

THE BLAZED TRAIL

hardly dared take a step for fear of crushing one of the open faces and expectant, pleading eyes looking up at him. It grew to be a nuisance. Wallace always claimed his trip was considerably shortened because he could not get away from his admirers.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

FINANCIALLY the Company was rated high, and yet was heavily in debt. This condition of affairs by no means constitutes an anomaly in the lumbering business.

The profits of the first five years had been immediately reinvested in the business. Thorpe, with the foresight that had originally led him into this new country, saw farther than the instant's gain. He intended to establish in a few years more a big plant which would be returning benefices in proportion not only to the capital originally invested, but also in ratio to the energy, time, and genius he had himself expended. It was not the affair of a moment. It was not the affair of half-measures, of timidity.

Thorpe knew that he could play safely, cutting a few millions a year, expanding cautiously. By this method he would arrive, but only after a long period.

Or he could do as many other firms have done; start on borrowed money.

In the latter case he had only one thing to fear, and that was fire. Every cent, and many times over.

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of his obligations would be represented in the state of raw material. All he had to do was to cut it out by the very means which the yearly profits of his business would enable him to purchase. For the moment, he owed a great deal; without the shadow of a doubt mere industry would clear his debt, and leave him with substantial acquisitions created, practically, from nothing but his own abilities. The money obtained from his mortgages was a tool which he picked up an instant, used to fashion one of his own, and laid aside.

Every autumn the Company found itself suddenly in easy circumstances. At any moment that Thorpe had chosen to be content with the progress made, he could have, so to speak, declared dividends with his partner. Instead of undertaking more improvements, for part of which he borrowed some money, he could have divided the profits of the season's cut. But this he was not yet ready to do.

He had established five more camps, he had acquired over a hundred and fifty million more of timber lying contiguous to his own, he had built and equipped a modern high-efficiency mill, he had constructed a harbor breakwater and the necessary booms, he had bought a tug, built a boarding-house. All this costs money. He wished now to construct a logging railroad. Then he promised himself and Wallace that they would be ready to commence paying operations.

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The logging railroad was just then beginning to gain recognition. A few miles of track, a locomotive, and a number of cars consisting uniquely of wheels and "bunks," or cross beams on which to chain the logs, and a fairly well-graded right-of-way comprised the outfit. Its use obviated the necessity of driving the river—always an expensive operation. Often, too, the decking at the skidways could be dispensed with; and the sleigh hauls, if not entirely superseded for the remote districts, were entirely so in the country for a half mile on either side of the track, and in any case were greatly shortened. There obtained, too, the additional advantage of being able to cut summer and winter alike. Thus, the plant once established, logging by railroad was not only easier but cheaper. Of late years it has come into almost universal use in big jobs and wherever the nature of the country will permit. The old-fashioned, picturesque ice-road sleigh-haul will last as long as north-woods lumbering—even in the railroad districts—but the locomotive now does the heavy work.

With the capital to be obtained from the following winter's product, Thorpe hoped to be able to establish a branch which should run from a point some two miles behind Camp One to a "dump" a short distance above the mill. For this he had made all the estimates, and even the preliminary survey. He was therefore the more grievously disappointed

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when Wallace Carpenter made it impossible for him to do so.

He was sitting in the mill-office one day about the middle of July. Herrick, the engineer, had just been in. He could not keep the engine in order, although Thorpe knew that it could be done.

"I've sot up nights with her," said Herrick, "and she's no go. I think I can fix her when my head gets all right. I got headachy lately. And somehow that last lot of Babbit metal didn't seem to act just right."

Thorpe looked out of the window, tapping his desk slowly with the end of a lead pencil.

"Collins," said he to the bookkeeper, without raising his voice or altering his position, "make out Herrick's time."

The man stood there astonished.

"But I had hard luck, sir," he expostulated. "She'll go all right now, I think."

Thorpe turned and looked at him.

"Herrick," he said, not unkindly, "this is the second time this summer the mill has had to close early on account of that engine. We have supplied you with everything you asked for. If you can't do it, we shall have to get a man who can."

"But I had—" began the man once more.

