonder valleys? have I not the facility of quitting them at any moment I will? of seeking a hiding-place, which might baffle, not only your vigilance to discover me, but that of the Law? True, my approaching marriage puts some clog upon my wing, but you know that I, of all men, am not likely to be the slave of passion. And what ties are strong enough to arrest the steps of him who flies from a fearful death? Am I using sophistry here, Houseman? Have I not reason on my side?"

"What you say is true enough," said Houseman reluctantly; "I do not gainsay it. But I know you have not sought me, in this spot, and at this hour, for the purpose of denying my claims: the desire of compromise alone can have brought you hither."

"You speak well," said Aram, preserving the admirable coolness of his manner; and continuing the deep and sagacious hypocrisy by which he sought to baffle the dogged covetousness and keen sense of interest with which he had to contend. "It is not easy for either of us to deceive the other. We are men, whose perceptions a life of danger, has sharpened upon all points; I speak to you frankly, for disguise is

unavailing. Though I can fly from your reach—though I can desert my present home and my intended bride, I would fain think I have free and secure choice to preserve that exact path and scene of life which I have chalked out for myself: I would fain be rid of all apprehension from you. There are two ways only by which this security can be won: the first is through your death;—nay, start not, nor put your hand on your pistol; you have not now cause to fear me. Had I chosen that method of escape, I could have effected it long since: When, months ago, you slept under my roof—ay, slept—what should have hindered me from stabbing you during the slumber? Two nights since, when my blood was up, and the fury upon me, what should have prevented me tightening the grasp that you so resent, and laying you breathless at my feet? Nay, now, though you keep your eye fixed on my motions, and your hand upon your weapon, you would be no match for a desperate and resolved man, who might as well perish in conflict with you, as by the protracted accomplishment of your threats. Your ball might fail—(even now I see your hand trembles)—mine, if I so will it, is certain death. No, Houseman, it would be as vain for your eye to scan the dark pool into whose breast you cataract casts its waters, as for your intellect to pierce the depths of my mind and motives. Your murder, though in self-defence, would lay a weight upon my soul, which would sink it for ever: I should see, in your death, new chances of detection spread themselves before me: the terrors of the dead are not to be bought or awed into silence; I should pass from one peril into another; and the law's dread vengeance might fall upon me, through the last peril, even yet more surely than through the first. Be composed, then, on this point! From my hand, unless you urge it madly upon yourself, you are wholly safe. Let us turn to my second method of attaining security. It lies, not in your momentary cessation from persecutions; not in your absence from this spot alone; you must quit the country—you must never return to it— your home must be cast, and your very grave dug in a foreign soil. Are you prepared for this? If not, I can say no more; and I again cast myself passive into the arms of Fate."

"You ask," said Houseman, whose fears were allayed by Aram's address, though, at the same time, his dissolute and desperate nature was subdued and tamed in spite of himself, by the very composure of the loftier mind with which it was brought in contact: "You ask," said he, "no trifling favour of a man—to desert his country for ever; but I am no dreamer, to love one spot better than another. I should, perhaps, prefer a foreign clime, as the safer and the freer from old recollections, if I could live in it as a man who loves the relish of life should do. Show me the advantages I am to gain by exile, and farewell to the pale cliffs of England for ever!"

