

marked for the last month. He passed over hill and dale, watching the moonlit glades, and the glancing holly bushes, and the dark masses of shade under the trees; and though without troubling himself much about the picturesque, there was a keen sense of enjoyment in it. At last stalking cautiously, a little eminence in the middle of an open heathy part, which the wary deer had chosen for his bed-chamber, in order to be able to see all around, he caught sight of the branching antlers among a herd of does. He dragged himself nearer and nearer still, and at last fired. The head fell, and he ran rapidly up the hill, the hinds racing off in all directions; he took out his knife to finish the poor thing's life, and began cutting him up, when, very low on the still night breeze came the bay of a hound. 'They've agot the blood-hound out after me,' thought Maurice, with a thrill, not exactly of terror, though there were terrible stories told of the hound, and he was only brought out on great occasions.

There was no use in attempting to get the stag off now; and he set off at a long trot towards running water, and a frequented road to destroy the scent. He ran up a little stream, but the rain had filled it, and it was unpleasantly deep, and prevented his getting on. He passed into a byre, where some lean cows had been driven in, for the same reason; still on and on, for he could hear the low bay of the hound growing nearer and nearer; evidently he was upon the scent, and was summoning his master. The perspiration ran down Maurice's face, and his blood curdled, for he was beginning to grow faint with fatigue; the horrible brute's dreaded and dreadful voice was the only sound except the wind that reached his ear; and besides the physical dread of being torn by a beast, which even a brave man shrinks from, the thought came over him with a force he never had felt before, that if ever Leverton caught and put him in prison, what a chance it was giving him with Rachel's grandfather; and he ground his teeth at his own folly. He might have thought of this before, says a sage reader. Yes, but Maurice was not the first or the last young man who has eaten sour grapes, and whose teeth have been consequently set on edge.

His strength was very nearly gone. His, the swift-foot of the village, was reduced to a pace that a child might have overtaken, when he suddenly remembered that the river was so full with the rain, that it could not be crossed save at the bridge far below; and that, if he could but jump a certain place which he well knew, where the overarching banks had narrowed the channel, he should be safe for a time from the human part of his pursuers. No man but himself he knew would dare such a leap, and he could do battle with the beast as from a vantage ground. He felt very uncertain whether he could cross it himself, exhausted as he was; but it was his last chance, and he plunged short off to the right. The river was overflowing its banks on either side; a dark mass of troubled water, bringing with it matted clods of grass and boughs of trees broken away in its forest course, swept past. When it reached the narrow, it foamed, and tumbled, and swirled into whirlpools; the ground about was wet and swampy with the rain. It was an ugly leap, and Maurice felt that if he missed his footing, he must be lost; for neither man nor beast could live in such a torrent. He had generally too taken the jump from the other side, where the ground was a little the highest; here he would have to jump up, which increased the difficulty, and he stood for a second or two measuring the distance. The night wind sighed among the branches; everything was still but the turbid rushing water. He had lost time by coming down that way; he must jump or be taken. He sprang at last in desperation. The ground was so soaked that, in spite of the run which he took, he had hardly any impetus; he caught at a sapling as his foot touched the other side; both it and the ground gave way, but a friendly beech-root below held good, and he fell foremost by main strength on shore, and on the right side. He was hardly sensible for the next few minutes; and when he rose, panting, he could scarcely bear to go near the foam-

ing brink again; but it was his best hope, and he ensconced himself in the roots of the beech, with his gun reversed in his hand. He could hear the growl of the hound, now on the crest of the knoll, whence he had just himself come down; the clouds were gathering again over the moon, but enough light was left to see the huge and dreaded brute come in sight at his slow, unerring trot, and pause on the edge before making his spring, for he saw his man. Now or never. As he sprang, Maurice aimed a tremendous blow at him with the butt-end of his gun, and with a frightful yell he fell into the boiling seething whirlpool. Maurice shook from head to foot with rage and fatigue, and a sort of misery at his deed; his sportsman nature could not bear to have killed a dog as he would a wild beast; it was a sort of high treason in woodcraft; and besides, he remembered how Rachel used to fondle him. The dog never reappeared, and sadly he turned home, footsore and completely beat.

His father, who had gone out with the 'powney,' had reached home before him, and was anxiously on the watch. When the keepers came up to the house, both father and son were in bed; but, although Leverton felt certain that Maurice was the culprit, no one had seen him, there was not the slightest evidence against him; and as Leverton had taken the dog without leave, he was not anxious to make much fuss about its death, lest the blame should fall on him. So the thing blew over, but he hated Maurice all the worse for the failure of his night's work.

It had been a great lesson for Maurice himself. He began to mistrust his father, to see that whatever might be the abstract right and wrong of poaching, it never would enable him to win Rachel, and that he was playing his rival's game with the old clerk most satisfactorily. Regular work was slack, but to keep himself out of mischief he hired himself as carekeeper to a farmer four miles off, and the winter passed quietly away. He was now hardly ever at home, for he was off by daylight and home long after dark; but somehow Leverton was convinced that he and Rachel met if only for a minute at a time.

