

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THORPE found the woods very different from when he had first traversed them. They were full of patches of wet earth and of sunshine; of dark pine, looking suddenly worn, and of fresh green shoots of needles, looking deliciously spring-like. This was the contrast everywhere—stern, earnest, purposeful winter, and gay, laughing, careless spring. It was impossible not to draw in fresh spirits with every step.

He followed the trail by the river. Butterballs and scoters paddled up at his approach. Bits of rotten ice occasionally swirled down the diminishing stream. The sunshine was clear and bright, but silvery rather than golden, as though a little of the winter's snow—a last ethereal incarnation—had lingered in its substance. Around every bend Thorpe looked for some of Radway's crew "driving" the logs down the current. He knew from chance encounters with several of the men in Bay City that Radway was still in camp; which meant, of course, that the last of the season's operations were not yet finished. Five miles farther Thorpe began to wonder whether this last conclusion might

## THE FOREST

not be erroneous. The Cass Branch had shrunken almost to its original limits. Only here and there a little *bayou* or marsh attested recent freshets. The drive must have been finished, even this early, for the stream in its present condition would hardly float saw logs, certainly not in quantity.

Thorpe, puzzled, walked on. At the banking ground he found empty skids. Evidently the drive was over. And yet even to Thorpe's ignorance, it seemed incredible that the remaining million and a half of logs had been hauled, banked and driven during the short time he had lain in the Bay City hospital. More to solve the problem than in any hope of work, he set out up the logging road.

Another three miles brought him to camp. It looked strangely wet and sodden and deserted. In fact, Thorpe found a bare half dozen people in it—Radway, the cook, and four men who were helping to pack up the movables, and who later would drive out the wagons containing them. The jobber showed strong traces of the strain he had undergone, but greeted Thorpe almost jovially. He seemed able to show more of his real nature now that the necessity of authority had been definitely removed.

"Hullo, young man," he shouted at Thorpe's mud-splashed figure, "come back to view the remains? All well again, heigh? That's good!"

He strode down to grip the young fellow heartily



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

by the hand. It was impossible not to be charmed by the sincere cordiality of his manner.

"I didn't know you were through," explained Thorpe, "I came to see if I could get a job."

"Well now I *am* sorry!" cried Radway, "you can turn in and help though, if you want to."

Thorpe greeted the cook and old Jackson Hines, the only two whom he knew, and set to work to tie up bundles of blankets, and to collect axes, peavies, and tools of all descriptions. This was evidently the last wagon-trip, for little remained to be done.

"I ought by rights to take the lumber of the roofs and floors," observed Radway thoughtfully, "but I guess she don't matter."

Thorpe had never seen him in better spirits. He ascribed the older man's hilarity to relief over the completion of a difficult task. That evening the seven dined together at one end of the long table. The big room exhaled already the atmosphere of desertion.

"Not much like old times, is she?" laughed Radway. "Can't you just shut your eyes and hear Baptist say, 'Mak' heem de soup one tam more for me'? She's pretty empty now."

Jackson Hines looked whimsically down the bare board. "More room than God made for geese in Ireland," was his comment.

After supper they even sat outside for a little time to smoke their pipes, chair-tilted against the logs of

## THE FOREST

the cabins, but soon the chill of melting snow drove them indoors. The four teamsters played seven-up in the cook camp by the light of a barn lantern, while Thorpe and the cook wrote letters. Thorpe's was to his sister.

"I have been in the hospital for about a month," he wrote. "Nothing serious—a crack on the head, which is all right now. But I cannot get home this summer, nor, I am afraid, can we arrange about the school this year. I am about seventy dollars ahead of where I was last fall, so you see it is slow business. This summer I am going into a mill, but the wages for green labor are not very high there either," and so on.

When Miss Helen Thorpe, aged seventeen, received this document she stamped her foot almost angrily. "You'd think he was a day-laborer!" she cried. "Why doesn't he try for a clerkship or something in the city where he'd have a chance to use his brains!"

The thought of her big, strong, tanned brother chained to a desk rose to her, and she smiled a little sadly.

