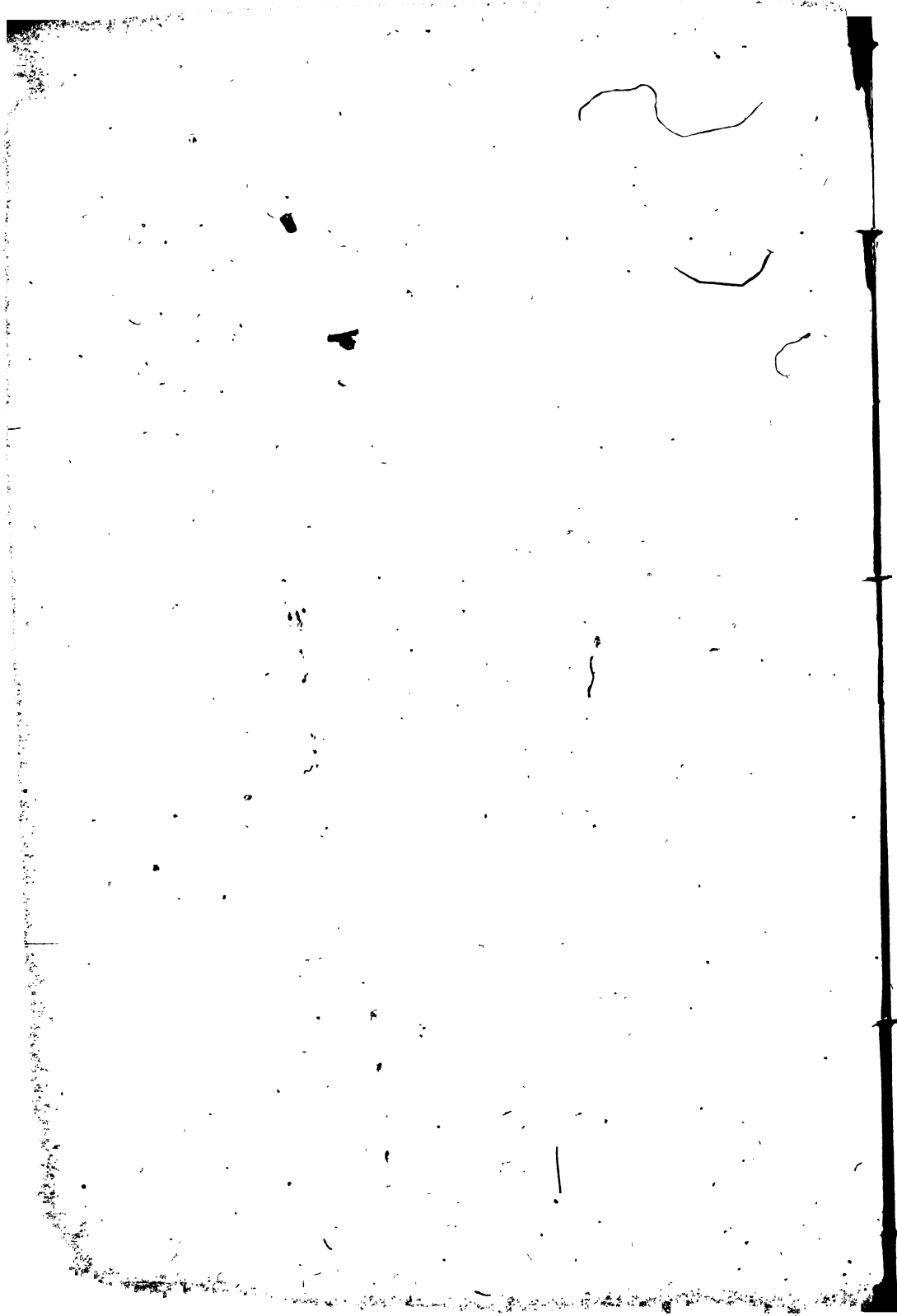


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With compliments of the Author

THE
DARK HUNTSMAN.

(A DREAM.)



THE DARK HUNTSMAN,

(A DREAM.)

'Twas eve, and I dreamed that across the dim plain
One swept o'er the stubble,—one ploughed through the grain;
His aspect was eager, his courser was fleet,
He drove through the gloom as through air drives the sleet;
And dark was his visage, and darker it grew,
As o'er the dim landscape yet faster he flew.

I dreamed still my dream, and beheld him career,—
Fly on like the wind after Ghosts of the deer—
Fly on like the wind, or the shaft from the bow,
Or avalanche urging from regions of snow;
Or star that is shot by the Gods from its sphere;—
He bore a Winged Fate on the point of his spear;
His eyes were as coals that in frost fiercely glow,
Or diamonds of darkness;—"Dark huntsman, what, ho!"

"What, ho!" and my challenge went wild through the vale,
And long was my hollo, and loud was my hail:
"Dark huntsman, dark huntsman, what, whither away?
Dark huntsman," I shouted, "I charge thee to stay;"
And backwards he bellowed, "I cannot obey—
A thousand ere midnight my task is to slay;
But ere comes the morrow,
With sickness and sorrow,
Shall I be swift riding again on this way."

And the huntsman laughed hollow,
 As my fancy did follow
 Him on his black courser that, knowing, did neigh ;
 My fancy did follow
 Adown the dim hollow,
 And heard in the distance his hunger-hounds bay ;
 The vanishing spectre
 Me left to conjecture,
 As on the dark huntsman dim hurried away.

As one all astonished, or stunned by a blow,
 Stands staggered or speechless with wonderment, so
 Awhile I dwelt silent ; around all was still,
 While wonder on wonder dumb wondered its fill ;
 From fancy to fancy my spirit was tossed,
 And reason at length was in reverie lost ;
 And lost was all note and all measure of time
 Until I awoke,
 As one at the stroke
 Of the ivy-grown steeple's deep, solemn-toned chime.

