

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

soft for travoying, and so on. At election-time, of course, a number of the men went out.

And one evening, two days after election-time, another and important character entered the North woods and our story.

## CHAPTER THREE

ON the evening in question, some thirty or forty miles southeast of Radway's camp, a train was crawling over a badly laid track which led toward the Saginaw Valley. The whole affair was very crude. To the edge of the right-of-way pushed the dense swamp, like a black curtain shutting the virgin country from the view of civilization. Even by daylight the sight could have penetrated but a few feet. The right-of-way itself was rough with upturned stumps, blackened by fire, and gouged by many and varied furrows. Across the snow were tracks of animals.

The train consisted of a string of freight cars, one coach divided half and half between baggage and smoker, and a day car occupied by two silent, awkward women and a child. In the smoker lounged a dozen men. They were of various sizes and descriptions, but they all wore heavy blanket mackinaw coats, rubber shoes, and thick German socks tied at the knee. This constituted, as it were, a sort of uniform. The air was so thick with smoke that the men had difficulty in distinguishing objects across the length of the car.

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

The passengers sprawled in various attitudes. Some hung their legs over the arms of the seats; others perched their feet on the backs of the seats in front; still others slouched in corners, half reclining. Their occupations were as diverse. Three nearest the baggage-room door attempted to sing, but without much success. A man in the corner breathed softly through a mouth organ, to the music of which his seat mate, leaning his head sideways, gave close attention. One big fellow with a square beard swaggered back and forth down the aisle offering to everyone refreshment from a quart bottle. It was rarely refused. Of the dozen, probably three quarters were more or less drunk.

After a time the smoke became too dense. A short, thick-set fellow with an evil dark face coolly thrust his heel through a window. The conductor, who, with the brakeman and baggage master, was seated in the baggage van, heard the jingle of glass. He arose.

"Guess I'll take up tickets," he remarked. "Perhaps it will quiet the boys down a little."

The conductor was a big man, raw-boned and broad, with a hawk face. His every motion showed lean, quick, panther-like power.

"Let her went," replied the brakeman, rising as a matter of course to follow his chief.

The brakeman was stocky, short, and long armed. In the old fighting days Michigan railroads chose

## THE FOREST

their train officials with an eye to their superior deltoids. A conductor who could not throw an undesirable fare through a car window lived a short official life. The two men loomed on the noisy smoking compartment.

"Tickets, please!" clicked the conductor sharply.

Most of the men began to fumble about in their pockets, but the three singers and the one who had been offering the quart bottle did not stir.

"Ticket, Jack!" repeated the conductor, "come on, now."

The big bearded man leaned uncertainly against the seat.

"Now look here, Bud," he urged in wheedling tones, "I ain't got no ticket. You know how it is, Bud. I blows my stake." He fished uncertainly in his pocket and produced the quart bottle, nearly empty, "Have a drink?"

"No," said the conductor sharply.

"A' right," replied Jack, amiably, "take one myself." He tipped the bottle, emptied it, and hurled it through a window. The conductor paid no apparent attention to the breaking of the glass.

"If you haven't any ticket, you'll have to get off," said he.

The big man straightened up.

"You go to hell!" he snorted, and with the sole of his spiked boot delivered a mighty kick at the conductor's thigh.

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

The official, agile as a wild cat, leaped back, then forward, and knocked the man half the length of the car. You see, he was used to it. Before Jack could regain his feet the official stood over him.

The three men in the corner had also risen, and were staggering down the aisle intent on battle. The conductor took in the chances with professional rapidity.

"Get at 'em, Jimmy," said he.

And as the big man finally swayed to his feet, he was seized by the collar and trousers in the grip known to "bouncers" everywhere, hustled to the door, which some one obligingly opened, and hurled from the moving train into the snow. The conductor did not care a straw whether the obstreperous Jack lit on his head or his feet, hit a snowbank or a pile of ties. Those were rough days, and the preservation of authority demanded harsh measures.

Jimmy had got at 'em in a method of his own. He gathered himself into a ball of potential trouble, and hurled himself bodily at the legs of his opponents which he gathered in a mighty bear hug. It would have been poor fighting had Jimmy to carry the affair to a finish by himself, but considered as an expedient to gain time for the ejection proceedings, it was admirable. The conductor returned to find a kicking, rolling, gouging mass of kinetic energy knocking the varnish off all one end of the car. A head appearing, he coolly batted it three

## THE FOREST

times against a corner of the seat arm, after which he pulled the contestant out by the hair and threw him into a seat where he lay limp. Then it could be seen that Jimmy had clasped tight in his embrace a leg each of the other two. He hugged them close to his breast, and jammed his face down against them to protect his features. They could pound the top of his head and welcome. The only thing he really feared was a kick in the side, and for that there was hardly room.

