

***GOTHIC BOURNES***

**COURTNEY CASTLE;  
OR, THE ROBBERS' CAVERN**

**(1801)**

TRANSCRIBED BY  
Manuel Aguirre

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ENTERTAINMENTS

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VOL. II

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EDMUND AND ALBINA; OR, GOTHIC TIMES.  
CHILDREN OF THE PRIORY, OR, WARS OF OLD.

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WITH ELEGANT ENGRAVINGS

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[38]

COURTNEY CASTLE;  
OR, THE ROBBERS' CAVERN.

The last smile of autumn had gleamed over the extensive and romantic boundaries of Courtney Castle, and an early winter had stripped of their luxuriant foliage, the ancient oaks which graced the majestic turrets of that impregnable pile, founded on ambition and defended by tyranny, in days when lordly rule held in ignoble chains a BRITISH PEASANTRY.

The haughty and vindictive William glowed with the spirit of the first baron Henry, who built the fortress with part of the wealth which fell to him on his marriage with Eleanor, celebrated for her beauty and unexampled sufferings. In form and fate the Lady Matilda but too nearly resembled the personage just mentioned, whose life was the life of sorrow—whose death, the death of mystery. The interment of Matilda was equal to her exalted birth. A sumptuous monument covered the mouldering remains of all that was in life, lovely or interesting; and the black flags waved to the wind on the lofty towers of Courtney Castle.

Courtney, the proud and unbending Courtney, experienced in Edward Fitz-Alban a powerful rival. In extent of domain, and in sovereignty of sway, Fitz-Alban remained more than his equal. This good and gallant nobleman once loved, and had been again beloved by, the departed Matilda, before she was condemned, by relenting prejudice, to be the wife of Courtney. Since her doubtful death, repose came not to the desponding heart of Edward; and on the summit of an aspiring hill, which commanded a view not more vast than beautiful, frowned, in proud defiance, the battlements of a mansion, towering and terrific as that of his envenomed and implacable enemy.

The mournful occasion demanded a pause from hostilities. During that pause, answering flags appeared on Fitz-Alban Towers, where they displayed a type of affection[.] But in these funeral ensigns an exception to uniformity presented itself to William, an exception which stung his soul even to its deepest recesses. A banner, raised above the rest, and streaked with lines of crimson, held forth a meaning, which at once appalled and irritated the turbulent Baron, and fixed his resolve of effecting a long meditated vengeance.

A few weeks before the death of her parent, young Fitz-Alban had seen the beautiful Caroline, while walking on the terrace which surrounded the walls of the Castle. From that moment the stripling conceived an affection for the daughter of

William; an affection which yielded not, in strength or in truth, to that which embittered the days of his father.

The gardens of Courtney Castle were extensive and solitary. Caroline had no female confidant in whose converse affliction might experience relief; therefore, since the loss of her best friend, every [39] evening beheld her on the terrace and paths about it, wherein the ill-fated Matilda loved to ramble and beguile melancholy. The first time Caroline beheld Anselm Fitz-Alban, was when riding past the gate which terminated the garden of the castle. The horse starting at something on the road, he was dismounted, and came to the ground. Stunned by the fall, his attendants bore him into the court-yard, where the servants ministered needful aid; while the Baron beheld him from a window, and was unfeeling enough to command that no one presumed to bring him beneath the roof of his dwelling. This circumstance rendered Courtney still more hateful to Fitz-Alban.

One evening Caroline wandered later than usual, and had proceeded to the end of a walk shaded with lofty trees. She was musing on the meaning of the striped banner which she had lately viewed as it fluttered in the wind. On her return, the distant thunder rolled awfully along the heavens. It became soon loud and frequent; and the atmosphere appeared in one blaze. Trembling with dismay, the agitated Caroline hastened to a temple in the walk. She entered the porch: at that moment a gleam of horrid light darted on the prostrate figure of a man, to all appearance lifeless on the pavement! "Mysterious and all-protecting heaven!" she exclaimed, "preserve thy creature!" At the moment another gleam, still more dreadful than the last, darted on the object, and presented to her view the form of Anselm Fitz-Alban.

The sight overpowered her senses, and the agitated Caroline sunk to the ground. A violent shriek, the prelude to insensibility, was heard by one of the armed watch, who had just taken his nightly station on the ramparts. The alarm was instantly given, and several of the Baron's domestics hastened to the spot from whence the sound proceeded. Caroline had left the temple before she fell, and was found motionless, pale, and lost to all enquiry, at some distance from it. She was borne to her chamber, and to the storm was attributed the cause of her situation.

