

# Captive of the Banditti

*A Terrific Tale Concluded*

By Dr Nathan Drake and A. N. Other

The sullen tolling of the curfew was heard over the heath, and not a beam of light issued from the dreary villages, the murmuring cotter had extinguished his enlivening embers, and had shrunk in gloomy sadness to repose, when Henry de Montmorency and his two attendants rushed from the castle of A—y.

The night was wild and stormy, and the wind howled in a fearful manner. The moon flashed, as the clouds passed from before her, on the silver armour of Montmorency, whose large and sable plume of feathers streamed threatening in the blast. They hurried rapidly on, and, arriving at the edge of a declivity, descended into a deep glen, the dreadful and savage appearance of which was sufficient to strike terror into the stoutest heart. It was narrow, and the rocks on each side, rising to a prodigious height, hung bellying over their heads; furiously along the bottom of the valley, turbulent and dashing against huge fragments of the rock, ran a dark and swollen torrent, and farther up the glen, down a precipice of near ninety feet, and roaring with tremendous strength, fell, at a single stroke, an awful and immense cascade. From the clefts and chasms of the crag, abrupt and stern the venerable oak threw his broad breadth of shade, and bending his gigantic arms athwart the stream, shed, driven by the wind, a multitude of leaves, while from the summits of the rock was heard the clamour of the falling fragments, that bounding from its rugged side leapt with resistless fury on the vale beneath.

Montmorency and his attendants, intrepid as they were, felt the inquietude of apprehension; they stood for some time in silent astonishment, but their ideas of danger from the conflict of the elements being at length alarming, they determined to proceed; when all instantly became dark, whilst the rushing of the storm, the roaring of the cascade, the shivering of the branches of the trees, and the dashing of the rock, assailed at once their sense of hearing. The moon, however, again darting from a cloud, they rode forward, and, following the course of the torrent, had advanced a considerable way, when the piercing shrieks of a person in distress arrested their speed; they stopped, and listening attentively, heard shrill, melancholy cries repeated, at intervals, up the glen, which, gradually becoming more distant, grew faint, and died away. Montmorency, ever ready to relieve the oppressed, couched his lance, and bidding his followers prepare, was hastening on; but again their progress was impeded by the harrowing and stupendous clash of falling armour, which, reverberating from the various cavities around, seemed here and there, and from every direction, to be echoed with double violence, as if a hundred men in armour had, in succession, fallen down in different parts of the valley. Montmorency, having recovered from the consternation into which this singular noise had thrown him, undauntedly pursued his course, and presently discerned, by the light of the moon, the gleaming of a coat of mail. He immediately made up to the spot, where he found, laid along at the root of an aged oak, whose branches hung darkling over the torrent, a knight wounded and bleeding: his armour was of burnished steel; by his side there lay a falchion, and a sable shield embossed with studs of gold; and, dipping his casque into the stream, he was endeavouring to allay his thirst, but, through weakness from loss of blood, with difficulty he got it to his mouth. Being questioned as to his misfortune, he shook his head, and unable to speak, pointed with his hand down the glen; at the some moment, the shrieks, which had formerly alarmed

Montmorency and his attendants, were repeated, apparently at no great distance; and now every mark of horror was depicted on the pale and ghastly features of the dying knight; his black hair, dashed with gore, stood erect, and, stretching forth his hands towards the sound, he seemed struggling for speech, his agony became excessive, and groaning, he dropped dead upon the earth.

