

CHAPTER TWENTY

THUS Thorpe and the Indian unexpectedly found themselves in the possession of luxury. The outfit had not meant much to Wallace Carpenter, for he had bought it in the city, where such things are abundant and excite no remark; but to the woodsman each article possessed a separate and particular value. The tent, an iron kettle, a side of bacon, oatmeal, tea, matches, sugar, some canned goods, a box of hard-tack—these, in the woods, represented wealth. Wallace's rifle chambered the .38 Winchester cartridge, which was unfortunate, for Thorpe's .44 had barely a magazineful left.

The two men settled again into their customary ways of life. Things went much as before, except that the flies and mosquitoes became thick. To men as hardened as Thorpe and the Indian, these pests were not as formidable as they would have been to any one directly from the city, but they were sufficiently annoying. Thorpe's old tin pail was pressed into service as a smudge-kettle. Every evening about dusk, when the insects first began to emerge from the dark swamps, Charley would build a tiny smoky fire in the bottom of the pail, feeding it with peat,

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damp moss, punk maple, and other inflammable smoky fuel. This censer swung twice or thrice about the tent, effectually cleared it. Besides, both men early established on their cheeks an invulnerable glaze of a decoction of pine tar, oil, and a pungent herb. Toward the close of July, however, the insects began sensibly to diminish, both in numbers and persistency.

Up to the present Thorpe had enjoyed a clear field. Now two men came down from above and established a temporary camp in the woods half a mile below the dam. Thorpe soon satisfied himself that they were picking out a route for the logging road. Plenty which could be cut and travoyed directly to the banking ground lay exactly along the bank of the stream; but every logger possessed of a tract of timber tries each year to get in some that is easy to handle and some that is difficult. Thus the average of expense is maintained.

The two men, of course, did not bother themselves with the timber to be travoyed, but gave their entire attention to that lying farther back. Thorpe was enabled thus to avoid them entirely. He simply transferred his estimating to the forest by the stream. Once he met one of the men; but was fortunately in a country that lent itself to his pose of hunter. The other he did not see at all.

But one day he heard him. The two up-river men were following carefully but noisily the bed of

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a little creek. Thorpe happened to be on the side-hill, so he seated himself quietly until they should have moved on down. One of the men shouted to the other, who, crashing through a thicket, did not hear. "Ho-o-o! *Dyer!*" the first repeated. "Here's that infernal comer; over here!"

"Yop," assented the other. "Coming!"

Thorpe recognized the voice instantly as that of Radway's scaler. His hand crisped in a gesture of disgust. The man had always been obnoxious to him.

Two days later he stumbled on their camp. He paused in wonder at what he saw.

The packs lay open, their contents scattered in every direction. The fire had been hastily extinguished with a bucket of water, and a frying pan lay where it had been overturned. If the thing had been possible, Thorpe would have guessed at a hasty and unpremeditated flight.

He was about to withdraw carefully lest he be discovered, when he was startled by a touch on his elbow. It was Injin Charley.

"Dey go up river," he said. "I come see what de row."

The Indian examined rapidly the condition of the little camp.

"Dey look for somethin'," said he, making his hand revolve as though rummaging, and indicating the packs.

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"I t'ink dey see you in de woods," he concluded. "Dey go camp gettum boss. Boss he gone on river trail two t'ree hour."

"You're right, Charley," replied Thorpe, who had been drawing his own conclusions. "One of them knows me. They've been looking in their packs for their note-books with the descriptions of these sections in them. Then they piled out for the boss. If I know anything at all, the boss'll make tracks for Detroit."

"W'ot you do?" asked Injin Charley curiously.

"I got to get to Detroit before they do; that's all."

Instantly the Indian became all action.

"You come," he ordered, and set out at a rapid pace for camp.

There, with incredible deftness, he packed together about twelve pounds of the jerked venison and a pair of blankets, thrust Thorpe's waterproof match safe in his pocket, and turned eagerly to the young man.

"You come," he repeated.

Thorpe hastily unearched his "descriptions" and wrapped them up. The Indian, in silence, rearranged the displaced articles in such a manner as to relieve the camp of its abandoned air.

