

It was a quarter to six, and Tom came slowly along Water street in Linn. Little John was standing in his office door, preparatory to his tramp toward St. Timothy's hill. Tom observed this with a chuckle, and hastening his steps, he hailed his partner just as the key was turning in the rusty lock.

"Where ye ben?" asked Little John, querulously. "Ye ain't ben here fer days!"

"Tendin' ter bus'ness," Tom answered. "Where ye goin'?"

"Ain't goin' nowhere," said John. "Goin' ter stay 'ith you."

The door was unlocked, and they entered. Tom pattered about his bench, and Little John took his favorite chair and watched.

"Goldthurst's house is burned down, 'n' some one broke in my house 'n' stole my wife's clothes?" Little John exclaimed.

"Did they?" said Tom, looking around and grinning. "Couldn't they find anythin' more valeble ter steal?"

"Stole her watch, too," John continued. "Who was it, d'ye know?"

Tom gravely put his finger beside his nose and thought, then shook his head.

"Didn't know but what ye could tell," said John; "ye know everythin'. Did ye see my girl?" eagerly.

"No; she must a died. I didn't see her nowhere."

"She ain't dead," breaking into a childish whine. "Ye didn't go where she is."

John went to the bench and took a long drink from the black bottle.

"Goin' ter be here ter-morrow?" he asked.

Tom shook his head.

"I've gut some bus'ness," he said. "I want ye ter go 'ith me ter-night. I've gut ter work a spell. I've gut ter make night day. I told 'em I would, 'n' I will!"

The braggart gave a mysterious shake of his head, his eyes were fairly blazing with self glorification.

"Ye'll go 'ith me, won't ye?" he asked.

"Yes," John answered, unhesitatingly. "P'raps we'll find my girl, too."

Tom looked at the shrunken figure, a peculiar smile moving his great lips.

"Ye go ter sleep," he said. "Ye'll hev ter keep awake a long watch ter-night ter see the spell. Take another swaller out o' the bottle, 'n' rest ye."

Little John tipped back his head and let the liquor gurgle down his throat, then he obediently closed his eyes and slept.

For a quarter hour Tom watched, his great head cocked one side, and a grin gradually broadening on his mahogany colored face, then he noiselessly tip-toed to the sleeping figure, and bending over it, removed from the waist coat pocket the gold-bowed spectacles, then the watch, then the wallet. Next he cast his eyes about the dingy room, but seeing nothing more of value, he returned to the bench, took a drink from the bottle, then filled his pipe, his face turned toward his sleeping partner the while, and wearing an expression of quiet enjoyment and satisfaction. At seven o'clock, when Little John awoke, Tom was sitting his feet on the salamander, his heavy boned face and bead like eyes glistening in the glow from his pipe.

"Are ye ready?" Tom asked, the minute the pale blue eyes opened.

"Yes," answered Little John. "Ye'll find her fer me, won't ye? D'ye think?"

"Sure to," said Tom, who held the bottle close to the little man's nose. "Take another swig o' this ter make ye brave. We've a long journey afore us."

By continually plying his partner with liquor Tom got him outside and the door locked, before the loss of the valuables were discovered. As they were starting away, John stopped.

"Where's my specs?" he said, tremulously, "'n' my watch? Hev ye seen 'em? Mother'll scold about 'em," whimpering.

"They're inside, on the bench," said Tom. "I see'd 'em. We ain't gut no time ter go back now. We'll come this way when we gits through 'n' git 'em."

Perfectly satisfied, the little man trotted along, stamping down his cane at each step, and occasionally turning his weak, unskeptical face toward the more powerful mind in simple questioning. They trudged across Linn till they struck the turnpike below the hotel.

"Be ye goin' much farther?" asked Little John, who was becoming very weary.

"Not much further afoot," Tom answered, and put new force into the feeble little man by giving him another draught from the bottle. "Now, ye wait here. I'll git my horse. I'm too old ter walk much, 'n' I keeps horses a handy."

John sat on a stone and waited, his hands folded on his knee, his eyes gazing vacantly into the darkness, which was not less penetrable than the heavy mist that was settling on his own brain. He gave no heed to Tom's long absence, but turned his head quickly toward the sound that bade him come. Seated in the carriage, he breathed the cool evening air and laughed in delight.

Tom's mood was so humane that the horse took its own time to Millbury. It was about nine o'clock when they rode through Mill street, and kept out across the bridge. When they had passed the last of the straggling houses, where dwelt the foremen of the mills, they alighted, and the horse was given his liberty, though encouraged to dash toward the woods by a sharp cut of the whip.

Tom led the way, closely followed by his partner, who, having rested, brought on himself many sharp admonitions of silence because of his light hearted prattle. By a circuitous route they forced their way through fields of low brush, and came to the mill stream. Without a waver little John followed his guide across the narrow plank, and moving up the stream they came to a high fence, which skirted the mill property. Tom stooped, removed one of the boards, and they were in the mill yard.

"We wants ter lay low," whispered Tom. "The watchman comes through the gate yonder. If he sees us he'll break the spell."

Little John nodded, laughed softly, and held up his finger in eager appreciation of the meaning. At that moment the watchman passed. When the steps were lost in the distance, Tom crawled out of the shed and slowly trailed what appeared to be a line across the yard. When he returned he said slowly—

"Just when the clock strikes ten ye must light a