

I was considerably stirred up, you see, and I did it. She's the dearest girl, and we are to be married at Christmas."

The man who carried the intelligence to Red Hill was grim and gaunt with fasting. His step was slow and labored, and his face wore an expression of despondency pitiful to look upon. It was the same man whom Tom in his early morning walk some weeks before had accosted, but the sunken cheeks told of the fearful ravages of that hopeless wait for succor from starvation. Stumbling through the street, he sank exhausted on the steps of his cheerless home. A groan issued from him as the crooning tones of his wife came from within where she tried to dull the cravings of her children's hunger by soothing them to sleep.

"Hush, me darlints! Yer father 'll bring ye the bread ye'r cryin' fer, plase God. Ye'll have yer fill. Ye was never born to starve."

There was a prophetic weirdness in her voice, that not only quieted the clamoring of the thin, feeble voices, but brought a momentary rest to the father's heart. A few minutes later the mother appeared in the door way. One glance and she understood all.

"Is it bad news?" she asked, her face gray and wan, but her voice so strong and calm that he turned to look at her.

"I was at the station and saw him myself," he said, gloomily. "The mills won't start up again."

"The wait's about over," said the woman. "They'll start or we'll die!"

She had shaded her eyes with her hand and was looking off toward the Millbury road, where arose a cloud of dust. The man, observing her fixed look, turned that way, and saw coming toward them a team. The horse's pace was so furious that the carriage was thrown from side to side of the road, in momentary danger of being overturned. Seated in the vehicle was Old Tom. A few sharp, irregular jerks, and the team drew up before the watching couple.

"Hello!" said Tom, then paused to note the effect of his presence in this new role. "D'ye remember wot I told ye? I told ye there was plenty ter eat 'n' drink down yonder, didn't I?"

The man nodded.

"'N' I said ye'd no need ter starve, didn't I?"

Again the man nodded.

"Look o' me!" said Tom. "I don't go hungry."

"How'd ye come by Brigham's team?" asked the man.

"Borrered it," answered Tom, showing his great tusks of teeth in a grin. "I was walkin' along peaceable like, when Mr. Brigham come out o' the Essex road. There wa'n't 'nough room fer him ter pass, I s'pose, fer he hit me over the head 'ith the whip. I borrered the team, then. He's layin' off, 'sleep, I shouldn't wonder, down by Pepper's pond."

Tom's grimaces as he related his adventures were frightful to behold. His mouth pouted and twisted, his eyes glittered, but he kept up his steady grin.

"It's jest the same 'ith all o' us. There ain't room 'nough in the world fer us!" he continued.

Tom waited a few minutes, cunningly watching the effect of his words, then, observing that the woman seemed about to go in doors, he beckoned the husband and asked—

"Who's the woman? Yer wife?"

"Yes!" shortly.

Tom reached under the seat and brought out a large loaf of bread.

"Here, woman!" he called, and he tossed the loaf. Like an animal she sprang for it, and catching it up, hugged it to her breast.

"God love ye!" she cried, and darted in.

"Don't give it to 'em!" called the husband after her. "He's put a spell on it!"

"Here!" said Tom, "what are ye a talkin' 'bout? I thought ye had more sense, by yer holdin' out so agin me. There ain't no sich things as spells. What I does I thinks out, 'n' them that don't think says they're spells."

"I don't think they're spells," said the man. "It's the hunger that's weakened me so's I ain't myself."

"Eat that!" throwing another loaf. "I allers hev 'nough."

"Ye steal it?" said the man, ferociously attacking the bread.

Tom grinned.

"No matter which way things goes, ye have got 'nough," said the man.

"'N' ye could, too," said Tom, "'n' ye wouldn' hear yer chillun a cryin' like that! Ye hold the men back! What d'ye git by it? Nothin'! Wot's it ter ye if some one's killed? Some one's gut ter be killed, 'n' as it's a goin' now ye're the some one. D'ye know why ye are starvin'? It's 'cause ye hain't got no work! I works! I worked ter-day 'n' yesterday, 'n' last night! I works overtime, I does!"

He was talking to some one behind the man, who, looking back, observed that his wife had returned and was an attentive listener.

"I works in the mills, I do," continued Tom; and then, as the man stopped eating and stared angrily, "Oh, I ain't cuttin' in on yer job! I ain't a workin' fer the bosses; I'm a workin' fer Tom. I'm a capitalist, I am!" chuckling. "Ye 'n' Missus Dermot, ye allers goes agin me 'n' gits the men down on me. I want ye ter go 'ith me once. If ye says the word, I'll git 'nough fer ye all ter eat, 'n' I'll stop the chillun's cryin', too!"

The man hesitated; the woman came down the steps and whispered. Tom, seeing the wavering, said:

"All ye've got ter do is ter hev the men here ter-night. Ye can tell 'em Tom's goin' ter work a spell. He's a goin' ter make night day, 'n' if night comes day it's a sign as they'll git all they wants ter eat."

Still the man hesitated, rudely pushing away the woman, who had recommenced her whisperings.

"What hev ye made by waitin' the last month?" continued Tom, in his most persuasive tones. "Ye starved 'cause ye was afraid o' the law! I'm a lawyer, I am! I'm everythin', 'n' I'll tell ye somethin' as won't cost ye nothin'. If a hundred men went down there," pointing toward the town, "'n' took what they wanted ter eat, the officers couldn't do nothin' to 'em if they caught 'em! The officers could on'y tech the leader, 'n' I'm the leader! That's mob law, that is. Will ye come?"

"Yes!"

"Tell 'em Old Tom told ye somethin' was a goin' ter happen. Ye'll come?"

"Yes!" repeated the man, and Tom drove away.