

Nash went back to the house. "If it's a fair question, Mr. Rawdon," said the Squire, "where are you going at this time of night?"

"Fair enough, Squire; I'm bound for Collinwood to ketch the mornin' train. Bye, bye! no time to lose." Off trudged the Grinstun man, once more whistling, but this time his tune was "It's no use a knockin' at the door."

The Squire, the detective, and the lawyer held a council of war.

"Pity we hadn't arrested that chap," remarked Mr. Nash.

"Couldn't do it," said Coristine; there is no warrant for his arrest, no definite charge against him. A justice of the peace can't issue one on mere suspicion, nor can he institute martial law, which would of course cover the case."

"If what Maister Nash has seen be as he thinks," added the Squire, "it's as weel we laid nae han' on him, for it would just hae preceipitated metters, and hae brocht the haill o' thae Lake Settlement deevils doon upon us. D'ye think Rawdon's gaun to Collingwood, Nash?"

"Not a bit of it. I believe he came past here, openly and dressed as he was, for three reasons. First, he wants to prove an alibi for himself, whatever happens. Second, he wanted to see how we are guarded, and by that loud whistling has informed his confederates not far off that it is useless to try the house from the front. Thirdly, he has circled round to take command of the villains that fired on me out of the waggon we couldn't find."

"What's to be done then?" asked the Squire and the lawyer in a breath.

"We must watch the means of access from the left to the right. You see, there are bushes, young willows and alders, all along the bank of the creek, behind which they can steal towards that ferny hollow under the birches, and, from thence, either make for the bit of bush Mr. Terry is guarding, or creep behind the scattered boulders towards the fence. Your shrubberies about the house and live hedges and little meadow copses are very pretty and picturesque, Squire, but a bare house on the top of a treeless hill would be infinitely better to stand a siege."

"Aye, aye, Nash; but I'm no gaun tae cut doon my bonnie trees an' busses for a wheen murderin' vagabones."

"Well, I'll get a gun from one of the men in the kitchen, and explore the hillside below the Captain."

Having secured Ben Toner's gun, the best of the lot, the detective walked down the garden to the gate, where he found Perrowne vainly endeavouring to comfort Muggins. The poor dog did not even whine, but shivered as he stood, otherwise paralyzed with abject terror.

"Crouch down by the fence," whispered the detective in the parson's ear, and at once crouched down beside him.

"Do you see that moving object coming up the hill from the birches? By Jove! there's another crawling behind it. What is it?"

"It's an animal of some sawrt," answered Perrowne.

"That accounts for your dog's fear. It isn't a bear, is it? There may be some about after early berries."

"Now, it's not a bear, though I've been towld dawgs are very much afraid of bears."

Just then the animal keeled over, and immediately there followed the report of a rifle. The crawler behind the beast slid back into the hollow and disappeared. Then, from the left of the house came a volley that woke the echoes all round; it was the explosion of the Captain's blunderbuss. The detective ran along the fence to Mr. Terry's beat, and found the veteran reloading his rifle from the muzzle. "Keep your post, Mr. Terry," he cried, "while I run and see what it is you have bagged. I imagine your son-in-law will look after the Captain." Mr. Nash ran down the hill, closely followed by the lawyer, who had come out to see the fun. All the bedroom windows were lit up, and eager eyes strained to learn the cause of the firing, while the remaining sentinels prepared for action. The animal shot was a large bloodhound, in life a dangerous brute with horrid, cruel-looking fangs, but now in the agonies of death. The detective drew his long dagger-like knife, and drove it into the creature's heart. Then, while Coristine lifted it by the two hind legs, he took a grasp of its collar, and they carried the trophy of the veteran's rifle on to the lawn in front of the house. There they learned that the Captain, being half asleep with no chance of an enemy in sight, dreamt his ship had been saluted coming into port on a holiday, and, as in duty bound, returned the salute. The blunderbuss had not exploded; it always made that grand, booming, rattling, diffusive sort of a report. The dead hound's collar was examined, and was discovered to bear the initials A. R. "Who is A. R.?" asked the Squire; and Mr. Nash replied: "He is no doubt my affianced bridegroom, Haltamont Rawdon."

It was two o'clock in the morning; so the guard was relieved, and the former sentries returned to their posts; but the Squire noticed, with a frown, that, just as the relief arrived at Mr. Errol's beat, a female form clothed in black darted round the stables towards the kitchen door. Also, he saw that the minister had a most unmilitary muffer, in the shape of a lady's cloud, round his neck, which he certainly had not when he went on duty. His high respect for the reverend gentleman hindered any outward expression of his combined amusement and annoyance. Muggins came back with Mr. Perrowne, but obstinately refused to go near the dead hound.

"Do you think he has ever seen it before?" asked the detective.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," replied the clergyman.

