

with consternation so strongly depicted on their countenances, that he shrunk back involuntarily with an undefined feeling of apprehension; but before he had time to reflect a moment longer, one of them suddenly darted out at the door, and seizing the boy roughly by the shoulder, dragged him violently into the cottage. "I am not what you take me for," said the boy attempting to laugh, "but only the poor pedlar who visited you last year." "Are you *alone*?" inquired the old woman, in a harsh deep tone, which made his heart thrill with apprehension, "Yes," said the boy, "I am alone *here*; and alas!" he added, with a burst of uncontrollable feeling, "I am alone in the wide world also. Not a person exists who would shed a single tear if I died this very night."—"Then you are welcome!" said one of the men with a sneer, while he cast a glance of peculiar expression at the other inhabitants of the cottage.

It was with a shiver of apprehension rather than of cold, that the boy drew towards the fire, and the looks which the old woman and her sons exchanged, made him wish that he had preferred the shelter of any one of the roofless cottages which were scattered near, rather than trust himself among persons of such dubious aspect. Dreadful surmises flitted across his brain: and terrors which he could neither combat nor examine, imperceptibly stole into his mind; but alone, and beyond the reach of assistance, he resolved to smother his suspicions, or, at least not to increase the danger by revealing them. The room to which he retired for the night had a confused and desolate aspect; the curtains seemed to have been violently torn down from the bed, and still hung in tatters around it—the table seemed to have been broken by some violent concussion, and the fragments of various pieces of furniture lay scattered upon the floor. The boy begged that a light might burn in his apartment till he was asleep, and anxiously examined the fastenings of the door; but they seemed to have been wrenched asunder on some former occasion, and were still left rusty and broken.

It was long ere the pedlar attempted to compose his agitated nerves to rest; but at length his senses began to "steep themselves in forgetfulness," though his imagination remained painfully active, and presented new scenes of terror to his mind, with all the vividness of reality. He fancied himself again wandering on the heath, which appeared to be peopled with spectres, who all beckoned to him not to enter the cottage, and as he approached it, they vanished with a hollow and despairing cry. The scene then changed, and he found himself again seated by the fire, where the countenances of the men scowled upon him with

the most terrifying malignity; and he thought the old woman suddenly seized him by the arms, and pinioned them to his side. Suddenly the boy was startled from these agitated slumbers, by what sounded to him like the cry of distress; he was broad awake in a moment, and sat up in bed,—but the noise was not repeated, and he endeavoured to persuade himself it had only been a continuation of the fearful images which had disturbed his rest, when, on glancing at the door, he observed a broad red stream of blood silently stealing its course along the floor. Frantic with alarm, it was but the work of a moment to spring from his bed, and rush to the door, through a chink of which, his eye nearly dimmed with affright, he could watch unsuspected whatever might be done in the adjoining room.

His fear vanished instantly when he perceived that it was only a goat that they had been slaughtering; and he was about to steal into bed again, ashamed of his groundless apprehensions, when his ear was arrested by a conversation which transfixed him aghast with terror to the spot.

"This is an easier job than you had yesterday," said the man who held the goat. "I wish all the throats we've cut were as easily and as quietly done. Did you ever hear such a noise as the old gentleman made last night! It was well we had no neighbour within a dozen miles, or they must have heard his cries for help and mercy."

"Don't speak of it," replied the other; "I was never fond of bloodshed."

"Ha! ha!" said the other, with a sneer, "you say so, do you?"

"I do," answered the first, gloomily; "the murder-hole is the thing for me—that tells no tales—a single scuffle—a single plunge—and the fellow's dead and buried to your hand in a moment. I would defy all the officers in Christendom to discover any mischief there."

"Ay, nature did us a good turn when she contrived such a place as that. Who that saw a hole in the heath, filled with clear water, and so small that the long grass meets over the top of it, would suppose that the depth is unfathomable, and that it contains more than forty people who have met their deaths there?—it sucks them in like a leech!"

"How do you mean to despatch the lad in the next room?" asked the old woman in an under tone. The elder son made her a sign to be silent and pointed towards the door where their trembling auditor was concealed; while the other, with an expression of brutal ferocity, passed his bloody knife across his throat.

The pedlar boy possessed a bold and daring spirit, which was now roused to desperation; but