

## A RUN FOR LIFE.

A prisoner had escaped from Dartmoor Prison. During a dense fog, which had suddenly enveloped a working convict-gang, one of them—a man notorious for being perhaps the most desperate character amongst the many desperate ones there—had contrived to escape, and, for the present at all events, had eluded capture.

It was not a particularly pleasant piece of news for us to hear, considering that we had, attracted by a very tempting advertisement, taken a small house for the summer months not very far distant from the famous prison itself. We were tired of seaside places; it seemed as if we should enjoy a change from our every-day life in London more if we were in some quiet secluded spot, far from uncompromising landladies, crowds of over-dressed people, and bands of music. Every day we scanned the papers with a view to discovering something to suit us; and our patience was at last rewarded by coming across the following advertisement, to which I promptly replied: "To be let for the summer months, a charming Cottage, beautifully situated on the borders of Dartmoor, containing ample accommodation for a small family, with every convenience; a good garden and tennis-lawn; also the use of a pony and trap, if required; and some choice poultry. Terms, to a careful tenant, most moderate. Apply to A. B., Post-office, &c."

The answer to my inquiries arrived in due time, and everything seemed so thoroughly satisfactory that I induced my husband to settle upon taking the place for three months without a personal inspection of it previously. The terms were two pounds ten shillings a week, and that was to include the use of the pony-trap, the poultry, and several other advantages not set forth in the advertisement. The only drawback—rather a serious one—was that Mr. Challacombe, to whom the place belonged, had informed me that it was about three miles from a station. However, with the pony-trap always at hand, even that did not seem an insuperable objection. He expatiated upon the beauty of the scenery; the perfect air from the heather-clad moors, and lastly, requested an early decision from us, as several other applicants for the Cottage were already in the field.

To be brief, we agreed to take it; and on a scorching day in July, our party—consisting of two maid-servants, my husband, and myself, and our only olive branch, a most precious little maiden of three years old—started from Paddington Station en route for Exeter, where we were to branch off for our final destination, Morleigh Cottage. The pony-trap was to meet us, and Mr. Challacombe had promised that we should find everything as comfortable as he could possibly arrange; and as sundry hampers had preceded us, I had no fears as to settling down cosily as soon as we should arrive.

The journey to Exeter by an express train was by no means tedious; we rather enjoyed it. As our branch train slowly steamed into the wayside station, we seemed to be the only passengers who wished to alight; and presently we found ourselves, with the exception of a solitary porter, the sole occupants of the platform. At one end of it lay a goodly pile of our luggage, which the said porter had in a very leisurely manner extracted from the van.

The pony-trap was to meet us; and as Mr. Challacombe had assured us it would not only hold four grown-up people and a child, but a fair amount of impedimenta, we were under no anxiety as to how we were to reach Morleigh Cottage.

"Is there anything here for us?" my husband inquired of the porter.

"No, sir; not that I know of."

"From Morleigh Cottage?" Jack explained.

"No, sir," he repeated. "But chance it may come yet."

"Chance, indeed," I echoed in a low tone. "It will be too disgraceful, Jack, if Mr. Challacombe has forgotten to desire the carriage to be sent."

We both proceeded to the other side of the station, and gazed through the fast-falling twilight up a narrow road, down which the porter informed us the pony-trap was sure to come, if it was coming at all—which did not seem probable after a dreary half-hour's hopeless waiting for it.

In the meanwhile, we beguiled the time by asking the porter some leading questions with regard to the surroundings, &c., of Morleigh Cottage; all of which he answered with a broad grin on his sunburnt, healthy face.

"How far is the Cottage from here?" Jack inquired.

"Better than six miles."

"Six miles!" I exclaimed—"O Jack, Mr. Challacombe said it was about three."

"It's a good step more than that," observed the porter, with a decided nod of his head.

"It is a very pretty place?" I said interrogatively.

"It isn't bad, for them as likes it," was the guarded and somewhat depressing response.

I felt my spirits sink to zero. I had persuaded Jack to take it; he had suggested that we should go to see it first; but the advertisement had been so tempting, and the idea of the other longing applicants had made me so keen to secure it, that I felt whatever it was like I must make the best of it, and contrive that Jack at least should not repent of having been beguiled by me into, as he expressed it, taking "a pig in a poke."

"The pony-carriage is sure to come," I said in a confident way, once more straining my eyes up the deserted road. As I uttered the word pony-carriage, I detected a distinct grin for the second time on the man's face, which was presently fully accounted for by the appearance of our equipage coming down the deeply rutted road. Imagine a tax-cart of the shabbiest, dirtiest description, with bare boards for seats, and the bottom strewn with straw; the pony, an aged specimen, shambling along, with a harness in which coarse pieces of rope predominated. It was a pony-trap with a vengeance.

I could almost have cried when it drew up, and I saw Jack's critical eye running over all its shortcomings. And it was all my fault.