"I know," she went on to herself, "he'd rather be a common laborer in the woods than railroad manager in the office. He loves his out-of-doors."

"Helen!" called a voice from below, "if you're through up there, I wish you'd come down and help me carry this rug out."



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

The girl's eyes cleared with a snap.

"So do I!" she cried defiantly, "so do I love out-of-doors! I like the woods and the fields and the trees just as much as he does, only differently; but *I* don't get out!"

And thus she came to feeling rebelliously that her brother had been a little selfish in his choice of an occupation, that he sacrificed her inclinations to his own. She did not guess—how could she?—his dreams for her. She did not see the future through his thoughts, but through his words. A negative hopelessness settled down on her, which soon her strong spirit, worthy counterpart of her brother's, changed to more positive rebellion. Thorpe had aroused antagonism where he craved only love. The knowledge of that fact would have surprised and hurt him, for he was entirely without suspicion of it. He lived subjectively to so great a degree that his thoughts and aims took on a certain tangible objectivity—they became so real to him that he quite overlooked the necessity of communication to make them as real to others. He assumed unquestioningly that the other must know. So entirely had he thrown himself into his ambition of making a suitable position for Helen, so continually had he dwelt on it in his thoughts, so earnestly had he striven for it in every step of the great game he was beginning to play, that it never occurred to him he should also concede a definite outward manifestation

## THE FOREST

of his feeling in order to assure its acceptance. Thorpe believed that he had sacrificed every thought and effort to his sister. Helen was becoming convinced that he had considered only himself.

After finishing the letter which gave occasion to this train of thought, Thorpe lit his pipe and strolled out into the darkness. Opposite the little office he stopped amazed.

Through the narrow window he could see Radway seated in front of the stove. Every attitude of the man denoted the most profound dejection. He had sunk down into his chair until he rested on almost the small of his back, his legs were struck straight out in front of him, his chin rested on his breast, and his two arms hung listless at his side, a pipe half falling from the fingers of one hand. All the facetious lines had turned to pathos. In his face sorrowed the anxious, questing, wistful look of the St. Bernard that does not understand.

"What's the matter with the boss, anyway?" asked Thorpe in a low voice of Jackson Hines, when the seven-up game was finished.

"H'aint ye heard?" inquired the old man in surprise.

"Why, no. What?"

"Busted," said the old man sententiously.

"How? What do you mean?"

"What I say. He's busted. That freshet caught him too quick. They's more'n a million and a half



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

logs left in the woods that can't be got out this year, and as his contract calls for a finished job, he don't get nothin' for what he's done."

"That's a queer rig," commented Thorpe. "He's done a lot of valuable work here—the timber's cut and skidded, anyway; and he's delivered a good deal of it to the main drive. The M. & D. outfit get all the advantage of that."

"They do, my son. When old Daly's hand gets near anything, it cramps. I don't know how the old man come to make such a contrac', but he did. Result is, he's out his expenses and time."

To understand exactly the catastrophe that had occurred, it is necessary to follow briefly an outline of the process after the logs have been piled on the banks. There they remain until the break-up attendant on spring shall flood the stream to a freshet. The rollways are then broken, and the saw logs floated down the river to the mill where they are to be cut into lumber.

If for any reason this transportation by water is delayed until the flood goes down, the logs are stranded or left in pools. Consequently every logger puts into the two or three weeks of freshet water a feverish activity which shall carry his product through before the ebb.

The exceptionally early break-up of this spring, combined with the fact that, owing to the series of incidents and accidents already sketched, the actual

## THE FOREST

cutting and skidding had fallen so far behind, caught Radway unawares. He saw his rollways breaking out while his teams were still hauling in the woods. In order to deliver to the mouth of the Cass Branch the three million already banked, he was forced to drop everything else and attend strictly to the drive. This left still, as has been stated, a million and a half on skidways, which Radway knew he would be unable to get out that year.

