

***GOTHIC BOURNES***

**THE ASTROLOGER'S PREDICTION;  
OR,  
THE MANIAC'S FATE!  
(1826)**

TRANSCRIPTION BY

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EDITING GOTHIC TEXTS  
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Nº 4

# LEGENDS OF TERROR!

AND

## TALES

OF THE

WONDERFUL AND THE WILD.

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Original and Select,

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IN PROSE AND VERSE.

WITH HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS.

AND

ELEGANT ENGRAVINGS

ON WOOD.

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All nations have their omens drear,  
Their Legends wild of woe and fear. —*Scott*

Here still the Legendary tale goes round  
Of charms, and spells, of treasures lost and found,  
Of fearful goblins, and malicious sprites,  
Enchanted damsels, and enamoured knights. —  
*Drummond.*

The mightiest chiefs of British song  
Scorned not such Legends to prolong;  
They gleam thro' Spenser's elfin dream  
And mix in Milton's heavenly theme. —*Scott.*

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(pages 38-43)

**THE ASTROLOGER'S PREDICTION;  
or,  
THE MANIAC'S FATE!**

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At the commencement of the eighteenth century, the Illuminati, or sect of Astrologers, had excited considerable sensation on the continent. Blending philosophy with enthusiasm, and uniting to a knowledge of every chemical process a profound acquaintance with astronomy, their influence over the superstitious feelings of their countrymen was prodigious. In one or two instances the infatuation was attended with fatal consequences; but in no case was the result so dreadful as in the subsequent narrative:—

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REGINALD, sole heir of the illustrious family of Di Venoni, was remarkable, from his earliest infancy, for a wild, enthusiastic disposition. His father, it was currently reported, had died of an hereditary insanity; and his friends, when they marked the wild mysterious intelligency of his eye, and the determined energy of his aspect, would often assert that the dreadful malady still lingered in the veins of young Reginald. Whether such was the case or not, certain it is, that his mode of existence was but ill calculated to eradicate any symptoms of insanity. Left at an early age to the guidance of his mother, who since the death of her husband had lived in the strictest seclusion, he experienced but little variety to divert or enliven his attention. The gloomy chateau in which he resided, was situated in Suabia<sup>1</sup> on the borders of the Black Forest.<sup>2</sup> It was a wild isolated mansion, built after the fashion of the day in the gloomiest style of Gothic architecture. At a distance rose the ruins of the once celebrated Castle of Rudstein, of which at present but a mouldering tower remained; and, beyond, the landscape was terminated by the deep shades and impenetrable recesses of the Black Forest.

Such was the spot in which the youth [39] of Reginald was immured. But his solitude was soon to be relieved by the arrival of an unexpected residence. On the anniversary of his eighteenth year an old man, apparently worn down with age and infirmity, took up his abode at the ruined tower of Rudstein. He seldom stirred out during the day; and from the singular circumstance of his perpetually burning a lamp in the tower, the villagers naturally enough concluded that he was an emissary of the devil. This report soon acquired considerable notoriety; and having at last reached the ears of Reginald through the medium of a gossiping gardener, his curiosity was awakened, and he

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<sup>1</sup> Commonly spelled "Swabia", it is a historic and cultural region in southwestern Germany. It derives from the Duchy of Swabia, which disappeared around the thirteenth century, and it is now an area divided among the two states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg ("Swabia" in <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swabia>. Date accessed: 05/11/2021)

<sup>2</sup> Black Forest: famous forest in southwestern Germany which is considered central part of German folklore. It was part of the main settings from which the Grimm Brothers compiled their fairytales. Moretti uses this text as an example of how the British gothic novel moved from an Italian or French setting towards a prominently German one around the 1800s, probably influenced by high popularity of the genre in the region (Franco Moretti. *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900*. London, New York: Verso, 1998, pp. 16).

resolved to introduce himself into the presence of the sage, and ascertain the motives of his singular seclusion. Impressed with this resolution he abruptly [sic] quitted the chateau of his mother, and bent his steps towards the ruined tower, which was situated at a trifling distance from his estate. It was a gloomy night, and the spirit of the storm seemed abroad on the wings of the wind. As the clock from the village church struck twelve, he gained the ruin; and ascending the time-worn stair-case, that tottered at each step he took, reached with some labour the apartment of the philosopher. The door was thrown open, and the old man was seated by the grated casement. His appearance was awfully impressive. A long white beard depended from his chin, and his feeble frame with difficulty sustained a horoscope that was directed to the heavens. Books, written in unknown characters of cabalism,<sup>3</sup> were promiscuously strewed about the floor; and an alabaster vase, engraved with the sign of the Zodiac, and circled by mysterious letters, was stationed on the table. The appearance of the Astrologer himself was equally impressive. He was habited in a suit of black velvet, fancifully embroidered with gold, and belted with a band of silver. His thin locks hung streaming in the wind, and his right hand grasped a wand of ebony. On the entrance of a stranger he rose from his seat, and bent a scrutinizing glance on the anxious countenance of Reginald.

