

the strangers to infer that they were seen, and hastily counted the chances of his being able to enter the house to arm himself, and awaken his servants, and yet still remain unseen. He determined to try. Fortunately they had sat beside the door, and the flowers around the porch screened them from observation. He therefore supported his wife into the house, and finding his way to his room, shortly returned, armed with a brace of pistols, and a short, heavy cutlass, which he had little thought would ever again be required for service. He did not wait to summon aid, the wife having promised to see to that, but returned as noiselessly as possible to watch the further proceedings of the enemy.

Already two of the men were under the windows, peering cautiously around. The third had apparently remained a short distance behind them.

"All is quiet enough, Ned," said one whispering. "The stables are unlocked; I see the door ajar. Would it not be best to take a pair of horses and be off? They're first rate beasts, and will have us many a mile away, before the loss is known."

"I thought as much," said the other. "Is this your courage, now that the game's begun. If we manage well, we may have the Captain's money, as well as his horses. You know his room. Lead the way there, and it will go hard but we'll get all he has without noise or nonsense. If we don't—"

"But, Ned!"—timidly interrupted the other.

"No *but*-ting, now. Had it not been for you I should not have been here. Now that I am, I'll not go back with nothing. That cursed mortgage has a chance of being paid off, if the captain is half as rich as you say he is, and I'll pay *him* when I'm able. However, there's no sin in my taking what I can get from him, for all he has should have been mine." The man who spoke was Craighton, but the meaning of his language his comrade could not fathom. His own words seemed to have lashed him into a fury, and he added, seeing that Whitley still hesitated, "Show me the way; if you don't, I'll find it out myself, and drive you before me."

"Let's take the horses," said Whitley. "They'll pay handsomely for this night's work. I've no fancy for throat-cutting, and in your present humour, it seems that less will hardly please you. If we get into the house, there will be fighting, for the Captain has been a soldier—and, the consequence, I don't like to think about. Be persuaded man, think of your wife——"

"Damn you!" cried Craighton, interrupting him. "Hold your tongue; or at any rate don't

name her; if you do again, I'll clear all scores between us in a short way. In—in—I say."

At this moment, the man who had waited behind, having apparently become impatient at the length of the controversy, approached them, and joined the side of Craighton.

He spoke in a whisper, so that his words were inaudible to Captain Willinton, but the consequences of his remonstrance were soon apparent.

A great part of the conversation was distinctly heard by Captain Willinton, who waited anxiously the promised aid. He saw that one was a determined, powerful man. The second, whose voice seemed not unfamiliar to his ear, was a trembling coward. But there was something in its tone that aroused a feeling of detestation, which even contempt could hardly master. Of the third he could form no judgment. He determined to watch the current of events, however, and only make his proximity known, when he could make it felt.

Two of the robbers approached the main entrance, beside which the Captain stood; the third still hung back. The man who came first carried a small bar of iron; sufficient, as he imagined, to force open the slight fastenings with which it was the custom of the country to secure the doors. As he laid his hand upon the latch, however, a strong arm was upon his collar, and the robber was hurled, as if shot from a cross-bow, half-way across the lawn.

It was the coward only, who was overthrown. The other man, who had imposed the menial task of opening the door upon his comrade, was close beside him, and in an instant saw how the matter stood.

For a moment he recoiled, but gathering up his energies, he sprang forward with a view to overpower, and master his opponent, but the captain was on his guard, and easily evaded the shock. With the flat of his cutlass, he struck his assailant, who fell backwards, and leant against one of the pillars, apparently stunned. The third man, who had been anxiously waiting the issue of the conflict, now approached. He was masked and disguised, the only one of the three who had taken any precaution to avoid detection. He carried a bludgeon in his hand, with which he aimed a stroke at the face of Captain Willinton; the latter, however, was well acquainted with the tricks of fence, and caught the blow as it fell, immediately returning it.

The man felt that he was wounded, but it was only enough to madden him, and make him reckless of the consequences. He snatched a pistol from his belt, and fired.

The wounded robber, disabled though he was,