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THE ROBBER'S TOWER
A TRUE ADVENTURE

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After a long period of debility, the consequence of a dangerous wound received in the great "Battle of Nations," fought near Leipzig, I found myself so far recruited in the autumn of 1815, as to undertake a long-planned excursion to the residence of a widowed aunt, who lived, with two daughters, on the family estate of her deceased husband, near the sources of the Elbe, in Bohemia. I proceeded by slow journeys, and at noon, on the fifth day after my departure from Berlin, reached a small post town, a few miles from my destination. Here I heard, with inexpressible sorrow, that my aunt had very recently lost her eldest daughter, a very lovely girl of eighteen, by fever. I had not seen my cousin since her childhood, but my reminiscences of a delightful visit to my hospitable aunt during the happy days of boyhood were acutely roused by this afflicting intelligence; and to save my bereaved relatives from the agonizing necessity of announcing their loss, I folded some crape round the sleeve of my uniform, and, with no enviable feelings, journeyed onward to the house of mourning. About a mile from the little post-town my carriage turned a sharp angle on the road, and suddenly one of the finest prospects in this romantic district burst upon me. Between the giant stems of a dozen venerable oaks I beheld a wide and fertile vale, through which the infant Elbe was gliding like a silver serpent. The middle ground was varied by green and swelling hills, crowned with copses of oak and beech, while in the distance towered the vast and awful forms of the venerable Giant mountains. On the slope of the highest intermediate hill stood the modern and elegant mansion of my aunt, surrounded by a well-wooded park, above which, on the summit of a dark and frowning rock, appeared the decayed but still imposing castle of my late uncle's ancestors, which retained its ancient and characteristic name of the "Robber's Tower." A large portion of this once extensive pile was now a shapeless mass of stones, over which the giant

ivy mantled in green and prodigal luxuriance; but the keep, a round tower of vast dimensions, still defied the tooth of time, and threw up its lofty head with Titan grandeur.

During my slow progress up the hilly roads, I recognised many spots endeared to me by vivid recollections of former enjoyment, but now they suggested no pleasurable associations; my fancy was haunted by the image of the disconsolate mother, and I could find no relief from depressing anticipations but in the hope that my unexpected arrival would afford at least a temporary relief to the mourners. The afternoon was considerably advanced when I arrived at the house; and my poor aunt, to whom the crape on my arm revealed my knowledge of her recent loss, clasped me in a maternal embrace, and, leaning her head upon my shoulder, sobbed aloud. Her once full and finely formed person was wasted with sorrow and want of sleep, and her expressive features were furrowed with the lines of deep and heart-rending misery. She was the living image of woe and desolation. "Dearest nephew!" she said at length, in a low and broken voice, "why did you not arrive three weeks sooner? You would then have found me rich and happy in the possession of two daughters; but it has pleased Heaven for wise purposes to sear me to the quick, and to deprive me of a moiety of all I valued in this world: for what has a widowed mother on this earth but her children!" At this moment entered Julia, her surviving daughter, a beautiful girl of seventeen; but grief had preyed upon her bloom, and her cheek was fair and spotless as her snowy neck, which rose in delicate proportion from the crape handkerchief which shaded her youthful bosom. She had heard of my arrival, and, while the ready tears started into her large and expressive blue eyes, she permitted me to salute her cheek, but her emotion forbade all audible welcome. Feeling how premature would be all attempts at consolation, I gradually led my aunt and cousin to discourse of the departed Cecilia, and had ere

long the pleasure to see them more tranquil, and able to speak of her with comparative firmness and resignation. From their conversation I gathered that she was perfectly conscious of her approaching death, but was nevertheless apprehensive of premature interment, and earnestly besought her mother to have the vault under the large round tower converted into sepulchre, and to place there her unscrewed coffin in an open sarcophagus. The tender mother eagerly promised to comply with the last wish of her darling child, and the pall which covered the coffin was daily moistened with the tears of the desolate survivors.

With a view to cheer the spirits of my aunt and cousin, whose health had visibly suffered from long confinement, I proposed a walk round the park. Avoiding the lower road which led to the sepulchre, I conducted my companions up a steep and well-remembered path, which brought us to a higher level of the castle ruins. Here an agreeable surprise awaited me. When I had played a boy about this ancient pile, all approach to the baron's hall and the apartments in the tower was impracticable, owing to the entire destruction of the lower staircases; but with a view to better security of person and property in case the not distant tide of war should roll through this secluded district, the baroness had ordered the construction of a staircase terminating in a long corridor, which connected the apartments in the great tower with a fine old baronial hall in tolerable preservation, and accessible only by a small door from the corridor, in consequence of the two grand entrances having been blocked up by large masses of ruin. In this noble apartment every trace of decay had now disappeared. A new flooring of polished oak, new furniture of massive and appropriate design, and new casements of stained glass which admitted a soft and chequered light through the tall and narrow windows, proved the tasteful application of abundant means. In each corner of