I awoke,—yet I dreamed ;—it was night, and there fell
 On my ear a sound sadder than numbers can tell ;
 I listened, it loudened, it ever did swell ;
 As when the choir singers,
 Or steeple-stood ringers,
 Give voice, or stout pull at each iron-mouthed bell ;
 Through night floated dreary
 A sad miserere,

I lay there and labored beneath the sound's spell ;
 Through night vainly gazing,
 The music amazing,
 Appeared now of Earth, now of Hades, now Hell.

I gazed once again, and athrough the grey gloom,
 Beheld the dark stranger,
 All reckless of danger,
 Sweep back like the tempest or fiercer simoom ;—
 Returning, I heard him slow wind a weird horn,
 Far o'er the wide dimness its echoes were borne ;—
 Wound dirge-like and dismal
 Through skyey abysmal,
 Wherein hung the moon to a crescent down shorn ;
 The blasts of his bugle grew wilder, more eerie,
 While gaily he galloped, as one never weary,
 Adown the dim valley, so doleful and dreary,
 And woke the tired twilight with echoes forlorn.

Forlorn were the sounds, and their burden was drear
 As the sighing of winds in the wane of the year—
 As the sighing of winds 'neath the sweep of the gale,
 Or howling of spirits in regions of bale ;

The Goblin of Ruin

Black mischief was brewing,
 And, wringing her hands at her sudden undoing,
 The woe-stricken Landscape uplifted her wail.

As might the grim lion, of forests the king,
 Come bounding, or eagle sweep by on the wing,—
 The eagle with scream and the lion with roar,
 So swept the dark huntsman ; and, chilled to the core,

I heard him still winding his slow, sullen horn,
 Returning with dolefullest breathings of scorn :
 Low moanings like those of the far off maelstrom,
 Sore swelled till with moanings was filled the night's womb ;
 And changed to wild wailings that wilder yet grew,
 And fiercely at length the dread trumpeter blew ;
 All o'er the black welkin the howling blast flies,
 And chases the stars from the tempest-struck skies ;
 Amidst cloudy darkness strange riot arose,
 And filled seemed the heavens with fighting of foes ;
 From 'neath heaven's margent came fear-breeding yells—
 Came long lamentations with laughter in spells,
 And sounds wherewith madmen give vent to their woes :
 Such noise as infuriate winds in their flight
 Give forth to the ear of the horrified night,
 As through the looped Ruin the hurricane blows ;
 Till ghastly the uproar, unearthly the blare,
 The on-coming rider sure rode the night-mare ;
 The winds seemed to moan.
 The woods seemed to groan,
 And wildly were tossing their heads in the air—
 A moment were dormant,
 Then, lashed into torment,
 Were frantically swinging their branches, leaf-bare :
 Till sighed I for silence :—but, though came a lull,—
 Though hearing was empty, the fancy was full :
 As storm-stranded vessel
 That lately did wrestle
 With wind and with wave, but where nought now can nestle,—
 A grave, a golgotha, a place of a skull,
 Wherein, full of dole,

Each mariner's soul
Still haunts his dead body that floats in the hull,
So lay I and dreamed,—till, as forth from its rock,
Sea-beaten forever, the home of the flock,
Is heard the hoarse cry of the sweeping sea-gull.
Rewound the weird horn, and, oppressed with dumb awe,
Lights feeble and few in the distance I saw,
Even such as appear in the mist-covered skies
At breaking of morn,
When stars, lustre lorn,
Are closing their heavy but fiery eyes ;
Huge hounds now loomed speeding, each fierce as a dragon ;
Like embers their eyes, their jaws foaming like flagon,
Seemed Cerberus manifold hunting the stag on
Hell's hills, flecked with shadows by distance shape-shorn ;
Deep toning these scoured o'er the dark, dewy grounds ;
The Ghosts of Gehenna seemed breaking their bounds ;
And oft, as from Scylla's
Vexed kennel of billows,
Sprang upwards the horror-tongued, Hadean hounds ;
More loud than tornado outswelled the huge roar ;
The horrible hubbub could gather no more ;
The pack gloomy howling went close sweeping by,
As might the loud whirlwind hoarse rave through the sky ;
The huntsman came after, full fleet as the wind,
Anent me a moment, tall, tarried behind ;
Regarding me, sat with his long, levelled spear,
Loud cried, "Thou didst call me and, lo ! I am here."
Then, hoary and hollow-eyed, horsed in the gloom,
Appearing half-angel, half-demon of doom,
I knew—and the knowledge possessèd me with fear—

He hunted for souls lieu of hunting the deer ;
 He waved his pale hand, and half-jeering did cry :—
 “ Behold thou didst call me, and, lo ! here am I :
 'Tis nigh unto midnight, and did I not say,
 A thousand ere midnight my task was to slay ?
 Mount quickly behind me,—
 Ha, ha ! thou shalt find me
 The hardest of riders, and rugged the way :
 Thy fate is to follow
 Me down yon dim hollow
 Where, pleased at thy coming, my hunger-hounds bay ;
 Thy terror dissemble,
 For why shouldst thou tremble
 To go where the Ghosts of thy Fathers glide grey ?
 With bit and with bridle
 We may not be idle :—
 To the Land of the Shadows come with me away :”
 The soul-hunting ranger
 Cried :—“ Come with me, stranger ;”
 And I the grim Goblin was bound to obey ;
 An agony shook me,
 All manhood forsook me,
 I woke—'twas a dream at the dying of day.

CHARLES HEAVYSEGE.