The conductor stood over the heap, at a manifest advantage.

"You lumber-jacks had enough, or do you want to catch it plenty?"

The men, drunk though they were, realized their helplessness. They signified they had had enough. Jimmy thereupon released them and stood up, brushing down his tousled hair with his stubby fingers.

"Now is it ticket or bounce?" inquired the conductor.

After some difficulty and grumbling, the two paid their fare and that of the third, who was still dazed. In return the conductor gave them slips. Then he picked his lantern from the overhead rack whither he had tossed it, slung it on his left arm, and sauntered on down the aisle punching tickets. Behind him followed Jimmy. When he came to the door he swung across the platform with the easy lurch

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

of the trainman, and entered the other car, where he took the tickets of the two women and the boy. One sitting in the second car would have been unable to guess from the bearing or manner of the two officials that anything had gone wrong.

The interested spectators of the little drama included two men near the water-cooler who were perfectly sober. One of them was perhaps a little past the best of life, but still straight and vigorous. His lean face was leather-brown in contrast to a long mustache and heavy eyebrows bleached nearly white, his eyes were a clear steady blue, and his frame was slender but wiry. He wore the regulation mackinaw blanket coat, a peaked cap with an extraordinarily high crown, and buckskin moccasins over long stockings.

The other was younger, not more than twenty-six perhaps, with the clean-cut, regular features we have come to consider typically American. Eyebrows that curved far down along the temples, and eyelashes of a darkness in contrast to the prevailing note of his complexion combined to lend him a rather brooding, soft, and melancholy air which a very cursory second examination showed to be fictitious. His eyes, like the woodsman's, were steady, but inquiring. His jaw was square and settled, his mouth straight. One would be likely to sum him up as a man whose actions would be little influenced by glamour or even by the sentiments. And yet,

## THE FOREST

equally, it was difficult to rid the mind of the impression produced by his eyes. Unlike the other inmates of the car, he wore an ordinary business suit, somewhat worn, but of good cut, and a style that showed even over the soft flannel shirt. The trousers were, however, bound inside the usual socks and rubbers.

The two seat-mates had occupied their time each in his own fashion. To the elder the journey was an evil to be endured with the patience learned in watching deer runways, so he stared straight before him, and spat with a certain periodicity into the centre of the aisle. The younger stretched back lazily in an attitude of ease which spoke of the habit of travelling. Sometimes he smoked a pipe. Thrice he read over a letter. It was from his sister, and announced her arrival at the little rural village in which he had made arrangements for her to stay. "It is interesting—now," she wrote, "though the resources do not look as though they would wear well. I am learning under Mrs. Renwick to sweep and dust and bake and stew and do a multitude of other things which I always vaguely supposed came ready-made. I like it; but after I have learned it all, I do not believe the practice will appeal to me much. However, I can stand it well enough for a year or two or three, for I am young; and then you will have made your everlasting fortune, of course."

Harry Thorpe experienced a glow of pride each

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

time he read this part of the letter. He liked the frankness of the lack of pretence; he admired the penetration and self-analysis which had taught her the truth that, although learning a new thing is always interesting, the practising of an old one is monotonous. And her pluck appealed to him. It is not easy for a girl to step from the position of mistress of servants to that of helping about the housework of a small family in a small town for the sake of the home to be found in it.

"She's a trump!" said Thorpe to himself, "and she shall have her everlasting fortune, if there's such a thing in the country."

He jingled the three dollars and sixty cents in his pocket, and smiled. That was the extent of his everlasting fortune at present.

The letter had been answered from Detroit.

"I am glad you are settled," he wrote. "At least I know you have enough to eat and a roof over you. I hope sincerely that you will do your best to fit yourself to your new conditions. I know it is hard, but with my lack of experience and my ignorance as to where to take hold, it may be a good many years before we can do any better."

When Helen Thorpe read this, she cried. Things had gone wrong that morning, and an encouraging word would have helped her. The sombre tone of her brother's communication threw her into a fit of the blues from which, for the first time, she saw her

## THE FOREST

surroundings in a depressing and distasteful light. And yet he had written as he did with the kindest possible motives.