the hall stood a vast iron stove of antiquated form, with the family arms curiously emblazoned; and on the walls hung some large oil paintings, bearing the stains and wrinkles of two or three centuries; but, having been recently cleaned and varnished, they were still, at some distance from the eye, wonderfully effective. The most striking of these were a wolf hunt, drawn with a display of bone and muscle not unworthy of Rubens; two battle-pieces from the days of chivalry; and the catastrophe of a mortal combat between two mailed knights. In the last, especially, the artist had produced an effect as powerful as it was appropriate and true. Observing how much I was struck by this old picture, my aunt told me that a clue to the subject had been found in an old family chronicle, written by the successive castle-chaplains. The prostrate knight was the valiant Bruno of Rothfels, who was killed in single combat about three hundred years since by Gotthard, then lord of the "Robber's Tower." The dying man was unhelmed, and his life-blood, issuing from a wide gash across his throat, had flowed in torrents over his breastplate. The convulsed features and glazed eye-balls of the wounded man told his approaching death, while his clenched right-hand was raised towards heaven, as if imprecating his adverse fortune, and his left was grasping the blood-stained grass. I gazed upon this singular picture until I fancied that I saw the sinewy limbs of the wounded knight quivering with convulsive effort, and almost thought I heard the death-rattle in his throat. When I described to my companions the strange impression which this scene of blood had produced upon my imagination, they acknowledged a similar feeling, and begged me to quit a place which they rarely entered, from an invincible reluctance to encounter this painfully effective picture. Returning to the corridor, I observed at its extremity a low arched iron door, secured with a bar of iron and large padlock. Inquiring to what part of the castle it conducted, my aunt informed me

that it was the entrance of an old armoury, which occupied the upper floor of a low square tower containing the castle dungeons; and, being massive and fire-proof, she had availed herself of its security to place there some plate and other valuables, until the Austrian deserters and other marauders, who occasionally committed outrages upon private property, had been taken or dispersed by the police. Above the iron door was suspended another old picture which immediately absorbed my attention. A young and lovely woman, in the garb of a nun, was kneeling in prayer before a shrined image of the Virgin. A beautiful infant boy lay dead and bleeding at her feet – wild despair and delirious agony spoke in every feature of the kneeling mother, and contrasted strangely with the lifeless, stony look of the image above. “Good Heaven!” I exclaimed, “what means this horrid picture?”

“It is a portait of the hapless Leah,” replied my aunt, “the daughter of the dying knight in the baron’s hall. Her young affections were secretly given to Gotthard, his opponent, who had in some forest-feud incurred her father’s hatred. Forced by her despotic parent to take the veil, she broke her vows, and fled with her lover to this castle, where she became the mother of a lovely boy; but when Gotthard had long and vainly sought to obtain for her dispensation from her vows, her wounded conscience preyed upon her reason, and, in a moment of delirium, she destroyed her infant and swallowed poison. The sad tale of her crimes and her remorse is legibly told in that coarse but powerful picture of some German master. Soon after this tragic event, the hostile knights met in the forest, and the fatal combat ensued which you have seen depicted in the hall. This dismal tale is still a popular legend in our valleys; the peasants will tell you that the unfortunate Leah rests not in her grave, and that the shades of her slain father and unhappy husband wander nightly in this castle. It has long been rumoured, too, that the clattering of swords

and armour, the chanting of nuns, and the sound of fearful groans and lamentations, have been occasionally heard here at midnight by the shepherds, when seeking stray sheep amidst the ruins.”

During this detail we had retraced our steps, and at the other end of the corridor we entered the large round tower or keep, from which the whole castle derived its romantic appellation. The spacious circle had been divided into two roomy apartments, of which the outer one had been elegantly fitted up as a parlour of Gothic design. On the wall hung the portraits of my late uncle, and of the lovely girl whose mortal remains reposed in the vault beneath. The picture of my cousin had been painted a few month before her death, and represented a blondine, blooming with health, innocence, and beauty. Her fine auburn hair clustered in glossy ringlets round her angelic features, and a white rose adorned her bosom. The resemblance to her sister was striking, and would have been perfect, had not the darker eyes of Julia given to her lovely countenance a character of greater intelligence and vivacity. “That is my sainted cousin,” I said, in a voice subdued by emotion into a whisper.

“Such she was, but two month back;” replied the agonized mother, “and now --”

Her sobs impeded farther utterance; and to change the current of her thoughts, I requested her to shew me the inner apartment. Here I found an elegant bedroom of Gothic design, and commanding from three windows in the half-circle described by the wall, successive and boundless views of hill and vale, of the distant high-ground in Silesia, and the lofty summits of the Giant mountains, some of which were capped with snow, and reflected in glowing and rosy tints a splendid sunset.

