

"But he is out," I repeated. "He was called to see Farmer Nash—five miles off, as you know—and he hasn't returned yet. I am sitting up for him."

What a mercy, I thought, that the supper things are removed and put away!

Tom eyed me suspiciously; my mien and manner deceived him. He did not think I suspected him, but he doubted me all the same.

"Look here," he said, with a touch of menace in his tone, "doctor don't want to go out because it's Christmas-eve, or maybe he's afeared; but he'll have to come all the same."

"Afraid?" I repeated, as if catching something of what was said. "I assure you you're wrong; if you don't believe me, go to the stable and see for yourself that my husband is away."

Tom winked at his companion, who opened the surgery-door and went out. Presently he came back.

"It's right enough," he said, "the horse isn't there."

I breathed a little more freely. But what would their next move be? If they would only go to "way-lay" my husband on the road!

"We'll wait for doctor," announced Tom. "But I assure you," I said, "I will send him as soon as he comes home."

"Best make sure of him," said Tom, radely; "we're going to wait for him—eh, Joe?"

Joe nodded and grinned. "Very well," said I, quietly: "but I am afraid you may have some time to wait."

That don't matter; what we want doctor for'll hold a sit—eh, Joe?"

Again Joe nodded, and both men, without more ado, pushed past me into the parlour; and as I followed I saw them draw up to the fire my husband's arm-chair and mine, and seat themselves, spreading their immense hands before the blaze. But insolent as this conduct was, I preferred it to their going into the kitchen, which was underneath my husband's bed-room. If, even here, he should be aroused by their gruff voices and come down! I was sick with terror, and yet I had never felt more perfectly self-possessed.

I sat down and took up my work again, as if such an invasion of my parlour was nothing out of the usual order of things. Mentally I was revolving how I could obtain assistance.

It was useless—even if I had anyone to send—to seek help at East Malden; West Malden was nearly three miles across the fells, and I could not, of course, go myself; the men would at once suspect me if I pretended to go to bed, leaving them in possession; and everything depended on my "playing" them.

Nellie! The thought—the hope—almost took my breath! Nellie had been sometimes to West Malden; but could she find the way thither over snow-covered fells—and at night? Would she undertake so perilous a journey? Could I risk the child's life to save my husband's?

Meanwhile Tom Smith and his companion had selected two of my husband's pipes, and, filling them with tobacco from a box on the mantelpiece, lighted them and began to smoke.

"I suppose," said Smith to me presently, "doctor's got a latch-key—eh?"

"A latch-key?" I answered. "Oh, no. Why?" I knew very well.

"Oh! nothing," he replied. "Say, missis, hast got any beer in the t'house?"

I thanked heaven that I had only a small quantity. What might not these wretches do if they got mad drunk?

"I have some," I said, rising, "but not much."

I rose to go to the larder where the barrel was kept. Joe, at a nudge from Smith, rose to follow me; he evidently wished to satisfy himself as to the quantity of beer we had in store. How I trembled as the man's heavy step sounded through the passage and the kitchen! If my husband should wake! but there was not a sound above. Nellie, as we crossed the kitchen, pretended to be very busy over mixing the pudding for the next day. I saw Joe glance at her with a grin. I knew the diabolical thought that was passing through his mind—there would be one short at the Christmas table to-morrow! He took the beer-cask and emptied all it contained—not much—into a large jug, with which he returned to the parlour, leaving the door a little open. Now was my opportunity; but I must be cautious.

"Nellie," I said, aloud, "you can leave that now and go to bed."

Then, as the broad form of Joe disappeared, I added, under breath:

"Nellie, would you go to West Malden for help? Could you go such a night as this?"

Heaven had put a heroine's soul into that girl of fifteen. She looked up at me straight, and whispered back:

"I'll find my way, m'm."

I just stooped forward and kissed her forehead. I couldn't have said a word if I had tried. Nellie's face flushed up with a strange delight; she turned away, and seemed to be putting things away, while I drew out a letter from my pocket, and on a blank sheet wrote:

"For Heaven's sake send armed help. There are two men in the house waiting to murder my husband. He is asleep in the house, unarmed."