It was nearly sundown. Without a word the two men struck off into the forest, the Indian in the lead. Their course was southeast, but Thorpe asked no

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questions. He followed blindly. Soon he found that if he did even that adequately, he would have little attention left for anything else. The Indian walked with long, swift strides, his knees always slightly bent, even at the finish of the step, his back hollowed, his shoulders and head thrust forward. His gait had a queer sag in it, up and down in a long curve from one rise to the other. After a time Thorpe became fascinated in watching before him this easy, untiring lope, hour after hour, without the variation of a second's fraction in speed nor an inch in length. It was as though the Indian were made of steel springs. He never appeared to hurry; but neither did he ever rest.

At first Thorpe followed him with comparative ease, but at the end of three hours he was compelled to put forth decided efforts to keep pace. His walking was no longer mechanical, but conscious. When it becomes so, a man soon tires. Thorpe resented the inequalities, the stones, the roots, the patches of soft ground which lay in his way. He felt dully that they were not fair. He could negotiate the distance; but anything else was a gratuitous insult.

Then suddenly he gained his second wind. He felt better and stronger and moved freer. For second wind is only to a very small degree a question of the breathing power. It is rather the response of the vital forces to a will that refuses to heed their first grumbling protests. Like dogs by the fire they

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do their utmost to convince their master that the limit of freshness is reached; but at last, under the whip, spring to their work.

At midnight Injin Charley called a halt. He spread his blanket, leaned on one elbow long enough to eat a strip of dried meat, and fell asleep. Thorpe imitated his example. Three hours later the Indian roused his companion, and the two set out again.

Thorpe had walked a leisurely ten days through the woods far to the north. In that journey he had encountered many difficulties. Sometimes he had been tangled for hours at a time in a dense and almost impenetrable thicket. Again he had spent a half day in crossing a treacherous swamp. Or there had interposed in his trail abattises of down timber a quarter of a mile wide over which it had been necessary to pick a precarious way eight or ten feet from the ground.

This journey was in comparison easy. Most of the time the travellers walked along high beech ridges or through the hardwood forests. Occasionally they were forced to pass into the lowlands, but always little saving spits of highland reaching out toward each other abridged the necessary wallowing. Twice they swam rivers.

At first Thorpe thought this was because the country was more open; but as he gave better attention to their route, he learned to ascribe it entirely to the skill of his companion. The Indian seemed

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by a species of instinct to select the most practicable routes. He seemed to know how the land ought to lie, so that he was never deceived by appearances into entering a *cul de sac*. His beech ridges always led to other beech ridges; his hardwood never petered out into the terrible black swamps. Sometimes Thorpe became sensible that they had commenced a long detour; but it was never an abrupt detour, unforeseen and blind.

From three o'clock until eight they walked continually without a pause, without an instant's breathing spell. Then they rested a half hour, ate a little venison, and smoked a pipe.

An hour after noon they repeated the rest. Thorpe rose with a certain physical reluctance. The Indian seemed as fresh—or as tired—as when he started. At sunset they took an hour. Then forward again by the dim intermittent light of the moon and stars through the ghostly haunted forest, until Thorpe thought he would drop with weariness, and was mentally incapable of contemplating more than a hundred steps in advance.

"When I get to that square patch of light, I'll quit," he would say to himself, and struggle painfully the required twenty rods.

"No, I won't quit here," he would continue, "I'll make it that birch. Then I'll lie down and die."

And so on. To the actual physical exhaustion of Thorpe's muscles was added that immense mental

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weariness which uncertainty of the time and distance inflicts on a man. The journey might last a week, for all he knew. In the presence of an emergency these men of action had actually not exchanged a dozen words. The Indian led; Thorpe followed.

When the halt was called, Thorpe fell into his blanket too weary even to eat. Next morning sharp, shooting pains, like the stabs of swords, ran through his groin.

"You come," repeated the Indian, stolid as ever.

When the sun was an hour high the travellers suddenly ran into a trail, which as suddenly dived into a spruce thicket. On the other side of it Thorpe unexpectedly found himself in an extensive clearing, dotted with the blackened stumps of pines. Athwart the distance he could perceive the wide blue horizon of Lake Michigan. He had crossed the Upper Peninsula on foot!

"Boat come by to-day," said Injin Charley, indicating the tall stacks of a mill. "Him no stop. You mak' him stop take you with him. You get train Mackinaw City to-night. Dose men, dey on dat train."

