

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

THORPE walked through the silent group of men without seeing them. He had no thought for what he had done, but for the triumphant discovery he had made in spite of himself. This he saw at once as something to glory in and as a duty to be fulfilled.

It was then about six o'clock in the morning. Thorpe passed the boarding-house, the store, and the office, to take himself as far as the little open shed that served the primitive town as a railway station. There he set the semaphore to flag the east-bound train from Duluth. At six thirty-two, the train happening on time, he climbed aboard. He dropped heavily into a seat and stared straight in front of him until the conductor had spoken to him twice.

"Where to, Mr. Thorpe?" he asked.

The latter gazed at him uncomprehendingly.

"Oh! Mackinaw City," he replied at last.

"How're things going up your way?" inquired the conductor by way of conversation while he made out the pay-slip.

"Good!" responded Thorpe mechanically.

The act of paying for his fare brought to his consciousness that he had but a little over ten dollars

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with him. He thrust the change back into his pocket, and took up his contemplation of nothing. The river water dripped slowly from his "cork" boots to form a pool on the car floor. The heavy wool of his short driving trousers steamed in the car's warmth. His shoulders dried in a little cloud of vapor. He noticed none of these things, but stared ahead, his gaze vacant, the bronze of his face set in the lines of a brown study, his strong capable hands hanging purposeless between his knees. The ride to Mackinaw City was six hours long, and the train in addition lost some ninety minutes; but in all this distance Thorpe never altered his pose nor his fixed attitude of attention to some inner voice.

The car-ferry finally landed them on the southern peninsula. Thorpe descended at Mackinaw City to find that the noon train had gone. He ate a lunch at the hotel—borrowed a hundred dollars from the agent of Louis Sands, a lumberman of his acquaintance; and seated himself rigidly in the little waiting-room, there to remain until the nine-twenty that night. When the cars were backed down from the siding, he boarded the sleeper. In the doorway stood a disapproving colored porter.

"Yo'll fin' the smokin' cah up fo'wu'd, suh," said the latter, firmly barring the way.

"It's generally forward," answered Thorpe.

"This yeah's th' sleepah," protested the functionary. "You pays extry."

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"I am aware of it," replied Thorpe curtly. "Give me a lower."

"Yessah!" acquiesced the darkey, giving way, but still in doubt. He followed Thorpe curiously, peering into the smoking-room on him from time to time. A little after twelve his patience gave out. The stolid gloomy man of lower six seemed to intend sitting up all night.

"Yo' berth is ready, sah," he delicately suggested.

Thorpe arose obediently, walked to lower six, and, without undressing, threw himself on the bed. Afterward the porter, in conscientious discharge of his duty, looked diligently beneath the seat for boots to polish. Happening to glance up, after fruitless search, he discovered the boots still adorning the feet of their owner.

"Well, for th' *lands* sake!" ejaculated the scandalized negro, beating a hasty retreat.

He was still more scandalized when, the following noon, his strange fare brushed by him without bestowing the expected tip.

Thorpe descended at Twelfth Street in Chicago without any very clear notion of where he was going. For a moment he faced the long park-like expanse of the lake front, then turned sharp to his left and picked his way south up the interminable reaches of Michigan Avenue. He did this without any conscious motive—mainly because the reaches seemed

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interminable, and he proved the need of walking. Block after block he clicked along, the caulks of his boots striking fire from the pavement. Some people stared at him a little curiously. Others merely glanced in his direction, attracted more by the expression of his face than the peculiarity of his dress. At that time rivermen were not an uncommon sight along the water front.

After an interval he seemed to have left the smoke and dirt behind. The street became quieter. Boarding-houses and tailors' shops ceased. Here and there appeared a bit of lawn, shrubbery, flowers. The residences established an uptown crescendo of magnificence. Policemen seemed trimmer, better-gloved. Occasionally he might have noticed in front of one of the sandstone piles a besilvered pair champing before a stylish vehicle. By and by he came to himself to find that he was staring at the deep-carved lettering in a stone horse-block before a large dwelling.