The suddenness of this shocking event, the total ignorance of its cause, the uncouth scenery around, and the dismal wailings of distress, which still poured upon the ear with aggravated strength, left room for imagination to unfold its most hideous ideas; yet Montmorency, though astonished, lost not his fortitude and resolution, but determined, following the direction of the sound, to search for the place whence these terrible screams seemed to issue, and recommending his men to unsheath their swords, and maintain a strict guard, cautiously followed the windings of the glen, until, abruptly turning the corner of an out-jutting crag, they perceived two corpses mangled in a frightful manner, and the glimmering of light appeared through some trees that hung depending from a steep and dangerous part of the rock. Approaching a little nearer, the shrieks seemed evidently to proceed from that quarter; upon which, tying their horses to the branches of an oak, they ascended slowly and without any noise towards the light: but what was their amazement, when, by the pale glimpses of the moon, where the eye could penetrate through the intervening foliage, in a vast and yawning cavern, dimly lighted by a lamp suspended from its roof, they beheld half a dozen gigantic figures in ponderous iron armour; their visors were up, and the lamp, faintly gleaming on their features, displayed an unrelenting sternness capable of the most ruthless deeds. One, who had the aspect and the garb of their leader, and who, waving his scimitar, seemed menacing the rest, held on his arm a massy shield, of immense circumference, and which being streaked with recent blood, presented to the eye an object truly terrific. At the back of the cave, and fixed to a brazen ring, stood a female figure, and, as far as the obscurity of the light gave opportunity to judge, of a beautiful and elegant form. From her the shrieks proceeded: she was dressed in white, and struggling violently and in a convulsive manner, appeared to have been driven almost to madness from the conscious horror of her situation. Two of the banditti were high in dispute, fire flashed from their eyes, and their scimitars were half unsheathed, and Montmorency, expecting that, in the fury of their passion, they would cut each other to pieces, waited the event: but, as the authority of their captain soon checked the tumult, he rushed in with his followers, and, hurling his lance, "Villains," he exclaimed, "receive the reward of cruelty." The lance bounded innocuous from the shield of the leader; who turning quickly upon Montmorency, a severe engagement ensued: they smote with prodigious strength, and the valley resounded to the clangour of their steel. Their falchions, unable to sustain the shock, shivered into a thousand pieces; when Montmorency, instantly elevating with both hands his shield, dashed it with resistless force against the head of his antagonist; lifeless he dropped prone upon the ground, and the crash of his armour bellowed through the hollow rock.

In the meantime his attendants, although they had exerted themselves with great bravery, and had already dispatched one of the villains, were, by force of numbers, overpowered, and being bound together, the remainder of the banditti rushed in upon Montmorency just as he had stretched their commander upon the earth, and obliged him also, notwithstanding the most vigorous efforts of valour, to surrender. The lady who, during the encounter, had fainted away, waked again to fresh scenes of misery, at the moment when these monsters of barbarity were conducting the unfortunate Montmorency and his companions to a dreadful grave. They were led, by a long and intricate passage, amid an immense assemblage of rocks, which, rising

between seventy and eighty feet perpendicular, bounded on all sides a circular plain, into which no opening was apparent, but that through which they came. The moon shone bright, and they beheld, in the middle of this plain, a hideous chasm; it seemed near a hundred feet in diameter, and on its brink grew several trees, whose branches, almost meeting in the centre, dropped on its infernal mouth a gloom of settled horror. "Prepare to die", said one of the banditti; "for into that chasm shall ye be thrown: it is of unfathomable depth; and that ye may not be ignorant of the place ye are so soon to visit, we shall gratify your curiosity with a view of it." So saying, two of them seized the wretched Montmorency, and dragging him to the margin of the abyss, tied him to the trunk of a tree, and having treated his associates in the same manner. "Look," cried a banditto with a fiend-like smile, "look and anticipate the pleasures of your journey." Dismay and pale affright shook the cold limbs of Montmorency, and as he leant over the illimitable void, the dew sat in big drops upon his forehead. The moon's rays, streaming in between the branches, shed a dim light, sufficient to disclose a considerable part of the vast profundity, whose depth lay hid; for a subterranean river, bursting with tremendous noise into its womb, occasioned such a mist from the rising spray, as entirely to conceal the dreary gulf beneath. Shuddering on the edge of this accursed pit stood the miserable warrior; his eyes were starting from their sockets, and, as he looked into the dank abyss, his senses, blasted by the view, seemed ready to forsake him. Meantime the banditti, having unbound one of the attendants, prepared to throw him in; he resisted with astonishing strength, shrieking aloud for help, and, just as he had reached the slippery margin, every fibre of his body racked with agonising terror, he flung himself with fury backwards on the ground; fierce and wild convulsions seized his frame, which being soon followed by a state of exhaustion, he was in this condition, unable any longer to resist, hurled into the dreadful chasm; his armour striking upon the rock, there burst a sudden effulgence, and the repetition of the stroke was heard for many minutes as he descended down its rugged side.

No words can describe the horrible emotions which, on the sight of this shocking spectacle, tortured the devoted wretches. The soul of Montmorency sank within him, and, as they unbound his last fellow-sufferer, his eyes shot forth a gleam of vengeful light, and he ground his teeth in silent and unutterable anguish. The inhuman monsters now laid hold of the unhappy man; he gave no opposition, and, though despair sat upon his features, not a shriek, not a groan escaped him: but no sooner had he reached the brink, than making a sudden effort, he liberated an arm, and grasping one of the villains round the waist, sprang headlong with him into the interminable gulf. All was silent—but at length a dreadful plunge was heard, and the sullen deep howled fearfully over its prey. The three remaining banditti stood aghast; they durst not unbind Montmorency, but resolved, as the tree to which he was tied grew near the mouth of the pit, to cut it down, and, by that means, he would fall along with it into the chasm. Montmorency, who, after the example of his attendant, had conceived the hope of avenging himself, now saw all possibility of effecting that design taken away; and as the axe entered the trunk, his anguish became so excessive that he fainted. The villains, observing this, determined, from a malicious prudence, to forbear, as at present he was incapable of feeling the terrors of his situation. They therefore withdrew, and left him to recover at his leisure.