Thorpe calculated rapidly. The enemy would require, even with their teams, a day to cover the thirty miles to the fishing village of Munising, whence the stage ran each morning to Seney, the present terminal of the South Shore Railroad. He,

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Thorpe, on foot and three hours behind, could never have caught the stage. But from Seney only one train a day was despatched to connect at Mackinaw City with the Michigan Central, and on that one train, due to leave this very morning, the up-river man was just about pulling out. He would arrive at Mackinaw City at four o'clock of the afternoon, where he would be forced to wait until eight in the evening. By catching a boat at the mill to which Injin Charley had led him, Thorpe could still make the same train. Thus the start in the race for Detroit's Land Office would be fair.

"All right," he cried, all his energy returning to him. "Here goes! We'll beat him out yet!"

"You come back?" inquired the Indian, peering with a certain anxiety into his companion's eyes.

"Come back!" cried Thorpe. "You bet your hat!"

"I wait," replied the Indian, and was gone.

"Oh, Charley!" shouted Thorpe in surprise. "Come on and get a square meal, anyway."

But the Indian was already on his way back to the distant Ossawinamakee.

Thorpe hesitated in two minds whether to follow and attempt further persuasion, for he felt keenly the interest the other had displayed. Then he saw, over the headland to the east, a dense trail of black smoke. He set off on a stumbling run toward the mill.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

HE arrived out of breath in a typical little mill town consisting of the usual unpainted houses, the saloons, mill, office, and general store. To the latter he addressed himself for information.

The proprietor, still sleepy, was mopping out the place.

"Does that boat stop here?" shouted Thorpe across the suds.

"Sometimes," replied the man somnolently.

"Not always?"

"Only when there's freight for her."

"Doesn't she stop for passengers?"

"Nope."

"How does she know when there's freight?"

"Oh, they signal her from the mill—" but Thorpe was gone.

At the mill Thorpe dove for the engine room. He knew that elsewhere the clang of machinery and the hurry of business would leave scant attention to him. And besides, from the engine room the signals would be given. He found, as is often the case in north-country sawmills, a Scotchman in charge.

"Does the boat stop here this morning?" he inquired.

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"Weel," replied the engineer with fearful deliberation, "I canna say. But I hae received na orders to that effect."

"Can't you whistle her in for me?" asked Thorpe.

"I canna," answered the engineer, promptly enough this time.

"Why not?"

"Ye're na what a body might call freight."

"No other way out of it?"

"Na."

Thorpe was seized with an idea.

"Here!" he cried. "See that boulder over there? I want to ship that to Mackinaw City by freight on this boat."

The Scotchman's eyes twinkled appreciatively.

"I'm dootin' ye hae th' freight-bill from the office," he objected simply.

"See here," replied Thorpe, "I've just got to get that boat. It's worth twenty dollars to me, and I'll square it with the captain. There's your twenty."

The Scotchman deliberated, looking aslant at the ground and thoughtfully oiling a cylinder with a greasy rag.

"It'll na be a matter of life and death?" he asked hopefully. "She aye stops for life and death."

"No," replied Thorpe reluctantly. Then with

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an explosion, "Yes, by God, it is! If I don't make that boat, I'll kill *you*."

The Scotchman chuckled and pocketed the money. "I'm dootin' that's in order," he replied. "I'll no be party to any such proceedin's. I'm goin' noo for a fresh pail of watter," he remarked, pausing at the door, "but as a wee item of information: yander's th' wheestle rope; and a mon wheestles one short and one long for th' boat."

He disappeared. Thorpe seized the cord and gave the signal. Then he ran hastily to the end of the long lumber docks, and peered with great eagerness in the direction of the black smoke.

The steamer was as yet concealed behind a low spit of land which ran out from the west to form one side of the harbor. In a moment, however, her bows appeared, headed directly down toward the Straits of Mackinaw. When opposite the little bay Thorpe confidently looked to see her turn in, but to his consternation she held her course. He began to doubt whether his signal had been heard. Fresh black smoke poured from the funnel; the craft seemed to gather speed as she approached the eastern point. Thorpe saw his hopes sailing away. He wanted to stand up absurdly and wave his arms to attract attention at that impossible distance. He wanted to sink to the planks in apathy. Finally he sat down, and with dull eyes watched the distance widen between himself and his aims.

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And then with a grand free sweep she turned and headed directly for him.