His mind took the letters in one after the other, perceiving them plainly before it accorded them recognition. Finally he had completed the word *Farrand*. He whirled sharp on his heel, mounted the broad white stone steps, and rang the bell.

It was answered almost immediately by a clean-shaven, portly and dignified man with the most impassive countenance in the world. This man looked upon Thorpe with lofty disapproval.

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"Is Miss Hilda Farrand at home?" he asked.

"I cannot say," replied the man. "If you will step to the back door, I will ascertain."

"The flowers will do. Now see that the south room is ready, Annie," floated a voice from within.

Without a word, but with a deadly earnestness, Thorpe reached forward, seized the astonished servant by the collar, yanked him bodily outside the door, stepped inside, and strode across the hall toward a closed portière whence had come the voice. The riverman's long spikes cut little triangular pieces from the hardwood floor. Thorpe did not notice that. He thrust aside the portière.

Before him he saw a young and beautiful girl. She was seated, and her lap was filled with flowers. At his sudden apparition, her hands flew to her heart, and her lips slightly parted. For a second the two stood looking at each other, just as nearly a year before their eyes had crossed over the old pole trail.

To Thorpe the girl seemed more beautiful than ever. She exceeded even his retrospective dreams of her, for the dream had persistently retained something of the quality of idealism which made the vision unreal, while the woman before him had become human flesh and blood, adorable, to be desired. The red of this violent unexpected encounter rushed to her face, her bosom rose and fell in a fluttering

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catch for breath; but her eyes were steady and inquiring.

Then the butler pounced on Thorpe from behind with the intent to do great bodily harm.

"Morris!" commanded Hilda sharply, "what are you doing?"

The man cut short his heroism in confusion.

"You may go," concluded Hilda.

Thorpe stood straight and unwinking by the straight portière. After a moment he spoke.

"I have come to tell you that you were right and I was wrong," said he steadily. "You told me there could be nothing better than love. In the pride of my strength I told you this was not so. I was wrong."

He stood for another instant, looking directly at her, then turned sharply, and head erect walked from the room.

Before he had reached the outer door the girl was at his side.

"Why are you going?" she asked.

"I have nothing more to say."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

She laughed happily to herself.

"But I have—much. Come back."

They returned to the little morning room, Thorpe's caulked boots gouging out the little triangular furrows in the hardwood floor. Neither

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noticed that. Morris, the butler, emerged from his hiding and held up the hands of horror.

"What are you going to do now?" she catechised, facing him in the middle of the room. A long tendril of her beautiful corn-silk hair fell across her eyes; her red lips parted in a faint wistful smile; beneath the draperies of her loose gown the pure slender lines of her figure leaned toward him.

"I am going back," he replied patiently.

"I knew you would come," said she. "I have been expecting you."

She raised one hand to brush back the tendril of hair, but it was a mechanical gesture, one that did not stir even the surface consciousness of the strange half-smiling, half-wistful, starry gaze with which she watched his face.

"O Harry," she breathed, with a sudden flash of insight, "you are a man born to be much misunderstood."

He held himself rigid, but in his veins was creeping a molten fire, and the fire was beginning to glow dully in his eye. Her whole being called him. His heart leaped, his breath came fast, his eyes swam. With almost hypnotic fascination the idea obsessed him—to kiss her lips, to press the soft body of the young girl, to tumble her hair down about her flower face. He had not come for this. He tried to steady himself, and by an effort that left him weak he succeeded. Then a new flood of passion overcame him.

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In the later desire was nothing of the old humble adoration. It was elemental, real, almost a little savage. He wanted to seize her so fiercely as to hurt her. Something caught his throat, filled his lungs, weakened his knees. For a moment it seemed to him that he was going to faint.

And still she stood there before him, saying nothing, leaning slightly toward him, her red lips half parted, her eyes fixed almost wistfully on his face.

