

THE BLAZED TRAIL

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.

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Wouldn't you just like to walk down it about sunset?"

"Yes, Harry."

"I wonder what we're stopping for. Seems to me they are stopping at every squirrel's trail. Oh, this must be Seney. Yes, it is. Queer little place, isn't it? but sort of attractive. Good deal like our town. You have never seen Carpenter, have you? Location's fine, anyway; and to me it's sort of picturesque. You'll like Mrs. Hathaway. She's a buxom, motherly woman who runs the boarding-house for eighty men, and still finds time to mend my clothes for me. And you'll like Solly. Solly's the tug captain, a mighty good fellow, true as a gun barrel. We'll have him take us out, some still day. We'll be there in a few minutes now. See the cranberry marshes. Sometimes there's a good deal of pine on little islands scattered over it, but it's very hard to log, unless you get a good winter. We had just such a proposition when I worked for Radway. Oh, you'll like Radway, he's as good as gold. Helen!"

"Yes," replied his sister.

"I want you to know Radway. He's the man who gave me my start."

"All right, Harry," laughed Helen. "I'll meet anybody or anything from bears to Indians."

"I know an Indian too—Geezigut, an Ojibwa—we called him Injin Charley. He was my first

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friend in the north woods. He helped me get my timber. This spring he killed a man—a good job, too—and is hiding now. I wish I knew where he is. But we'll see him some day. He'll come back when the thing blows over. See! See!"

"What?" they all asked, breathless.

"It's gone. Over beyond the hills there I caught a glimpse of Superior."

"You are ridiculous, Harry," protested Helen Thorpe laughingly. "I never saw you so. You are a regular boy!"

"Do you like boys?" he asked gravely of Hilda.

"Adore them!" she cried.

"All right, I don't care," he answered his sister in triumph.

The air brakes began to make themselves felt, and shortly the train came to a grinding stop.

"What station is this?" Thorpe asked the colored porter.

"Shingleville, sah," the latter replied.

"I thought so. Wallace, when did their mill burn, anyway? I haven't heard about it."

"Last spring, about the time you went down."

"Is *that* so? How did it happen?"

"They claim incendiarism," parried Wallace cautiously.

Thorpe pondered a moment, then laughed. "I am in the mixed attitude of the small boy," he ob-

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served, "who isn't mean enough to wish anybody's property destroyed, but who wishes that if there is a fire, to be where he can see it. I am sorry those fellows had to lose their mill, but it was a good thing for us. The man who set that fire did us a good turn. If it hadn't been for the burning of their mill, they would have made a stronger fight against us in the stock market."

Wallace and Hilda exchanged glances. The girl was long since aware of the inside history of those days.

"You'll have to tell them that," she whispered over the back of her seat. "It will please them."

"Our station is next!" cried Thorpe, "and it's only a little ways. Come, get ready!"

They all crowded into the narrow passageway near the door, for the train barely paused.

"All right, sah," said the porter, swinging down his little step.

Thorpe ran down to help the ladies. He was nearly taken from his feet by a wild-cat yell, and a moment later that result was actually accomplished by a rush of men that tossed him bodily onto its shoulders. At the same moment, the mill and tug whistles began to screech, miscellaneous firearms exploded. Even the locomotive engineer, in the spirit of the occasion, leaned down heartily on his whistle rope. The sawdust street was filled with screaming, jostling men. The homes of the town were

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brilliantly draped with cheesecloth, flags and bunting.

For a moment Thorpe could not make out what had happened. This turmoil was so different from the dead quiet of desertion he had expected, that he was unable to gather his faculties. All about him were familiar faces upturned to his own. He distinguished the broad, square shoulders of Scotty Parsons, Jack Hyland, Kerlie, Bryan Moloney; Ellis grinned at him from the press; Billy Camp, the fat and shiny drive cook; Mason, the foreman of the mill; over beyond howled Solly, the tug captain, Rollway Charley, Shorty, the chore-boy; everywhere were features that he knew. As his dimming eyes travelled here and there, one by one the Fighting Forty, the best crew of men ever gathered in the northland, impressed themselves on his consciousness. Saginaw birlers, Flat River drivers, woodsmen from the forests of lower Canada, bully boys out of the Muskegon waters, peavey men from Au Sable, white-water daredevils from the rapids of the Menominee—all were there to do him honor, him in whom they had learned to see the supreme qualities of their calling. On the outskirts sauntered the tall form of Tim Shearer, a straw peeping from beneath his flax-white mustache, his eyes glimmering under his flax-white eyebrows. He did not evidence as much excitement as the others, but the very bearing of the man expressed the deepest satisfaction.

