

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

RAPIDLY Thorpe explained what was to be done, and thrust his rifle into the Indian's hands. The latter listened in silence and stolidity, then turned, and without a word departed swiftly in the darkness. The two white men stood a minute attentive. Nothing was to be heard but the steady beat of rain and the roaring of the wind.

Near the bank of the river they encountered a man, visible only as an uncertain black outline against the glow of the lanterns beyond. Thorpe, stopping him, found Big Junko.

"This is no time to quit," said Thorpe, sharply.

"I 'aint quittin'," replied Big Junko.

"Where are you going, then?"

Junko was partially and stammeringly unresponsive.

"Looks bad," commented Thorpe. "You'd better get back to your job."

"Yes," agreed Junko helplessly. In the momentary slack tide of work, the giant had conceived the idea of searching out the driver crew for purposes of pugilistic vengeance. Thorpe's suspicions stung him, but his simple mind could see no direct way to explanation.

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All night long in the chill of a spring rain and wind-storm the Fighting Forty and certain of the mill crew gave themselves to the labor of connecting the slanting stone cribs so strongly, by means of heavy timbers chained end to end, that the pressure of a break in the jam might not sweep aside the defences. Wallace Carpenter, Shorty, the chore-boy, and Anderson, the barn-boss, picked a dangerous passage back and forth carrying pails of red-hot coffee which Mrs. Hathaway constantly prepared. The cold water numbed the men's hands. With difficulty could they manipulate the heavy chains through the auger holes; with pain they twisted knots, bored holes. They did not complain. Behind them the jam quivered, perilously near the bursting point. From it shrieked aloud the demons of pressure. Steadily the river rose, an inch an hour. The key might snap at any given moment—they could not tell—and with the rush they knew very well that themselves, the tug, and the disabled pile-driver would be swept from existence. The worst of it was that the blackness shrouded their experience into uselessness; they were utterly unable to tell by the ordinary visual symptoms how near the jam might be to collapse.

However, they persisted, as the old-time riverman always does, so that when dawn appeared the barrier was continuous and assured. Although the pressure of the river had already forced the logs

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against the defences, the latter held the strain well.

The storm had settled into its gait. Overhead the sky was filled with gray, beneath which darker scuds flew across the zenith before a howling southwest wind. Out in the clear river one could hardly stand upright against the gusts. In the fan of many directions furious squalls swept over the open water below the booms, and an eager boiling current rushed to the lake.

Thorpe now gave orders that the tug and driver should take shelter. A few moments later he expressed himself as satisfied. The dripping crew, their harsh faces gray in the half-light, picked their way to the shore.

In the darkness of that long night's work no man knew his neighbor. Men from the river, men from the mill, men from the yard all worked side by side. Thus no one noticed especially a tall, slender, but well-knit individual dressed in a faded mackinaw and a limp slouch hat which he wore pulled over his eyes. This young fellow occupied himself with the chains. Against the racing current the crew held the ends of the heavy booms, while he fastened them together. He worked well, but seemed slow. Three times Shearer hustled him on after the others had finished, examining closely the work that had been done. On the third occasion he shrugged his shoulder somewhat impatiently.

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The men straggled to shore, the young fellow just described bringing up the rear. He walked as though tired out, hanging his head and dragging his feet. When, however, the boarding-house door had closed on the last of those who preceded him, and the town lay deserted in the dawn, he suddenly became transformed. Casting a keen glance right and left to be sure of his opportunity, he turned and hurried recklessly back over the logs to the centre booms. There he knelt and busied himself with the chains.

In his zigzag progression over the jam he so blended with the morning shadows as to seem one of them, and he would have escaped quite unnoticed had not a sudden shifting of the logs under his feet compelled him to rise for a moment to his full height. So Wallace Carpenter, passing from his bedroom, along the porch, to the dining-room, became aware of the man on the logs.

His first thought was that something demanding instant attention had happened to the boom. He therefore ran at once to the man's assistance, ready to help him personally or to call other aid as the exigency demanded. Owing to the precarious nature of the passage, he could not see beyond his feet until very close to the workman. Then he looked up to find the man, squatted on the boom, contemplating him sardonically.

"Dyer!" he exclaimed.

"Right, my son," said the other coolly.

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"What are you doing?"

"If you want to know, I am filing this chain."

Wallace made one step forward and so became aware that at last firearms were taking a part in this desperate game.

"You stand still," commanded Dyer from behind the revolver. "It's unfortunate for you that you happened along, because now you'll have to come with me till this little row is over. You won't have to stay long; your logs'll go out in an hour. I'll just trouble you to go into the brush with me for a while."

