

saying in a whisper, "Go not to Moreton by the direct route, for your life is in danger! but take the old road, over the common, it is rough and a mile further, but safe." Having thus spoken she left the factory with rapid strides and disappeared, leaving me rivetted to the spot with wonder.

While this conversation was going on, Lucy and my daughter had strayed to another part of the grounds, nor did I awaken from my reverie until they returned and accosted me with, "Uncle!—Father!—what is the matter?"

"Matter! I scarcely know what! Pho; nothing: what am I thinking about! But come my children, we have tarried too long—it is almost dark—let us return to the Inn."

On our return to the Inn I endeavoured to persuade Lucy to stop for the night, as it was now almost dark, and a strange road before us.

"Oh, no!" she replied, "let us push on to Moretonhampstead, I wish to pass this night in my uncle's house. What is it to ride five or six miles after night! Surely, Uncle, there is nought to fear? Besides, who can sleep in such a house as this? I'm sure I could not, for the Landlady stares at me with her small dark eyes, peering out from their depths 'neath a shaggy and overhanging forehead, looking as though she would pierce me through. Besides, she steals about with a tread as noiseless as though she were a ghost, she is all over the house in a minute, prying into every person's business,—Uncle, there's evil in that woman: if there are people in the world wicked enough to rob or murder travelers this woman is one of them."

"Evil to her who evil thinks!" said a shrill harsh voice. We turned our heads in surprise, and there stood the beldam, with cheeks flushed with anger, close behind Lucy's chair—neither of us had noticed her approach. She continued in a broad provincial dialect, "What doth *her* know about me, or what hath her zeen in our house, that she slanders an honest 'ooman arter that vashion? Look to theeze! Miss *Lucy Hicks*, or thee may'st be tied up to wan as wicked as I be—and var wuss, that I tell'ee!"

Having delivered herself to this effect, she flung out of the room in high dudgeon, leaving us gazing on each other in astonishment. How foolish does pride sometimes appear! at this instant I was too proud—I was ashamed to disclose to Lucy my fears in pursuing the journey. True, it would not be pleasant to stay where we were for the night, neither were we certain of being accommodated more to our liking if we sought another hostelry, but at all events there was little personal danger to be apprehended in the heart of an English village, no matter how wild the district in which it was situated, still when Lucy pressed me to order the horses and proceed I tried to convince myself that my fears were groundless, that the warning of the girl "Miriam" was nothing but an idle freak and that the knowledge she and the hostess possessed of our persons was obtained accidentally,—I therefore complied with Lucy's wishes. I left the room in which we were seated and sought the landlady, to order our horses and to settle the reckoning; but on my entering the bar-room I caught a glimpse of the back of a very tall woman, leaving it hastily by another door, which she closed quickly after her. I saw no part of her face, but from the glimpse I obtained of her stature and dress I was convinced that it was the mysterious pottery girl who had given me the warning. I was surprised at her evident desire to shun me, and was at the same time struck with the coincidence of this girl and the landlady both being acquainted with our persons, and convinced that however the knowledge was obtained, it had been derived from the same source,—Subsequently I had reason to connect this incident with suspicions of a horrid nature.

"So you be going?" said my hostels, without waiting for me to address her, "well, I knew you would—though p'raps you'd better a-stopt—zo I've just ordered your 'osses, and here's your bill."

I took the proffered slip of paper and read as follows:—

"Measter Hicks Dr

to the Landlord o' th' punch bowl.

to tu gallons o' Hoats vor th' 'osses	-	-	2	0
to tu glasses o' corejal vor th' Young ladies	-	-	1	0
to wan glass o' brandey vor zelf	-	-	0	6

3s 6d

bovey-tracey, }
Hawgust, 1808 }

received payt.

Dorothy Grimp."

"Dorothy Grimp!" I muttered as I left the room, after paying this curious bill; Heavens, what a name! It should have been *Dorothy Grim!*"

We mounted our horses and left the village, but so true is it that

"Coming events cast their shadows before"

that a feeling of indefinite dread came over me such as I never experienced before nor since, and as we left Bovey Tracey behind us I would have given a hundred pounds to have been safe within the boundaries of Moretonhampstead.

"Hillo, stranger!" thus I accosted the first person we met—a peasant apparently returning from his labour—"Is this the direct road to Moretonhampstead?"

"I doant know zur,—where be ye a-coming vrom!"

"Why, from Bovey to be sure; but you can tell us whether we are in the right road or not, without making such enquiries."

"From Bovey!" he replied, without noticing the latter part of my address, then maybe you stopt at Mother Grimp's to feed your 'osses loike,—most travellers stop there?"

"Yes we stopt there, but quite accidentally, for we knew not one tavern from another."

"Oh! that may be, and not haxidently nuther! The Devil's kind to's own they zay; ha, ha, ha! But zurely since you were at mother Grimp's you need'nt ask the way ov me, vor she could not only direct ye, but gie ye a charm to purtect ye, if she loiked."

"I asked no direction or charm from her, nor was I aware of her character."