Fascinated with the picturesque situation of these apartments, and desirous to behold from their windows the glories

of a summer morning in this mountain region, I begged permission to occupy this delightful bedroom during my stay. My aunt appeared to find gratification in the idea, that I should sleep near the tomb of her Cecilia, and willingly consented; promising that she and Julia would join me to an early breakfast in the tower the next morning; and, on our return to the house, ordered my old play-fellow Caspar, the gamekeeper, to carry my luggage after supper to the castle. Fatigued with several days of travel in a still infirm state of health, I left my aunt and cousin before eleven, and walked with old Caspar to the ruins. The day had been intensely hot; some menacing clouds in the southern horizon indicated an approaching storm, and, as we ascended the staircase leading to the corridor, the deep, low muttering of distant thunder was audible from the mountains.

“And do you really mean to sleep every night in the ‘Robber’s Tower,’ Major?” said the old man, as he placed my portmanteau, sabre, and pistols, on a chair in the Gothic parlour.

“Certainly, my good Caspar! and why not?” I replied.

“I would only say,” answered he, “that you must have more courage than I have; and yet a Bohemian gamekeeper is no coward. Many a dark night have I passed alone in the mountain woods, in spite of old Rübzahl and his imps, and the Wild Huntsman to boot; but in this tower I would not sleep alone, for all my lady’s broad lands.”

“What Caspar!” I exclaimed, “an old woodsman, like you, afraid to sleep where my aunt and cousins slept every night last summer?”

“Ay, ay, Major!” muttered the old man, “the castle was quiet enough then; but since the death of my Lady Cecilia, strange sights and sounds have been heard here; and you may take my word for it, that the Lady Leah, who murdered her child, is not yet quiet in her grave.”

The old man then lighted my tapers with his lantern,

commended me cordially to the protection of Heaven, and departed, leaving me considerably less pleased with my quarters than when I had seen them by the rich and cheering light of sunset. The consciousness of utter solitude, at such an hour, and in such a place, began to infect me with the superstitious fears of old Caspar, and the solemn stillness of the lofty and dimly lighted Gothic room, interrupted only by an occasional and distant roll of thunder, made me feel something very like repentance, that I had exchanged the modern mansion of my aunt for this old robber's nest on a mountain crag. During the struggle which released Germany from the iron grasp of Napoleon, I had stared death in the face too often to fear any danger from human agency, and a liberal education in Prussia had raised me above any apprehension of supernatural sounds and appearances; but as I sat alone near midnight, in this old tower, and recollected my immediate vicinity to the sepulchre, and the baron's hall, the grim picture of the dying Bruno, and the still more appalling portrait of the pallid nun and her bleeding infant, I felt the necessity of banishing from my thoughts a crowd of images which would inevitably murder sleep; and, exchanging my tight uniform for a light dressing-gown, I bolted the door, snuffed my candles, and looked around for a book, with which to beguile an hour, and induce a more tranquil train of thought. In a small recess between the windows I discovered a few books, one of which I eagerly opened, and found a collection of hymns, treating upon death and eternity. I closed it, and opened another entitled, "An Essay on Death." A third was, "The Solace of Old Age and Infirmary." This was a most unpalatable collection for a reader in quest of worldly associations; but at length I discovered a small volume, curiously bound in black velvet, and containing more mundane matter. It was an historical detail of the Order of Knights Templars, printed in ancient black letter; and, according to the title-page, from a rare and

curious manuscript of the thirteenth century. Having been always prone to the study of history, this little book would have been a prize under any circumstances; but as the solace of a sleepless night, in this lonely tower, it was above all price, and I sat down with eager impatience, to peruse it. Opening it accidentally at the chapter describing the ceremonies of the order, I recognised with surprise and delight the name of a valiant ancestor of my own, whose deeds shine brightly in the history of Germany's middle ages. I knew not, however, that he had in middle life become a knight of this order, until I here discovered a detailed account of an imposing funeral service, performed over his remains at Prague in the year 1190. To be reminded of this great man's death, and to read of his funeral at such an hour, and in a place fraught with sepulchral associations, were somewhat singular coincidences and with strong and growing excitement, I read as follows.

“The temple walls were covered with black cloth, and on a trestle in the centre of the church was placed the coffin, containing the mortal remains of the departed knight. Nine skeletons stood near the coffin, each bearing a lamp, which threw a dim religious light over the lower part of the spacious edifice, leaving the higher portion in deep shadow. Upon the upper end of the coffin lid, lay a chaplet of white roses, below which were the insignia of the order, and the sword of the deceased Templar; and upon a table near the coffin was a skull surrounded by seven large candle-sticks, moulded like sphinxes, but bearing no lights. The Grand Master, followed by seven Knights Preceptors, seven Knights Companions, and seven Squires or Novices, all bearing tapers, and attired in black, with scarfs of crape, now entered the temple, one by one, and silently as shadows. They stood opposite to the skeletons and the coffin, and were addressed by the Grand Master, who, in few words, informed them that the purpose

of their assemblage was to hold a judgment on the Knight, whose mortal remains were before them.