Other men might have wept or shouted. Thorpe merely became himself, imperturbable, commanding, apparently cold. He negotiated briefly with the captain, paid twenty dollars more for speed and the privilege of landing at Mackinaw City. Then he slept for eight hours on end and was awakened in time to drop into a small boat which deposited him on the broad sand beach of the lower peninsula.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE train was just leisurely making up for departure. Thorpe, dressed as he was in old "pepper and salt" garments patched with buckskin, his hat a flopping travesty on headgear, his moccasins, worn and dirty, his face bearded and bronzed, tried as much as possible to avoid attention. He sent an instant telegram to Wallace Carpenter conceived as follows:

"Wire thirty thousand my order care Land Office, Detroit, before nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Do it if you have to rustle all night. Important."

Then he took a seat in the baggage car on a pile of boxes and philosophically waited for the train to start. He knew that sooner or later the man, provided he were on the train, would stroll through the car, and he wanted to be out of the way. The baggage man proved friendly, so Thorpe chatted with him until after bedtime. Then he entered the smoking car and waited patiently for morning.

So far the affair had gone very well. It had depended on personal exertions, and he had made it go. Now he was forced to rely on outward circum-

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stances. He argued that the up-river man would have first to make his financial arrangements before he could buy in the land, and this would give the landlooker a chance to get in ahead at the office. There would probably be no difficulty about that. The man suspected nothing. But Thorpe had to confess himself fearfully uneasy about his own financial arrangements. That was the rub. Wallace Carpenter had been sincere enough in his informal striking of partnership, but had he retained his enthusiasm? Had second thought convicted him of folly? Had conservative business friends dissuaded him? Had the glow faded in the reality of his accustomed life? And even if his good-will remained unimpaired, would he be able, at such short notice, to raise so large a sum? Would he realize from Thorpe's telegram the absolute necessity of haste?

At the last thought, Thorpe decided to send a second message from the next station. He did so. It read: "Another buyer of timber on same train with me. Must have money at nine o'clock or lose land." He paid day rates on it to insure immediate delivery. Suppose the boy should be away from home!

Everything depended on Wallace Carpenter; and Thorpe could not but confess the chance slender. One other thought made the night seem long. Thorpe had but thirty dollars left.

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Morning came at last, and the train drew in and stopped. Thorpe, being in the smoking car, dropped off first and stationed himself near the exit where he could look over the passengers without being seen. They filed past. Two only he could accord the rôle of master lumbermen — all the rest were plainly drummers or hayseeds. And in these two Thorpe recognized Daly and Morrison themselves. They passed within ten feet of him, talking earnestly together. At the curb they hailed a cab and drove away. Thorpe with satisfaction heard them call the name of a hotel.

It was still two hours before the Land Office would be open. Thorpe ate breakfast at the depot and wandered slowly up Jefferson Avenue to Woodward, a strange piece of our country's medievalism in modern surroundings. He was so occupied with his own thoughts that for some time he remained unconscious of the attention he was attracting. Then, with a start, he felt that every one was staring at him. The hour was early, so that few besides the working classes were abroad, but he passed one lady driving leisurely to an early train whose frank scrutiny brought him to himself. He became conscious that his broad hat was weather-soiled and limp, that his flannel shirt was faded, that his "pepper and salt" trousers were patched, that moccasins must seem as anachronistic as chain mail. It abashed him. He could not know that it was all

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wild and picturesque, that his straight and muscular figure moved with a grace quite its own and the woods', that the bronze of his skin contrasted splendidly with the clearness of his eye, that his whole bearing expressed the serene power that comes only from the confidence of battle. The woman in the carriage saw it, however.

"He is magnificent!" she cried. "I thought such men had died with Cooper!"

Thorpe whirled sharp on his heel and returned at once to a boarding-house off Fort Street, where he had "outfitted" three months before. There he reclaimed his valise, shaved, clothed himself in linen and cheviot once more, and sauntered slowly over to the Land Office to await its opening.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

AT nine o'clock neither of the partners had appeared. Thorpe entered the office and approached the desk.

"Is there a telegram here for Harry Thorpe?" he inquired.

The clerk to whom he addressed himself merely motioned with his head toward a young fellow behind the railing in a corner. The latter, without awaiting the question, shifted comfortably and replied:

"No."

At the same instant steps were heard in the corridor, the door opened, and Mr. Morrison appeared on the sill. Then Thorpe showed the stuff of which he was made.

"Is this the desk for buying Government lands?" he asked hurriedly.

"Yes," replied the clerk.

"I have some descriptions I wish to buy in."

"Very well," replied the clerk, "what township?"

Thorpe detailed the figures, which he knew by heart, the clerk took from a cabinet the three books