"Your demand is just," answered Aram; "listen, then. I am willing to coin all my poor wealth, save alone the barest pittance wherewith to sustain life; nay, more, I am prepared also to melt down the whole of my possible expectations from others, into the form of an annuity to yourself. But mark, it will be taken out of my hands, so that you can have no power over me to alter the conditions with which it will be saddled. It will be so vested that it shall commence the moment you touch a foreign clime; and wholly and for ever cease the moment you set foot on any part of English ground; or, mark also, at the moment of my death. I shall then know that no farther hope from me can induce you to risk this income; for, as I should have spent my all in attaining it, you cannot even meditate the design of extorting more. I shall know that you will not menace my life; for my death would be the destruction of your fortunes. We shall live thus separate and secure from each other; you will have only cause to hope for my safety; and I shall have no reason to shudder at yours. Through one channel alone could I then fear; namely, that in dying, you should enjoy the fruitless vengeance of criminating me. But this chance I must patiently endure: you, if older, are more robust and hardy than myself—your life will probably be longer than mine; and, even were it otherwise, why should we destroy one another? At my death-bed I will solemnly swear to respect your secret; why not on your part, I say not swear, but resolve, to respect mine? We cannot love one another; but why hate with a gratuitous and demon vengeance? No, Houseman, however circumstances may have darkened or steeled your heart, it is touched with humanity yet—you will have owed to me the bread of a secure and easy existence—you will feel that I have stripped myself, even to penury, to purchase the comforts I cheerfully resign to you—you will remember that, instead of the sacrifices enjoined by this alternative, I might have sought only to counteract your threats, by attempting a life that you strove to make a snare and torture to my own. You will remember this; and you will not grudge me the austere and gloomy solitude in which I seek to forget, or the one solace with which I, perhaps vainly, endeavour to cheer my passage to a quiet grave. No, Houseman, no; dislike, hate, menace me as you will, I still feel I shall have no cause to dread the mere wantonness of your revenge."

These words, aided by a tone of voice, and an expression of countenance that gave them perhaps their chief effect, took even the hardened nature of Houseman by surprise; he was affected by an emotion which he could not have believed it possible the man who till then had galled him by the humbling sense of inferiority, could have created. He extended his hand to Aram.

"By—," he exclaimed, with an oath which we spare the reader, "you are right! you have made me as helpless in your hands, as an infant. I accept your offer—if I were to refuse it, I should be driven to the

same courses I now pursue. But look you; I know not what may be the amount of the annuity you can raise. I shall not, however, require more than will satisfy wants, which, if not so scanty as your own, are not at least very extravagant or very refined. As for the rest, if there be any surplus, in God's name keep it for yourself, and rest assured that, so far as I am concerned, you shall be molested no more."

"No, Houseman," said Aram, with a half smile, "you shall have all I first mentioned; that is, all beyond what nature craves, honourably and fully. Man's best resolutions are weak: if you knew I possessed aught to spare, a fancied want, a momentary extravagance might tempt you to demand it. Let us put ourselves beyond the possible reach of temptation. But do not flatter yourself by the hope that the income will be magnificent. My own annuity is but trifling, and the half of the dowry I expect from my future father-in-law, is all that I can at present obtain. The whole of that dowry is insignificant as a sum. But if this does not suffice for you, I must beg or borrow elsewhere."

"This, after all, is a pleasanter way of settling business," said Houseman, "than by threats and anger. And now I will tell you exactly the sum on which, if I could receive it yearly, I could live without looking beyond the pale of the Law for more—on which I could cheerfully renounce England, and commence 'the honest man.' But then, hark you, I must have half settled on my little daughter."

"What! have you a child?" said Aram eagerly, and well pleased to find an additional security for his own safety.

"Ay, a little girl, my only one, in her eighth year; she lives with her grandmother, for she is motherless, and that girl must not be left quite penniless should I be summoned hence before my time. Some twelve years hence—as poor Jane promises to be pretty—she may be married off my hands, but her childhood must not be left to the chances of beggary or shame."

"Doubtless not, doubtless not. Who shall say now that we ever outlive feeling?" said Aram, "Half the annuity shall be settled upon her, should she survive you; but on the same conditions, ceasing when I die, or the instant of your return to England. And now, name the sum that you deem sufficing."

"Why," said Houseman, counting on his fingers, and muttering "twenty—fifty—wine and the creature cheap abroad—humph! a hundred for living, and half as much for pleasure. Come, Aram, one hundred and fifty guineas per annum, English money, will do for a foreign life—you see I am easily satisfied."

"Be it so," said Aram, "I will engage by one means or another to procure it. For this purpose I shall set out for London to-morrow; I will not lose a moment in seeing the necessary settlement made as we have specified. But meanwhile, you must engage to leave this neighbourhood, and if possible, cause your comrades to do the same, although you will not hesitate, for the sake of your own safety, immediately to separate from them."

