

## THE BLAZED TRAIL

looked at him from a height of superior soft-eyed tenderness as a woman might look at a child. "You must not. It is not right."

Then he kissed the fingers very gently before they were withdrawn, and she said nothing at all in rebuke, but looked straight before her with troubled eyes.

The voices of evening began to raise their jubilant notes. From a tree near by the olive thrush sang like clockwork; over beyond carolled eagerly a black-throat, a myrtle warbler, a dozen song sparrows, and a hundred vireos and creepers. Down deep in the blackness of the ancient woods a hermit thrush uttered his solemn bell-note, like the tolling of the spirit of peace. And in Thorpe's heart a thousand tumultuous voices that had suddenly roused to clamor, died into nothingness at the music of her softly protesting voice.

## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

THORPE returned to Camp One shortly after dark. He found there Scotty Parsons, who had come up to take charge of the crew engaged in clearing French Creek. The man brought him a number of letters sent on by Collins, among which was one from Wallace Carpenter.

After commending the camping party to his companion's care, and giving minute directions as to how and where to meet it, the young fellow went on to say that affairs were going badly on the Board.

"Some interest that I haven't been able to make out yet has been hammering our stocks down day after day," he wrote. "I don't understand it, for the stocks are good—they rest on a solid foundation of value—and intrinsically are worth more than is bid for them right now. Some powerful concern is beating them down for a purpose of its own. Sooner or later they will let up, and then we'll get things back in good shape. I am amply protected now, thanks to you, and am not at all afraid of losing my holdings. The only difficulty is that I am unable to predict exactly when the other fellows will decide that they have accomplished whatever

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they are about, and let up. It may not be before next year. In that case I couldn't help you out on those notes when they come due. So put in your best licks, old man. You may have to pony up for a little while, though, of course, sooner or later I can put it all back. Then, you bet your life, I keep out of it. Lumbering's good enough for yours truly.

"By the way, you might shine up to Hilda Farrant and join the rest of the fortune-hunters. She's got it to throw to the birds, and in her own right. Seriously, old fellow, don't put yourself into a false position through ignorance. Not that there is any danger to a hardened old woodsman like you."

Thorpe went to the group of pines by the pole trail the following afternoon because he had said he would, but with a new attitude of mind. He had come into contact with the artificiality of conventional relations, and it stiffened him. No wonder she had made him keep silence the afternoon before! She had done it gently and nicely, to be sure, but that was part of her good-breeding. Hilda found him formal, reserved, polite; and marvelled at it. In her was no coquetry. She was as straightforward and sincere as the look of her eyes.

They sat down on a log. Hilda turned to him with her graceful air of confidence.

"Now talk to me," said she.

"Certainly," replied Thorpe in a practical tone of voice, "what do you want me to talk about?"

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She shot a swift, troubled glance at him, concluded herself mistaken, and said:

"Tell me about what you do up here—your life—all about it."

"Well—" replied Thorpe formally, "we haven't much to interest a girl like you. It is a question of saw logs with us"—and he went on in his driest, most technical manner to detail the process of manufacture. It might as well have been bricks.

The girl did not understand. She was hurt. As surely as the sun tangled in the distant pine frond, she had seen in his eyes a great passion. Now it was coldly withdrawn.

"What has happened to you?" she asked finally, out of her great sincerity.

"Me? Nothing," replied Thorpe.

A forced silence fell upon him. Hilda seemed gradually to lose herself in reverie. After a time she said softly:

"Don't you love this woods?"

"It's an excellent bunch of pine," replied Thorpe bluntly. "It'll cut three million at least."

"Oh!" she cried drawing back, her hands pressed against the log either side of her, her eyes wide.

After a moment she caught her breath convulsively, and Thorpe became conscious that she was studying him furtively with a quickening doubt.

After that, by the mercy of God, there was no more talk between them. She was too hurt and

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shocked and disillusioned to make the necessary effort to go away. He was too proud to put an end to the position. They sat there apparently absorbed in thought, while all about them the accustomed life of the woods drew nearer and nearer to them, as the splash of their entrance into it died away.