In spite of the jobber's certainty that his claim was thus annulled, and that he might as well abandon the enterprise entirely for all he would ever get out of it, he finished the "drive" conscientiously and saved to the Company the logs already banked. Then he had interviewed Daly. The latter refused to pay him one cent. Nothing remained but to break camp and grin as best he might over the loss of his winter's work and expenses.

The next day Radway and Thorpe walked the ten miles of the river trail together, while the teamsters and the cook drove down the five teams. Under the influence of the solitude and a certain sympathy which Thorpe manifested, Radway talked—a very little.

"I got behind; that's all there is to it," he said. "I s'pose I ought to have driven the men a little; but still, I don't know. It gets pretty cold on the plains. I guess I bit off more than I could chew."





## THE BLAZED TRAIL

His eye followed listlessly a frenzied squirrel swinging from the tops of poplars.

"I wouldn't 'a done it for myself," he went on. "I don't like the confounded responsibility. They's too much worry connected with it all. I had a good snug little stake—mighty nigh six thousand. She's all gone now. That'd have been enough for me—I ain't a drinkin' man. But then there was the woman and the kid. This ain't no country for woman-folks, and I wanted t' take little Lida out o' here. I had lots of experience in the woods, and I've seen men make big money time and again, who didn't know as much about it as I do. But they got there, somehow. Says I, I'll make a stake this year—I'd 'a had twelve thousand in th' bank, if things'd have gone right—and then we'll jest move down around Detroit an' I'll put Lida in school."

Thorpe noticed a break in the man's voice, and glancing suddenly toward him was astounded to catch his eyes brimming with tears. Radway perceived the surprise.

"You know when I left Christmas?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I was gone two weeks, and them two weeks done me. We was going slow enough before, God knows, but even with the rank weather and all, I think we'd have won out, if we could have held the same gait."

Radway paused. Thorpe was silent.

## THE FOREST

"The boys thought it was a mighty poor rig, my leaving that way."

He paused again in evident expectation of a reply. Again Thorpe was silent.

"Didn't they?" Radway insisted.

"Yes, they did," answered Thorpe.

The older man sighed. "I thought so," he went on. "Well, I didn't go to spend Christmas. I went because Jimmy brought me a telegram that Lida was sick with diphtheria. I sat up nights with her for 'leven days."

"No bad after-effects, I hope?" inquired Thorpe.

"She died," said Radway simply.

The two men tramped stolidly on. This was too great an affair for Thorpe to approach except on the knees of his spirit. After a long interval, during which the waters had time to still, the young man changed the subject.

"Aren't you going to get anything out of M. & D.?" he asked.

"No. Didn't earn nothing. I left a lot of their saw logs hung up in the woods, where they'll deteriorate from rot and worms. This is their last season in this district."

"Got anything left?"

"Not a cent."

"What are you going to do?"

"Do!" cried the old woodsman, the fire springing to his eye. "Do! I'm going into the woods, by



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

God! I'm going to work with my hands, and be happy! I'm going to do other men's work for them and take other men's pay. Let them do the figuring and worrying. I'll boss their gangs and make their roads and see to their logging for 'em, but it's got to be *theirs*. Do! I'm going to be a free man by the G. jumping Moses!"

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THORPE dedicated a musing instant to the incongruity of rejoicing over a freedom gained by ceasing to be master and becoming servant.

"Radway," said he suddenly, "I need money and I need it bad. I think you ought to get something out of this job of the M. & D.—not much, but something. Will you give me a share of what I can collect from them?"

"Sure!" agreed the jobber readily, with a laugh. "Sure! But you won't get anything. I'll give you ten per cent. quick."

"Good enough!" cried Thorpe.

"But don't be too sure you'll earn day wages doing it," warned the other. "I saw Daly when I was down here last week."

"My time's not valuable," replied Thorpe. "Now when we get to town I want your power of attorney and a few figures, after which I will not bother you again."

The next day the young man called for the second time at the little red-painted office under the shadow of the mill, and for the second time stood before the bulky power of the junior member of the firm.



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?" asked the latter.

"I have been informed," said Thorpe without preliminary, "that you intend to pay John Radway nothing for the work done on the Cass Branch this winter. Is that true?"