Not many minutes had passed away when, life and sensation returning, the hapless Montmorency awoke to the remembrance of his fate. "Have mercy," he exclaimed, the briny sweat trickling down his pallid features, "O Christ, have mercy": then looking around him, he started at the abyss beneath, and, shrinking from its ghastly brink, pressed close against the tree. In a little time, however, he recovered his perfect recollection, and, perceiving that the banditti had left him, became more composed. His hands, which were bound behind him, he endeavoured

to disentangle, and, to his inexpressible joy, after many painful efforts, he succeeded so far as to loosen the cord, and by a little more perseverance, effected his liberty. He then sought around for a place to escape through, but without success; at length, as he was passing on the other side of the chasm, he observed a part of its craggy side, as he thought, illuminated, and, advancing a little nearer, he found that it proceeded from the moon's rays shining through a large cleft of the rock, and at a very considerable depth below the surface. A gleam of hope now broke in upon his despair; and gathering up the ropes which had been used for himself and his associates, he tied them together, and fastening one end to the bole of a tree, and the other to his waist, he determined to descend as far as the illuminated spot. Horrible as was the experiment, he hesitated not a moment in putting it into execution, for, when contrasted with his late fears, the mere hazard of an accident weighed as nothing, and the apprehension that the villains might return before his purpose was secure, accelerated, and gave vigour to his effort. Soon was he suspended in the gloomy abyss, and neither the roaring of the river, nor the dashing of the spray, intimidated his daring spirit, but, having reached the cleft, he crawled within it, then, loosing the cord from off his body, he proceeded onwards, and, at last, with a rapture no description can paint, discerned the appearance of the glen beneath him. He knelt down, and was returning thanks to heaven for his escape, when suddenly——

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*Concluded by Another Hand*

—his attention was attracted by a figure at the entrance of a forest which was on his left hand. Whole shades seemed to declare it a place fitted only for the residence of perturbed spirits, or that of the ferocious and remorseless banditti. It was dressed in white; and in the disordered eye of Montmorency appeared infinitely to surpass the human stature. For a few moments he paused, being transfixed with astonishment at an appearance, which in his present situation he could not help looking on as supernatural.

At length he began to recover from the terror which this new adventure, together with the danger which had threatened him in his former one, had inspired in his breast; when perceiving the mysterious object still before him, he advanced towards it. Forgetting that he was standing on a craggy piece of the rock, he fell to the ground. Stunned with the blow, he lay for some time deprived of sense and motion; and on coming to himself, to his no small surprise, found he was supported by the same figure which had so forcibly engrossed his attention on his first emerging from the horrid chasm, where his unfortunate retinue had met with a fate the most dreadful that barbarity could possibly inflict. The stranger no sooner saw him open his eyes, than she, in the tenderest manner, enquired if he had received any hurt from his fall; to which he answered in the negative; and in his turn demanded who she was, and for what reason she had been induced to wander in that solitary place, and at that mysterious hour (for it was then very near midnight).

The fair fugitive readily complied with his request, and informed him that she was the only daughter of the renowned baron of Dunholm, and heiress to his vast domains. In consequence of which, she had been surrounded by innumerable admirers, and those of the first rank; who all fought for her hand with the greatest avidity. Among these Count Edelbert, a knight of the most profligate manners, found means to ingratiate himself with the baron; who, lured by the ancestry of his family, and the vast domains he pretended to be possessed of, readily accepted his proposals, and commanded Dorothee (for that was the name of the stranger) to look on him as her future husband. This, although her heart was entirely disengaged, and the person of the count