"Go away!" he whispered hoarsely at last. The voice was not his own. "Go away! Go away!"

Suddenly she swayed to him.

"O Harry, Harry," she whispered, "must I tell you? Don't you see?"

The flood broke through him. He seized her hungrily. He crushed her to him until she gasped; he pressed his lips against hers until she all but cried out with the pain of it; he ran his great brown hands blindly through her hair until it came down about them both in a cloud of spun light.

"Tell me!" he whispered. "Tell me!"

"Oh! oh!" she cried. "Please! What is it?"

"I do not believe it," he murmured savagely.

She drew herself from him with gentle dignity.

"I am not worthy to say it," she said soberly, "but I love you with all my heart and soul!"

Then for the first and only time in his life Thorpe fell to weeping, while she, understanding, stood by and comforted him.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

THE few moments of Thorpe's tears eased the emotional strain under which, perhaps unconsciously, he had been laboring for nearly a year past. The tenseness of his nerves relaxed. He was able to look on the things about him from a broader standpoint than that of the specialist, to front life with saving humor. The deep breath after striving could at last be taken.

In this new attitude there was nothing strenuous, nothing demanding haste; only a deep glow of content and happiness. He savored deliberately the joy of a luxurious couch, rich hangings, polished floor, subdued light, warmed atmosphere. He watched with soul-deep gratitude the soft girlish curves of Hilda's body, the poise of her flower head, the piquant, half-wistful, half-childish set of her red lips, the clear star-like glimmer of her dusky eyes. It was all near to him; his.

"Kiss me, dear," he said.

She swayed to him again, deliciously graceful, deliciously unself-conscious, trusting, adorable. Already in the little nothingnesses of manner, the trifles of mental and bodily attitude, she had as-

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sumed that faint trace of the maternal which to the observant tells so plainly that a woman has given herself to a man.

She leaned her cheek against her hand, and her hand against his shoulder.

"I have been reading a story lately," said she, "that has interested me very much. It was about a man who renounced all he held most dear to shield a friend."

"Yes," said Thorpe.

"Then he renounced all his most valuable possessions because a poor common man needed the sacrifice."

"Sounds like a medieval story," said he with unconscious humor.

"It happened recently," rejoined Hilda. "I read it in the papers."

"Well, he blazed a good trail," was Thorpe's sighing comment. "Probably he had his chance. We don't all of us get that. Things go crooked and get tangled up, so we have to do the best we can. I don't believe I'd have done it."

"Oh, you are delicious!" she cried.

After a time she said very humbly: "I want to beg your pardon for misunderstanding you and causing you so much suffering. I was very stupid, and didn't see why you could not do as I wanted you to."

"That is nothing to forgive. I acted like a fool."

"I have known about you," she went on. "It

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has all come out in the *Telegram*. It has been very exciting. Poor boy, you look tired."

He straightened himself suddenly. "I have forgotten—actually forgotten," he cried a little bitterly. "Why, I am a pauper, a bankrupt, I——"

"Harry," she interrupted gently, but very firmly, "you must not say what you were going to say. I cannot allow it. Money came between us before. It must not do so again. Am I not right, dear?"

She smiled at him with the lips of a child and the eyes of a woman.

"Yes," he agreed after a struggle, "you are right. But now I must begin all over again. It will be a long time before I shall be able to claim you. I have my way to make."

"Yes," said she diplomatically.

"But you!" he cried suddenly. "The papers remind me. How about that Morton?"

"What about him?" asked the girl, astonished. "He is very happily engaged."

Thorpe's face slowly filled with blood.

"You'll break the engagement at once," he commanded a little harshly.

"Why should I break the engagement?" demanded Hilda, eyeing him with some alarm.

"I should think it was obvious enough."

"But it isn't," she insisted. "Why?"

Thorpe was silent—as he always had been in emergencies, and as he was destined always to be.