"You ought then; there be queer doings on the Moors I'll azure-ee, and this road is not over safe to travel in, and no one knows it so well as mother Grimp."

"You insinuate queer things of my late hostess!"

"No zur I zinnuate nothing; but there be queer folks in the world, and this here mother Grimp be one of 'em. But come nearer zur and let me whisper, for who knows but she may be listening.—All the family be queer; I knowed her fayther and mother; she was a rum'un, nobody loiked to have her ill-wish, vor some how or other it always fell home to 'em. Her fayther left a tavern on the Moors with a neighbour one night, and the other was never zeen or heard of again, but exactly a year an' a day arterwards he was himzelf vound drowned in a turf pit near the same road, and people zay he was thrown in by the other man's ghost, for there were marks of a scramble loike on the bank, showing that he struggled hard vor his life. They had a son, who went off to sea quite a younker, and was never heerd on again. Then there was the two girls, so much alike that nobody ever knowed one from the tother; one on 'em—Nancy Eyres—vor that was their maiden name—is now the vamous Witch of Brentor, and there's this Dorothy,—she stays in Bovey, and her husband keeps a turf-tavern on the Moors, near the pit were the old man wur drowned. 'Tis a hout o'the way place, no travelling of decent people there, but a regular hulk for poachers, smugglers, French prisoners, and—they zay worse than all that—highwaymen! now this here mother Grimp and her sister be zo much aloike that b—st me if ever I could tell the difference, unless I zeed 'em both together, and each has queer ways with her. I've heerd ov people leaving the sign ov the Punch Bowl and the landlady behind them, and riding as hard as a horse could gallop to her husbands turf-tavern, and yet found her there before them."

"Well well, friend," said I, for the relation of his superstitious fears had had become tedious to me, "all this may or may not be true, I dont want to dispute with you—but tell me if there is not an old road leading to Moreton, turning off to the left somewhere, over the Moors!"

"Yes, there be;" said he sulkily.

"Then be good enough to direct me my good fellow, for I want to take that road."

"If zo be as mother Grimp has directed you to take *that* road, and you wont be warned by I when I tell you she's a witch, go your own way, vor the finger-board can direct ye as well as I can." Saying this he turned abruptly away.

We rode on for about half a mile in silence, when my niece said, "Well, Uncle, didn't I say that woman was an evil one? How glad I am that we left her house! An hour's riding will bring us safe to Moreton."

"God grant it may be so," I responded, "but—hark! what is that, thunder?" A flash of lightning was the only reply. The darkness which succeeded was so intense that the road was scarcely visible. The country we were now in was wild and open, such as is generally found in the vicinity of an extensive common; not a shrub was to be seen when the lightning illuminated the scene, nothing but rough stone fences and open fields. Yet a low unearthly sound moaned through the air, as though it were the murmuring of the wind among the forest trees. "One part at least of the pottery girl's prophecy is about to be fulfilled," I muttered, "would to God we were in Moreton!"

At that instant another flash of lightning more vivid than the first struck us so fiercely as almost to deprive me of sight. Lucy's horse uttered a scream, reared, and fell back on his haunches. I flew to her assistance, but found her safe on her feet. "I am not hurt, Uncle do not be alarmed," she said, "but what is that by the road side, which startled my horse?"

"That! that is the finger-post; see the arms branching out; this is the place where the road divides."

"But, Uncle, did you not see some person standing behind it? I am sure I did, and it was that I think which frightened the horse."

"I saw it," interrupted my daughter; "it was the tall girl we met in the pottery,—I was looking straight in that direction when the lightning came, and I could swear it is the same; she was trying to conceal herself behind the post!"

By this time Lucy was mounted again, and without offering any remarks on the mysterious appearance of the girl at such a place, and in such an hour, I said, "come my children, let us proceed; this is our way, to the left."

"Are you certain, Uncle? The other seems to me to be the direct route, while that to the left turns off towards the wild moors."

"It is the road I am directed, Lucy; I am told the other road is *dangerous*."

"I hope sir you do not follow the directions of the Inn-Keeper! I would not trust her with my safety on any account, especially after what we have just heard about her."

"She did not direct me; it was another person."

Here all conversation was suspended, but it was evident neither of us were satisfied. I repented we had left Bovey, for the flashes of lightning came quicker and fiercer, the thunder-claps nearer and louder, until they burst with deafening thours immediately above our heads, and the big drops began to fall at intervals, portending the coming storm. Our horses shrunk from meeting the contending elements, and it was only by dint of the whip and spur we could induce them to proceed. The darkness was now intense, so much so that we could perceive nothing about us, except when the electric fluid like a ball of fire rolled along the ground. The road too became worse and worse as we proceeded; we had passed the fences and now were travelling on the open common; deep ruts, pits and holes, often occasioned our horses to stumble, until we found ourselves riding over the turf, and on the lightning blazing forth again, we found we had left the road altogether! I was alarmed, not for myself as much as for the two tender girls. We were consulting whether we should

turn to the right or to the left, in search of the road we had strayed from, when a rushing noise was heard in the distance, nearer and nearer it came, until the storm burst upon us in all its fury. I now proposed to try the instinct of the horses, but on being left to their own pleasure, they immediately turned about and ran before the storm. We had then nothing left us but to face the rain, knowing that our route must lay in that direction.