Daly studied his antagonist meditatively. "If it is true, what is it to you?" he asked at length.

"I am acting in Mr. Radway's interest."

"You are one of Radway's men?"

"Yes."

"In what capacity have you been working for him?"

"Cant-hook man," replied Thorpe briefly.

"I see," said Daly slowly. Then suddenly, with an intensity of energy that startled Thorpe, he cried: "Now you get out of here! Right off! Quick!"

The younger man recognized the compelling and autocratic boss addressing a member of the crew.

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" he replied with a flash of fire.

The mill-owner leaped to his feet every inch a leader of men. Thorpe did not wish to bring about an actual scene of violence. He had attained his object, which was to fluster the other out of his judicial calm.

"I have Radway's power of attorney," he added.

Daly sat down, controlled himself with an effort, and growled out, "Why didn't you say so?"

## THE FOREST

"Now I would like to know your position," went on Thorpe. "I am not here to make trouble, but as an associate of Mr. Radway, I have a right to understand the case. Of course I have his side of the story—," he suggested, as though convinced that a detailing of the other side might change his views.

Daly considered carefully, fixing his flint-blue eyes unswervingly on Thorpe's face. Evidently his scrutiny advised him that the young man was a force to be reckoned with.

"It's like this," said he abruptly, "we contracted last fall with this man Radway to put in five million feet of our timber, delivered to the main drive at the mouth of the Cass Branch. In this he was to act independently except as to the matter of provisions. Those he drew from our van, and was debited with the amount of the same. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," replied Thorpe.

"In return we were to pay him, merchantable scale, four dollars a thousand. If, however, he failed to put in the whole job, the contract was void."

"That's how I understand it," commented Thorpe. "Well?"

"Well, he didn't get in the five million. There's a million and a half hung up in the woods."

"But you have in your hands three million and a



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

half, which under the present arrangement you get free of any charge whatever."

"And we ought to get it," cried Daly. "Great guns! Here we intend to saw this summer and quit. We want to get in every stick of timber we own so as to be able to clear out of here for good and all at the close of the season; and now this condigned jobber ties us up for a million and a half."

"It is exceedingly annoying," conceded Thorpe, "and it is a good deal of Radway's fault, I am willing to admit, but it's your fault too."

"To be sure," replied Daly with the accent of sarcasm.

"You had no business entering into any such contract. It gave him no show."

"I suppose that was mainly his lookout, wasn't it? and as I already told you, we had to protect ourselves."

"You should have demanded security for the completion of the work. Under your present agreement, if Radway got in the timber, you were to pay him a fair price. If he didn't, you appropriated everything he had already done. In other words, you made him a bet."

"I don't care what you call it," answered Daly, who had recovered his good-humor in contemplation of the security of his position. "The fact stands all right."

"It does," replied Thorpe unexpectedly, "and

## THE FOREST

I'm glad of it. Now let's examine a few figures. You owned five million feet of timber, which at the price of stumpage" (standing trees) "was worth ten thousand dollars."

"Well."

"You come out at the end of the season with three million and a half of saw logs, which with the four dollars' worth of logging added, are worth twenty-one thousand dollars."

"Hold on!" cried Daly, "we paid Radway four dollars; we could have done it ourselves for less."

"You could not have done it for one cent less than four-twenty in that country," replied Thorpe, "as any expert will testify."

"Why did we give it to Radway at four, then?"

"You saved the expense of a salaried overseer, and yourselves some bother," replied Thorpe. "Radway could do it for less, because, for some strange reason which you yourself do not understand, a jobber can always log for less than a company."

"We could have done it for four," insisted Daly stubbornly, "but get on. What are you driving at? My time's valuable."

"Well, put her at four, then," agreed Thorpe. "That makes your saw logs worth over twenty thousand dollars. Of this value Radway added thirteen thousand. You have appropriated that much of his without paying him one cent."



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

Daly seemed amused. "How about the million and a half feet of ours *he* appropriated?" he asked quietly.