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His was not a nature of expression, but of action. A crisis always brought him, like a bulldog, silently to the grip.

Hilda watched him puzzled, with bright eyes, like a squirrel. Her quick brain glanced here and there among the possibilities, seeking the explanation. Already she knew better than to demand it of him.

"You actually don't think he's engaged to *me*!" she burst out finally.

"Isn't he?" asked Thorpe.

"Why no, stupid! He's engaged to Elizabeth Carpenter, Wallace's sister. Now *where* did you get that silly idea?"

"I saw it in the paper."

"And you believe all you see! Why didn't you ask Wallace—but of course you wouldn't! Harry, you are the most incoherent dumb old brute I ever saw! I could shake you! Why don't you say something occasionally when it's needed, instead of sitting dumb as a sphinx and getting into all sorts of trouble? But you never will. I know you. You dear old bear! You *need* a wife to interpret things for you. You speak a different language from most people." She said this between laughing and crying; between a sense of the ridiculous uselessness of withholding a single timely word, and a tender pathetic intuition of the suffering such a nature must endure. In the prospect of the future she saw her use. It gladdened her and filled her with a serene

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happiness possible only to those who feel themselves a necessary and integral part in the lives of the ones they love. Dimly she perceived this truth. Dimly beyond it she glimpsed that other great truth of nature, that the human being is rarely completely efficient alone, that in obedience to his greater use he must take to himself a mate before he can succeed.

Suddenly she jumped to her feet with an exclamation.

"O Harry! I'd forgotten utterly!" she cried in laughing consternation. "I have a luncheon here at half-past one! It's almost that now. I must run and dress. Just look at me; just *look!* *You* did that!"

"I'll wait here until the confounded thing is over," said Thorpe.

"Oh, no, you won't," replied Hilda decidedly. "You are going down town right now and get something to put on. Then you are coming back here to stay."

Thorpe glanced in surprise at his driver's clothes, and his spiked boots.

"Heavens and earth!" he exclaimed, "I should think so! How am I to get out without ruining the floor?"

Hilda laughed and drew aside the portière.

"Don't you think you have done that pretty well already?" she asked. "There, don't look so solemn.

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We're not going to be sorry for a single thing we've done to-day, are we?" She stood close to him holding the lapels of his jacket in either hand, searching his face wistfully with her fathomless dusky eyes.

"No, sweetheart, we are not," replied Thorpe soberly.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

SURELY it is useless to follow the sequel in detail, to tell how Hilda persuaded Thorpe to take her money. She aroused skillfully his fighting blood, induced him to use one fortune to rescue another. To a woman such as she this was not a very difficult task in the long run. A few scruples of pride; that was all.

"Do not consider its being mine," she answered to his objections. "Remember the lesson we learned so bitterly. Nothing can be greater than love, not even our poor ideals. You have my love; do not disappoint me by refusing so little a thing as my money."

"I hate to do it," he replied; "it doesn't look right."

"You must," she insisted. "I will not take the position of rich wife to a poor man; it is humiliating to both. I will not marry you until you have made your success."

"That is right," said Thorpe heartily.

"Well, then, are you going to be so selfish as to keep me waiting while you make an entirely new start, when a little help on my part will bring your plans to completion?"

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She saw the shadow of assent in his eyes.

"How much do you need?" she asked swiftly.

"I must take up the notes," he explained. "I must pay the men. I may need something on the stock market. If I go in on this thing, I'm going in for keeps. I'll get after those fellows who have been swindling Wallace. Say a hundred thousand dollars."

"Why, it's nothing," she cried.

"I'm glad you think so," he replied grimly.

She ran to her dainty escritoire, where she scribbled eagerly for a few moments.

"There," she cried, her eyes shining, "there is my check book all signed in blank. I'll see that the money is there."

Thorpe took the book, staring at it with sightless eyes. Hilda, perched on the arm of his chair, watched his face closely, as later became her habit of interpretation.

"What is it?" she asked.

