

**HARPER'S STEREOTYPE
EDITION. EUGENE
ARAM: A TALE, VOL. II**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649578207

Harper's Stereotype Edition. Eugene Aram: A Tale, Vol. II by Edward Bulwer Lytton

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EDWARD BULWER LYTTON

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No 52142
Harper's Stereotype Edition.

EUGENE ARAM.

A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"PELHAM," "THE DISOWNED," "DEVEREUX," &c.

"Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still."

* * * * *
"All things that are
Made for our general uses, are at war,
E'en we among ourselves!"

JOHN FLETCHER,
Upon "An Honest Man's Fortune."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

By Edward George Bulwer-Luttrell

NEW-YORK:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY J. & J. HARPER,
NO. 82 CLIFF-STREET.

AND SOLD BY THE PRINCIPAL BOOKSELLERS THROUGHOUT THE
UNITED STATES

1852.

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NEW YORK
PUBLIC
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EUGENE ARAM

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BOOK III

COMPLETE.

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BOOK THE THIRD

CONTINUED.

CHAPTER VII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The order you have kindly given me will amply satisfy my purpose," answered Aram: "And so, there

has been no clue to these robberies discovered throughout the day?"

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

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

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

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

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

with certain of our brethren, who seem to think a novel like a bundle of wood, the more faggots it contains the greater its value, allowed by the rapidity of our narrative to relate them.

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

Winding a narrow path (for the whole country was as familiar as a garden to his footstep) that led through the tall wet herbage, almost along the perilous brink of the stream, Aram was now aware, by the increased and deafening sound of the waters, that the appointed spot was nearly gained; and presently the glimmering and imperfect light of the skies revealed the dim shape of a

gigantic rock, that rose abruptly from the middle of the stream; and which, rude, barren, vast, as it really was, seemed now, by the uncertainty of night, like some monstrous and deformed creature of the waters, suddenly emerging from their vexed and dreary depths. This was the far-famed crag, which had borrowed from tradition its evil and ominous name. And now, the stream bending round with a broad and sudden swoop showed at a little distance, ghostly and indistinct through the darkness, the mighty waterfall, whose roar had been his guide. Only in one streak a-down the giant cataract, the stars were reflected; and this long train of broken light glittered preternaturally forth through the ragged crags and the sombre verdure, that wrapped either side of the waterfall in utter and rayless gloom.

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

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

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

It was noticeable that as they proceeded, Aram walked on with an unsuspecting and careless demeanour; but Houseman pointing out the way with his hand, not leading it, kept a little behind Aram, and watched his motions with a vigilant and wary eye. The student, who

had diverged from the path at Houseman's direction, now paused at a place where the matted bushes seemed to forbid any farther progress; and said, for the first time breaking the silence, "We cannot proceed; shall this be the place of our conference?"

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

"And wherefore?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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