peated. Then, quickly, "We'll go right home as soon's the rain holds up; we'll—"

"No, I can not go back there again," said Marie. "Everything is dark and hopeless before me, but I can not go back with you."

"Mother won't be cross any more, I guess," said John, but there was considerable hesitation in his tone. Then, brightly, "I'll tell her I won't sign no more papers if she plagues you again."

Little John appeared to think that a threat of this nature would give proper protection, for he smiled and nodded and looked as cheerful and happy as though everything was satisfactorily settled. But Marie shook her head. Little John became grave and thoughtful again. Finally he burst out in some petulance—

"'Twas that Hawkes. If he'd 'a' let you alone mother wouldn't 'a' had nothin' to scold about. You didn't want him to talk with you, did you?"

Marie's only answer was a quick, burning blush. She was looking steadily into the fire.

"Where's yer father an' mother?" Little John asked. He had forgotten that he had put a previous question.

"I am alone in the world," Marie answered. The flush had not left her cheek, neither had she ceased to study the glowing coal. "I do not remember my father, but I sometimes think that my mother loved me, and that wherever she is the separation from me is a pain to her. I sometimes think I remember her face, but again I fear it is only a dream. Where I see her it is all water about us, and it seems that she took me in her arms and kissed me. I hope it is not a dream," in a low, half audible voice. "I could be happy, even in my present misery, if I could know that the haunting vision was a reality, and that some day, even if not till I die, I shall meet a mother who loved me."

"There, there," said Little John, wiping his eyes, for he was crying copiously, "don't ye talk so, deary. I'm goin' away pretty soon," smoothing her hand. "I'm old an' ain't good for nothin' here, an' they don't want me. I'll take all my money an' won't let 'em have a cent. But what'll we do with the big house?" stopping and looking puzzled as this obstacle to the total demolition of his family presented itself. "I'll make a will an' leave it to you, an' then you can let me live with you, an' you'll read to me. Yes, that's what I'll do," rubbing his hands in delight, "an' we won't never let that Hawkes man come in the house, an' you won't have to cry any more."

At that moment the latch on the door rattled loudly, and Marie started up in affright.

"It's only some o' my old friends," said John, in a whisper, "I won't let 'em in."

John opened the door a crack, but his intention of concealing Marie was frustrated, for whoever it was without gave the door such a push that the little man was almost thrown on his back. The next instant Old Tom, his clothing drenched, was standing in front of the salamander.

"What do ye want here?" asked Little John. He had closed the door and was standing in front of Marie. There was something like determination in his weak eyes.

Tom's hands were clasped behind him, his face wore a smile so broad that it resembled a grotesque mask. The tone of his voice was particularly friendly as he answered—

"Hello!"

John seated himself, and drawing Marie close to him, looked up into the visitor's face in a relieved, if not to say interested, way.

"I ben a-walkin' a little fer exercise," said Tom, "an' the rain comed down an' wet me through an' through," examining closely the tails of his dripping coat. "I knowed ye was here, 'cause I seed the smoke a-comin' from the chimbly, an' I thought I'd come in ter see ye. Didn't know as how there was ladies present."

He bowed to the lady, with a smile intended to be reassuring, then he began to scowl. Next he fumbled in his pockets.

"Here's a dollar I've got," he said, exhibiting the piece, "so ye see I don't want ter rob ye. A friend o' mine gin it ter me. He gins me money every time I comes 'round. He likes me, he does' an' I think more o' him 'an I do o' my own son." Tom moved his lips to such an alarming extent that Marie crept closer to Little John. "Don't be afeard," cautioned Tom, with a grin, "I wouldn't hurt a hair o' yer purty head fer nothin'. Ye're awful purty, an' I'm a-goin' ter tell the man as gin me this dollar about yer, an' he'll come an' marry ye," with a leer of bulky playfulness. "His name's Hawkes, an'—hey?" The last exclamation was caused by an interruption from Little John.

"Where's he live?" John repeated.

"Lives up in Boston. He's a banker, an' he's got ropes o' money."

"He's a very bad man," said Little John, sulkily. "He makes Marie cry."

"How's that?" Tom asked, thrusting out his lips in his championship of his friend.

"He follers her 'round when she don't want him to," complained John, "an' her mistress makes her cry a-twittin' of her. She was a-goin' ter run away."

"Please don't say any more," whispered Marie, in great distress.

"Mr. Hawkes 's a gentleman, he is," said Tom. "I'll tell him not to bother ye no more," with a reassuring nod.

"Please say nothing about me," Marie pleaded.