

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

**T**HE moment had struck for the woman. Thorpe did not know it, but it was true. A solitary, brooding life in the midst of grand surroundings, an active, strenuous life among great responsibilities, a starved, hungry life of the affections whence even the sister had withdrawn her love—all these had worked unobtrusively toward the formation of a single psychological condition. Such a moment comes to every man. In it he realizes the beauties, the powers, the vastnesses which unconsciously his being has absorbed. They rise to the surface as a need, which, being satisfied, is projected into the visible world as an ideal to be worshipped. Then is happiness and misery, beside which the mere struggle to dominate men becomes trivial, the petty striving with the forces of nature seems a little thing. And the woman he at that time meets takes on the qualities of the dream; she is more than woman, less than goddess; she is the best of that man made visible.

Thorpe found himself for the first time filled with the spirit of restlessness. His customary iron evenness of temper was gone, so that he wandered quickly from one detail of his work to another, without seeming to penetrate below the surface need of any

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

one task. Out of the present his mind was always escaping to a mystic fourth dimension which he did not understand. But a week before, he had felt himself absorbed in the component parts of his enterprise, the totality of which arched far over his head, shutting out the sky. Now he was outside of it. He had, without his volition, abandoned the creator's standpoint of the god at the heart of his work. It seemed as important, as great to him, but somehow it had taken on a strange solidarity, as though he had left it a plastic beginning and returned to find it hardened into the shapes of finality. He acknowledged it admirable—and wondered how he had ever accomplished it! He confessed that it should be finished as it had begun—and could not discover in himself the Titan who had watched over its inception.

Thorpe took this state of mind much to heart, and in combating it expended more energy than would have sufficed to accomplish the work. Inexorably he held himself to the task. He filled his mind full of lumbering. The millions along the bank on section nine must be cut and travoyed directly on the rollways. It was a shame that the necessity should arise. From section nine Thorpe had hoped to lighten the expenses when finally he should begin operations on the distant and inaccessible headwaters of French Creek. Now there was no help for it. The instant necessity was to

## THORPE'S DREAM GIRL

get thirty millions of pine logs down the river before Wallace Carpenter's notes came due. Every other consideration had to yield before that. Fifteen millions more could be cut on seventeen, nineteen, and eleven—regions hitherto practically untouched—by the men in the four camps inland. Camp One and Camp Three could attend to section nine.

These were details to which Thorpe applied his mind. As he pushed through the sun-flecked forest, laying out his roads, placing his travoy trails, spying the difficulties that might supervene to mar the fair face of honest labor, he had always this thought before him—that he must apply his mind. By an effort, a tremendous effort, he succeeded in doing so. The effort left him limp. He found himself often standing, or moving gently, his eyes staring sightless, his mind cradled on vague misty clouds of absolute inaction, his will chained so softly and yet so firmly that he felt no strength and hardly the desire to break from the dream that lulled him. Then he was conscious of the physical warmth of the sun, the faint sweet woods smells, the soothing caress of the breeze, the sleepy cicada-like note of the pine creeper. Through his half-closed lashes the tangled sunbeams made soft-tinted rainbows. He wanted nothing so much as to sit on the pine needles there in the golden flood of radiance, and dream—dream on—vaguely, comfortably, sweetly—dream of summer—

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

Thorpe, with a mighty and impatient effort, snapped the silken cords asunder.

"Lord, Lord!" he cried impatiently. "What's coming to me? I must be a little off my feed!"

And he hurried rapidly to his duties. After an hour of the hardest concentration he had ever been required to bestow on a trivial subject, he again unconsciously sank by degrees into the old apathy.

"Glad it isn't the busy season!" he commented to himself. "Here, I must quit this! Guess it's the warm weather. I'll get down to the mill for a day or two."

There he found himself incapable of even the most petty routine work. He sat to his desk at eight o'clock and began the perusal of a sheaf of letters, comprising a certain correspondence, which Collins brought him. The first three he read carefully; the following two rather hurriedly; of the next one he seized only the salient and essential points; the seventh and eighth he skimmed; the remainder of the bundle he thrust aside in uncontrollable impatience. Next day he returned to the woods.

The incident of the letters had aroused to the full his old fighting spirit, before which no mere instincts could stand. He clamped the iron to his actions and forced them to the way appointed. Once more his mental processes became clear and incisive, his commands direct and to the point. To all outward appearance Thorpe was as before.

## THORPE'S DREAM GIRL

He opened Camp One, and the Fighting Forty came back from distant drinking joints. This was in early September, when the raspberries were entirely done and the blackberries fairly in the way of vanishing. That able-bodied and devoted band of men was on hand when needed. Shearer, in some subtle manner of his own, had let them feel that this year meant thirty million or "bust." They tightened their leather belts and stood ready for commands. Thorpe set them to work near the river, cutting roads along the lines he had blazed to the inland timber on seventeen and nineteen. After much discussion with Shearer the young man decided to take out the logs from eleven by driving them down French Creek.