A red squirrel poised thirty feet above them, leaped, and clung swaying to a sapling-top a dozen yards from the tree he had quitted. Two chickadees, upside down, uttering liquid undertones, searched busily for insects next their heads. Wilson's warblers, pine creepers, black-throats, myrtle and magnolia warblers, oven birds, peewits, blue-jays, purple finches, passed silently or noisily, each according to his kind. Once a lone spruce hen dusted herself in a stray patch of sunlight until it shimmered on a tree trunk, raised upward, and disappeared, to give place to long level dusty shafts that shot here and there through the pines laying the spell of sunset on the noisy woods brawlers.

Unconsciously the first strain of opposition and of hurt surprise had relaxed. Each thought vaguely his thoughts. Then in the depths of the forest, perhaps near at hand, perhaps far away, a single hermit thrush began to sing. His song was of three solemn deep liquid notes; followed by a slight rhetorical pause as of contemplation; and then, deliberately, three notes more on a different key—and so on without haste and without pause. It is the most digni-

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fied, the most spiritual, the holiest of woods utterances. Combined with the evening shadows and the warm soft air, it offered to the heart an almost irresistible appeal. The man's artificial antagonism modified; the woman's disenchantment began to seem unreal.

Then subtly over and through the bird-song another sound became audible. At first it merely repeated the three notes faintly, like an echo, but with a rich, sad undertone that brought tears. Then, timidly and still softly, it elaborated the theme, weaving in and out through the original three the glitter and shimmer of a splendid web of sound, spreading before the awakened imagination a broad river of woods-imagery that reflected on its surface all the subtler moods of the forest. The pine shadows, the calls of the wild creatures, the flow of the brook, the splashes of sunlight through the trees, the sigh of the wind, the shout of the rapid—all these were there, distinctly to be felt in their most ethereal and beautiful forms. And yet it was all slight and tenuous as though the crack of a twig would break it through—so that over it continually like a grand full organ-tone repeated the notes of the bird itself.

With the first sigh of the wonder-music the girl had started and caught her breath in the exquisite pleasure of it. As it went on they both forgot everything but the harmony and each other.

"Ah, beautiful!" she murmured.

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"What is it?" he whispered marvelling.

"A violin—played by a master."

The bird suddenly hushed, and at once the strain abandoned the woods-note and took another motif. At first it played softly in the higher notes, a tinkling lightsome little melody that stirred a kindly surface-smile over a full heart. Then suddenly, without transition, it dropped to the lower register, and began to sob and wail in the full vibrating power of a great passion.

And the theme it treated was love. It spoke solemnly, fearfully of the greatness of it, the glory. These as abstractions it amplified in fine full-breathed chords that swept the spirit up and up as on the waves of a mighty organ. Then one by one the voices of other things were heard—the tinkling of laughter, the roar of a city, the sob of a grief, a cry of pain suddenly shooting across the sound, the clank of a machine, the tumult of a river, the puff of a steamboat, the murmuring of a vast crowd—and one by one, without seeming in the least to change their character, they merged imperceptibly into, and were part of the grand-breathed chords, so that at last all the fames and ambitions and passions of the world came, in their apotheosis, to be only parts of the master-passion of them all.

And while the echoes of the greater glory still swept beneath their uplifted souls like ebbing waves, so that they still sat rigid and staring with the

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majesty of it, the violin softly began to whisper. Beautiful it was as a spirit, beautiful beyond words, beautiful beyond thought. Its beauty struck sharp at the heart. And they two sat there hand in hand dreaming—dreaming—dreaming—

At last the poignant ecstasy seemed slowly, slowly to die. Fainter and fainter ebbed the music. Through it as through a mist the solemn aloof forest began to show to the consciousness of the two. They sought each other's eyes gently smiling. The music was very soft and dim and sad. They leaned to each other with a sob. Their lips met. The music ceased.

Alone in the forest side by side they looked out together for a moment into that eternal vision which lovers only are permitted to see. The shadows fell. About them brooded the inscrutable pines stretching a canopy over them enthroned. A single last shaft of the sun struck full upon them, a single light-spot in the gathering gloom. They were beautiful.