"I lawst Muggins, you know, at Tossorontio, and there was a man there at the time, a short man in a pea-jacket or cowl, down't you know, who had a big dawg. When Muggins disappeared, I thought the big dawg might have killed him. But now I think the man with the pea-cowl saved him from the big dawg, and that's how Muggins came to go after him. What do you imagine that beast was after, coming up the hill towards Muggins?"

"I think he was coming to overpower you, Mr. Perrowne, and bring all our forces to your aid, while the fellow behind him slipped in and fired the house or did some similar mischief."

"I tell you, Mr. Nash, he'd have had my two barrels first, and I'm a pretty fair shot, down't you know? But, look here, it's dry work mounting guard, so I'll have another pull at the tankard."

The Squire came in from guard mounting, somewhat fatigued. He had been on the stretch mentally and physically ever since the Captain's arrival. "You had better go to bed, grandfather, and take Thomas with you," he said to the veteran.

"Not a wink this blissid noight, Squoire," replied Mr. Terry; "the smell av the powder has put new loife into my owld carcass. The Captin can go iv he plazes."

"Avast, there! I say, messmate," growled Captain Thomas, "I don't run this mill, but my youngster's here under hatches, and I'm a goin' to keep watch on, watch off, along of any other man. I don't think that o'yours is half up to the mark, Mr. Terry."

"Oi was thinkin' 'twas a bit wake mysilf," replied the old soldier, filling up his glass, and handing the decanter to his neighbour, who likewise improved the occasion.

"Oi'm suppawsin now, sorr," continued the veteran, addressing the dominie, "that this is yer first apparance on shintry."

"You are right, Mr. Terry, in your supposition."

"An', sorr, it's a credit to yeez to be shtandin' an' facin' the inimy wid divel a thing in yer hand but a pish-till. Oi moind a big shtroppin' liftinant av ours was called Breasel, an' sid he was discinded from the great Breasel Breck av Oirish hishty. Wan noight he was slavin', whin four nagurs av Injuns kim into his tint, an' picked the sword an' pishtils and the uniform aff the bid he was on. Thin he woke up, an' him havin' sorra a thing to difind himself wid but a good Oirish tongue in his hid. But it's Tipperary the liftinant foired at the haythens, an' it moight ha' been grape an' canister, for they dhropped the plundher and run for loife, all but wan that got howlt av an anhevis drawin' plashter the liftinant had for a bile an the back av his neck, an' wasn't usin' at the toime. Someways the plashter got on to his nakid chist an' gripped him, an' he was that wake wid freight, the other nagurs had to carry him away. Afther that the Injuns called Breasel by the name of Shupay, a worrud that in their spache manes the divil—savin' yer prisence, Mish-ter Wilkinson."

"One time the Susan Thomas was at Belle Ewart loadin' on lumber," growled the Captain. "Sylvanus heerd as how the Mushrats, that's the folks acrost on t'other side of the bay, was a comin' over to fasten him and me down in the hold and paint the schooner. They was a goin' to paint her The Spotted Dog, than which there's no meaner kind o' fish. So, I bid Sylvanus pile a great heap of useless, green, heavy, barky slabs on top o' the good lumber; then we took the occasion of a little wind, and stood her out to anchor a little ways from the dock. Sure enough, when night come, the Mushrats came a hollerin' aand yellin'. Unfortnitly I'd left the salutin' blunderbuss here at home, and hadn't but one pike-pole aboard. 'How many boat loads of 'em is there, Sylvanus?' I says. 'Two,' says he. 'All right,' says I, 'that's one apiece. Take off your coat, and roll up your shirt sleeves, Sylvanus,' says I, 'for you're a goin' to have heavy work slab heavin'!' On they come to board us, one on each side. 'Fire out them or'nary useless slabs, Sylvanus,' says I. 'But there's a boat with a lot of men in it,' says he, a-chucklin' like an ijut. Hope I haven't given the pass word away, John? Well, I said: 'Fire out the slabs, and let the men get out o' the way.' And he began firing, and I kept my side a-goin', and the slabs fell flat and heavy and fast, knockin' six at a shot, till they cussed and swore, and hollered and yelled murder, and that was the last we two saw of the Mushrats and the paintin' of the Susan Thomas."

Subdued but hearty laughter followed these stories, and, when the Captain ended, the veteran pushed the decanter towards him, remarking: "A good shtory is a foine thing, Captin, dear, but it makes ye just a throifle dhroy." The Captain responded, and told Mr. Terry that he was neglecting himself, an omission which that gentleman proceeded to rectify. Mr. Errol, with his muffling cloud still round his neck, was asleep in an easy chair. In his sleep he dreamt, the dream ending in an audible smack of his lips, and the exclamation: "Very many thanks, ma'am; the toddy's warm and comfortin'." When his own voice aroused him, he was astonished to witness the extreme mirth of all parties, and was hardly convinced when it was attributed to the stories of the veteran and the Captain. The Squire, though amused, was resolved to have a word with his widowed sister.