The perturbed state of the mind of Caroline forbade repose. During the night she remained in a stupor, which raised serious apprehensions; nor till the noon of the next day did she exhibit signs of returning reason. Her father, from an adjoining chamber, heard, with a mixture of surprise and indignation, the name of Anselm Fitz-Alban pronounced in piteous and inquiring accents from the lips of his distracted daughter. The afflicted Caroline, recovering by slow degrees, experienced not the consolation of a parent whose affection was her right, and which she had never forfeited. Restored to health, but for ever lost to happiness, Caroline sought the presence of her father in vain. The thoughts of its being totally withdrawn, stern and regardless as she had ever found him, preyed upon her spirits. She was but too sensible of her love for Anselm, but she had determined never to swerve from the duty of a child, although the ties of nature appeared to be renounced by the author of her being.

[40] One evening, while wandering round the boundaries of the castle, Anselm suddenly appeared before her. "Think not," said he, "I can remain conscious of your

sufferings on my account from a vindictive father." Caroline, with all the dignity of virtue, fixed her expressive eyes on Anselm; they darted reproof, and looked him into silence, on a subject hostile to those feelings which inborn virtue had planted in her unsullied bosom.

After a pause, Caroline earnestly intreated Fitz-Alban to retire, and warned him of the consequence, should he be discovered by any one belonging to the castle. Anselm was on the point of making a reply, when, reddening with fury, the Baron approached, accompanied by two of the castle guard, who had discovered Anselm at a distance, on his way to the innocent but unfortunate object of his love. The youth was disarmed; but, at the moment his dagger was taken from him, darting a severe and reproachful look, he exclaimed, "Monster, I am no *murderer*; and was Courtney in my power, I should only devote him to his bitterest enemy—his own reflection! Do with me as you will; and if it will gratify your resentment, or your pride, hear me defend a daughter, whose sense of duty to yourself will never permit her to listen to the voice of her adorer Anselm."

The Baron surveyed the lovers by turns, while suspicion, dark as his own heart, lowered on his brow. Then sternly commanding his daughter to her chamber, he said to the guard, "Release this presuming boy! Thus disarmed and disgraced, I dismiss a son who would have robbed me of my child, to a father who would have drawn my wife to dishonour." Anselm, from the noblest motives, and apprehensive of the too probable fate of Caroline, made no other reply to the tyrant than, "Be merciful to your innocent, your honorable, your duteous daughter; as you wish heaven, in your expiring moments, may visit them with peace." Saying this, he instantly departed, never to return to Courtney Castle; and the Baron proceeded to the chamber of Caroline.

In vain the daughter of Courtney pleaded her innocence. The incensed Baron turned a deaf ear to her protestations, reproached her with all the vehemence of unrestrained passion, and on his departure affirmed, with a solemn oath, that not till young Fitz-Alban ceased to be the object of his suspicion, would he permit her to wander beyond the limits of the gallery which led to her chamber. Many revolving days passed away in sorrow and confinement, before Caroline again beheld her father; but on his next visit his manner appeared more endearing than she had lately experienced. Emboldened by his looks, she ventured to implore forgiveness. The Baron passed, gazed upon her in expressive silence, and with a deep sigh bade her be at peace, as he himself wished to be. Then grasping her hand, he hastened from her presence, while her tearful eye followed him till he reached the staircase, and was lost for ever to her sight.

She proceeded to the gallery; and, in returning to her chamber, she stopped at the door to take another view of the gallery, when, [41] to her astonishment, her eye glanced on a letter which lay on the floor. It was addressed to Baron Courtney. Caroline paused upon the impropriety of examining its contents; but the sudden and recent change she had observed in the person whose name was on it, raised her curiosity, and prevailed on her at length to peruse her father's letter.

The dreadful scroll was the work of the domestic Osborne, long in the confidence of his cruel master. Its contents might well create terror and dismay—they were

penned—by a MURDERER! In characters but too legible, the mystery of her mother's death was at length unfolded. In a state little short of distraction, she threw herself on the floor, and bathed the letter with her tears; then rising, she determined on seeking her parent. She hastened to the stair-case, but her progress was checked by a door barred and bolted. She recollected she was a prisoner, a recollection replete with horror. Again she perused the dreadful lines. "The hand that removed one object of your displeasure, is ready to execute your commands on another. The lady Matilda is at rest: pronounce the sentence, and the Lady Caroline shall offend no more."