The scaler picked his file from beside the weakened link.

"What have you against us, anyway, Dyer?" asked Wallace. His quick mind had conceived a plan. At the moment, he was standing near the outermost edge of the jam, but now as he spoke he stepped quietly to the boom log.

Dyer's black eyes gleamed at him suspiciously, but the movement appeared wholly natural in view of the return to shore.

"Nothing," he replied. "I didn't like your gang particularly, but that's nothing."

"Why do you take such nery chances to injure us?" queried Carpenter.

"Because there's something in it," snapped the scaler. "Now about face; mosey!"

Like a flash Wallace wheeled and dropped into

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the river, swimming as fast as possible below water before his breath should give out. The swift current hurried him away. When at last he rose for air, the spit of Dyer's pistol caused him no uneasiness. A moment later he struck out boldly for shore.

What Dyer's ultimate plan might be, he could not guess. He had stated confidently that the jam would break "in an hour." He might intend to start it with dynamite. Wallace dragged himself from the water and commenced breathlessly to run toward the boarding-house.

Dyer had already reached the shore. Wallace raised what was left of his voice in a despairing shout. The scaler mockingly waved his hat, then turned and ran swiftly and easily toward the shelter of the woods. At their border he paused again to bow in derision. Carpenter's cry brought men to the boarding-house door. From the shadows of the forest two vivid flashes cut the dusk. Dyer staggered, turned completely about, seemed partially to recover, and disappeared. An instant later, across the open space where the scaler had stood, with rifle a-trail, the Indian leaped in pursuit.

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“WHAT is it?” “What’s the matter?”
“What the hell’s up?” “What’s happened?” burst on Wallace in a volley.

“It’s Dyer,” gasped the young man. “I found him on the boom! He held me up with a gun while he filed the boom chains between the centre piers. They’re just ready to go. I got away by diving. Hurry and put in a new chain; you haven’t much time!”

“He’s a gone-er now,” interjected Solly grimly.—
“Charley is on his trail—and he is hit.”

Thorpe’s intelligence leaped promptly to the practical question.

“Injin Charley, where’d he come from? I sent him up Sadler’s & Smith’s. It’s twenty miles, even through the woods.”

As though by way of colossal answer the whole surface of the jam moved inward and upward, thrusting the logs bristling against the horizon.

“She’s going to break!” shouted Thorpe, starting on a run toward the river. “A chain, quick!”

The men followed, strung high with excitement. Hamilton, the journalist, paused long enough to

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glance up-stream. Then he, too, ran after them, screaming that the river above was full of logs. By that they all knew that Injin Charley’s mission had failed, and that something under ten million feet of logs were racing down the river like so many battering rams.

At the boom the great jam was already a-tremble with eagerness to spring. Indeed a miracle alone seemed to hold the timbers in their place.

“It’s death, certain death, to go out on that boom,” muttered Billy Mason.

Tim Shearer stepped forward coolly, ready as always to assume the perilous duty. He was thrust back by Thorpe, who seized the chain, cold-shut and hammer which Scotty Parsons brought, and ran lightly out over the booms, shouting:

“Back! back! Don’t follow me, on your lives! Keep ’em back, Tim!”

The swift water boiled from under the booms. *Bang! smash! bang!* crashed the logs, a mile up-stream, but plainly audible above the waters and the wind. Thorpe knelt, dropped the cold-shut through on either side of the weakened link, and prepared to close it with his hammer. He intended further to strengthen the connection with the other chain.

“Lem’ me hold her for you. You can’t close her alone,” said an unexpected voice next his elbow.

Thorpe looked up in surprise and anger. Over

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him leaned Big Junko. The men had been unable to prevent his following. Animated by the blind devotion of the animal for its master, and further stung to action by that master's doubt of his fidelity, the giant had followed to assist as he might.

"You damned fool," cried Thorpe exasperated, then held the hammer to him, "strike while I keep the chain underneath," he commanded.

Big Junko leaned forward to obey, kicking strongly his caulks into the barked surface of the boom log. The spikes, worn blunt by the river work already accomplished, failed to grip. Big Junko slipped, caught himself by an effort, overbalanced in the other direction, and fell into the stream. The current at once swept him away, but fortunately in such a direction that he was enabled to catch the slanting end of a "dead head" log whose lower end was jammed in the crib. The dead head was slippery, the current strong; Big Junko had no crevice by which to assure his hold. In another moment he would be torn away.

"Let go and swim!" shouted Thorpe.

"I can't swim," replied Junko in so low a voice as to be scarcely audible.

For a moment Thorpe stared at him.

"Tell Carrie," said Big Junko.

