

pay-day afternoon. The boys don't bother him there.'

The dancing-room was lined on two sides with beer-barrels and whiskey-kegs; at one end the orchestra sat, at the other was a table with refreshments, where the 'soft drinks' might be had. Those who wanted anything else might pass through a short passage into the bar just behind.

This was evidently a superior kind of ball, for the men kept on their coats, and went through the various figures with faces of unnatural solemnity. But the strain upon their feelings was quite apparent, and it became a question how long it could be maintained. As the trips through the passage-way became more frequent the dancing grew in vigor and hilarity, until by the time supper was announced the stiffness had sufficiently vanished to give no further anxiety to the committee.

But the committee had other cause for concern, inasmuch as after supper certain of the miners appeared with their coats off, and proceeded to 'knock the knots out of the floor' in break-down dances of extraordinary energy. These, however, were beguiled into the bar-room and 'filled up' for safety, for the committee were determined that the respectability of the ball should be preserved to the end. Their reputation was at stake, not in Black Rock only, but at the Landing as well, from which most of the ladies had come; and to be shamed in the presence of the Landing people could not be borne. Their difficulties seemed to be increasing, for at this point something seemed to go wrong with the orchestra. The 'cello appeared to be wandering aimlessly up and down the scale, occasionally picking up the tune with animation, and then dropping it. As Billy saw me approaching, he drew himself up with great solemnity, gravely winked at me, and said—

'Shlipped a cog, Mishter Connor! Mosh hunfortunate! Beauchful h'nstrument, but shlips a cog. Mosh hunfortunate!'

And he wagged his little head sagely, playing all the while for dear life, now second and now lead.

Poor Billy! I pitied him, but I thought chiefly of the beautiful, eager face that leaned towards him the night the League was made, and of the bright voice that said, 'You'll sign with me, Billy?' and it seemed to me a cruel deed to make him lose his grip of life and hope; for this is what the pledge meant to him.

While I was trying to get Billy, away to some safe place, I heard a great shouting in the direction of the bar, followed by trampling and scuffling of feet in the passage-way. Suddenly a man burst through, crying—

'Let me go! Stand back! I know what I'm about!'

It was Nixon, dressed in his best; black clothes, blue shirt, red tie, looking handsome enough, but half-drunk and wildly excited. The Highland Fling competition was on at the moment, and Angus Campbell, Lachlan's brother, was representing the lumber camps in the contest. Nixon looked on approvingly for a few moments, then with a quick movement he seized the little Highlander, swung him in his powerful arms clean off the floor, and deposited him gently upon a beer-barrel. Then he stepped into the centre of the room, bowed to the judges, and began a sailor's hornpipe.

The committee were perplexed, but after deliberation they decided to humor the new competitor, especially as they knew that

Nixon with whiskey in him was unpleasant to cross.

Lightly and gracefully he went through his steps, the men crowding in from the bar to admire, for Nixon was famed for his hornpipe. But when, after the hornpipe, he proceeded to execute a clog-dance, garnished with acrobatic feats, the committee interfered. There were cries of 'Put him out!' and 'Let him alone! Go on, Nixon!' And Nixon hurled back into the crowd two of the committee who had laid remonstrating hands upon him, and, standing in the open centre, cried out scornfully—

'Put me out! Put me out! Certainly! Help yourselves! Don't mind me!' Then grinding his teeth, so that I heard them across the room, he added with savage deliberation, 'If any man lays a finger on me, I'll—I'll eat his liver cold.'

He stood for a few moments glaring round upon the company, and then strode toward the bar, followed by the crowd wildly yelling. The ball was forthwith broken up. I looked around for Billy, but he was nowhere to be seen. Graeme touched my arm—

'There's going to be something of a time, so just keep your eyes skinned.'

'What are you going to do?' I asked.

'Do? Keep myself beautifully out of trouble,' he replied.

In a few moments the crowd came surging back headed by Nixon, who was waving a whiskey-bottle over his head and yelling as one possessed.

'Hello!' exclaimed Graeme softly, 'I begin to see. Look there!'

'What's up?' I asked.

'You see Idaho and Slavin and their pe's,' he replied.

'They got poor Nixon in tow. Idaho is rather nasty,' he added, 'but I think I'll take a hand in this game; I've seen some of Idaho's work before.'