"I ask every man to succeed in what I give him to do," interrupted Thorpe. "If he has a headache, he must brace up or quit. If his Babbit doesn't act

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just right he must doctor it up; or get some more, even if he has to steal it. If he has hard luck, he must sit up nights to better it. It's none of my concern how hard or how easy a time a man has in doing what I tell him to. *I expect him to do it.* If I have to do all a man's thinking for him, I may as well hire Swedes and be done with it. I have too many details to attend to already without bothering about excuses."

The man stood puzzling over this logic.

"I ain't got any other job," he ventured.

"You can go to piling on the docks," replied Thorpe, "if you want to."

Thorpe was thus explicit because he rather liked Herrick. It was hard for him to discharge the man peremptorily, and he proved the need of justifying himself in his own eyes.

Now he sat back idly in the clean painted little room with the big square desk and the three chairs. Through the door he could see Collins, perched on a high stool before the shelf-like desk. From the open window came the clear, musical note of the circular saw, the fresh aromatic smell of new lumber, the bracing air from Superior sparkling in the offing. He felt tired. In rare moments such as these, when the muscles of his striving relaxed, his mind turned to the past. Old sorrows rose before him and looked at him with their sad eyes; the sorrows that had helped to make him what he was. He wondered

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where his sister was. She would be twenty-two years old now. A tenderness, haunting, tearful, invaded his heart. He suffered. At such moments the hard shell of his rough woods life seemed to rend apart. He longed with a great longing for sympathy, for love, for the softer influences that cradle even warriors between the clangors of the battles.

The outer door, beyond the cage behind which Collins and his shelf desk were placed, flew open. Thorpe heard a brief greeting, and Wallace Carpenter stood before him.

"Why, Wallace, I didn't know you were coming!" began Thorpe, and stopped. The boy, usually so fresh and happily buoyant, looked ten years older. Wrinkles had gathered between his eyes. "Why, what's the matter?" cried Thorpe.

He rose swiftly and shut the door into the outer office. Wallace seated himself mechanically.

"Everything! everything!" he said in despair. "I've been a fool! I've been blind!"

So bitter was his tone that Thorpe was startled. The lumberman sat down on the other side of the desk.

"That'll do, Wallace," he said sharply. "Tell me briefly what is the matter."

"I've been speculating!" burst out the boy.

"Ah!" said his partner.

"At first I bought only dividend-paying stocks

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outright. Then I bought for a rise, but still outright. Then I got in with a fellow who claimed to know all about it. I bought on a margin. There came a slump. I met the margins because I am sure there will be a rally, but now all my fortune is in the thing. I'm going to be penniless. I'll lose it all."

"Ah!" said Thorpe.

"And the name of Carpenter is so old-established, so honorable!" cried the unhappy boy, "and my sister!"

"Easy!" warned Thorpe. "Being penniless isn't the worst thing that can happen to a man.

"No; but I am in debt," went on the boy more calmly. "I have given notes. When they come due, I'm a goner."

"How much?" asked Thorpe laconically.

"Thirty thousand dollars."

"Well, you have that amount in this firm."

"What do you mean?"

"If you want it, you can have it."

Wallace considered a moment.

"That would leave me without a cent," he replied.

"But it would save your commercial honor."

"Harry," cried Wallace suddenly, "couldn't this firm go on my note for thirty thousand more? Its credit is good, and that amount would save my margins."

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"You are partner," replied Thorpe, "your signature is as good as mine in this firm."

"But you know I wouldn't do it without your consent," replied Wallace reproachfully. "O Harry!" cried the boy, "when you needed the amount, I let you have it!"

Thorpe smiled.

"You know you can have it, if it's to be had, Wallace. I wasn't hesitating on that account. I was merely trying to figure out where we can raise such a sum as sixty thousand dollars. We haven't got it."

"But you'll never have to pay it," assured Wallace eagerly. "If I can save my margins, I'll be all right."

"A man has to figure on paying whatever he puts his signature to," asserted Thorpe. "I can give you our note payable at the end of a year. Then I'll hustle in enough timber to make up the amount. It means we don't get our railroad, that's all."

"I knew you'd help me out. Now it's all right," said Wallace, with a relieved air.

Thorpe shook his head. He was already trying to figure how to increase his cut to thirty million feet.

"I'll do it," he muttered to himself, after Wallace had gone out to visit the mill. "I've been demanding success of others for a good many years; now I'll demand it of myself."

PART IV

THORPE'S DREAM GIRL