Then there beneath the swirling gray sky, under the frowning jam, in the midst of flood waters, Thorpe had his second great Moment of Decision.

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He did not pause to weigh reasons or chances, to discuss with himself expediency, or the moralities of failure. His actions were foreordained, mechanical. All at once the great forces which the winter had been bringing to power crystallized into something bigger than himself or his ideas. The trail lay before him; there was no choice.

Now clearly, with no shadow of doubt, he took the other view: There could be nothing better than Love. Men, their works, their deeds were little things. Success was a little thing; the opinion of men a little thing. Instantly he felt the truth of it.

And here was Love in danger. That it held its moment's habitation in clay of the coarser mould had nothing to do with the great elemental truth of it. For the first time in his life Thorpe felt the full crushing power of an abstraction. Without thought, instinctively, he drew before the necessity of the moment all that was lesser. It was the triumph of what was real in the man over that which environment, alienation, difficulties had raised up within him.

At Big Junko's words, Thorpe raised his hammer and with one mighty blow severed the chains which bound the ends of the booms across the opening. The free end of one of the poles immediately swung down with the current in the direction of Big Junko. Thorpe like a cat ran to the end of the boom, seized

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the giant by the collar, and dragged him through the water to safety.

"Run!" he shouted. "Run for your life!"

The two started desperately back, skirting the edge of the logs which now the very seconds alone seemed to hold back. They were drenched and blinded with spray, deafened with the crash of timbers settling to the leap. The men on shore could no longer see them for the smother. The great crush of logs had actually begun its first majestic sliding motion when at last they emerged to safety.

At first a few of the loose timbers found the opening, slipping quietly through with the current; then more; finally the front of the jam dove forward; and an instant later the smooth, swift motion had gained its impetus and was sweeping the entire drive down through the gap.

Rank after rank, like soldiers charging, they ran. The great fierce wind caught them up ahead of the current. In a moment the open river was full of logs jostling eagerly onward. Then suddenly, far out above the uneven tossing skyline of Superior, the strange northern "loom," or mirage, threw the spectres of thousands of restless timbers rising and falling on the bosom of the lake.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

THEY stood and watched them go.
"Oh, the great man! Oh, the great man!" murmured the writer, fascinated.

The grandeur of the sacrifice had struck them dumb. They did not understand the motives beneath it all, but the fact was patent. Big Junko broke down and sobbed.

After a time the stream of logs through the gap slackened. In a moment more, save for the inevitably stranded few, the booms were empty. A deep sigh went up from the attentive multitude.

"She's gone!" said one man, with the emphasis of a novel discovery; and groaned.

Then the awe broke from about their minds, and they spoke many opinions and speculations. Thorpe had disappeared. They respected his emotion and did not follow him.

"It was just plain damn foolishness;—but it was great!" said Shearer. "That no-account jackass of a Big Junko ain't worth as much per thousand feet as good white pine."

Then they noticed a group of men gathering about the office steps, and on it some one talking. Collins, the bookkeeper, was making a speech.

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Collins was a little hatchet-faced man, with straight, lank hair, near-sighted eyes, a timid, order-loving disposition, and a great suitability for his profession. He was accurate, unemotional, and valuable. All his actions were as dry as the sawdust in the burner. No one had ever seen him excited. But he was human; and now his knowledge of the Company's affairs showed him the dramatic contrast. *He knew!* He knew that the property of the firm had been mortgaged to the last dollar in order to assist expansion, so that not another cent could be borrowed to tide over present difficulty. He knew that the notes for sixty thousand dollars covering the loan to Wallace Carpenter came due in three months; he knew from the long table of statistics which he was eternally preparing and comparing that the season's cut should have netted a profit of two hundred thousand dollars—enough to pay the interest on the mortgages, to take up the notes, and to furnish a working capital for the ensuing year. These things he knew in the strange concrete arithmetical manner of the routine bookkeeper. Other men saw a desperate phase of firm rivalry; he saw a struggle to the uttermost. Other men cheered a rescue: he thrilled over the magnificent gesture of the Gambler scattering his stake in largesse to Death.

It was the simple turning of the hand from full-breathed prosperity to lifeless failure.

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His view was the inverse of his master's. To Thorpe it had suddenly become a very little thing in contrast to the great, sweet elemental truth that the dream girl had enunciated. To Collins the affair was miles vaster than the widest scope of his own narrow life.

The firm could not take up its notes when they came due; it could not pay the interest on the mortgages, which would now be foreclosed; it could not even pay in full the men who had worked for it—that would come under a court's adjudication.

