

Murdoch and brave the worst—but where, where is he to be found?” and he looked again at the letter. ‘*At the Pine Crag, beyond Saint Swithin’s cave.*’ “Saint Swithin’s cave!” he murmured to himself, then started as if some sudden thought had flashed across his brain. “The time—the hour! yes, yes, my star is propitious—to night I will seek the page of futurity. ’Tis the eve of Hallowmas, and according to the legend of the cave, the mortal who is bold enough to speak the charm shall find three answers to three questions. If I remember rightly, ’tis thus runs the legend—

‘He who dares sit in Saint Swithin’s chair
When the Night Hag wings the troubled air,
Questions three if speaks the spell
He may ask and she must tell.’

Yes! by the fiends of darkness I will dare to know my fate. ’Tis already evening—the clouds are full of storm—no prying fool will be abroad to mark my movements, and unseen I may seek the counsel of the hag. If it be good, then shall I be happy and life will be worth living for—if evil, why then I know the worst, and better to be mouldering in my grave than to live upon the rack of dread uncertainty—to feel the harpy of crime for ever gnawing at my heart and know that I am at the mercy of a villain. Yes—this moment will I seek her counsel.” and he rushed from the apartment, pale, haggard and desperate. The rain fell in torrents. The heavens were wrapped in the sheeted lightnings, and the artillery of heaven rolled louder and louder as if thundering their vengeance against him who sought to penetrate the secrets of futurity.

The cave of Saint Swithin stood upon the borders of a broad and deep highland lake, formed of basaltic pillars, through which the waters entered to some depth, and when chafed by a tempest, used to make the hollow arches and rifted crevices, echo with a mournful and terrific sound. That night the waters lashed and roared as if the demons of destruction were waging war upon their bosoms. With difficulty did Allan gain the cave by a narrow pathway, which winding around the base of the mountain, led to a small opening which conducted into its heart. Deep and impenetrable darkness reigned throughout, save when the lightning for a moment irradiated its walls and showed the waves heaving and swelling, tipped with their feathery foam. In one corner of the cave was a rude seat, formed by nature out of the solid rock, like a large gothic chair, and, according to the legend which from time immemorial had existed among the inhabitants,

had been once the seat of the Saint Swithin, to whom innumerable virtues as well as evils were attributed, but none greater than the one contained in the episode quoted in our story.—To this Allan directed his trembling footsteps, and seating himself in it, with beating heart and trembling lips pronounced the following—

“By the sacred blood of Saint Within bold,
When his naked foot traced the midnight wold,
I call thee fiend to appear this night,
And to me reveal thy promised plight.”

Strange and unearthly voices rose upon the blast, the wind swept through the cavern with terrific fury, a bright flame rose from the water and the form of a tall and hideous looking woman stood before him. In her hand she held the branch of a pine—her hair was grizzled and fell in thick masses over her naked shoulders and bosom, displaying only a skeleton form covered with shrivelled skin—her eyes gleamed with an unearthly brightness, and her deep and sepulchral voice fell on the ear of Allan like the knell of death, while she said—“Behold! True to the spell thou hast spoke this night, I come to reveal my promised plight.”

“Ah! is it so?” exclaimed Allan, “am I then in the presence of the Night Hag?”

“Yes! bold mortal, thou hast severed the seal that bound thy future destiny. Speak thy wishes and I will answer thee.”

“Then be it so,” cried Allan, desperation taking the place of terror in his heart. “Tell me, shall I ever hold the means to silence my enemy, Murdoch McIvor?”

“Thou shalt!” exclaimed the hag.

“And in two days?”

“In two days!” replied she.

“And by what means?” asked Allan.

“By blood!” screamed the fiend, and a loud laugh burst from her bosom.

“Horrible! horrible! and by whom shall that blood be shed?” cried Allan.

“I cannot tell—three answers hast thou already had—the spell is broken!” A loud clap of thunder burst in the heavens—the cave shook to its foundation, as if crumbling into pieces—and all again was darkness.

For several minutes Allan was unconscious of what had taken place, and when he began gradually to recover his senses, and the doubtful issue of his mission flashed upon his mind, he would have given worlds, had he possessed them, not to have pryed into the book of futurity. Slowly and with trembling steps he regained his aunt’s mansion—but sleep was denied to him—his villainy to his poor cousin