Thorpe had the misfortune to be one of those individuals who, though careless of what people in general may think of them, are in a corresponding degree sensitive to the opinion of the few they love. This feeling was further exaggerated by a constitutional shrinking from any outward manifestation of the emotions. As a natural result, he was often thought indifferent or discouraging when in reality his natural affections were at their liveliest. A failure to procure for a friend certain favors or pleasures dejected him, not only because of that friend's disappointment, but because, also, he imagined the failure earned him a certain blame. Blame from his heart's intimates he shrank from. His life outside the inner circles of his affections was apt to be so militant and so divorced from considerations of amity, that as a matter of natural reaction he became inclined to exaggerate the importance of small objections, little reproaches, slight criticisms from his real friends. Such criticisms seemed to bring into a sphere he would have liked to keep solely for the mutual reliance of loving kindness, something of the hard utilitarianism of the world at large. In consequence he gradually came to choose the line of least resistance, to avoid instinctively even the slightly disagreeable. Perhaps for this reason he

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

was never entirely sincere with those he loved. He never gave assent to, manifested approval of, or showed enthusiasm over any plan suggested by them, for the reason that he never dared offer a merely problematical anticipation. The affair had to be absolutely certain in his own mind before he ventured to admit any one to the pleasure of looking forward to it—and simply because he so feared the disappointment in case anything should go wrong. He did not realize that not only is the pleasure of anticipation often the best, but that even disappointment, provided it happen through excusable causes, strengthens the bonds of affection through sympathy. We do not want merely results from a friend—merely finished products. We like to be in at the making, even though the product spoil.

This unfortunate tendency, together with his reserve, lent him the false attitude of a rather cold, self-centred man, discouraging suggestions at first only to adopt them later in the most inexplicable fashion, and conferring favors in a ready-made impersonal manner which destroyed utterly their quality as favors. In reality his heart hungered for the affection which this false attitude generally repelled. He threw the wet blanket of doubt over warm young enthusiasms because his mind worked with a certain deliberateness which did not at once permit him to see the practicability of the scheme. Later he would approve. But by that time, prob-

## THE FOREST

ably, the wet blanket had effectually extinguished the glow. You cannot always savor your pleasures cold.

So after the disgrace of his father, Harry Thorpe did a great deal of thinking and planning which he kept carefully to himself. He considered in turn the different occupations to which he could turn his hand, and negatived them one by one. Few business firms would care to employ the son of as shrewd an embezzler as Henry Thorpe. Finally he came to a decision. He communicated this decision to his sister. It would have commended itself more logically to her had she been able to follow step by step the considerations that had led her brother to it. As the event turned, she was forced to accept it blindly. She knew that her brother intended going West, but as to his hopes and plans she was in ignorance. A little sympathy, a little mutual understanding would have meant a great deal to her, for a girl whose mother she but dimly remembers, turns naturally to her next of kin. Helen Thorpe had always admired her brother, but had never before needed him. She had looked upon him as strong, self-contained, a little moody. Now the tone of his letter caused her to wonder whether he were not also a trifle hard and cold. So she wept on receiving it, and the tears watered the ground for discontent.

At the beginning of the row in the smoking car, Thorpe laid aside his letter and watched with keen

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

appreciation the direct practicality of the trainmen's method. When the bearded man fell before the conductor's blow, he turned to the individual at his side.

"He knows how to hit, doesn't he!" he observed. "That fellow was knocked well off his feet."

"He does," agreed the other dryly.

They fell into a desultory conversation of fits and starts. Woodsmen of the genuine sort are never talkative; and Thorpe, as has been explained, was constitutionally reticent. In the course of their disjointed remarks Thorpe explained that he was looking for work in the woods, and intended, first of all, to try the Morrison & Daly camps at Beeson Lake.

"Know anything about logging?" inquired the stranger.

"Nothing," Thorpe confessed.

"Ain't much show for anything but lumber-jacks. What did you think of doing?"

"I don't know," said Thorpe, doubtfully. "I have driven horses a good deal; I thought I might drive team."

The woodsman turned slowly and looked Thorpe over with a quizzical eye. Then he faced to the front again and spat.

"Quite like," he replied still more dryly.

The boy's remark had amused him, and he had showed it, as much as he ever showed anything. Excepting always the riverman, the driver of a team

## THE FOREST

commands the highest wages among out-of-door workers. He has to be able to guide his horses by little steps over, through, and around slippery and bristling difficulties. He must acquire the knack of facing them square about in their tracks. He must hold them under a control that will throw into their collars, at command, from five pounds to their full power of pull, lasting from five seconds to five minutes. And above all, he must be able to keep them out of the way of tremendous loads of logs on a road which constant sprinkling has rendered smooth and glassy, at the same time preventing the long tongue from sweeping them bodily against leg-breaking *débris* when a curve in the road is reached. It is easier to drive a fire-engine than a logging team.

But in spite of the *naïveté* of the remark, the woodsman had seen something in Thorpe he liked. Such men become rather expert in the reading of character, and often in a log shanty you will hear opinions of a shrewdness to surprise you. He revised his first intention to let the conversation drop.