Thorpe looked up with a pitiful little smile that seemed to beg indulgence for what he was about to say.

"I was just thinking, dear. I used to imagine I was a strong man, yet see how little my best efforts amount to. I have put myself into seven years of the hardest labor, working like ten men in order to succeed. I have foreseen all that mortal could foresee. I have always thought, and think now, that a

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man is no man unless he works out the sort of success for which he is fitted. I have done fairly well until the crises came. Then I have been absolutely powerless, and if left to myself, I would have failed. At the times when a really strong man would have used effectively the strength he had been training, I have fallen back miserably on outer aid. Three times my affairs have become critical. In the crises I have been saved, first by a mere boy; then by an old illiterate man; now by a weak woman!"

She heard him through in silence.

"Harry," she said soberly when he had quite finished, "I agree with you that God meant the strong man to succeed; that without success the man has not fulfilled his reason for being. But, Harry, *are you quite sure that God meant him to succeed alone?*"

The dusk fell through the little room. Out in the hallway a tall clock ticked solemnly. A noiseless servant appeared in the doorway to light the lamps, but was silently motioned away.

"I had not thought of that," said Thorpe at last.

"You men are so selfish," went on Hilda. "You would take everything from us. Why can't you leave us the poor little privilege of the occasional deciding touch, the privilege of succor. It is all that weakness can do for strength."

"And why," she went on after a moment, "why is not that, too, a part of a man's success—the gath-

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ering about him of people who can and will supplement his efforts? Who was it inspired Wallace Carpenter with confidence in an unknown man? You. What did it? Those very qualities by which you were building your success. Why did John Radway join forces with you? How does it happen that your men are of so high a standard of efficiency? Why am I willing to give you everything, *everything*, to my heart and soul? Because it is you who ask it. Because you, Harry Thorpe, have woven us into your fortune, so that we have no choice. Depend upon us in the crises of your work! Why, so are you dependent on your ten fingers, your eyes, the fibre of your brain! Do you think the less of your fulfillment for that?"

So it was that Hilda Farrand gave her lover confidence, brought him out from his fanaticism, launched him afresh into the current of events. He remained in Chicago all that summer, giving orders that all work at the village of Carpenter should cease. With his affairs that summer we have little to do. His common-sense treatment of the stock market, by which a policy of quiescence following an outright buying of the stock which he had previously held on margins, retrieved the losses already sustained, and finally put both partners on a firm financial footing. That is another story. So too is his reconciliation with and understanding of his sister. It came about through Hilda, of course.

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Perhaps in the inscrutable way of Providence the estrangement was of benefit—even necessary—for it had thrown him entirely within himself during his militant years.

Let us rather look to the end of the summer. It now became a question of re-opening the camps. Thorpe wrote to Shearer and Radway, whom he had retained, that he would arrive on Saturday noon, and suggested that the two begin to look about for men. Friday, himself, Wallace Carpenter, Elizabeth Carpenter, Morton, Helen Thorpe, and Hilda Farrand boarded the north-bound train.

CHAPTER SIXTY

THE train of the South Shore Railroad shot its way across the broad reaches of the northern peninsula. On either side of the right-of-way lay mystery in the shape of thickets so dense and overgrown that the eye could penetrate them but a few feet at most. Beyond them stood the forests. Thus Nature screened her intimacies from the impertinent eye of a new order of things.

Thorpe welcomed the smell of the northland. He became almost eager, explaining, indicating to the girl at his side.

"There is the Canada balsam," he cried. "Do you remember how I showed it to you first? And yonder the spruce. How stuck up your teeth were when you tried to chew the gum before it had been heated. Do you remember? Look! Look there! It's a white pine! Isn't it a grand tree? It's the finest tree in the forest, by my way of thinking, so tall, so straight, so feathery, and so dignified. See, Hilda, look quick! There's an old logging road all filled with raspberry vines. We'd find lots of partridges there, and perhaps a bear.