"I'm coming to that. Now for your losses. At the stumpage rate your million and a half which Radway 'appropriated' would be only three thousand. But for the sake of argument, we'll take the actual sum you'd have received for saw logs. Even then the million and a half would only have been worth between eight and nine thousand. Deducting this purely theoretical loss, Radway has occasioned you, from the amount he has gained for you, you are still some four or five thousand ahead of the game. For that you paid him nothing."

"That's Radway's lookout."

"In justice you should pay him that amount. He is a poor man. He has sunk all he owned in this venture, some twelve thousand dollars, and he has nothing to live on. Even if you pay him five thousand, he has lost considerable, while you have gained."

"How have we gained by this bit of philanthropy?"

"Because you originally paid in cash for all that timber on the stump just ten thousand dollars and you get from Radway saw logs to the value of twenty," replied Thorpe sharply. "Besides you still own the million and a half which, if you do not

## THE FOREST

care to put them in yourself, you can sell for something on the skids."

"Don't you know, young man, that white pine logs on skids will spoil utterly in a summer? Worms get into 'em."

"I do," replied Thorpe, "unless you bark them; which process will cost you about one dollar a thousand. You can find any amount of small purchasers at reduced price. You can sell them easily at three dollars. That nets you for your million and a half a little over four thousand dollars more. Under the circumstances, I do not think that my request for five thousand is at all exorbitant."

Daly laughed. "You are a shrewd figurer, and your remarks are interesting," said he.

"Will you give five thousand dollars?" asked Thorpe.

"I will not," replied Daly, then with a sudden change of humor, "and now I'll do a little talking. I've listened to you just as long as I'm going to. I have Radway's contract in that safe and I live up to it. I'll thank you to go plumb to hell!"

"That's your last word, is it?" asked Thorpe, rising.

"It is."

"Then," said he slowly and distinctly, "I'll tell you what *I'll* do. I intend to collect in full the four dollars a thousand for the three million and a half Mr. Radway has delivered to you. In return Mr.



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

Radway will purchase of you at the stumpage rates of two dollars a thousand the million and a half he failed to put in. That makes a bill against you, if my figuring is correct, of just eleven thousand dollars. You will pay that bill, and I will tell you why: your contract will be classed in any court as a gambling contract for lack of consideration. You have no legal standing in the world. I call your bluff, Mr. Daly, and I'll fight you from the drop of the hat through every court in Christendom."

"Fight ahead," advised Daly sweetly, who knew perfectly well that Thorpe's law was faulty. As a matter of fact the young man could have collected on other grounds, but neither was aware of that.

"Furthermore," pursued Thorpe in addition, "I'll repeat my offer before witnesses; and if I win the first suit, I'll sue you for the money we could have made by purchasing the extra million and a half before it had a chance to spoil."

This statement had its effect, for it forced an immediate settlement before the pine on the skids should deteriorate. Daly lounged back with a little more deadly carelessness.

"And, lastly," concluded Thorpe, playing his trump card, "the suit from start to finish will be published in every important paper in this country. If you do not believe I have the influence to do this, you are at liberty to doubt the fact."

Daly was cogitating many things. He knew that

## THE FOREST

publicity was the last thing to be desired. Thorpe's statement had been made in view of the fact that much of the business of a lumber firm is done on credit. He thought that perhaps a rumor of a big suit going against the firm might weaken confidence. As a matter of fact, this consideration had no weight whatever with the older man, although the threat of publicity actually gained for Thorpe what he demanded. The lumberman feared the noise of an investigation solely and simply because his firm, like so many others, was engaged at the time in stealing government timber in the upper peninsula. He did not call it stealing; but that was what it amounted to. Thorpe's shot in the air hit full.

"I think we can arrange a basis of settlement," he said finally. "Be here to-morrow morning at ten with Radway."

"Very well," said Thorpe.

"By the way," remarked Daly, "I don't believe I know your name?"

"Thorpe," was the reply.

"Well, Mr. Thorpe," said the lumberman with cold anger, "if at any time there is anything within my power or influence that you want—I'll see that you don't get it."