We forced our horses against the storm for a short distance, when another flash disclosed to us an immense rock at but a few rods distance. We turned towards it in hopes to find shelter, nor were we disappointed,—one side of the huge block overhung in such a manner that we found no difficulty in riding underneath. We all alighted, and while groping about I fell over a heap of something, which on examination I found to be peat. I carried a brace of pistols about me, so taking one of them and drawing the charge, I pulled the trigger, and by the powder in the pan lit a piece of paper, and in a few minutes kindled a blazing fire. As it sent its red glare up against an angle of the rock, and the dense smoke curled overhead, while we stood drying our dripping garments, a sound seemed to be borne upon the wind like that of voices at a distance, joined in the chorus of some popular ballad. So faint did the sounds come at first that we could scarcely tell whether they were human or the moanings of the wind, till after a while, succeeding a comparative calm, a sudden gust bore them distinctly to our senses.

"Thank God!" said Lucy, "we are within the sound of human voices, and that's one comfort in this dreadful night. Uncle, had we not better depart and endeavour to find the habitation of those who are so merry; surely they would not harm travellers so hard pressed as we have been, nor deny us the hospitality of their fire-side?"

"You display the ignorance of inexperience, Lucy, when you imagine the misfortunes of a person will screen him from the knavery of a wicked world, and as you are sheltered from the rain and by a good fire, I would advise you to stay where you are until the storm is over; but I am curious to know what sort of neighbours we have got, so, while you are drying your wet garments I will ride forth and reconnoitre."

I did so. At first the darkness was so dense that I could see nothing; my horse was unwilling to leave his companions, and began neighing, when, annoyed as much at this untimely noise as at his unwillingness, I applied the whip pretty liberally. He bounded forward, but before he had proceeded many yards stopped suddenly, tossed up his head and snorted in evident alarm. I endeavoured to spur him on, but in vain, he absolutely refused to move an inch. I then alighted and peered forward. By degrees my vision became accustomed to the light, and I found I was standing on the very brink of a precipice, and beneath me was a narrow gorge apparently overhung with huge masses of granite. While I gazed beneath, endeavouring in vain to penetrate the darkness of its depths, the sounds of boisterous merriment again arose, and a flickering light appeared on the other side of the dell, almost immediately opposite to where I stood. It was apparent that the *locale* of the wassailers was in the dell, and I began to consider how I should reach it. To descend the precipitous cliff appeared to be impracticable, so I remounted, determined to wind around the precipice and seek for some path by which I might approach. My course was soon interrupted by detached pieces of granite, and I found it necessary to take a wider circle; in doing this I soon had the satisfaction of hearing my horses' hoofs strike against the hard bottom of a beaten path, and leaving the reins loose he soon bore me into a narrow opening, turning frequently and abruptly among the rocks. I had just turned a projecting angle when a group of four or five men stood close by my side, and one of them springing forward seized the reins and presenting a pistol shouted "Deliver or die!"

For an instant I was spell-bound—not at the demand, for I had wound up my expectation to something of the kind, but the *words*, the *voice*, the *manner*, were all that of the pottery girl who had accosted me—in what I then thought to be a joke—at Bovey! Many circumstances corroborated this conviction, the large stature and deep voice convinced me that when I saw him (for I had no doubts now but it was a man) at Bovey the sex was disguised. Then the intimacy with Mother Grimp; after having *warned* me out of the direct road into this wild and outlawed corner to be waylaid and murdered. His desire of concealment—when holding a confab—doubtless plotting this very denouement—with Mother Grimp. All, *all* forced conviction on my mind that I had been the dupe of a base and deep conspiracy, of which this was to be the *finale*; and the traitor—the villain was now before me! My blood boiled at the thought, and without considering the odds against me—forgetting my danger—I determined on revenge. All of this—though it takes long to relate it—were the reflections of a moment, and raising myself in my stirrups, I swung round my loaded whip, and struck the villain on the head with all my might. His grasp relaxed and he fell, but not until the weapon in his hand was discharged. I felt myself struck, but I had no time for reflection, for as soon as my horse found himself at liberty he bounded forward with all his might, while the discharge of three or four pistols behind me made the rocks reverberate, as the balls went hissing and rattling harmlessly among them. I felt dizzy—a sickening sensation came over me, and losing my balance I fell off and rolled into a ditch by the road side! It was well I did so, for at that instant my poor beast plunged head foremost over a tremendous precipice. Consciousness was now fast-failing me, and the last thing I heard was the "hurra!" of the robbers, as they imagined both horse and rider were plunged—the one into nothingness, the other into eternity!

[END OF CHAPTER III.]

CALL not the gray hairs of age the snows of winter—call them not the frosts of time! They are white—spring-blossoms, betokening the Eternal spring-time of Heaven.