It was too late to recede from our bargain now; all that we could do was to bundle into the horrible machine, and endure as we best could an hour's martyrdom driving to Morleigh Cottage.

Our groom was a civil boy of about fifteen, clad in ordinary working-clothes. He managed to sit on the shaft or somewhere, and to drive us back, as Jack of course had no idea of the direction; and judging from the solitariness of the scene, we should not have been wise to depend upon chance passers-by to direct us.

Arrived at last, we found the Cottage was just two shades better than the trap. It was a tiny abode, and desolately situated as it was possible to conceive; the only redeeming point about it being that it was clean.

The next morning, which happened to be a very wet misty one, we surveyed our garden and domain generally. The tennis-lawn was spacious enough, and the garden, to do Mr. Challacombe justice, was well stocked; but the place itself was like the city of the dead—so silent, so quiet, so lonely.

But as the weather improved we got out most of the day, which rendered us very independent of the small low roofed rooms. Jack and I took long walks, and occasionally we utilized the pony-trap, taking with us our little Rose and her nurse.

We began to think soon of asking some of our relations to visit us; and the first to whom I sent an invitation was an elderly cousin, who resided in London, and who was in rather delicate health. I candidly explained the out-of-the-way nature of the place we were in, but desisted upon the great pleasure it would be to have her, and my entire conviction that she would do her an immense amount of good. She came; and it was very fortunate for me that she did so, as about three days after a telegram had reached us requesting my husband to lose no time in returning to town, in consequence of one of his partners being taken ill. It was raining when he left; and I watched the wretched shandrydan disappear down the road with feelings I could scarcely repress—a sense of foreboding evil seemed to oppress me. I tried in vain to shake it off, but only partly succeeded in doing so. Cousin Susan endeavored to console me by reminding me constantly that Jack had promised to return in a day or two.

Jack had just been gone for one week, when Rose's nurse, a pleasant girl of about twenty, came to my room and informed me of the occurrence I have already alluded to—"A prisoner had escaped."

Nothing could have frightened me more, and I was afraid it might alarm Cousin Susan, so I charged Margaret on no account to let it reach her ears. Very likely even now the man was captured; it was rare indeed that a convict ever escaped; but I had heard stories of their eluding capture, until, driven by sheer starvation, they often surrendered themselves to any stray passer-by, to whom the reward might or might not be of some consequence.

That very morning we had arranged to drive to a rather distant spot to get some ferns. I would fain have deferred the expedition; but Cousin Susan was already preparing for it, so I could only have postponed it by giving my reasons; and the chance of encountering the convict seemed too small to risk terrifying her by telling her of it at all.

It was a lovely morning when we started, and Cousin Susan became quite enthusiastic over the "frowning tors and wind-swept moors."

"Don't you admire them, Helen?" she said.

"They are very grand," I admitted.

"Oh, so lovely, so wild!" said Susan.

I was glad she liked them.

The ferns were to be found in a sort of ravine, which was reached by a narrow lane; on one side was almost a precipice, overhanging a streamlet, now nearly dry, but one which the winter rains soon transformed into a torrent; on the other side was a wood, composed principally of stunted oak-trees, with hardly any foliage, and singularly small; but all around the trees was a thick sort of underwood.

We had left Tom the stable-boy with the trap by the roadside, and I had privately resolved not to let my cousin penetrate farther into the ravine than I could help; but she was so charmed with its wealth of rare ferns, that she skipped from one point to another with an amount of dexterity and nimbleness I had never before given her credit for.

"I do think we might collect quite a hamperful, Helen!" she said, kneeling down as she spoke to dig up a root most energetically.

"We had better come another day, then," I responded. "I don't want to be late of getting back, so, if you don't mind just taking a few specimens—when Jack is with us we can come again."

"Now or never!" gaily rejoined my cousin, little imagining how soon her own words were to be applicable to ourselves. She pounced joyfully upon her ferns, and had collected quite a small heap, when I suggested that we had better tell Tom to tie the pony to a gate, and come up to carry them down for her.

"O no!" said Cousin Susan. "I will carry them myself. Do help me here just a minute, Helen."

By this time we were some distance up the ravine; the walk was narrow and winding; we had gone farther than even I had intended. I bent down to give her the assistance she wanted in raising up some lovely lichen from the trunk of a dead tree. As I did so my eyes wandered some distance from where we were standing towards a fallen tree. I fancied—perhaps it was only fancy—I knew I was in a very nervous state, and apt to imagine, but I fancied I saw a movement just beyond the tree—it was within twenty paces of us. I felt my face grow icy cold; my veins seemed chilling; for a moment I feared I was going to faint. Death must be something like what I felt on that sunny day in August when I stood in the Devonian ravine with my unconscious cousin. I looked again. There it was more distinctly visible than ever—a line of drab-coloured clothing, and presently