

and the two men stepped noiselessly into it and pushed off. Pont rowed close in shore, as noiselessly as if he had been an Adirondack hunter, floating for midnight game. He rowed until they could see the dark hull of the schooner, and detect the lines of her masts defined against the sky. He pulled on until they lay abreast of her. There was no sound on board, and there were no lights to be seen. She was out of the track of all passing craft, and, so far as the reconnoiterers could judge, the men on board had turned in and gone to sleep.

They sat for some minutes in silence, and then they heard a movement; and against the moonlight that flooded the western water and the western sky, they saw three or four figures rise, and slowly disappear. Then they heard the sound of oars, and after a few minutes, a black speck showed itself out upon the gleaming water, moving away from them toward a village on the opposite side of the river.

"Turn about and row back, Pont," said Nicholas. The command was silently obeyed, and when Nicholas reached his house he found Mrs. Fleming awaiting his return, just where he had left her.

"What did you find?" she inquired.

"We found a schooner, and saw her men leave her. They are probably a lot of shirks, who have run in here to get out of sight, and thus to secure an opportunity for a carouse on shore. I don't think we have anything to fear from them."

Although they all went nervous and indefinitely apprehensive to bed, they passed the night without disturbance; but the next day, while the village lawyer and Nicholas were reviewing their work in a state of profound absorption, they were conscious of a movement near them, and looking up, they saw, observing them with wicked black eyes, a middle-aged, rough-looking man, who had entered the house unbidden and unheralded.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said, scraping his right foot and placing his hat under his arm, "but would you be kind enough to give a poor fellow a trifle to get to New York? I was put off the train here, for the lack of the needful, you know."

The safe stood open by the side of Nicholas, revealing its valuable contents. It was too late to shut it, but Nicholas impulsively rose closed and locked it, and put the key in his pocket, as he was in the habit of doing. The motion was watched with evident interest by the intruder.

The appeal of the tramp was humbly enough made, but both Nicholas and his companion instinctively recognised its insincerity, and felt that the man was a spy.

"What business have you in this house, you dirty dog?" said Nicholas, his anger rising the moment he began to speak.

"Well, it doesn't look as if I had any," replied the man, sullenly,