“Child of ill-starred fortunes!” he exclaimed in a hollow tone, “dost thou come to pry into the secrets of futurity? Avoid me, for thy life, or, what is dearer still, thine eternal happiness! for I say unto thee, Reginald Di Venoni, it is better that thou hadst never been born, than permitted to seal thy ruin in a spot which, in after years, shall be the witness of thy fall.”

The countenance of the Astrologer as he uttered these words was singularly terrific, and rung in the ears of Reginald like his death-knell. “I am innocent, father!” he falteringly [sic] replied, “nor will my disposition suffer me to perpetrate the sins you speak of.” — “Hah!” resumed the prophet, “man is indeed innocent, till the express moment of his damnation; but the star of thy destiny already wanes in the heavens, and the fortunes of the proud family of Venoni must decline with it. Look to the west! Yon planet that shines so brightly in the night-sky, is the star of thy nativity. When next thou shalt behold it, shooting downward like a meteor through the hemisphere, think on the words of the prophet and tremble. A deed of blood will be done, and thou art he that shall perpetrate it!”

At this instant the moon peeped forth from the dun clouds that lagged slowly in the firmament, and shed a mild radiance upon the earth. To the west, a single bright star was visible. It was the star of Reginald’s nativity. He gazed with eyes fixed in the breathless intensity of expectation, and watched it till the passing clouds concealed its radiance from his view. The Astrologer, in the meantime, had resumed his station at the window. He raised the horoscope to heaven. His frame seemed trembling with

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<sup>3</sup>The Webster’s Dictionary of 1828 defines it as “the secret science of the cabalists”. Cabala is thus defined as “Tradition, or a mysterious kind of science among Jewish Rabbis, pretended to have been delivered to the ancient Jews by revelation, and transmitted by oral tradition [...] This science consists chiefly in understanding the combination of certain letters, words and numbers, which are alleged to be significant. Every letter, word, number and accent of the law is supposed to contain a mystery, and the cabalists pretend even to foretell future events by the study of this science”.

convulsion. Twice he passed his hand across his brow, and shuddered as he beheld the aspect of the heavens. "But a few days," he said, "are yet left me on earth, and then [40] shall my spirit know the eternal repose of the grave. The star of my nativity is dim and pale. It will never be bright again, and the aged one will never know comfort more. Away!" he continued, motioning Reginald from his sight, "disturb not the last moments of a dying man; in three days return, and under the base of this ruin inter the corpse that you will find mouldering within. Away!"

Impressed with a strange awe, Reginald could make no reply. He remained as it were entranced; and after the lapse of a few minutes rushed from the tower, and returned in a state of disquietude to the gloomy chateau of his mother.

The three days had now elapsed, and, faithful to his promise, Reginald pursued his route back to the tower. He reached it at night-fall, and tremblingly entered the fatal apartment. All within was silent, but his steps returned a hollow echo as he passed. The wind sighed around the ruin, and the raven from the roofless turrets had already commenced his death-song. He entered. The Astrologer, as before, was seated by the window, apparently in profound abstraction, and the horoscope was placed by his side. Fearful of disturbing his repose, Reginald approached with caution. The old man stirred not. Emboldened by so unexpected a silence, he advanced, and looked at the face of the Astrologer. It was a corpse he gazed on, —the relic of what had once been life. Petrified with horror at the sight, the memory of his former promise escaped him, and he rushed in agony from the apartment.

For many days the fever of his mind continued unabated. He frequently became delirious, and in the hour of his lunacy was accustomed to talk of an evil spirit that had visited him in his slumbers. His mother was shocked at such evident symptoms of derangement. She remembered the fate of her husband; and implored Reginald, as he valued her affection, to recruit the agitation of his spirits by travelling. With some difficulty he was induced to quit the home of his infancy. The expostulations of the countess at last prevailed, and he left the chateau Di Venoni for the sunny climes of Italy.