The lawyer paced up and down in the cool night, trying to combine two things which do not necessarily go

together, warmth and wakefulness. Everything was so quiet, that he seemed to hear Timotheus and Sylvanus pacing about rapidly like himself, when suddenly a little spark of fire appeared at the far end of the verandah towards the stables. Cautiously, under cover of bushes, he approached the spot, but saw nothing, although he smelt fire. Then he knelt down and peered under the flower-laden structure. The light was there, growing. In a moment it became a flame, and, as he rushed to the spot, a lad fell into his arms. Clutching his collar with his left hand in spite of kicks and scratches, he hauled his prisoner back to the verandah, and, thrusting in his right arm beneath the floor, drew out the blazing rags and threw them on the gravel walk or on the grass until he was sure that not one remained. Some watcher at the front window had alarmed the guard-room, for out tumbled its occupants, and the lad was secured by Nash, and handed over to the Captain and Mr. Errol. Calling to Toner to keep an eye on the whole front, the detective, taking in the situation, hastened to the stables along with the lawyer, while the Squire and Mr. Perrowne went round the back way on the same errand. No guard was visible, and there was fire in two places, both happily outside sheds, one abutting on the garden fence, the other farther to the right. The Squire went for water-pails, while Nash and the veteran followed the course of the incendiaries towards the bush guarded by Rufus. But the lawyer and the parson, seizing stout poles, which were apparently Tryphena's clothes props, knocked the blazing sheds to pieces with them, and scattered the burning boards over the ground. Before the water came, the report of a rifle, a fowling piece, and of several pistol shots, rang through the air. No more signs of fire were discovered, so the water was poured upon the still burning boards, and the firemen waited for the report of the pursuers. While thus waiting, they heard a groan, and, going to the place whence it proceeded, discovered Timotheus, with a gag plaster on his mouth and an ugly wound on the back of his head, lying close to the garden fence below the fired shed. Some water on his face revived him, and at the same time moistened the plaster, but as it would not come off, Coristine cut it open with his penknife between the lips of the sufferer. Even then he could hardly articulate, yet managed to ask if all was safe and to thank his deliverers. He was helped into the house, and delivered over to the awakened and dressed Tryphena and Tryphosa, the latter behaving very badly and laughing in a most unfeeling way at the comical appearance cut by her humble swain. When Tryphena removed the plaster, and Tryphosa, returning to duty with an effort, bathed his head, the wounded sentry felt almost himself again, and guised he must ha' looked a purty queer pictur. Soon after, Rufus staggered into the kitchen in a similar condition, and his affectionate sisters had to turn their attention to the Baby. These were all the casualties on the part of the garrison, and, overpowered though the two sentries had been, their arms had not been taken by the enemy.

The Squire went forward to see after the welfare of his father-in-law, and found Mr. Terry carrying his own rifle and the gun of Sylvanus, while the said Pilgrim helped the detective to carry a groaning mass of humanity towards the kitchen hospital.

"Oi tuk my man this toime, Squire," said Mr. Terry, gleefully; Oi wuz marcifil wid the crathur and aimed for the legs av' im. It's a foine nate little howl this swate roife has dhilled in his shkin, an' niver a bone shplit nor a big blood vissel tapped, glory be, say Oi!"

It appeared, on examination of the parties, that Ben Toner and Sylvanus had indulged in a prolonged talk at the point where their beats met, during which a party of six, including the two prisoners, creeping up silently through the bush, prostrated Rufus with the blow of a bludgeon on the back of the head. Then, they advanced and repeated the operation on Timotheus, after which three of them, with cotton cloths soaked in oil, fired the sheds and the verandah. But for the lawyer's discovery of the spark under the latter, the fire might have been beyond control in a few minutes, and the end of the murderous gang accomplished. The whole household was roused; indeed, save in the case of the children, it can hardly be said to have been asleep. Mrs. Carruthers descended, and, sending Tryphosa to look after her young family, helped her father to bind up the wound of the grizzled incendiary, who refused to give any account of himself. "I know him," said the detective to the Squire; "his name is Newcome and he's a bad lot." Soon the Captain and Mr. Errol brought their prisoner in. The hospital and guard-room was the winter kitchen of the house, a spacious apartment almost unused during the summer months. When the lad was brought into it, he seemed to recognize the place with his dull big grey eyes, and spoke the first words he had uttered since his capture. "Bread and meat for Monty." "Why," said Tryphena, "it's the ijut boy." "So it is," ejaculated Mrs. Carruthers, "What is your name, Monty?" With an idiotic smile on his face, but no light in those poor eyes, he answered: "Monty Rawn, and mother's in the water place." Mrs. Carruthers explained that the lad had been often in the kitchen in winter, and that she had told Tryphena to feed him well and be kind to him, so that it is no wonder he recognized the scene of his former enjoyment. "Puir laddie," said the Squire, "he's no' responsible, but the born deevil that set him on should be hanged, drawn, and quartered."