"Now that we are on good terms," replied Houseman, "I will not scruple to oblige you in these particulars. My comrades intend to quit the country before to-morrow; nay, half are already gone; by daybreak I myself will be some miles hence, and separated from each of them. Let us meet in London after the business is completed, and there conclude our last interview on earth."

"What will be your address?"

"In Lambeth there is a narrow alley that leads to the water-side, called Peveril Lane. The last house to the right, towards the river, is my usual lodging; a safe resting-place at all times, and for all men."

"There then will I seek you. And now, Houseman, fare-you-well! As you remember your word to me, may life flow smooth for your child."

"Eugene Aram," said Houseman, "there is about you something against which the fiercer devil within me would rise in vain. I have read that the tiger can be awed by the human eye, and you compell me into submission by a spell equally unaccountable. You are a singular man, and it seems to me a riddle, how we could ever have been thus connected; or how—but we will not rip up the past, it is an ugly sight, and the fire is just out. Those stories do not do for the dark. But to return;—were it only for the sake of my child, you might depend upon me now; better too an arrangement of this sort, than if I had a larger sum in hand which I might be tempted to fling away, and in looking for more, run my neck into a halter, and leave poor Jane upon charity. But come, it is almost dark again, and no doubt you wish to be stirring: stay, I will lead you back, and put you on the right track, lest you stumble on my friends."

"Is this cavern one of their haunts?" said Aram.

"Sometimes: but they sleep the other side of the Devil's Crag to-night. Nothing like a change of quarters for longevity—eh?"

"And they easily spare you."

"Yes, if it be only on rare occasions, and on the plea of family business. Now then, your hand, as before. Jesu! how it rains—lightning too—I could look with less fear on a naked sword, than those red, forked, blinding flashes—Hark! thunder."

The night had now, indeed, suddenly changed its aspect; the rain descended in torrents, even more impetuously than on the former night, while the thunder burst over their very heads, as they wound upward through the brake. With every instant, the lightning broke from the riven chasm of the blackness that seemed suspended as in a solid substance above, brightened the whole heaven into one livid and terrific flame, and showed to the two men the faces of each other, rendered deathlike and ghastly by the glare. Houseman was evidently affected by the fear that sometimes seizes even the sturdiest criminals, when exposed to those more fearful phenomena of the Heavens, which seem to humble into nothing the power and the wrath of man. His teeth chattered, and he muttered broken words about the peril of wandering near trees when the lightning was of that forked character, accelerating his pace at every sentence, and sometimes interrupting himself with an ejaculation, half oath, half prayer, or a congratulation that the rain at least diminished the danger. They soon cleared the thicket, and a few minutes brought them once more to the banks of the stream, and the increased roar of the cataract. No earthly scene perhaps could surpass the appalling sublimity of that which they beheld;—every instant the lightning, which became more and more frequent, converting the black waters into billows of living fire, or wreathing itself in lurid spires around the huge crag that now rose in sight; and again, as the thunder rolled onward, darting its vain fury upon the rushing cataract, and the tortured breast of the gulf that raved below low. And the sounds that filled the air were even more fraught with terror and menace than the scene;—the waving, the groans, the crash of the pines on the hill, the impetuous force of the rain upon the whirling river, and the everlasting roar of the cataract, answered anon by the yet more awful voice that burst above it from the clouds.

They halted while yet sufficiently distant from the cataract to be heard by each other. "My path," said Aram, as the lightning now paused upon the scene, and seemed literally to wrap in a lurid shroud the dark figure of the Student, as he stood, with his hand calmly raised, and his cheek pale, but dauntless and composed; "My path now lies yonder: in a week we shall meet again."

"By the fiend," said Houseman, shuddering, "I would not, for a full hundred, ride alone through the moor you will pass. There stands a gibbet by the road, on which a parricide was hanged in chains. Pray Heaven this night be no omen of the success of our present compact!"

"A steady heart, Houseman," answered Aram, striking into the separate path, "is its own omen."