was by no means despicable, she could not comply with. A secret horror thrilled through her whole frame whenever her eyes met his. Impressed with these sensations, she ventured to declare her repugnance to the baron. Her father was inflexible, and the day was fixed for her union with the count. A few days previous to that appointed for the approaching nuptials, the count left Dunholm Castle with the utmost precipitation; apologising for his abrupt departure, by saying that a relation of the family, from whom he had also great expectation, had sent for him, as he found his dissolution fast approaching. The appointed moment at length arrived that was to unite the fair Dorothee to the abandoned count, but no Edelbert made his appearance; a circumstance which, at the same time as it created no small surprise in the bosom of the astonished baron, gave infinite pleasure to his afflicted daughter, as she now found her fate retarded a few days longer. In this state of mysterious suspense they remained about a week. Then, one evening, just as the sun had begun to retire behind the western mountains, a special messenger brought a packet for the baron from the Count Edelbert, informing her father that soon after her lover had arrived at the castle of his ancestors, the Danes having made an incursion, and penetrated as far as the castle, had not only spoiled and laid waste that and the whole of his domains, but were also very near taking him prisoner. Prejudiced in his favour, the baron readily gave credence to the contents of this epistle; and was on the point of sending him a consolatory answer, when he received another packet from a friend, who lived in the neighbourhood of the count, informing him that the whole of Edelbert's estates had been seized on, to defray the debts which a life of debauchery and excess had drawn upon him. Enraged at his dissimulation, the baron instantly dispatched one of his vassals with a letter, forbidding him the castle, and informing him that he was thoroughly acquainted with his perfidy. The count appeared much embarrassed on the receipt of this message; but endeavouring to conceal his emotion, he sent the servant back with an answer, that being convinced of the integrity of his own actions, he should leave it to time to clear him from the vile aspersion he laboured under. "From that time," continued Dorothee, "we heard no more of him; and concluded that in order to mend his battered fortunes, he had fled to some distant country; when yester-evening, as my father and myself were returning from Dunholm convent; where, as was our usual custom on an evening, we had been to hear mass, the uncommon fineness of the evening induced us to turn out of the road which led to the castle; when giving the rein to our horses, we were led insensibly to the narrow pass between the mountains; where we had not proceeded many steps before we were attacked by a numerous party of banditti. The baron defended himself with the greatest valour imaginable for a considerable time; when receiving a desperate wound in his side, near his heart, he fell. At that moment the chief of the banditti, in whose ruthless visage I then recognised the features of the profligate count, caused me to quit the horse I rode; and then placing me before him on his own, bore me off to his cavern, in spite of the piercing cries which I uttered, in hopes of bringing some valiant knight to my assistance. Immediately on entering the cavern, I was confined in the manner you saw; in which situation I was doomed to pass my time, until I should consent to become his mistress. From that horrid fate your timely interference preserved me, although you failed in effecting my liberty. I will not attempt to describe my feelings when I saw you overpowered by the banditti. I felt your misfortunes as acutely as my own; and when they led you and your domestics off, to inflict the horrid sentence they had passed on you; unable to bear the horrid ideas which at that moment oppressed me, I fainted a second time. On my recovery, I found the count, who had been only stunned by the blow, his helmet having broken the force thereof, and his vile associates flying up and down the cavern in the greatest confusion, vowing the most exemplary revenge on you; who I now perceived, to my inexpressible joy, had effected

your escape in a most miraculous manner. Overwhelmed with fury and disappointment, the banditti at length left the cavern; when finding myself alone, I used every endeavour to obtain my liberty. For some time my exertions proved abortive; but the chain at length breaking, I quitted the cavern and fled on, without once looking behind me, to this very spot, where I have the happiness of meeting with you.”

Dorothee finished her narrative, and demanded of her deliverer to return, to what singular circumstance she was indebted for his fortunate arrival. He then informed her that he had left the castle of A—y on the preceding evening during a tremendous storm, accompanied by two of his vassals, in order to relieve and assist such helpless fugitives as chance and misfortune might have exposed to the rude inclemencies of the weather; and then proceeded to inform her of what had passed previous to his attacking the banditti; which was scarcely finished when the ears of Montmorency were assailed by the sound of horses’ feet. Raising his eyes, he saw the ferocious Edelbert advancing at the head of the surviving banditti. Driven to desperation, our hero was about to rush into the midst of them, and boldly meet his death; when he discovered another party coming full speed down the opposite side of the glen; whom on their near approach proved, to his no small joy, to be a troop of his own domestics, who had been collected together by one of his former retinue, that had fled in the first engagement. They presented a sword to Montmorency; who having mounted one of the horses, flew to the attack. The conflict was dreadful in the extreme, and for some time victory hung doubtful over the head of either. At length Edelbert falling by the hands of Montmorency, the day was declared in favour of the latter, who having secured the banditti, conducted them, and the lady, to his castle. Thereafter, following the careful burial of the remains of Dorothee’s father, and a suitable period of mourning, she became the lawful mistress of A—y Castle by giving her hand to her valiant protector; and together they lived a life of uninterrupted happiness for many years, surrounded by the admiration of all people.