“‘It is midnight;’ he continued, ‘and the grave is ready. Our brother knight has finished his earthly probation. Let us look back upon his life, and see how he has stood the test. If any of you can accuse the deceased of wrong, let him stand forth and declare it.’

“A deep unbroken silence prevailed throughout the assemblage, and, after a long pause, the senior Knight Preceptor advanced to the head of the coffin, begged permission to speak, and thus began:

“‘Brother Grand Master!

“‘Brother Preceptors, Companions, and Novices!

“‘It belongs not unto man, but unto God, to judge the dead. He alone can reward and punish – he alone can look into our souls, and know our most secret doings. Therefore, brother Grand Master! wert thou to call upon us even thrice to accuse our departed brother, thou wouldst call in vain, for we are all brethren in Christ our Lord.’

“‘It is my bounden duty,’ resumed the Grand Master; ‘again to ask you. Brother Templars! ye are free members of the order: speak, if ye have aught to speak, against the departed.’ Again he paused, but the death-like stillness remained unbroken. Then did the Grand Master exclaim, with a loud voice; ‘As there is no accuser, there can be no judgment. Does no man accuse the dead?’

“‘And all the Templars knelt down and answered, ‘God is our judge.’ The Grand Master now raised an iron hammer, struck with it three heavy blows upon an iron cross, placed at the head of the coffin, and called aloud, ‘Open the gates of Death!’”

I had read thus far, when I heard three knocks, which sounded seemingly from the corridor. I started, closed the

book involuntarily, and listened long and anxiously, but all was silent. "It was delusion," whispered common sense; "my heated imagination carried me amidst the Templars, and the blows of the Grand Master's hammer struck not my outward, but my fancy's ear." Determining to place this probable construction on the mysterious sounds, I again opened the little book, which had laid a strong hold of my curiosity, and pursued as follows:

"And now the Novices rolled up the tapestry, which covered the floor on the left side of the trestle, and behold! there was an open grave close to the coffin. Then did the three junior Novices deck the brink of the grave with garlands of red and white roses; and, while they were thus employed, the Grand Master said, 'Brother Preceptors! give answer to my questions. When will God judge the dead?'

First Preceptor. On the day of Judgment.

Grand Master. Who will be man's accuser?

Second Preceptor. His conscience.

Grand Master. Who his defender?

Third Preceptor. No one.

Grand Master. Who will have mercy on him?

Fourth Preceptor. No one.

Grand Master. No one?

Fifth Preceptor. God is our judge!

Grand Master. Is not God almighty?

Sixth Preceptor. Almighty and all-just.

Grand Master. Hear, then, brother Templars! God is almighty and all-just; therefore, obey his laws.

Seventh Preceptor. The grave is ready. Commit our brother to his mother-earth.

"And again the Grand Master, struck the iron cross thrice with his hammer, and the brotherhood knelt around the grave, and kissed the earth in silence.' ---

At this moment I again heard three knocks more distinctly than before, succeeded, too, by a low sound of mingled muttering and lamentation. I distinguished both sounds with a clearness which no excitement of my imagination could supply, and I observed that the three knocks resembled the ringing sound of iron upon iron. I gazed in alarm at the door which opened on the long corridor, from whence the noise had seemed to proceed; and with growing horror, I now heard a clearly audible and long continued sobbing, like the last struggling breath of a dying man. At this instant the thunder again reverberated in long echoes from the mountains – the book dropped from my trembling hand – I felt a sudden shivering of the extremities, and all the blood rushed to my heart, which beat with audible violence. I now fancied that I heard the sound of distant footsteps, and seizing the candle, I approached the door and listened, but no sound was distinguishable. “Nonsense!” I exclaimed, assuming an indifference I did not feel; “’tis nothing but the rising storm-gust, howling in the long passages and wide chimneys of the castle.” I resumed my book and chair, determined to finish the curious recital, and retire to bed. The narrative proceeded thus:

“Then did the Novices remove the coffin-lid, and expose to view the body of the deceased Templar in a white shroud. The hands and feet were tied with cords – the temples were adorned with a chaplet of laurel and vine leaves – on the breast lay a golden cross, sparkling with jewels – and on the heart a bunch of fresh-culled violets.

“‘Brother Novices!’ said the Grand Master, ‘give heed to my commands, and answer to my questions. What means the chaplet of laurel and vine leaves?’

“*First Novice.* It means that man was born to honour and enjoyment.

“Grand Master. Better things await him in a better world. The laurel and the vine decay and perish. Strip the dead of such frail distinctions.

“And the Novices took the chaplet from the temples of the deceased.

“Grand Master. What means the sparkling cross?

“Second Novice. It means that man striveth after wealth and splendour.

“Grand Master. How does man come into the world?

“Third Novice. Naked and poor.

“Grand Master. Then must he return to his mother-earth, naked and poor as he was born. Strip the dead of such vain adornment.