The Student soon gained the spot in which he had left his horse; the animal had not attempted to break the bridle, but stood trembling from limb to limb, and testified by a quick short neigh the satisfaction with which it hailed the approach of its master, and found itself no longer alone.

Aram remounted, and hastened once more into the main road. He scarcely felt the rain, though the fierce wind drove it right against his path; he scarcely marked the lightning, though at times it seemed to dart its arrows on his very form; his heart was absorbed in the success of his schemes.

"Let the storm without howl on," thought he, "that within hath a respite at last. Amidst the winds and rains I can breathe more freely than I have done on the smoothest summer day. By the charm of a deeper mind and a subtler tongue, I have then conquered this desperate foe; I have silenced this inveterate spy: and, Heaven be praised, he too has human ties; and by those ties I hold him! Now, then, I hasten to London—I arrange this annuity—see that the law tightens every cord of the compact; and when all is done, and this dangerous man fairly departed on his exile, I return to Madeline, and devote to her a life no longer the vassal of accident and the hour: but I have been taught caution. Secure as my own prudence may have made me from farther apprehension of Houseman, I will yet place myself wholly beyond his power: I will still consummate my former purpose, adopt a new name, and seek a new retreat; Madeline may not know the real cause; but this brain is not barren of excuse. Ah!" as drawing his cloak closer round him, he felt the purse hid within his breast which contained the order he had obtained from Lester; "Ah! this will now add its quota to purchase, not a momentary relief, but the stipend of perpetual silence. I have passed through the ordeal easier than I had hoped for. Had the devil at his heart been more difficult to lay, so necessary is his absence, that I must have purchased it at any cost. Courage, Eugene Aram! thy mind, for which thou hast lived, and for which thou hast hazarded thy soul—if soul and mind be distinct from each other—thy mind can support thee yet through every peril: not till thou art stricken into idiotcy, shalt thou behold thyself defenceless. How cheerfully," muttered he, after a momentary pause, "how cheerfully, for safety, and to breathe with a quiet heart, the air of Madeline's presence, shall I rid myself of all save enough to defy want. And want can never now come to me, as of old. He who knows the sources of every science from which wealth is wrought holds even wealth at his will."

Breaking at every interval into these soliloquies, Aram continued to breast the storm until he had won half his journey, and had come upon a long and bleak moor, which was the entrance to that beautiful line of country in which the valleys around Grassdale are embosomed: faster and faster came the rain; and though the thunder-clouds were now behind, they yet followed loweringly, in their black array, the path of the lonely horseman.

But now he heard the sound of hoofs making towards him; he drew his horse on one side of the road, and at that instant a broad flash of lightning illumining the space around, he beheld four horsemen speeding along at a rapid gallop; they were armed, and conversing loudly—their oaths were heard jarringly and distinctly amidst all the more solemn and terrific sounds of the night. They came on, sweeping by the Student, whose hand was on his pistol, for he recognised in one of the riders the man who had escaped unwounded from Lester's house. He and his comrades were evidently, then, Houseman's desperate associates; and they too, though they were borne too rapidly by Aram to be able to rein in their horses on the spot, had seen the solitary traveller, and already wheeled round, and called upon him to halt!

The lightning was again gone, and the darkness snatched the robbers and their intended victim from the sight of each other. But Aram had not lost a moment; fast fled his horse across the moor, and when, with the next flash, he looked back, he saw the ruffians, unwilling even for booty to encounter the horrors of the night, had followed him but a few paces, and again turned round; still he dashed on, and had now nearly passed the moor; the thunder rolled fainter and fainter from behind, and the lightning only broke forth at prolonged intervals, when suddenly, after a pause of unusual duration, it brought the whole scene into a light, if less intolerable, even more livid than before. The horse, that had hitherto sped on without start or stumble, now recoiled in abrupt affright; and the horseman, looking up at the cause, beheld the Gibbet of which Houseman had spoken immediately fronting his path, with its ghastly tenant waving to and fro, as the winds rattled through the parched and arid bones; and the inexpressible grin of the skull fixed, as in mockery, upon his countenance.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EUGENE ARAM — VOLUME 03 ***

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