"From the wife of Dr. CARLTON."

"Give this," I said, "to the sergeant at the police-station."

Nellie took the paper and thrust it into her bosom. "All right," she whispered. "I won't be seen."

"He'll help me!" she said, "and keep you and the dear master safe. Good night, missis," she added, aloud.

I kissed her once more. I might never see the brave-hearted girl again; and yet her simple faith

had deeply impressed me, and given me hope, despite the agony of suspense and dread.

Nellie's bedroom was at the end of the passage. I knew that she meant to get out of her window. I looked through the kitchen-window; it was a dark night, the snow falling fast, but not heavily. How cold it was—even here, where there was a fire; or was it that my blood was chilled to ice?

I dare not leave the two ruffians long; they might take it into their heads to suspect me, or make a row, and so arouse my husband.

I returned to the parlour and sat down again. The men were still smoking—the beer they had finished—and talking in muttered tones. They glanced at me, but continued talking together as if I had not been there.

"Think she's any notion—eh?" asked Joe, with another covert look at me.

Smith chuckled. "No! D'y- think she could take it so cool if she had? She knows we mean to make doctor come, wher he don't want to—that's it. Of course he wouldn't go along with we if he could help it after murdering my baby and my threatening him."

"But look here," said Joe, "what's the use of leaving witness s to tell on us?"

Tom did not answer for a moment. "Tom did not answer for a moment. But I took a fresh thread from the cotton, and began to thread my needle."

Then Tom shaking the ashes from his pipe, said, slowly:

"No Joe, not if we can help it; it's doctor we've got the quarrel with. We don't want more blood than his."

Joe nodded sul'ently, and muttered something about "no fun in hanging just for a couple of women," but Tom made no rejoinder, only looking at his watch.

As he turned back his rough coat to do this I saw the butt-end of a pistol sticking out of an inner pocket. I had feared the fellow was armed; I knew it now.

The clock in the kitchen struck twelve. What a hideous Christmas-eve was this! Here I sat with two murderers, knowing not what a minute might bring forth, my husband asleep above; and help, if it could even be reached, hours away. Yet I must be calm when I was enduring such mental tortures as cannot be even faintly pictured, save by those who have gone through a similar experience. Every sound made my heart almost cease beating—the chirp of a cricket in the kitchen, the fall of a coal in the grate, the soft thud of the snow against the window panes. I listened—listened till every nerve seemed endowed with the sense of hearing—for a footfall above, the sound of an opening door.

The minutes dragged themselves out into years of agony, and yet it must be hours before help came, even if it came too late; even if brave Nellie did not lose her way, or perish in her noble task. She could not reach West Malden under an hour and a half, and the constables would be at least as long in returning, if the snowstorm by th t time had not increased so much as to prevent them coming at all, then, or even if they were too long delayed, might not the murderers begin to search for him?

I tried to put such horrible fears from me—it might unnerve me—but how could I put them away? I rose and went to the window, in the restlessness of agony; it was snowing still, but, Heaven be praised! not thickly. What was Nellie? Was she near her goal or wandering hopelessly about, or lying prone on the pitiless fell-side?

"I think it is very likely," I said, "that Dr. Carlton has been kept at Farmer Nash's, as it is so bad a night."

"Oh!—aye, he'll come home," responded Tom Smith: "his horse'd know the way, if he didn't—he'd come home Christmas-eve."

He chuckled as he said this, and nodded at Joe. I sat down again baffled, leaning my head on my hand as if I were sleepy. Sleepy! I felt as if slumber could never visit me again! And he above slept still—thank Heaven, oh, thank Heaven!

By-and-by the men ordered me to bring them supper. I was glad they did not go themselves to fetch it; they would have certainly made a noise over it. I brought them in pretty well all the cooked food the house contained in the way of eatables. Eating would keep them occupied for a time at any rate, though not for long. How can men look at foot who have murder in their hearts?

They went at the viands with a will, eating coarsely and greedily, and consuming a enormous quantity, for we had laid in provisions for several days, being Christmas-time, and a good deal of it was cooked, or of a kind that did not require cooking.