In awful suspense the time passed on, till the bell in sullen tone announced the third hour. All was still. Presently she heard the sound of a footstep approaching the door of her chamber. Fear forbade utterance; and now, by the reflection of the light, she discovered Osborne!

Seizing her arm, he muttered, "Attempt to raise alarm, and I silence you for ever. Go with me; but fear not. You may sleep as sound in Fernly Wood, as others have done before you." Osborne, on saying this, applied the ruffian mode of insuring silence on the part of Caroline, and instantly proceeded to where two mules were in waiting behind the castle, to which she was no more to return. Through paths solitary and rude as the mind can possibly conceive, they travelled for several hours. At length they halted at the entrance of a cavern, situated deep in the mazes of the wood. "Now, Lady," exclaimed Osborne, "you find yourself where human aid can never reach you, and from whence flight is impossible."

Osborne conducted, or rather forced, Caroline to a seat at a board supplied with the varieties of luxury and intemperance, and at which were placed a party of banditti. At the call of their Captain, they arose, and filled each his goblet, to *the fair stranger*. Remaining stedfast in her refusal to partake of the banquet, Osborne said, "I would advise you, Lady, to become resigned to a better fate than was intended for you. By this time the Baron thinks you are no more: forget, therefore, such a father, and consider me as your protector. Therefore take comfort; fear no violence from any here: while I am away, presume not to question: be obedient, and be happy."

This daring address was received with indignation and horror. Osborne waited not a reply; but left the cavern, and repaired to [42] the Baron. In a few days it was given out that the Lady Caroline had died suddenly. Funeral rites were again performed. The proud, unbending man, now left alone, and unblessed, was sensible doubts existed in the breasts of many; but equally well he knew, that no tongue would presume to utter them. To return to Caroline. The recent declaration of Osborne removed apprehensions of insult from the ruffian band, who knew how to pursue their nightly work of rapine and murder, and left her to herself.

Alone, in a place too, the aspect of which was sufficient to appal the stoutest heart, still fear assailed not that of Caroline. As she looked around at the vastness of her subterraneous abode, and its dark and deep recesses, her thoughts were engaged on the martyred Matilda; and, in the anguish of her soul, she exclaimed aloud, "Look down, Sainted Mother, on thy Caroline. The thought of a Father prevents my sending up the prayer to all-righteous Heaven— "REVENGE A PARENT'S MURDER!"

She wandered, absorbed in bitter reflection, beyond the light reflected by a flame issuing from a large lamp, suspended by a chain. At the end of one of the recesses her progress was impeded by a door secured on the outside with strong bolts. At that moment she heard a deep sigh, followed with, "Where will my miseries end?" which suggested an idea, that the voice was that of some hopeless wretch confined for sacrifice, and that now was the time to summon all her fortitude. With trembling hand she drew the bolts, opened the door, and beheld, extended on a couch, the figure of a woman, who, on Caroline's approach, buried her countenance on the pillow, uttered a shriek, and cried, "Leave me! inhuman monster, leave me! The night-flame still exists, and loathed dawn is still far distant." Caroline knew the accents, and sunk down by the side of Matilda! The mother of Caroline started from her couch, and retreated to a table on which was placed the night-flame she mentioned. Caroline followed; her parent's recollection returned, and embraces mutual and fervent succeeded.

To explanation no pause could be given at a period so important. The means of escape presented itself; but it promised no more than escape from the cavern. Its intricate and untraced boundaries were beset with danger hostile to their hopes. Long confinement had rendered Matilda extremely weak, and it was with difficulty she proceeded to a situation in the wood, which seemed the most favourable for concealment.

While, as they too fondly imagined, they remained secure from discovery, the Lady Courtney informed Caroline that Osborne, after conveying her from the castle to the cavern, produced his Lord's letter, which commanded him to dispatch and bury her in the wood they were now in; at the same time making merit of his forbearance in her favour, and promising her life on submitting to proposals which she felt herself degraded even in calling to remembrance. Fortunately for the preservation of her honor, the Captain of the band pretended to no small portion of generosity, and, as he [43] termed it, manly principle; and, strange as it may seem, while, with a heart callous to the pleadings of humanity, he could uplift the dagger of death, and plunge it into the bosom of the struggling and devoted female, still would he startle at violation. "The cell where you found me has been my prison. An opening in the cavern, secured by a grating, renders it tolerably light during the day: at night I was indulged with a lamp."

Caroline then recounted her own sufferings since the supposed death of her mother. When the day was pretty far advanced, they determined on seeking refuge and protection in the Castle of Fitz-Alban. In this resolve they pursued their way, at intervals looking fearfully around them in the dread of discovery.