“And the Novices took the cross from the breast of the deceased.

“Grand Master. Why are his hands and feet bound with cords?

“Fourth Novice. To shew that in this life man is the slave of sin.

“Grand Master. Death has overcome the dominion of sin.

“Release the freedman from his earthly bondage.

“And the Novices did as they were commanded.

“Grand Master. What means the bunch of violets on his heart?

“Fifth Novice. It is the emblem of humility, and the offering of brotherly love to the departed, who deserved the tribute; because, during life, he was humble and pure in heart. Blessed are such, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

“Grand Master. Know ye of a truth that our brother in the coffin is dead, and ripe for the long sleep of the grave?

“Sixth Novice. (*Taking the hand of the dead.*) The flesh cleaveth not unto the bones, nor the skin unto the flesh – He is dead.

“Grand Master. How looks his grave?

“*Seventh Novice. (Looking down into the grave.)* Deep – dark – narrow – cold.

“*Grand Master.* Knights Companions of the Order! do the last kind office to the departed, and give him a brother’s blessing, for he was one of you.

“And the seven Knights Companions slowly approached the coffin, and placed their right hands upon the head, eyes, face, mouth, heart, hand, and feet of the departed brother, each accompanying this solemn rite with a fervent blessing; after which the Novices replaced the lid upon the coffin, and nailed it with seven nails. Then sang the Preceptors to a low accompaniment from the choir above, the awful words: –

“*Ne recorderis, Domine! peccata illius, dum veneris judicare sæculum per ignem.*’

“After which, all the assembled Preceptors, Companions, and Novices, chanted the *De profundis*, while each in succession sprinkled holy water on the coffin, saying, ‘My brother! thou art dead to this world, and livest now in the Lord.’

“Then did the invisible choristers in the gallery begin to chant the *Libera*; and their voices sounded, afar off, like the answerings of departed spirits. Every taper, save that of the Grand Master, was now extinguished, and all the Knights, Preceptors, and Companions, prostrating themselves in the figure of a cross, prayed silently. Meanwhile the Novices gently and slowly lowered the coffin into the grave, and the Grand Master, again raising the iron hammer, struck the iron cross three times and said, with deep and solemn unction –

“I bless thee in the name of the tri-une God – in the name of the ancient and venerable order of Knights Templars – in the name of the Preceptors, Companions, and Novices here assembled” ---

Here I was again interrupted by the sound of three knocks near my door, ringing like the blows of iron upon iron, and

so loudly audible, that I could no longer doubt the evidence of my senses, nor reason down my apprehensions that either earthly mischief, or, possibly, unearthly agency, was busy near me. The knocks were again succeeded by low sounds of lamentation and groans, followed, as before, by a quick and sobbing respiration, which I could compare with nothing but the death-rattle. I struggled hard with a growing suspicion that some supernatural intelligence was at work here, and yet my reason equally rejected the possible contingencies of robbers, or midnight frolics. Thieves would not thus announce their presence, and it was utterly improbable that my afflicted relatives, or their attached and sympathising domestics, would amuse themselves by trying midnight experiments upon my courage. I had clearly distinguished that these mysterious sounds proceeded not from the sepulchre beneath me, but from the hall or corridor. "Can it be," whispered my excited imagination, "the unquiet spirit of the murdered Bruno, or of his suicide daughter, the unhappy Leah? Or, can it be the shade of my ancestor, the long-departed Templar? Or, it suddenly occurred to me, is it not rather some benighted traveller, attracted by the light in my window, knocking at the gate for admittance? It is, it must be some helpless wayfarer," I exclaimed, clinging to this preferable solution of the sounds which had alarmed me. Transferring one of my candles to a lantern which I found in the book-closet, I seized my sabre, and was hastening to the door, when suddenly the sound of solemn music floated through the apartment. The tones were harp-like, and gradually rose with a sublime swell, which, at such an hour and place, seemed to me more than earthly. The soaring swell was succeeded by a gradual and dying cadence, which melted away in the distant night-breeze; I paused and listened in still astonishment – but all was silent. I endeavoured to persuade myself that it was another delusion of my fevered brain, and that the ill-cured sabre-wound

on my head had contributed to the successive hallucinations of the night; but the melody had been so distinct and peculiar that I could repeat every note. At this moment I heard the clock of the neighbouring convent of St. Clara sound the midnight hour from the vale below; it was accompanied by a long-drawn wailing gust of wind through the corridor, and the deep-toned bell struck on my saddened ear like the knell of some one I had loved and lost. Soon the music rose again as if from the vault beneath, and I distinctly heard the sound of harmonious voices, singing with impressive and perfect modulation, the following words from the fine opening of Mozart's Requiem: –

Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine!

Et lux perpetua luceat eis.

A rich and powerful soprano then sang in thrilling tones the solo –

Te decet hymnus Deus in Sion,

Et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.

