

The Murder Hole

Anonymous

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He tapped lightly on the window, and they all started up, with consternation on their faces, and one of the men suddenly darted out at the door, seized the boy roughly by the shoulder and dragged him inside. He said, trying to laugh, "I am only the poor peddler who visited you last year."

"Are you alone?" cried the old woman in a harsh, deep voice.

"Alone here—and alone in the whole world," replied the boy sadly.

"Then you are welcome," said one of the men with a sneer. Their words filled the boy with alarm, and the confusion and desolation of the formerly neat and orderly cottage seemed to show signs of recent violence.

The curtains had been torn down from the bed to which he was shown, and though he begged for a light to burn until he fell asleep, his terror kept him long awake.

In the middle of the night he was awakened by a single cry of distress. He sat up and listened, but it was not repeated, and he would have lain down to sleep again, but suddenly his eye fell on a stream of blood slowly trickling under the door of his room. In terror he sprang to the door, and through a chink he saw that the victim outside was only a goat. But just then he overheard the voices of the two men, and their words transfixed him with horror. "I wish all the throats we cut were as easy," said one. "Did you ever hear such a noise as the old gentleman made last night?"

"Ah, the Murder Hole's the thing for me," said the other. "One plunge and the fellow's dead and buried in a moment." "How do you mean to dispatch the lad in there?" asked the old woman in a harsh whisper, and one of the men silently drew his bloody knife across his throat to answer.

The terrified boy crept to his window and managed to let himself down without a sound. But as he stood wondering which way to turn, a dreadful cry rang out: "The boy has escaed—let loose the bloodhound." He ran for his life, blindly, but all too soon he heard the dreadful baying About three hundred years ago, on the estate of Lord Cassilus between Ayrshire and Galloway, lay a great moor, unrelieved by any trees or vegetation.

It was rumored that unwary travelers had been intercepted and murdered there, and that no investigation ever revealed what had happened to them. People living in a nearby hamlet believed that in the dead of night they sometimes heard a sudden cry of anguish; and a shepherd who had lost his way once declared that he had seen three mysterious figures struggling together, until one of them, with a frightful scream, sank suddenly into the earth. So terrifying was this place that at last no one remained there, except one old woman and her two sons, who were too poor to flee, as their neighbors had done. Travelers occasionally begged a night's lodging at their cottage, rather than continue their journey across the moor in the darkness, and even by day no one traveled that way except in companies of at least two or three people.

One stormy November night, a peddler boy was overtaken by darkness on the moor. Terrified by the solitude, he repeated to himself the promises of Scripture, and so struggled toward the old cottage, which he had visited the year before in a large company of travelers, and where he felt assured of a welcome. Its light guided him from afar, and he knocked at the door, but at first received no answer. He then peered through a window and saw that the occupants were all at their accustomed occupations: the old woman was scrubbing the floor and strewing it with sand; her two sons seemed to be thrusting something large and heavy into a great chest, which they then hastily locked. There was an air of haste about all this which puzzled the waiting boy outside..of the hound and the voices of the men in pursuit. Suddenly he stumbled and fell on a heap of rough stones which cut him in every limb, so that his blood poured over the stones. He staggered to his feet and ran on; the hound was so near that he could almost feel its breath on his back. But suddenly it smelled the blood on the stones, and, thinking the chase at an end, it lay down and refused to go farther after the same scent. The boy fled on and on till morning, and when

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at last he reached a village, his pitiable state and his fearful story roused such wrath that three gibbets were at once set upon the moor, and before night the three villain had been captured and had confessed their guilt. The bones of their victims were later discovered, and with great difficulty brought up from the dreadful hole with its narrow aperture into which they had been thrust.