With all his care he could not come upon them, but sometimes she looked a little brighter and her steps were more light, and then Leverton, whose senses were sharpened by jealousy, could have told pretty nearly to an hour when they had come together.

It was a long and hard winter to poor Rachel, but spring came at last, and Maurice's six months were over; his master wanted him no more, and he returned home for a time.

It was a beautiful May. The apple and cherry orchards were sheets of blossom, May and yellow broom and 'fuzzen' scented the air, the ground was a perfect carpet of anemones, blue harebells, and primroses.

While the blackbird and the thrush, Good morrow said from break and bush, and Maurice and Rachel, like the birds, could not but be glad too in their spring, and feel convinced that all must go right with their love. 'Look at yon,' he said as they stood hand in hand one day 'under the hawthorn in the dale.' He pointed to a chaffinch flying with a long straw in its beak to make its nest. 'They've a-had a hard winter too, but it be all acome right with um, and they're abuilding their nestes as we shall soon oun, Rachel.' She smiled a happy smile and turned to go. 'What art thou adoin' of to-morrow?' said Maurice; 'art agoing to Mrs. Strange's?' 'No, not to-morrow, on'y Thursday.' 'And what time wilt thou be a coming whuom, for my fether he aworkin' up by Long-dean and I allus come back that way if so be I can. I love the grove, and I'd be there to take thee back at any time thou bidd'st.' They settled the hour and she tripped off home. There had been another listener.

On Thursday Rachel made good haste with her work; Mrs. Strange had never known her so anxious to have done. She was rather a fussy old body however, and it was past five before Rachel was able to get away. She had hurried herself by her haste, and only breathed freely when she came to the grove of tall beech.

It was here that Maurice had met her nearly two years before, and told her that he loved her; and for

some time she was so occupied with her own thoughts that she did find the time long. At last it grew quite late, there was no Maurice, the shadows began to creep fast under the trees, the sun was almost down, and she was growing nervous, when she saw a number of cows on their leisurely road home, poking their noses into a thicket not far off, sniffing the ground, galloping off again, and returning to look once more, as is the manner of cows, who are very curious by nature. She could see the herd-boys trying to get them home, at last go and examine for themselves, and heard their cries of wonder; one raced off to the nearest cottage, the smallest, little Reuben, saw her and ran up, great in his importance at having a story to tell.

'Oh Rachel, it's blood, there's quite a pool of blood, and it's all trampled and torn round, only p'raps the cows has made that; and Rachel, Tom says that both Leverton and Maurice is missin' sin' yesterday evenin'. The keeper was a callin' of him all about the village to-day, and old Master Lovel wanted Maurice badly, for the wood-cuttin' could na be finished without he.' Rachel sat down in mute terror, too miserable even to think out her own thought. Tom was not long in returning; that part of the wood was very unfrequented, but there was a sort of path not far beyond, and he overtook some men going home from their work, one with his fork over his shoulder. It was growing almost too dusk to see footmarks, but a little moon was rising and they could just see by it and the waning sunlight, traces of broken boughs and fern where something had been dragged along; a sullen little dark boggy pool lay in the heather just outside the farthest trees, and thither the tracks led.

The woodmen began to tear down pieces of bark and light them, and a number of flaming torches were soon moving about round the pool. How does news, particularly bad news, travel so fast? there were now fifteen or twenty men about, coming from all sides; a discovery of this kind seems to be perceived long distances off as vultures scent a dead body. They began with their rude pieces of stick to sound the ill-looking pool, black with peaty soil. Poor Rachel could not stir: she watched the glancing lights, the dark forms in and out among the giant trunks, the red glare on the water, as if it were not a horrible reality but only a picture. Little Reuben had taken his stand on a bank commanding both positions; the men had abused him for getting between their legs in his vehement curiosity, and he now acted as telegraph to Rachel, who had buried her face in her hands, and besides, where she sat could hardly see what was doing. 'Master Tomkins says as how he feels summat—no, 'tain't only a log;' then a dead silence, and the gesticulating little arms rose again. 'They've afound un, they've afound un;' found him, found whom?—Rachel's heart stood still, 'Oh! not him, not Maurice, good God, not him!' Then she felt as if she were praying for the death of another man, and besides was it not better that he were the murdered than the murderer?

Her suspense seemed to make her live hours in the minutes that passed, before the boy who had gone down, in his mad excitement, to the pond again to see for himself, rushed back to her.

It was neither Maurice nor Leverton, no one knew the face—it was a stranger's.

CHAPTER III.

'The crowner sat upon the body,' but he did not elicit much. There was a vague rumour of a man of the same height and appearance having been seen at —, ten miles off, but it was a thriving and frequented port, where many strangers came and went, and nothing followed from the clue. Old Lovel knew nothing of his son.

A night or two afterwards, however, Rachel was sitting sadly at the foot of her little bed; the moon threw the shadow of the quarries of the window-panes over her, not a breath stirred, when a handful of thin gravel was thrown gently against the window. She looked out; a dark figure was standing in the moonlight, and she flew downstairs and gently opened the door. Maurice was leaning sadly against the doorpost, but at the sight of her he seemed for a moment