The men were rather merry over their meal, and every second I dreaded a shout of laughter or the thump of a huge fist on the table; but they chuckled rather than laughed out; and once, when Joe hit the table rather sharply to emphasize a coarse joke he had uttered, and I felt as all was over now, Smith stopped him with a quick:

"Hut! mate, t'doctor may have a latch key after all, and this" tapping his coat significantly—"we want to hear him!"

Was it not some relief to know that they would be quiet, for the better carrying out of their fell purpose?

"Two o'clock," announced Tom Smith, presently. They were sitting by the fire again, for which I, by their orders, had lately fethered coals. "We're going home till had day, in time for his Christmas dinner, and there ain't much of it left."

They both laughed at this sally. Till morning! If help did not come then, what would the end be? For the morning light would surely wake my husband! Almost dead silence fell at last—nothing but the soft thud of the snow against the window and the occasional dropping of a coal in the grate.

Great Heaven! that awful night! What would the dawning of Christmas-day be for me?

Three o'clock. I looked out again; it was snowing faster—thicker; it was not quite twelve when Nellie went. Perhaps she had never reached West Malden; and if she had reached it, and the constables came back with her, would they approach the house cautiously? If these men saw or heard anyone coming they would, perhaps, in their rage kill me. Well, but if they did—still my husband would be saved—only would he value his life at such a cost?

Was there no hope? Half-past three, and no help yet! The men had not moved or spoken for nearly an hour; they sat watching and waiting like bulldogs.

I rose, and was moving to the window again, from which the front-door was not visible, when I heard a sound that seemed to turn my heart in that second to molten wax. It was too light a sound for any sense of hearing less acute than mine was to-night—just the light touch of a foot above.

My husband was awake! The long agony was all in vain! One moment more—

A loud, heavy knock at the outer door rang through the house!

The two men leaped to their feet—Smith with his hand on his pistol!

Great Heaven! even now it might be too late! I rushed towards the open door, but Smith, with a fearful exertion, caught me, and, hurling me back, strode to the outer door. I heard him open it—then there was a fearful yell—a heavy sound—the crash of a falling body—and then what seemed to me a roar of voices.

I saw faces—faces; someone was at my feet—Nellie, I knew afterwards; and next I was clasped close in strong, loving arms; and that was all I knew for many hours to come.

I was ill for months afterwards, and perhaps my nerves will never be what they were; the tension of that Christmas-eve almost killed me. My husband said the long illness saved my reason.

They nursed me back to life, Nellie and my husband; and now you see, I can even talk about that night. But for many years the sight of snow would drive me into a fit of nervous trembling.

Tom Smith was fatally injured by the blow the constable's staff gave him. Joe was sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude.

That was the first time I have been north since that night, and I am glad to leave it even now. I suppose I shall never care to look at the snow as long as I live.

That is rather a woful story to beguile the time of waiting, isn't it? But it has made the time pass quickly, too, I think, for here comes the London train.

Fashion Notes.

Feather bands both plain and shaded are a favorite garniture on new wraps.

All sorts of novel bows are used to form the high bonnet trimmings of this season.

Rough camel's-hair fabrics of every description are popular for tailor-made gowns.

Applique galloons trim many handsome cloth and wool dresses.

Very small pokes are worn by young women, married or single.

Jackets grow longer.

Short basques are going out of favor.

Beaded velvet bonnets are worn with dressy frocks.

Very few dresses are made of one fabric.

Fur boas are from two to three yards long, and some have tassels and others balls on the end.

Furs, especially Astrakhan and black martin, will be used to trim cloth suits for midwinter wear.

Alpaca is now brought out in new colorings and improved texture that drapes better than the old.

Hoods appear to be added to every sort of wearing apparel upon which they can possibly be adjusted. Some are merely ornamental, others intended to be useful as well.

Rounded, pointed, flat-gathered, and even heart shape, they are seen upon the backs of cloth Newmarkets, pelerines, visites, ulsters, opera cloaks, waterproofs, and even upon some Paris-made tea gowns.

Colored and black velvet bands are again worn round the throat with evening dresses.

Inclosed please find \$2. I consider the FARMER'S ADVOCATE the best paper out.—JOHN FLEMING Bay View, P.E.I.