And over behind the trees, out of the light and the love and the beauty, little Phil huddled, his great shaggy head bowed in his arms. Beside him lay his violin, and beside that his bow, broken. He had snapped it across his knee. That day he had heard at last the Heart Song of the Violin, and uttering it, had bestowed love. But in accordance with his prophecy he had that day lost what he cared for most in all the world, his friend.

## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

THAT was the moon of delight. The days passed through the hazy forest like stately figures from an old masque. In the pine grove on the knoll the man and the woman had erected a temple to love, and love showed them one to the other.

In Hilda Farrand was no guile, no coquetry, no deceit. So perfect was her naturalism that often by those who knew her least she was considered affected. Her trust in whomever she found herself with attained so directly its reward; her unconsciousness of pose was so rhythmically graceful; her ignorance and innocence so triumphantly effective, that the mind with difficulty rid itself of the belief that it was all carefully studied. This was not true. She honestly did not know that she was beautiful; was unaware of her grace; did not realize the potency of her wealth.

This absolute lack of self-consciousness was most potent in overcoming Thorpe's natural reticence. He expanded to her. She came to idolize him in a manner at once inspiring and touching in so beautiful a creature. In him she saw reflected all the lofty attractions of character which she herself possessed,

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but of which she was entirely unaware. Through his words she saw to an ideal. His most trivial actions were ascribed to motives of a dignity which would have been ridiculous, if it had not been a little pathetic. The woods-life, the striving of the pioneer kindled her imagination. She seized upon the great facts of them and fitted those facts with reasons of her own. Her insight perceived the adventurous spirit, the battle-courage, the indomitable steadfastness which always in reality lie back of these men of the frontier to urge them into the life; and of them constructed conscious motives of conduct. To her fancy the lumbermen, of whom Thorpe was one, were self-conscious agents of advance. They chose hardship, loneliness, the strenuous life because they wished to clear the way for a higher civilization. To her it seemed a great and noble sacrifice. She did not perceive that while all this is true, it is under the surface, the real spur is a desire to get on, and a hope of making money. For, strangely enough, she differentiated sharply the life and the reasons for it. An existence in subduing the forest was to her ideal; the making of a fortune through a lumbering firm she did not consider in the least important. That this distinction was most potent, the sequel will show.

In all of it she was absolutely sincere, and not at all stupid. She had always had all she could spend, without question. Money meant nothing to her, one

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way or the other. If need was, she might have experienced some difficulty in learning how to economize, but none at all in adjusting herself to the necessity of it. The material had become, in all sincerity, a basis for the spiritual. She recognized but two sorts of motives; of which the ideal, comprising the poetic, the daring, the beautiful, were good; and the material, meaning the sordid and selfish, were bad. With her the mere money-getting would have to be allied with some great and poetic excuse.

That is the only sort of aristocracy, in the popular sense of the word, which is real; the only scorn of money which can be respected.

There are some faces which symbolize to the beholder many subtleties of soul-beauty which by no other method could gain expression. Those subtleties may not, probably do not, exist in the possessor of the face. The power of such a countenance lies not so much in what it actually represents, as in the suggestion it holds out to another. So often it is with a beautiful character. Analyze it carefully, and you will reduce it generally to absolute simplicity and absolute purity—two elements common enough in adulteration; but place it face to face with a more complex personality, and mirror-like it will take on a hundred delicate shades of ethical beauty, while at the same time preserving its own lofty spirituality.

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Thus Hilda Farrand reflected Thorpe. In the clear mirror of her heart his image rested transfigured. It was as though the glass were magic, so that the gross and material was absorbed and lost, while the more spiritual qualities reflected back. So the image was retained in its entirety, but etherealized, refined. It is necessary to attempt, even thus faintly and inadequately, a sketch of Hilda's love, for a partial understanding of it is necessary to the comprehension of what followed the moon of delight.

That moon saw a variety of changes.

The bed of French Creek was cleared. Three of the roads were finished, and the last begun. So much for the work of it.