To this end a gang was put to clearing the creek-bed. It was a tremendous job. Centuries of forest life had choked the little stream nearly to the level of its banks. Old snags and stumps lay imbedded in the ooze; decayed trunks, moss-grown, blocked the current; leaning tamaracks, fallen timber, tangled vines, dense thickets gave to its course more the appearance of a tropical jungle than of a north-country brook-bed. All these things had to be removed, one by one, and either piled to one side or burnt. In the end, however, it would pay. French Creek was not a large stream, but it could be driven during the time of the spring freshets.

Each night the men returned in the beautiful

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

dream-like twilight to the camp. There they sat, after eating, smoking their pipes in the open air. Much of the time they sang, while Phil, crouching wolf-like over his violin, rasped out an accompaniment of dissonances. From a distance it softened and fitted pleasantly into the framework of the wilderness. The men's voices lent themselves well to the weird minor strains of the chanteys. These times—when the men sang, and the night-wind rose and died in the hemlock tops—were Thorpe's worst moments. His soul, tired with the day's iron struggle, fell to brooding. Strange thoughts came to him, strange visions. He wanted something—he knew not what; he longed, and thrilled, and aspired to a greater glory than that of brave deeds, a softer comfort than his old foster mother, the wilderness, could bestow.

The men were singing in a mighty chorus, swaying their heads in unison, and bringing out with a roar the emphatic words of the crude ditties written by some genius from their own ranks.

*“Come all ye sons of freedom throughout old Michigan,  
Come all ye gallant lumbermen, list to a shanty man.  
On the banks of the Muskegon, where the rapid waters flow,  
OH!—we'll range the wild woods o'er while a-lumbering  
we go.”*

Here was the bold unabashed front of the pioneer, here was absolute certainty in the superiority of his

## THORPE'S DREAM GIRL

calling—absolute scorn of all others. Thorpe passed his hand across his brow. The same spirit was once fully and freely his.

*“The music of our burnished axe shall make the woods resound,  
And many a lofty ancient pine will tumble to the ground.  
At night around our shanty fire we'll sing while rude winds  
blow,  
OH!—we'll range the wild woods o'er while a-lumbering  
we go!”*

That was what he was here for. Things were going right. It would be pitiful to fail merely on account of this idiotic lassitude, this unmanly weakness, this boyish impatience and desire for play. He a woodsman! He a fellow with these big strong men!

A single voice, clear and high, struck into a quick measure:

*“I am a jolly shanty boy,  
As you will soon discover;  
To all the dodges I am fly,  
A hustling pine-woods rover.  
A peavey-hook it is my pride,  
An axe I well can handle.  
To fell a tree or punch a bull  
Get rattling Danny Randall.”*

And then with a rattle and crash the whole Fighting Forty shrieked out the chorus:

*“Bung yer eye! bung yer eye!”*

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

Active, alert, prepared for any emergency that might arise; hearty, ready for everything, from punching bulls to felling trees—that was something like! Thorpe despised himself. The song went on.

*"I love a girl in Saginaw,  
She lives with her mother.  
I defy all Michigan  
To find such another.  
She's tall and slim, her hair is red,  
Her face is plump and pretty.  
She's my daisy Sunday best-day girl,  
And her front name stands for Kitty."*

And again as before the Fighting Forty howled truculently:

*"Bung yer eye! bung yer eye!"*

The words were vulgar, the air a mere minor chant. Yet Thorpe's mind was stilled. His aroused subconsciousness had been engaged in reconstructing these men entire as their songs voiced rudely the inner characteristics of their beings. Now his spirit halted, finger on lip. Their bravery, pride of caste, resource, bravado, boastfulness—all these he had checked off approvingly. Here now was the idea of the Mate. Somewhere for each of them was a "Kitty," a "daisy Sunday best-day girl"; the eternal feminine; the softer side; the tenderness, beauty,

## THORPE'S DREAM GIRL

glory of even so harsh a world as they were compelled to inhabit. At the present or in the past these woods roisterers, this Fighting Forty, had known love. Thorpe arose abruptly and turned at random into the forest. The song pursued him as he went, but he heard only the clear sweet tones, not the words. And yet even the words would have spelled to his awakened sensibilities another idea—would have symbolized, however rudely, companionship and the human delight of acting a part before a woman.

*"I took her to a dance one night,  
A mossback gave the bidding—  
Silver Jack bossed the shebang,  
And Big Dan played the fiddle.  
We danced and drank the livelong night  
With fights between the dancing,  
Till Silver Jack cleaned out the ranch  
And sent the mossbacks prancing."*

And with the increasing war and turmoil of the quick water the last shout of the Fighting Forty mingled faintly and was lost.

*"Bung yer eye! bung yer eye!"*

Thorpe found himself at the edge of the woods facing a little glade into which streamed the radiance of a full moon.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THERE he stood and looked silently, not understanding, not caring to inquire. Across the way a white-throat was singing, clear, beautiful, like the shadow of a dream. The girl stood listening.