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Perhaps he remembered that zero morning so many years before when he had watched the thinly clad, shivering chore-boy set his face for the first time toward the dark forest.

Big Junko and Anderson deposited their burden on the raised platform of the office steps. Thorpe turned and fronted the crowd.

At once pandemonium broke loose, as though the previous performance had been nothing but a low-voiced rehearsal.

The men looked upon their leader and gave voice to the enthusiasm that was in them. He stood alone there, straight and tall, the muscles of his brown face set to hide his emotion, his head thrust back proudly, the lines of his strong figure tense with power—the glorification in finer matter of the hardy, reliant men who did him honor.

“Oh, aren’t you *proud* of him?” gasped Hilda, squeezing Helen’s arm with a little sob.

In a moment Wallace Carpenter, his countenance glowing with pride and pleasure, mounted the platform and stood beside his friend, while Morton and the two young ladies stopped half-way up the steps.

At once the racket ceased. Every one stood at attention.

“Mr. Thorpe,” Wallace began, “at the request of your friends here, I have a most pleasant duty to fulfill. They have asked me to tell you how glad

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they are to see you; that is surely unnecessary. They have also asked me to congratulate you on having won the fight with our rivals.”

“You done ’em good.” “Can’t down the Old Fellow,” muttered joyous voices.

“But,” said Wallace, “I think that I first have a story to tell on my own account.

“At the time the jam broke this spring, we owed the men here for a year’s work. At that time I considered their demand for wages ill-timed and grasping. I wish to apologize. After the money was paid them, instead of scattering, they set to work under Jack Radway and Tim Shearer to salvage your logs. They have worked long hours all summer. They have invested every cent of their year’s earnings in supplies and tools, and now they are prepared to show you the Company’s booms, three million feet of logs, rescued by their grit and hard labor from total loss.”

At this point the speaker was interrupted. “Saw off,” “Shut up,” “Give us a rest,” growled the audience. “Three million feet ain’t worth talkin’ about,” “You make me tired,” “Say your little say the way you oughter,” “Found purty nigh two millions pocketed on Mare’s Island, or we wouldn’t a had that much,” “Damn-fool undertaking, anyhow.”

“Men,” cried Thorpe, “I have been very fortunate. From failure success has come. But never

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have I been more fortunate than in my friends. The firm is now on its feet. It could afford to lose three times the logs it lost this year——”

He paused and scanned their faces.

“But,” he continued suddenly, “it cannot now, nor ever can afford to lose what those three million feet represent—the friends it has made. I can pay you back the money you have spent and the time you have put in——” Again he looked them over, and then for the first time since they have known him his face lighted up with a rare and tender smile of affection. “But, comrades, I shall not offer to do it: the gift is accepted in the spirit with which it was offered——”

He got no further. The air was rent with sound. Even the members of his own party cheered. From every direction the crowd surged inward. The women and Morton were forced up the platform to Thorpe. The latter motioned for silence.

“Now, boys, we have done it,” said he, “and so will go back to work. From now on you are my comrades in the fight.”

His eyes were dim; his breast heaved; his voice shook. Hilda was weeping from excitement. Through the tears she saw them all looking at their leader, and in the worn, hard faces glowed the affection and admiration of a dog for its master. Something there was especially touching in this, for strong men rarely show it. She felt a great wave of ex-

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citement sweep over her. Instantly she was standing by Thorpe, her eyes streaming, her breast throbbing with emotion.

“Oh!” she cried, stretching her arms out to them passionately, “Oh! I love you; I love you all!”

THE END