"I think M. & D. is rather full up just now," he remarked. "I'm walkin'-boss there. The roads is about all made, and road-making is what a green-horn tackles first. They's more chance earlier in the year. But if the *Old Fellow*" (he strongly accented the first word) "h'aint nothin' for you, just ask for Tim Shearer, an' I'll try to put you on the trail for some jobber's camp."

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

The whistle of the locomotive blew, and the conductor appeared in the doorway.

"Where's that fellow's turkey?" he inquired.

Several men looked toward Thorpe, who, not understanding this *argot* of the camps, was a little bewildered. Shearer reached over his head and took from the rack a heavy canvas bag, which he handed to the conductor.

"That's the 'turkey'"—he explained, "his war bag. Bud'll throw it off at Scott's, and Jack'll get it there."

"How far back is he?" asked Thorpe.

"About ten mile. He'll hoof it in all right."

A number of men descended at Scott's. The three who had come into collision with Jimmy and Bud were getting noisier. They had produced a stone jug, and had collected the remainder of the passengers—with the exception of Shearer and Thorpe—and now were passing the jug rapidly from hand to hand. Soon they became musical, striking up one of the weird long-drawn-out chants so popular with the shanty boy. Thorpe shrewdly guessed his companion to be a man of weight, and did not hesitate to ascribe his immunity from annoyance to the other's presence.

"It's a bad thing," said the walking-boss, "I used to be at it myself, and I know. When I wanted whiskey, I needed it worse than a scalded pup does a snowbank. The first year I had a hundred and

## THE FOREST

fifty dollars, and I blew her all in six days. Next year I had a little more, but she lasted me three weeks. That was better. Next year, I says to myself, I'll just save fifty of that stake, and blow the rest. So I did. After that I got to be scaler, and sort've quit. I just made a deal with the *Old Fellow* to leave my stake with headquarters no matter whether I call for it or not. I got quite a lot coming, now."

"Bees'n Lake!" cried Jimmy fiercely through an aperture of the door.

"You'll find th' boardin'-house just across over the track," said the woodsman, holding out his hand, "so long. See you again if you don't find a job with the *Old Fellow*. My name's Shearer."

"Mine is Thorpe," replied the other. "Thank you."

The woodsman stepped forward past the carousers to the baggage compartment, where he disappeared. The revelers stumbled out the other door.

Thorpe followed and found himself on the frozen platform of a little dark railway station. As he walked, the boards shrieked under his feet and the sharp air nipped at his face and caught his lungs. Beyond the fence-rail protection to the side of the platform he thought he saw the suggestion of a broad reach of snow, a distant lurking forest, a few shadowy buildings looming mysterious in the night.

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

The air was twinkling with frost and the brilliant stars of the north country.

Directly across the track from the railway station, a single building was pricked from the dark by a solitary lamp in a lower-story room. The four who had descended before Thorpe made over toward this light, stumbling and laughing uncertainly, so he knew it was probably in the boarding-house, and prepared to follow them. Shearer and the station agent—an individual much muffled—turned to the disposition of some light freight that had been dropped from the baggage car.

The five were met at the steps by the proprietor of the boarding-house. This man was short and stout, with a harelip and cleft palate, which at once gave him the well-known slurring speech of persons so afflicted, and imparted also to the timbre of his voice a peculiarly hollow, resonant, trumpet-like note. He stumped about energetically on a wooden leg of home manufacture. It was a cumbersome instrument, heavy, with deep pine socket for the stump, and a projecting brace which passed under a leather belt around the man's waist. This instrument he used with the dexterity of a third hand. As Thorpe watched him, he drove in a projecting nail, kicked two "turkeys" dexterously inside the open door, and stuck the armed end of his peg-leg through the top and bottom of the whiskey jug that one of the new arrivals had set down near the door.

## THE FOREST

The whiskey promptly ran out. At this the cripple flirted the impaled jug from the wooden leg far out over the rail of the veranda into the snow.

A growl went up.

"What'n hell's that for!" snarled one of the owners of the whiskey threateningly.

"Don't allow no whiskey here," snuffed the harelip.

The men were very angry. They advanced toward the cripple, who retreated with astonishing agility to the lighted room. There he bent the wooden leg behind him, slipped the end of the brace from beneath the leather belt, seized the other, peg end in his right hand, and so became possessed of a murderous bludgeon. This he brandished, hopping at the same time back and forth in such perfect poise and yet with so ludicrous an effect of popping corn, that the men were surprised into laughing.

"Bully for you, peg-leg!" they cried.

"Rules 'n regerlations, boys," replied the latter, without, however, a shade of compromising in his tones. "Had supper?"

On receiving a reply in the affirmative, he caught up the lamp, and, having resumed his artificial leg in one deft motion, led the way to narrow little rooms.