Time rolled on; and a constant succession of novelty had produced so beneficial an effect, that scarcely any traces remained of the once mysterious and enthusiastic Venoni. Occasionally his mind was disturbed and gloomy, but a perpetual recurrence of amusement diverted the influence of past recollection, and rendered him at least as tranquil as it was in the power of his nature to permit. He continued for years abroad, during which time he wrote frequently to his mother, who still continued at the chateau Di Venoni, and at last announced his intention of settling finally at Venice. He had remained but a few months in the city, when, at the gay period of the Carnival, he was introduced, as a foreign nobleman, to the beautiful daughter of the Doge. She was amiable, accomplished, and endowed with every requisite to ensure permanent felicity. Reginald was charmed with her beauty, and infatuated with the excellent qualities of her mind. He confessed his attachment, and was informed with a blush that the affection was mutual. Nothing, therefore, remained but application to the Doge; who was instantly addressed on the subject, and implored to consummate the felicity of the

young couple. The request was attended with success, and the happiness of the lovers was complete.

On the day fixed for the wedding, a brilliant assemblage of beauty thronged the ducal palace of St. Mark. All Venice crowded to the festival; and, in the presence of the gayest noblemen of Italy, Reginald Count Di Venoni received the hand of Marcelia<sup>4</sup>, the envied daughter of the Doge. In the evening, a masqued festival was given at the palace; but the young couple, anxious to be alone, escaped the scene of revelry, and hurried in their gondola to the chateau that was prepared for their reception.

It was a fine moonlight night. The mild beams of the planets sparkled on the silver bosom of the Adriatic, and the light tones of music, "by distance made more sweet," came wafted on the western gale. A thousand lamps, from the illuminated squares of the city, reflected their burnished hues along the wave, and the mellow chaunt [sic] of the gondoliers kept time to the gentle plashing of their oars. The hearts of the lovers were full, and the witching spirit of the hour passed with all its loveliness into their souls. On a sudden [sic] a deep groan escaped the overcharged heart of Reginald. He had looked to the western hemisphere, and the star which, at that moment, flashed brightly in the horizon, reminded him of the awful scene which he had witnessed at the tower of Rudstein. His eye sparkled with delirious brilliancy; and had not a shower of tears come opportunely to his relief, the consequence might have been fatal. But the affectionate caresses of his young bride succeeded for the present in soothing his agitation, and restoring his mind to its former tranquil temperament.

A few months had now elapsed from the period of his marriage, and the heart of Reginald was happy. He loved Marcelia, and was tenderly beloved in return. Nothing, therefore, remained to complete his felicity but the presence of his mother, the Countess. He wrote accordingly to entreat that she would come and reside with him at Venice, but was informed by her confessor in reply, that she was dangerously ill, and requested the immediate attendance of her son. On the receipt of this afflicting intelligence he hurried with Marcelia to the chateau Di Venoni. The Countess was still alive when he entered, and received him with an affectionate embrace. But the exertion of so unexpected an interview with her son, was too great for the agitated spirits of the parent, and she expired in the act of folding him to her arms.

From this moment the mind of Reginald assumed a tone of the most confirmed dejection. He followed his mother to the grave, and was observed to smile with unutterable meaning as he returned home from the funeral. The chateau Di Venoni increased the native depression of his spirits, and the appearance of the ruined tower never failed to imprint a dark frown upon his brow. He would wander for days from his home, and when he returned, the moody expression of his countenance alarmed the affection of his wife. She did all in her power to assuage his anguish, but his melancholy remained unabated. Sometimes, when the fit was on him, he would repulse her with

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<sup>4</sup> The name of Marcelia, the feminine form of "Mark", means "consecrated to the god Mars". Mars is one of the first planets to appear as a star after the sunset. Therefore, a connection could be created between her, the Astrologer's use of Reginald's nativity star (also mentioned as the western planet) and his fate as a maniac later in story in the figure of Marcelia.

fury; but, in his gentler moments, would gaze on her as on a sweet vision of vanished happiness.

He was one evening wandering with her through the village, when his conversation assumed a more dejected tone than usual. The sun was slowly setting, and their route back to the chateau lay through the churchyard where the ashes of the Countess reposed. Reginald seated himself with Marcelia by the grave, and plucking a few wild flowers from the turf, exclaimed, "Are you not anxious to join my mother, sweet girl? She has gone to the land of the blest—to the land of love and sunshine! If we are happy in this world, what will be our state of happiness in the next? Let us fly to unite our bliss with her's,<sup>5</sup> and the measure of our joy will be full." As he uttered these words his eye glared with delirium, and his hand seemed searching for a weapon. Marcelia alarmed at his appearance, hurried him from the spot, and clasping his hand in her's,<sup>6</sup> drew him gently onward.

The sun in the meantime had sunk, and the stars of evening came out in their glory. Brilliant above all shone the fatal western planet, the star of Reginald's nativity. He observed it with [42] horror, and pointed it out to the notice of Marcelia. "The hand of heaven is in it!" he mentally exclaimed, "and the proud fortunes of Venoni hasten to a close." At this instant the ruined tower of Rudstein appeared in sight, with the moon shining full upon it. "It is the place," resumed the maniac, "where a deed of blood must be done, and I am he that must perpetrate it! But fear not, my poor girl," he added, in a milder tone, while the tears sprang from his eyes, "thy Reginald cannot harm thee; he may be wretched, but he never shall be guilty!" With these words he reached the chateau, and threw himself on his couch in restless anxiety of mind.