After which, all the voices and the harp, in fine accord, and in a louder strain, resumed –

Exaudi orationem meam,

Ad te omnis caro veniet.

I heard every word as distinctly as if the singers had been at my elbow; and, convinced that they were no spirits, but human choristers chanting in the sepulchre beneath me, I opened the window, and saw a blaze of light streaming through the bronze latticed gate of the vault, over a small flower-garden, which embellished the approach to Cecilia's tomb. After a brief pause, the solemn strains proceeded, when, unable to repress my curiosity, I called aloud, "Who is there?" But no answer was returned, save from the echoing rocks, which responded – "Who is there? – there?" with startling accuracy. Determined to unravel this mystery, I sallied forth with sword and lantern into the corridor, descended the

stair-case, and cautiously approached the bronze gate, concealing the lantern under my ample dressing-gown. Screened by a luxuriant hedge of evergreens, I reached a point commanding a view of the interior, and beheld by the light of four tapers, held by as many figures muffled from head to foot in dark drapery, a spacious and lofty sepulchre, in the centre of which, on a marble basement, stood an open sarcophagus, containing a richly-decorated coffin, from which the black-silk pall had been partially rolled back. A female form, attired in white and flowing garments, was kneeling on the basement; her hands were folded as if in prayer, and her forehead was reclining on the margin of the sarcophagus. She was a lovely blondine, her hair, of silken texture, and in colour the brightest auburn, fell in graceful abundance over her shoulders; the visible portion of her face was of an ashy paleness, and on her bosom I observed a white rose. The music had ceased before I reached my concealed station, but the dead silence which had succeeded was now interrupted by loud tokens of the approaching storm. A gust of wind shook the mighty oaks on the adjacent slope – the kneeling figure turned her face towards the grating, and by the glare of a bright flash of lightning, I saw the whole unearthly visage. Gracious Heaven! it was the sainted Cecilia – the white rose in her bosom – in short, the perfect semblance of her portrait in the room above.

The lantern dropped from my trembling hand, and I gazed on this appalling group of figures in speechless horror, aggravated by the howling of the blast, the creaking of the branches, and the endless echoing of the thunder in the mountains. My blood ran cold with nameless apprehensions, but soon the tide of feeling took an opposite direction. Maddened with this inexplicable succession of alarming incidents, I determined to sever at once the Gordian knot, and, rushing forward with desperate resolution, I seized and shook the bronze

gates with maniacal vehemence, shouting, in the voice of one possessed, "Oh, Cecilia! Cecilia!"

"Jesus Maria!" ejaculated the pallid figure in white, turning upon me a pair of large blue eyes, which appeared glassy and lifeless. In a moment every taper disappeared, and a horrid scream rang through the vault, succeeded by a crash which seemed to shake the massive tower above the sepulchre.

Overwhelmed with terror and surprise at the strange termination of this awful scene, I plunged through the darkness, explored with difficulty my way to the stair-case, and ascended it with headlong velocity. While feeling the way to my apartment along the wall of the corridor, my attention was roused by a noise at the other end, resembling the creak of a heavy door when moving on rusty hinges. Turning round, I saw a faint gleam of light shoot athwart the deep gloom of this long passage, and with inexpressible astonishment I beheld the iron door of the armoury gradually opened, and the lofty figure of a knight in complete armour, issue from it, with a naked sword in one hand, and a small lantern in the other, which he held up as if to explore the intense darkness of the corridor. Congratulating myself that my person was concealed in the deep shadow, I gazed in utter perplexity and terror upon this spectral figure, until I saw it turn round and retreat into the armoury, the door of which, opening outwards, immediately closed, as if impelled by a spring. Soon as I could regain the power of volition, I returned to my apartment in the tower, more perplexed than ever with the rapid succession of extraordinary and startling incidents which I had encountered in this mysterious old castle. "Surely," I began to think, "if the dead are permitted to revisit this earth, this is the very hour and place in which to expect them." My wonted freedom from all superstitious fancies still, however, struggled with this thickening evidence of supernatural agency, and, opening the window, I looked

out to observe if any light was again visible from the sepulchre; but the moon was obscured by heavy clouds, and all was midnight darkness. During a short interval between the whistling blasts, I thought I could distinguish the sound of a light footstep; and, looking more intently, I saw, by a faint gleam of lightning, a figure in white drapery turn hastily round an angle of the ruins, and disappear under the trees. I was vainly puzzling myself to account for this new incident, when the appalling knocks of iron upon iron, again sounded in the corridor. Rousing by a sudden effort my drooping courage, I hastened to the door, and opening it, listened with renewed horror to the agonising groans of some dying sufferer. Awhile rooted to the spot with nameless apprehensions, a burst of loud and horrid laughter struck suddenly upon my startled ears. It proceeded, I thought, from the armoury out of which the mailed knight had issued, and the tones had a brazen, gong-like reverberation, to which no human organs could possibly have given utterance. This monstrous peal of merriment was succeeded by the clash of swords and armour, and I plainly heard heavy blows descending upon helmets, shields, and corslets. No language can describe the perplexity with which I listened to this appalling uproar, which now seemed to resound from the baron's hall; and, under the insane impulses of fear, I gradually yielded to a belief that the ghosts of Bruno and Gotthard nightly visited the castle to renew their deadly conflict. "Surely all the powers of hell are in league to-night against me!" I exclaimed, as I retreated into my apartment, barred the door in unutterable anxiety, and began to weigh whether it would not be advisable to return to the comfortable mansion of my aunt, and leave the "Robber's Tower" to its infernal tenantry. Suddenly, however, a suspicion flashed upon me, that this old castle, having been for some months unoccupied by the family, had become the haunt of gipsies or robbers, and that the mysterious sounds