He had therefore watched Thorpe's desperate sally to mend the weakened chain, in all the suspense of a man whose entire universe is in the keeping of the chance moment. It must be remembered that at bottom, below the outer consciousness, Thorpe's final decision had already grown to maturity. On the other hand, no other thought than that of accomplishment had even entered the little bookkeeper's head. The rescue and all that it had meant had hit him like a stroke of apoplexy, and his thin emotions had curdled to hysteria. Full of the idea he appeared before the men.

With rapid, almost incoherent speech he poured it out to them. Professional caution and secrecy were forgotten. Wallace Carpenter attempted to push through the ring for the purpose of stopping him. A gigantic riverman kindly but firmly held him back.

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"I guess it's just as well we hears this," said the latter.

It all came out—the loan to Carpenter, with a hint at the motive: the machinations of the rival firm on the Board of Trade; the notes, the mortgages, the necessity of a big season's cut; the reasons the rival firm had for wishing to prevent that cut from arriving at the market; the desperate and varied means they had employed. The men listened silent. Hamilton, his eyes glowing like coals, drank in every word. Here was the master motive he had sought; here was the story great to his hand!

"That's what we ought to get," cried Collins, almost weeping, "and now we've gone and bust, just because that infernal river-hog had to fall off a boom. By God, it's a shame! Those scalawags have done us after all!"

Out from the shadows of the woods stole Injin Charley. The whole bearing and aspect of the man had changed. His eye gleamed with a distant far-seeing fire of its own, which took no account of anything but some remote vision. He stole along almost furtively, but with a proud upright carriage of his neck, a backward tilt of his fine head, a distention of his nostrils that lent to his appearance a panther-like pride and stealthiness. No one saw him. Suddenly he broke through the group and mounted the steps beside Collins.

"The enemy of my brother is gone," said he

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simply in his native tongue, and with a sudden gesture held out before them—a scalp.

The medieval barbarity of the thing appalled them for a moment. The days of scalping were long since past, had been closed away between the pages of forgotten histories, and yet here again before them was the thing in all its living horror. Then a growl arose. The human animal had tasted blood.

All at once like wine their wrongs mounted to their heads. They remembered their dead comrades. They remembered the heart-breaking days and nights of toil they had endured on account of this man and his associates. They remembered the words of Collins, the little bookkeeper. They hated. They shook their fists across the skies. They turned and with one accord struck back for the railroad right-of-way which led to Shingleville, the town controlled by Morrison & Daly.

The railroad lay for a mile straight through a thick tamarack swamp, then over a nearly treeless cranberry plain. The tamarack was a screen between the two towns. When half-way through the swamp, Red-Jacket stopped, removed his coat, ripped the lining from it, and began to fashion a rude mask.

"Just as well they don't recognize us," said he.

"Somebody in town will give us away," suggested Shorty, the chore-boy.

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"No, they won't; they're all here," assured Kerlie.

It was true. Except for the women and children, who were not yet about, the entire village had assembled. Even old Vanderhoof, the fire-watcher of the yard, hobbled along breathlessly on his rheumatic legs. In a moment the masks were fitted. In a moment more the little band had emerged from the shelter of the swamp, and so came into full view of its objective point.

Shingleville consisted of a big mill; the yards, now nearly empty of lumber; the large frame boarding-house; the office; the stable; a store; two saloons; and a dozen dwellings. The party at once fixed its eyes on this collection of buildings, and trudged on down the right-of-way with unhastening grimness.

Their approach was not unobserved. Daly saw them; and Baker, his foreman, saw them. The two at once went forth to organize opposition. When the attacking party reached the mill-yard, it found the boss and the foreman standing alone on the sawdust, revolvers drawn.

Daly traced a line with his toe.

"The first man that crosses that line gets it," said he.

They knew he meant what he said. An instant's pause ensued, while the big man and the little faced a mob. Daly's rivermen were still on drive. He

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knew the mill men too well to depend on them. Truth to tell, the possibility of such a raid as this had not occurred to him; for the simple reason that he did not anticipate the discovery of his complicity with the forces of nature. Skillfully carried out, the plan was a good one. No one need know of the weakened link, and it was the most natural thing in the world that Sadler & Smith's drive should go out with the increase of water.

The men grouped swiftly and silently on the other side of the sawdust line. The pause did not mean that Daly's defence was good. I have known of a crew of striking mill men being so bluffed down, but not such men as these.

"Do you know what's going to happen to you?" said a voice from the group. The speaker was Radway, but the contractor kept himself well in the background. "We're going to burn your mill; we're going to burn your yards; we're going to burn your whole shooting match, you low-lived whelp!"