The hours passed on in fruitless endeavour to clear the wood, which became more and more perplexed, till at length, fatigued, and nearly exhausted, they were under the necessity of sitting down to recover strength. They had not remained long in a spot which seemed to invite repose, before Caroline uttered a violent shriek, and seizing the arm of her mother, tore her from the bank on which they had reclined. From the hollow of an ancient oak, an enormous snake darted forth, as if to drive them upon an enemy equally dreadful and envenomed. The creature was first seen by Caroline; and, in hastening from a spot, where, but for her cries, they would have escaped

observation, they were instantly surrounded by a party of the robbers, with Osborne at their head.

Unresisting, and dejected, they were consigned to different cells, and in a little time the Captain and the rest of the gang appeared. Night had pretty far advanced before the party broke up. Osborne, elevated by the juice of the grape, entered into a severe dispute with the Captain upon the impropriety of not being permitted to pursue the dictates of his will respecting his own captive. In this remonstrance he was seconded by another, to whom he had promised the possession of Matilda, in case his assistance, aptly thrown in, should incline their leader to compliance with his desire. The debate insensibly grew warm, and Howell at length dared to insult his Captain in terms so gross and unqualified as to provoke the latter to spurn him to the earth. He was, however, brought to a sense of his offense, and, on submission, what he had said was readily forgiven.

The next day was set apart as a festival on some occasion held *joyful* by those unthinking, dissipated, and guilty men; and all was confusion and uproar. Osborne proposed to open the cells of the fair prisoners, bring them to the convivial board, and oblige them to become partakers in the grand revelling. This proved the moment of his triumph: Their Captain's objections were drowned in clamor, and Matilda and Caroline were dragged shrieking from their confinement. While the ruffians were exulting over them, the entrance to their den of darkness, which was secured by a door of iron, they now heard yielding with a tremendous crash, and in an instant the two Fitz-Albans appeared to disengage the af[44]frighted objects of their unhallowed violence. Osborne met his death from the hand of young Fitz-Alban, while in the act of dragging Caroline to the table. The Baron executed a similar vengeance on the wretch who held the struggling Matilda.

The wife and daughter of Courtney were conveyed to Baron Fitz-Alban's castle. On their way to it, he said to the objects of his rescue, "The events of this day must appear to you mysterious and unlooked for. The loss of the owner of Courtney castle surely cannot excite your griefs, however it may create pity, which must arise for an object cut off, as he has been, in the midst of unrepented crimes. But a few days are elapsed since I received a letter from the Baron. Judge of my astonishment on reading, "If Fitz-Alban can stifle former resentments, he will instantly attend the expiring Courtney." You may readily suppose I lost no time in obeying a call so mystical and solemn. Arriving at the castle, I was informed that the Baron Courtney had not many hours to live. On entering the chamber, he made an unsuccessful effort to rise, the while he cast upon me such a look of pleading sorrow, as fully spoke the state of his mind. I seated myself and requested to know how I could possibly assist him. He looked earnestly in my face, and said, "Can Courtney die, pardoned by Fitz-Alban?" Assuring him of my forgiveness, he continued, "My wife and daughter have been sacrificed to the jealousy and hatred of a wretch, who falls a victim to stubborn pride and unjust resentment. These papers will settle all animosity between you and me; and, may heaven pre—Here his speech failed him; and, with the unfinished word quivering on his lips, he sunk down to everlasting silence. The nature of his disorder was such as made a speedy interment needful; and Providence so ordered its events, as to

dissipate my concern for a man who had pursued me through life with hatred, and had procured the untimely death of those most dear to myself, and my noble Anselm. Such were my thoughts on my return from the funeral, when one of my domestics informed me that a person had been waiting for me, charged with a momentous business, on which depended every thing that was dear to my interest and affections. To be brief, the person proved to be one of the banditti. His name is Howel. From this fellow a discovery was made which led to your preservation. The cause which induced him to betray his comrades, arose from an indignity offered by his Captain: but from his account of his leader, I feel myself inclined to interest myself in his pardon. The rest, excepting Howel, must suffer the death they merit.”

In bonds of the most refined friendship, the Lady Courtney and the Baron Fitz-Alban remained during life. Numerous were their acts of charity and exalted benevolence; and no day passed away without some memorial in the cause of virtue. After the usual period of mourning was past, an union took place between Anselm and Caroline; and many revolving years rolled on, and during their course, all was harmony and peace.