and appearances which had alarmed me, were the ingenious contrivances of these vagabonds to terrify the servants of the baroness, and thereby retain undisturbed possession of the ruins. Inexpressibly relieved by this more rational view of the extraordinary adventures of the night, and fearless of human agency, I determined to solve the enigma without delay, and seized my pistols with intent to explore immediately the hall and armoury, from one of which the clash of weapons still resounded. My nerves, however, were still unstrung by the terrors I had experienced, and fearing that my unsteady hand would not effectually level a pistol, I took, in preference, my keen-edged sabre, grasped it with feverish energy, and proceeded with a candle into the corridor, determined to enact myself the Castle Spectre, for which personification my tall figure and white drapery were well adapted.

The combat was continued with unabated energy, and the ringing sound of swords and armour now evidently proceeded from the armoury, towards which I was cautiously advancing, when another peal of grating and Satanic laughter made me pause in shivering astonishment. At this moment the storm-clouds, which had been for some time concentrating, burst in fury over the ruins; the rain fell in heavy torrents, and an intensely vivid flash of lightning was instantaneously succeeded by a monstrous burst of thunder, which shook the old castle to its foundations. When the long enduring reverberations of the thunder had ceased, I approached the armoury and listened at the door, from which I now observed that the massive iron bar and padlock had been removed.

Hearing no noise within, I grasped my sabre more firmly, and, clenching my teeth in angry and bitter determination to unravel, at all risks, this tissue of mysteries, I placed my only remaining taper on the ground, to preserve it from sudden extinction, pulled the door, which opened outwards, and stepped into the armoury, when, behold! by the faint light of

two small lanterns, I saw the towering figures of Bruno and Gotthard, in panoplies of steel, and beavers down, crossing their long swords to renew the combat.

Appalled to a degree far exceeding all former apprehensions, I stood in gasping and speechless terror before these colossal spectres, who paused as they beheld me, lowered the points of their tremendous weapons, and remained fixed and motionless as statues. I fancied as I gazed upon them in silent horror, that I could distinguish two human skulls within their barred helmets, and, ejaculating I know not what, I turned round and darted into the corridor, hurling after me the iron door with such force as to detach the picture of the poisoned nun from the wall above, and it fell behind me with a noise which increased no little my consternation. Overturning the candle in my rapid progress, I rushed along the corridor in utter darkness, until I found my speed arrested by some one pulling vigorously at my dressing-gown. Desperation now supplied the place of courage, and with a backward thrust, I plunged my sabre-point deep into the body of my pursuer. This defensive blow did not, however, release me from his grasp; and to aggravate my perplexity, I now heard immediately behind me the agonizing sobs and groans which had so often alarmed me during this eventful night. During this climax of horrors, the creaking of the armoury door diverted my attention from the awful sounds at my elbow, and my heart died within me as I beheld the two mailed spectres hastening with long strides and uplifted swords and lanterns towards me.

By the approaching light I now discovered to my infinite relief, that my flight had been arrested by neither human nor superhuman interference, but simply by the iron door-latch of one of the hall stoves, which was supplied with fuel through an aperture in the corridor, as is still the custom in many modern houses throughout Germany. My long

dressing-gown had floated behind me as I rushed down the corridor; the projecting latch had caught the lining, and my sabre had pierced no hostile pursuer but the tightly extended skirt of my unfortunate garment. Hastily extricating myself by severing the skirt with a sabre cut, I turned round and desperately faced my grim antagonists, who were now within a few yards of me, and held up their lanterns as if to assist their examination of my features.