The scene was one quite strange to me, and was wild beyond description. A hundred men filled the room. Bottles were passed from hand to hand, and men drank their fill. Behind the refreshment-tables stood the hotelman and his barkeeper with their coats off and sleeves rolled up to the shoulder, passing out bottles, and drawing beer and whiskey from two kegs hoisted up for that purpose. Nixon was in his glory. It was his night. Every man was to get drunk at his expense, he proclaimed, flinging down bills upon the table. Near him were some League men he was treating liberally, and never far away were Idaho and Slavin passing bottles, but evidently drinking little.

I followed Graeme, not feeling too comfortable, for this sort of thing was new to me, but admiring the cool assurance with which he made his way through the crowd that swayed and yelled and swore and laughed in a most disconcerting manner.

'Hello!' shouted Nixon as he caught sight of Graeme. 'Here you are!' passing him a bottle. 'You're a knocker, a double-handed front-door knocker. You polished off old whiskey-soak here, old demijohn,' pointing to Slavin, 'and I'll lay five to one we can lick any blankety blank thieves in the crowd,' and he held up a roll of bills.

But Graeme proposed that he should give the hornpipe again, and the floor was cleared at once, for Nixon's hornpipe was very popular, and to-night, of course, was in high favor. In the midst of his dance Nixon stopped short, his arms dropped to his side, his face had a look of fear, of horror.

There, before him, in his riding-cloak and boots, with his whip in his hand as he had come from his ride, stood Mr. Craig. His face was pallid, and his dark eyes were blazing with fierce light. As Nixon stopped, Craig stepped forward to him, and sweeping his eyes round upon the circle he said in tones intense with scorn—

'You cowards! You get a man where he's weak! Cowards! you'd damn his soul for his money!'

There was dead silence, and Craig, lifting his hat, said solemnly—

'May God forgive you this night's work!'

Then, turning to Nixon, and throwing his arm over his shoulder, he said in a voice broken and husky—

'Come on, Nixon! we'll go!'

Idaho made a motion as if to stop him, but Graeme stepped quickly forward and said sharply, 'Make way there, can't you?' and the crowd fell back and we four passed through, Nixon walking as in a dream, with Craig's arm about him. Down the street we went in silence, and on to Craig's shack, where we found old man Nelson, with the fire blazing, and strong coffee steaming on the stove. It was he that had told Craig, on his arrival from the Landing, of Nixon's fall.

There was nothing of reproach, but only gentlest pity, in tone and touch as Craig placed the half-drunk, dazed man in his easy-chair, took off his boots, brought him his own slippers, and gave him coffee. Then, as his stupor began to overcome him, Craig put him in his own bed, and came forth with a face written over with grief. 'Don't mind, old chap,' said Graeme kindly.

But Craig looked at him without a word, and, throwing himself into a chair, put his face in his hands. As we sat there in silence the door was suddenly pushed open and in walked Abe Baker with the words, 'Where is Nixon?' and we told him where he was. We were still talking when again a tap came to the door, and Shaw came in looking much disturbed.

'Did you hear about Nixon?' he asked. We told him what we knew.

'But did you hear how they got him?' he asked, excitedly.

As he told us the tale, the men stood listening, with faces growing hard.

It appeared that after the making of the League the Black Rock Hotel man had bet Idaho one hundred to fifty that Nixon could not be got to drink before Easter. All Idaho's schemes had failed, and now he had only three days in which to win his money, and the ball was his last chance. Here again he was balked, for Nixon, resisting all entreaties, barred his shack door and went to bed before nightfall, according to his invariable custom on pay-days. At midnight some of Idaho's men came battering at the door for admission, which Nixon reluctantly granted. For half an hour they used every art of persuasion to induce him to go down to the ball, the glorious success of which was glowingly depicted; but Nixon remained immovable, and they took their departure, baffled and cursing. In two hours they returned drunk enough to be dangerous, kicked at the door in vain, finally gained entrance through the window, hauled Nixon out of bed, and, holding a glass of whiskey to his lips, bade him drink. But he knocked the glass away, spilling the liquor over himself and the bed.

It was drink or fight, and Nixon was ready to fight; but after parley they had a drink all round, and fell to persuasion