

"How much?" bargained Tom, following to the door. "Ten dollars?"

"Yes," answered Hawkes, and he turned up the street. When he reached the railway station in Linn, he found Fred Kipp, satchel in hand, among the waiting passengers.

"Where now?" Hawkes asked.

"To Essex," Kipp answered. "Can't I induce you to accompany me? Come down; Joe will be delighted to have you. He talked quite a time about you when I last saw him. You can share my room," eagerly. "We have doubled up before today. I only heard of your arrival yesterday or I should have come to see you."

"I'll go with you," Hawkes answered. He felt a genuine pleasure in again hearing the voice of his old friend.

At midnight of the same day Summit avenue, St. Timothy's hill, was silent in sleep. The moon shot a pale, sickly light through breaks in the murky, half transparent, ragged clouds that were scudding across the heavens. The restless breakers rolled on the beach with a mournful roar. Beyond the farthest breaker a black speck was rising and falling on the sea. When opposite the Goldthurst estate the speck assumed the shape of a boat propelled by a sculler; there, putting about, the boat made straight in and landed on the beach. A coarse bag was thrown ashore, and as it struck the sand there was a sound as of hard substances knocking together. The noise seemed to disconcert the sculler, for he grasped his oar and for a few minutes stood motionless, as though awaiting a surprise. None coming, he went far up on the beach and buried his anchor, returned to the boat, swung the bag over his shoulder, and commenced the ascent of the cliff steps. When his eyes were level with the lawn he took a careful survey, then came up to the path. At that moment the moon shone bright through a rift in the scud and revealed the man to be Old Tom. There was terror mingled with rage in Tom's face as he looked up at the gleaming disc, then he squatted to the earth like a crawling thing. The clouds met again, but he did not immediately rise. He reached out his neck like a turtle and peered about, then catching up his bag he went toward the house. To-night he was plainly surprised to find a light in the Goldthurst study. The discovery occasioned him deep thought, as a result of which he deposited the bag behind a tree, took a revolver from his pocket, examined it attentively, replaced it, then going up the side steps, knocked at the door. Some minutes elapsed before he was answered, then a voice, a man's voice poorly disguised to effect a woman's, asked what was wanted.

"It's me, Old Tom!" in his unmistakable accents.

The bolts were withdrawn, but as on his former visit to the house, Tom saw no one to give him welcome. He entered the study, the same door opposite opened, and Mr. Goldthurst appearing, went about fastening the windows as before. At the sight of Tom, he made the same exclamation of surprise.

"You here again?" he asked, in feigned impatience. "What can I do for you, my man? The hour is late, and respectable people should be at rest."

Such a cold stress he placed on the word respectable. Tom did not hear. He was eyeing the disordered papers that had been hastily thrust into the desk.

"I comed ter see 'f ye'd gin me somethin' ter live on," he said, in his surliest growl. "I'm a goin' hungry nowadays, 'thout no work."

"Do you work?" with the shade of a smile. "I had an idea that you thrived by stealing from your mates; that you incited broils and riots, that in the confusion you might carry away booty. But you work?" and he raised his brows.

"Will ye gin me money ter live on?" Tom asked again.

"No!" was the half angry answer. "Go, stir up more riots. You fare well at such times."

"You put me up to it!" Tom was sulkily shaking his head.

"I never saw you before the night you showed your dirty presence in this room!" said Mr. Goldthurst, with cutting coldness.

"You lie!" Tom's face wore its ugliest frown.

Mr. Goldthurst was so taken aback at the suddenness of the change in his visitor's manner that he recoiled a step or two. When he had recovered himself Tom's revolver was aimed at his heart.

"You had the up side last time." Tom's expression had changed again, and he was grinning. "Now Tom's gut it! I look 'so's I'd do murder, don't I? Well, don't try me! I want ye ter set in thet ther chair!" pointing to the farthest end of the room. "Ye'd better go!" as the gentleman still stood looking into the revolver.

There was no terror in Mr. Goldthurst's face. Instead, rather an expression of languid curiosity, but he went to the chair, and seating himself, said:

"Well, vagabond?"

The epithet did not give Tom displeasure. He simply grinned the broader.

"I comed here ter night ter rob ye," he said, wagging his head and grinning still; "but 'slong's I found ye at home 'n' up, why 'twan't no use. Howsomever, the time ain't wasted, 'cause while I'm here I might's well settle up an old score I gut with ye. This 'ere score's so old I've gut ter have interest. Less see; s'pose I calls it two thousand dollars a year, 'n' then I counts up my chalk marks, 'n' there's fifteen on 'em. That makes thirty thousand dollars.

Tom repeated his reckoning by chalk marks with a great deal of satisfaction, for he had noticed an involuntary start in his cool, gentlemanly host.

"I likes ye, Mr. Goldthurst, I does," he continued. "I likes ye better'n I does me own son, 'n' that's consid'rabl, that is. I likes ye so well thet I've follered ye these fifteen years. That's a long time, Mr. Goldthurst, ain't it?"

Mr. Goldthurst was looking unflinchingly into the mouth of the revolver. His lips were set close. Except for two bright red spots growing in his cheeks, his was the same cold, hard face.

"I used ter hear ye preach," said Tom. "I've gone out o' my way many's the time ter hear ye. Ye shook han's with me once, 'n' told me how 'f I kep' a good conscience I'd git ter heaven. Long 'fore that I'd ben a sailor, 'n' sailors need good advice. They all does."

There was a sudden change in his listener's face. The natural hauteur had given way to intense interest. His eyes were wide open and less mocking, the two bright red spots were larger, and his lips were getting dry, for he moistened them with his tongue.