Her small fair head was inclined ever so little sideways and her finger was on her lips as though she wished to still the very hush of night, to which impression the inclination of her supple body lent its grace. The moonlight shone full upon her countenance. A little white face it was, with wide clear eyes and a sensitive, proud mouth that now half parted like a child's. Her eyebrows arched from her straight nose in the peculiarly graceful curve that falls just short of pride on the one side and of power on the other, to fill the eyes with a pathos of trust and innocence. The man watching could catch the poise of her long white neck and the molten moon-fire from her tumbled hair—the color of corn-silk, but finer.

And yet these words mean nothing. A painter might have caught her charm, but he must needs be a poet as well—and a great poet, one capable of grandeurs and subtleties.

## THORPE'S DREAM GIRL

To the young man standing there rapt in the spell of vague desire, of awakened vision, she seemed most like a flower or a mist. He tried to find words to formulate her to himself, but did not succeed. Always it came back to the same idea—the flower and the mist. Like the petals of a flower most delicate was her questioning, upturned face; like the bend of a flower most rare the stalk of her graceful throat; like the poise of a flower most dainty the attitude of her beautiful, perfect body sheathed in a garment that outlined each movement, for the instant in suspense. Like a mist the glimmering of her skin, the shining of her hair, the elusive moon-like quality of her whole personality as she stood there in the ghost-like clearing listening, her fingers on her lips.

Behind her lurked the low, even shadow of the forest where the moon was not, a band of velvet against which the girl and the light-touched twigs and bushes and grass blades were etched like frost against a black window pane. There was something, too, of the frost-work's evanescent spiritual quality in the scene—as though at any moment, with a puff of the balmy summer wind, the radiant glade, the hovering figure, the filigreed silver of the entire setting would melt into the accustomed stern and menacing forest of the northland, with its wolves, and its wild deer, and the voices of its sterner calling.

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

Thorpe held his breath and waited. Again the white-throat lifted his clear, spiritual note across the brightness, slow, trembling with ecstasy. The girl never moved. She stood in the moonlight like a beautiful emblem of silence, half real, half fancy, part woman, wholly divine, listening to the little bird's message.

For the third time the song shivered across the night; then Thorpe with a soft sob, dropped his face in his hands and looked no more.

He did not feel the earth beneath his knees, nor the whip of the sumach across his face; he did not see the moon shadows creep slowly along the fallen birch; nor did he notice that the white-throat had hushed its song. His inmost spirit was shaken. Something had entered his soul and filled it to the brim, so that he dared no longer stand in the face of radiance until he had accounted with himself. Another drop would overflow the cup.

Ah, sweet God, the beauty of it, the beauty of it! That questing, child-like starry gaze, seeking so purely to the stars themselves! That flower face, those drooping, half-parted lips! That inexpressible, unseizable something they had meant! Thorpe searched humbly — eagerly — then with agony through his troubled spirit, and in its furthest depths saw the mystery as beautifully remote as ever. It approached and swept over him and left him gasping passion-racked. Ah, sweet God, the



Hilda

## THORPE'S DREAM GIRL

beauty of it! the beauty of it! the vision! the dream!

He trembled and sobbed with his desire to seize it, with his impotence to express it, with his failure even to appreciate it as his heart told him it should be appreciated.

He dared not look. At length he turned and stumbled back through the moonlit forest crying on his old gods in vain.

At the banks of the river he came to a halt. There in the velvet pines the moonlight slept calmly, and the shadows rested quietly under the breezeless sky. Near at hand the river shouted as ever its cry of joy over the vitality of life, like a spirited boy before the face of inscrutable nature. All else was silence. Then from the waste boomed a strange, hollow note, rising, dying, rising again, instinct with the spirit of the wilds. It fell, and far away sounded a heavy but distant crash. The cry lifted again. It was the first bull moose calling across the wilderness to his mate.

And then, faint but clear, down the current of a chance breeze drifted the chorus of the Fighting Forty.

*"The forests so brown at our stroke go down,  
And cities spring up where they fell;  
While logs well run and work well done  
Is the story the shanty boys tell."*



## THE BLAZED TRAIL

Thorpe turned from the river with a thrust forward of his head. He was not a religious man, and in his six years' woods experience had never been to church. Now he looked up over the tops of the pines to where the Pleiades glittered faintly among the brighter stars.

"Thanks, God," said he briefly.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

FOR several days this impression satisfied him completely. He discovered, strangely enough, that his restlessness had left him, that once more he was able to give to his work his former energy and interest. It was as though some power had raised its finger and a storm had stilled, leaving calm, unruffled skies.

He did not attempt to analyze this; he did not even make an effort to contemplate it. His critical faculty was stricken dumb and it asked no questions of him. At a touch his entire life had changed. Reality or vision, he had caught a glimpse of something so entirely different from anything his imagination or experience had ever suggested to him, that at first he could do no more than permit passively its influences to adjust themselves to his being.

Curiosity, speculation, longing — all the more active emotions remained in abeyance while outwardly, for three days, Harry Thorpe occupied himself only with the needs of the Fighting Forty at Camp One.

In the early morning he went out with the gang. While they chopped or heaved, he stood by serene.