Brandishing my sabre, I shouted, "Avaunt, ye hellish forms!" but, to my indescribable amazement, they suddenly paused, exchanged a few words, threw down their swords, and, raising their beavers, showed me the broad, bluff features of my aunt's gardeners, two old Austrian dragoons, whose tall athletic figures I had scanned with a soldier's eye during my evening walk to the ruins. A ludicrous explanation now ensued, and I heard that in consequence of the appearance of some marauders in the mountains, my aunt's steward had ordered the gardeners to sleep by turns in the old armoury as a protection to the valuable property deposited there. The old soldiers, whose long campaigning had not much abated their dread of the supernatural, were afraid to mount guard alone in the armoury, and had agreed to watch there together; but, unable to sleep during the storm, had challenged each other to a game at broadsword, by way of killing the time, and, to heighten the joke, had donned two suits of the old armour which hung round the walls of the armoury. The steward was not aware of my intention to occupy the apartments in the tower; and, had the men not previously seen me in the garden with the baroness, a serious, and too probably, fatal encounter would have been the consequence of the critical situation I have described. On farther inquiry, I found that whenever one of these lusty knights had placed an effective blow, they burst into a horse laugh, which, sounding from their capacious throats through the barred helmets, and reverberating

through the lofty corridor, had produced the unnatural and gong-like peal which had so much astonished and alarmed me. They acknowledged, too, that they had been no little terrified when they saw a tall figure in white, with a naked sabre, enter the armoury; that, however, they had gathered courage from my sudden retreat, and, beginning to suspect that I was a robber, had pursued and recognised me. I had found, also, a clue to the mysterious sobs and lamentations in the corridor, while endeavouring to separate my dressing-gown from the latch, during which operation the creaking hinges of the stove door, not having been oiled for many years, emitted the wailing, groaning sounds which had made my blood run cold. While still examining the stove, another tremendous blast shook the corridor, and the storm-gust, rushing down the capacious chimney, burst open the heavy iron door, which fell back against then iron catch, and rebounding twice with the shock, explained very naturally the fancied hammer-blows of the Grand Master upon the iron cross; the expiring gust then moving the door more gently on its rusty hinges, made them wail and creak as before; after which the diminishing current, rushing through the imperfectly closed door, produced the intermitting, sobbing noise, which my tortured imagination had converted into a death-rattle.

Dismissing the mailed gardeners to their armoury, I retired immediately to bed; and, deferring until morning my proposed investigation of the mysterious incidents in the sepulchre, I slept in defiance of the storm, until roused by a summons from my aunt and cousin to join them in the outer room to breakfast.

When I met my amiable relatives at the breakfast table, I was concerned to observe the lovely Julia still more pallid than I had found her the previous evening, and expressed my fear that she was indisposed.

“I have passed a sleepless and miserable night,” she replied,

“in consequence of an appalling incident which occurred last night in your immediate vicinity. Soon after you left us, four nuns from the convent of St. Clara, called upon me on their way to chant a midnight requiem over the dear remains of my blessed sister, and requested me to accompany them on a harp, which is usually left for this purpose in the sepulchre. As I have found a melancholy gratification in this solemn service, which the nuns perform twice every week, when their convent duties permit, I did not allow the still distant storm, nor the cool white gown which had replaced my hot mourning dress, to deter me from an act of duty to the dear departed one. I accompanied the nuns to the sepulchre, and, after they had sung the requiem, I was kneeling in silent prayer against the sarcophagus, when suddenly, the brazen gates of the vault were shaken with a giant’s grasp – I beheld the figure of a colossal woman in white garments on the outside – and a voice shrieked “Cecilia! Cecilia!” in tones so wild and unearthly, that the nuns in terror dropped their tapers, and we fled into the inner vault, pulling the heavy door after us with a shock, which reverberated like thunder, and greatly increased our alarm. There we remained some time in an agony of terror, and in total darkness, until the hoarse voice of the approaching storm warned us to depart, and we fled through the grove to the villa, trembling at the sound of our own footsteps.”

It was now my turn to explain the various wonders of the night; and, with a view to cheer my drooping and agitated relatives, I endeavoured to relieve with humourous colouring the extraordinary adventures which had crowded upon me in such rapid succession. I enjoyed the heartfelt gratification to see my efforts crowned with success. The pale and care-worn features of my aunt and cousin relaxed into frequent smiles as I pursued my strange narrative, and the ludicrous climax of my adventure with the two gardeners created even a hearty

laugh at my expense. When I had concluded, the lovely Julia repaired the awful damage inflicted on my dressing-gown, and my aunt made me a present of the formidable portrait of the hapless Leah; the removal of which, she said, would alone convince the villagers that the unhappy original no longer walked the castle at midnight.

During a few weeks of delightful intercourse with these intelligent and amiable women, I greatly recruited my injured constitution, and at length succeeded in my earnest endeavours to prevail upon my aunt and her daughter to quit for some months an abode fraught with melancholy associations, and to pass the autumn and winter under my mother's roof in Berlin.

There I had the delight to see their deeply seated woe gradually yield to the influence of frequent collision with a select and sympathising circle, and assume a more tranquil and cheerful character. There, too, my daily intercourse with the unassuming and lovely Julia rapidly matured my early prepossession into a fervent and enduring attachment; and the following summer I revisited the "Robber's Tower," no longer an emaciated and fanciful invalid, but in the full enjoyment of health and happiness, the husband of my adored Julia, and the joint consoler of her still mourning, but resigned and tranquil parent.