"Yes, and we're going to string you to your own trestle!" growled another voice harshly.

"Dyer!" said Injin Charley, simply, shaking the wet scalp arm's length toward the lumbermen.

At this grim interruption a silence fell. The owner paled slightly; his foreman chewed a nonchalant straw. Down the still and deserted street crossed and recrossed the subtle occult influences of a half-hundred concealed watchers. Daly and his

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subordinate were very much alone, and very much in danger. Their last hour had come; and they knew it.

With the recognition of the fact, they immediately raised their weapons in the resolve to do as much damage as possible before being overpowered.

Then suddenly, full in the back, a heavy stream of water knocked them completely off their feet, rolled them over and over on the wet sawdust, and finally jammed them both against the trestle, where it held them, kicking and gasping for breath, in a choking cataract of water. The pistols flew harmlessly into the air. For an instant the Fighting Forty stared in paralyzed astonishment. Then a tremendous roar of laughter saluted this easy vanquishment of a formidable enemy.

Daly and Baker were pounced upon and captured. There was no resistance. They were too nearly strangled for that. Little Solly and old Vanderhoof turned off the water in the fire hydrant and disconnected the hose they had so effectively employed.

"There, damn you!" said Rollway Charley, jerking the mill man to his feet. "How do *you* like too much water, hey?"

The unexpected comedy changed the party's mood. It was no longer a question of killing. A number broke into the store, and shortly emerged, bearing pails of kerosene with which they deluged the slabs on the windward side of the mill. The

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flames caught the structure instantly. A thousand sparks, borne by the off-shore breeze, fastened like so many stinging insects on the lumber in the yard.

It burned as dried balsam thrown on a camp fire. The heat of it drove the onlookers far back in the village, where in silence they watched the destruction. From behind locked doors the inhabitants watched with them.

The billow of white smoke filled the northern sky. A whirl of gray wood ashes, light as air, floated on and ever on over Superior. The site of the mill, the squares where the piles of lumber had stood, glowed incandescence over which already a white film was forming.

Daly and his man were slapped and cuffed hither and thither at the men's will. Their faces bled, their bodies ached as one bruise.

"That squares us," said the men. "If we can't cut this year, neither kin you. It's up to *you* now!"

Then, like a destroying horde of locusts, they gutted the office and the store, smashing what they could not carry to the fire. The dwellings and saloons they did not disturb. Finally, about noon, they kicked their two prisoners into the river, and took their way stragglingly back along the right-of-way.

"I surmise we took that town apart *some!*" remarked Shorty with satisfaction.

"I should rise to remark," replied Kerlie. Big

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Junko said nothing, but his cavernous little animal eyes glowed with satisfaction. He had been the first to lay hands on Daly; he had helped to carry the petroleum; he had struck the first match; he had even administered the final kick.

At the boarding-house they found Wallace Carpenter and Hamilton seated on the veranda. It was now afternoon. The wind had abated somewhat, and the sun was struggling with the still flying scuds.

"Hello, boys," said Wallace, "been for a little walk in the woods?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jack Hyland, "we——"

"I'd rather not hear," interrupted Wallace. "There's quite a fire over east. I suppose you haven't noticed it."

Hyland looked gravely eastward.

"Sure 'nough!" said he.

"Better get some grub," suggested Wallace.

After the men had gone in, he turned to the journalist.

"Hamilton," he began, "write all you know about the drive, and the break, and the rescue, but as to the burning of the mill——"

The other held out his hand.

"Good," said Wallace offering his own.

And that was as far as the famous Shingleville raid ever got. Daly did his best to collect even circumstantial evidence against the participants, but in

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vain. He could not even get any one to say that a single member of the village of Carpenter had absented himself from town that morning. This might have been from loyalty, or it might have been from fear of the vengeance the Fighting Forty would surely visit on a traitor. Probably it was a combination of both. The fact remains, however, that Daly never knew surely of but one man implicated in the destruction of his plant. That man was Injin Charley, but Injin Charley promptly disappeared.

After an interval, Tim Shearer, Radway and Kerlie came out again.

"Where's the boss?" asked Shearer.

"I don't know, Tim," replied Wallace seriously. "I've looked everywhere. He's gone. He must have been all cut up. I think he went out in the woods to get over it. I am not worrying. Harry has lots of sense. He'll come in about dark."

"Sure!" said Tim.

"How about the boy's stakes?" queried Radway. "I hear this is a bad smash for the firm."

"We'll see that the men get their wages all right," replied Carpenter, a little disappointed that such a question should be asked at such a time.

"All right," rejoined the contractor. "We're all going to need our money this summer."