

It was about two weeks after Mario's disappearance, and an intensely hot day. Little John had the Water street door of his office wide open, and was sitting on a stool. In his mouth he held a short-stemmed, black-bowled clay pipe. The door was opened at such an angle that the lower half of the room was obscured from the gaze of a passer, but certain sounds that came from within told that Little John was not the only occupant. A steady pounding, interrupted at times by a grating noise, was made by a man who stood at the bench, on which were a number of thick earthen dishes, with pestles protruding above their tops. The diligent workman was Old Tom. On account of the stifling heat Tom had thrown aside his coat and waist coat, and there was exposed a dirty linen shirt, rope suspenders holding up pantaloons very baggy in the seat and short in the legs. A sunburned, grizzly neck and thick black hair, cut as square as a thoroughbred's tail, completed the rear view of the worker, who pounded and ground something in one of the dishes.

At about three o'clock on this afternoon, a man entered Water street some quarter of a mile above Little John's shop. To a boy who was vainly trying to find sufficient air to fly a kite, the man put some questions, and receiving answers, came leisurely toward the wharves, and presented himself at Little John's door.

Little John was still smoking and gazing into space, and it took some seconds for his eyes to focus so as to comprehendingly behold the figure, but when he got the required distance he took out his pipe and exclaimed, in a complaining whine,

"Now, you go away from here! I don't want you! 'Twas you that drove her off!"

Instead of being dismayed at Little John's violent gestures, the man pushed him gently aside and entered the office. Tom, who had turned about, said, his hubby face wreathed in his most conciliatory smile:

"Don't ye take on so, John! He won't hurt nobody. I know him well. He's Mr. Hawkes, 'n' he's a come ter see me. Ain't ye?"

"I don't want no Mr. Hawkes here!" persisted Little John, sullenly. "He made my girl go away. He worried her, 'n' she's run off."

John was sniveling like a crossed child. Hawkes attempted to soothe him, saying:

"I did not drive her away. When she went I was many miles from here. I have come to assist you to find her."

There was a black bottle on the bench beside Tom and it was evident to Hawkes that the little man had tasted often of its contents.

"Will you bring her back?" asked Little John, who had caught only the last of the remark.

"You must help me find her," said Hawkes.

"I don't know where she is!" Little John exclaimed, half crying in disappointment.

"You keep still, John," said Old Tom; then in an aside "Don't ye mind him, Mr. Hawkes," Tom tapped his great head significantly, then asked in a louder tone, "Ye's my pardner, ain't ye, John?"

John nodded feebly, then his head dropped, and he fell asleep.

"What are you doing here, Tom?" Hawkes asked. "You seem to have struck prosperity at last. I shall stay with you awhile," drawing up a chair and lighting a cigar.

"I'm in business," said Tom, grinning. "This 'ere's my factory. S'pose ye know I'm a chemieler. I'm a goin' ter learn him my formulur," nodding toward the sleeping John. "All the trouble is, he can't keep 'wake long 'nough, 'n' when he's a sleepin' he fergets all wot I've a told him."

"What are you grinding there?" Hawkes asked.

"Them's yearbs," turning to his work. "I'm makin' stuff as 'll kill warts now. A old Injin gin me the formulur. I'm a chemieler, I am. I use oxalic acid, 'n' gamboge, 'n' sugar o' lead, 'n' sich suff."

He paused in his grinding to look back and impart this information, with a face expressing consciousness of his accomplishments.

"And occasionally you get time to tip up that black bottle," said Hawkes.

"When he gin's me a chance," said Tom, with another grin. "He's at it most o' the time," then turning abruptly, his dirty face shining, in his most wheedling smirk, "Gin me a dollar."

"No!" Hawkes answered, firmly.

Tom looked surprised, but was instantly smiling again, and came toward the banker, crying coaxingly:

"Come, now, do. I allers thought more o' ye 'n' I does o' me own son. I's told ye so many's the time, 'n' I tell ye so agin."

"I said the last time that I would give you nothing more. If you will answer my questions, I'll pay you, but I'll give you nothing. I want to know if you can tell me anything about the lady, his wife's companion?" pointing to Little John. "Has he ever told you of her?"

"I knows all about her," effusively. "I knows more'n anybody."

"Where is she?"

"Runned away."

"Alone?"

"No; with t'other gall, the one as the old man's son was a goin' ter marry."

"How do you know?"

"Old man said so," scowling at the doubt in the questioner's voice.

"Did you ever see her?"

For a few minutes Tom eyed his questioner cunningly.

"O' course I seed her!" he answered. "I seed her afore anybody round here seed her. I made her cry once," grinning broadly.

"How could you make her cry? Was she afraid of you?"

"Will ye gin me the dollar?" shrewdly.

Hawkes nodded.

"'Twar a paper I had, 'n' she read it 'n' cried. I got it here in my old coat. Ye can have it if ye want it. She cried 's though her own mother writ it. 'Say,' with a return of the cunning twinkle, "p'raps her own mother did writ it."

"I'll keep the paper," said Hawkes. "Does he know anything of her movements since she left his house?"

Tom shook his head.

"He ain't done nothin' but cry after her."

Hawkes rose to go.

"Here is your dollar," he said. "If you will find out where she went when she left, I will pay well for the information."