Morton and Cary shot four deer between them, which was unpardonably against the law, caught fish in plenty, smoked two and a half pounds of tobacco, and read half of one novel. Mrs. Cary and Miss Carpenter walked a total of over a hundred miles, bought twelve pounds of Indian work of all sorts, embroidered the circle of two embroidery frames, learned to paddle a birch-bark canoe, picked fifteen quarts of berries, and gained six pounds in weight. All the party together accomplished five picnics, four explorations, and thirty excellent camp-fires in the evening. So much for the fun of it.

Little Phil disappeared utterly, taking with him his violin, but leaving his broken bow. Thorpe has

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it even to this day. The lumberman caused search and inquiry on all sides. The cripple was never heard of again. He had lived his brief hour, taken his subtle artist's vengeance of misplayed notes on the crude appreciation of men too coarse-fibred to recognize it, brought together by the might of sacrifice and consummate genius two hearts on the brink of misunderstanding;—now there was no further need for him, he had gone. So much for the tragedy of it.

"I saw you long ago," said Hilda to Thorpe. "Long, long ago, when I was quite a young girl. I had been visiting in Detroit, and was on my way all alone to catch an early train. You stood on the corner thinking, tall and straight and brown, with a weather-beaten old hat and a weather-beaten old coat and weather-beaten old moccasins, and such a proud, clear, undaunted look on your face. I have remembered you ever since."

And then he told her of the race to the Land Office, while her eyes grew brighter and brighter with the epic splendor of the story. She told him that she had loved him from that moment—and believed her telling; while he, the unsentimental leader of men, persuaded himself and her that he had always in some mysterious manner carried her image prophetically in his heart. So much for the love of it.

In the last days of the month of delight Thorpe

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received a second letter from his partner, which to some extent awakened him to the realities.

"My dear Harry," it ran. "I have made a startling discovery. The other fellow is Morrison. I have been a blind, stupid dolt, and am caught nicely. You can't call me any more names than I have already called myself. Morrison has been in it from the start. By an accident I learned he was behind the fellow who induced me to invest, and it is he who has been hammering the stock down ever since. They couldn't lick you at your game, so they tackled me at mine. I'm not the man you are, Harry, and I've made a mess of it. Of course their scheme is plain enough on the face of it. They're going to involve me so deeply that I will drag the firm down with me.

"If you can fix it to meet those notes, they can't do it. I have ample margin to cover any more declines they may be able to bring about. Don't fret about that. Just as sure as you can pay that sixty thousand, just so sure we'll be ahead of the game at this time next year. For God's sake get a move on you, old man. If you don't—good Lord! The firm'll bust because she can't pay; I'll bust because I'll have to let my stock go on margins—it'll be an awful smash. But you'll get there, so we needn't worry. I've been an awful fool, and I've no right to do the getting into trouble and leave you to the hard work of getting out again. But as part-

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ner I'm going to insist on your having a salary— etc.”

The news aroused all Thorpe's martial spirit. Now at last the mystery surrounding Morrison & Daly's unnatural complaisance was riven. It had come to grapples again. He was glad of it. Meet those notes? Well I guess so! He'd show them what sort of a proposition they had tackled. Sneaking, underhanded scoundrels! taking advantage of a mere boy. Meet those notes? You bet he would; and then he'd go down there and boost those stocks until M. & D. looked like a last year's bird's nest. He thrust the letter in his pocket and walked buoyantly to the pines.

The two lovers sat there all the afternoon drinking in half sadly the joy of the forest and of being near each other, for the moon of delight was almost done. In a week the camping party would be breaking up, and Hilda must return to the city. It was uncertain when they would be able to see each other again, though there was talk of getting up a winter party to visit Camp One in January. The affair would be unique.

Suddenly the girl broke off and put her fingers to her lips. For some time, dimly, an intermittent and faint sound had been felt, rather than actually heard, like the irregular muffled beating of a heart. Gradually it had insisted on the attention. Now at last it broke through the film of consciousness.

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“What is it?” she asked.

Thorpe listened. Then his face lit mightily with the joy of battle.

“My axe-men,” he cried. “They are cutting the road.”

A faint call echoed. Then without warning, nearer at hand the sharp ring of an axe sounded through the forest.