Night waned, morning dawned on the upland lands of the scenery, and with it came a renewal of Reginald's disorder. The day was stormy, and in unison with the troubled feeling of his spirit. He had been absent from Marcelia since day-break, and had given her no promise of return. But as she was seated at twilight, near the lattice, playing on her harp a favourite Venetian canzonet, the folding doors flew open, and Reginald made his appearance. His eye was red with the deepest — the deadliest madness, and his whole frame seemed unusually convulsed. "Twas not a dream," he exclaimed, "I have seen her and she has beckoned us to follow." "Seen her, seen who?" said Marcelia, alarmed at his phrenzy [sic]. "My mother," replied the maniac. "Listen while I repeat the horrid narrative. Methought as I was wandering in the forest, a sylph of heaven approached, and revealed the countenance of my mother, I flew to join her but was withheld by a sage who pointed to the western star. On a sudden loud shrieks were heard, and the sylph assumed the guise of a demon. Her figure towered to an awful height, and she pointed in scornful derision to thee; yes, to thee, my Marcelia. With rage she drew thee towards me. I seized — I murdered thee; and hollow groans broke on the midnight gale. The voice of the fiendish Astrologer was heard shouting as from a charnel house, 'The destiny is accomplished, and the victim may retire with honour.' Then, methought, the fair front of heaven was obscured, and thick gouts of clotted clammy

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<sup>5</sup> Ungrammatical form of the possessive pronoun 'hers'.

<sup>6</sup> Same as 5

blood showered down in torrents from the blackened clouds of the west. The star shot through the air, and — the phantom of my mother again beckoned me to follow.”

The maniac ceased, and rushed in agony from the apartment. Marcelia followed and discovered him leaning in a trance against the wainscot of the library. With gentlest motion she drew his hand in her's [sic], and led him into the open air. They rambled on, heedless of the gathering storm, until they discovered themselves at the base of the tower of Rudstein. Suddenly the maniac paused. A horrid thought seemed flashing across his brain, as with giant grasp he seized Marcelia in his arms, and bore her to the fatal apartment. In vain she shrieked for help, for pity. “Dear Reginald, it is Marcelia who speaks, you cannot surely harm her.” He heard — he heeded not, nor once staid his steps, till he reached the room of death. On a sudden his countenance lost its wildness, and assumed a more fearful, but composed look of determined madness. He advanced to the window, and gazed on the stormy face of heaven. Dark clouds flitted across the horizon, and the hollow thunder echoed awfully in distance [sic]. To the west the fatal star was still visible, but shone with sickly lustre. At this instant a flash of lighting re-illuminated the whole apartment, and threw a broad red glare upon a skeleton that mouldered upon the floor. Reginald observed it with affright, and remembered the unburied Astrologer. He advanced to Marcelia, and pointing to the rising moon. “A dark cloud is sailing by,” he shudderingly exclaimed, “but ere the full orb again shines forth, thou shalt die, I will accompany thee in [43] death, and hand in hand will we pass into the presence of our mother.” The poor girl shrieked for pity, but her voice was lost in the angry ravings of the storm. The cloud, in the meantime, sailed on, —it approached— the moon was dimmed, darkened, and finally buried in its gloom. The maniac marked the hour, and rushed with a fearful cry towards his victim. With murderous resolution he grasped her throat, while the helpless hand and half strangled articulation, implored his compassion. After one final struggle the hollow death rattle announced that life was extinct, and that the murderer held a corpse in his arms. An interval of reason now occurred, and on the partial restoration of his mind, Reginald discovered himself the unconscious murderer of Marcelia. Madness—deepest madness again took possession of his faculties. He laughed—he shouted aloud with the unearthly yellings of a fiend, and in the raging violence of his delirium, hurled himself headlong from the summit of the tower.

In the morning the bodies of the young couple were discovered, and buried in the same tomb. The fatal ruin of Rudstein still exists; but is now commonly avoided as the residence of the spirits of the departed. Day by day it slowly crumbles to earth, and affords a shelter for the night raven, or the wild brutes of the forests. Superstition has consecrated it to herself, and the tradition of the country has invested it with all the awful appendages of a charnel house. The wanderer who passes at night-fall, shudders while he surveys its utter desolation, and exclaims as he journies [sic] on “Surely this is a spot where guilt may thrive in safety, or bigotry weave a spell to enthrall her misguided votaries.”