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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS
IN THE GREAT NORTH WOODS ***



"You Ruffian!"
Frontispiece

Grace Harlowe's Overland Riders in the Great North Woods

by

Jessie Graham Flower, A. M.

Illustrated

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GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS IN THE GREAT NORTH WOODS

CHAPTER I

ON THE BIG WOODS TRAIL

Hippy Wingate stepped from the train that had just pulled into the little Red River Valley station and turned to observe Tom Gray and the others of the Overland Riders detrain. In one hand Hippy carried a suitcase, in the other a disconsolate-looking bull pup done up in a shawl strap.

"Be you Gray?"

Hippy turned to look at the owner of the voice, not certain that the question had been addressed to him. He found himself facing an uncouth-looking youth who, despite the heat of an early September afternoon, wore a heavy blanket Mackinaw coat, rubber shoes and thick stockings tied at the knee. Khaki trousers, and a cap of the same material as the coat, completed the typical lumberjack outfit, though Tom Gray was the only member of the Overland party who recognized it as such. The youngster's hands were thrust firmly into the pockets of the Mackinaw coat as he stood eyeing Hippy with a sullen expression on his face.

"Am I what?" demanded the Overland Rider, putting down the suitcase and dropping the pup, much to the animal's relief.

"I said, be you Gray?"

"Not yet, old chap. I am threatened with a bald head early in my young life, but I thank goodness I am not gray. Why? What's the joke?"

The loungers on the station platform laughed, and the boy shifted uneasily and leaned against a station pillar.

"'Cause I was to meet er feller named Gray who was comin' in on this train."

"Oh! That's it, is it? I thought you meant is my hair gray," grinned Hippy. "Oh, Tom! Here is your man. Here's your guide," cried Hippy, shaking hands cordially with the young fellow.

Detaching himself from the girls of the party of Overland Riders who were assembling their luggage, Tom Gray stepped over to Lieutenant Wingate.

"Are you Joe Shafto?" questioned Tom, addressing the boy.

"Naw, I ain't. Joe sent me over to meet you folks and tell you how to git up to the place."

"Why isn't Joe here to meet us?" demanded Grace Harlowe, joining the group in time to hear the boy's explanation.

"Joe's doin' the washin' to-day, and to-morrer is ironin' day. Joe sent word sayin' as I was to meet you and tell you not to git up there before late to-morrer afternoon."

"Ho, ho! Doing the family washing, eh?" chortled Hippy. "Fine guide you have selected, Tom Gray. Hey there!" Hippy made a spring for the bull pup, who had fastened his teeth in the neck of a fox terrier, and picked his dog up by the handle of the shawl strap. The fox terrier came up with Hindenburg, by which name the bull was known, and it required the united efforts of Tom and Hippy to extricate the fox terrier from Hindenburg's tenacious grip.

"It might be wise to hang onto your dog, Hippy," advised Tom. "You are to show us the way to Shafto's, I presume?" questioned Tom Gray, addressing the boy again.

"Naw. I reckon you can find the way yourself. Can't spare the time. I got a fall job in the woods over near the reservation. You take the main road straight north from here till you git to Bisbee's Corners. Ask at the general store there where Joe Shafto lives and they'll steer you. Joe said to tell you folks to get your supplies there, too. Bye." The boy turned abruptly and walked

away.

"Hold on! Not so fast, boy. How far is it to Joe's?" demanded Tom.

"Nigh onto thirty mile," flung back the boy.

"I wish I had stayed at home," wailed Emma Dean.

"We have not yet begun, dear," reminded Elfreda Briggs, to which Anne Nesbit and Nora Wingate agreed with emphatic nods.

"Tom Gray, I fear you have made a mess of selecting a guide to pilot us through the Big North Woods of Minnesota," declared Grace with a doubtful shake of the head.

"I can't help that. I engaged Shafto on the recommendation of the postmaster of this very town. He wrote me that, according to his information, no man in the state knows the woods so well as this fellow Shafto does. At my request, the postmaster engaged him for us, so don't blame me because Joe is doing the family washing instead of being here to meet us," retorted Tom with a show of impatience.

"Lay it to the postmaster and let it go at that," suggested Hippy good-naturedly.

"Tom, I am really amazed that you, a woodsman and a professional forester, should require the services of a guide," teased Anne.

"I don't. The guide is for you folks. Of course I know how to keep from getting lost, but I shall not be with you all the time, so—"

"Come, let's get busy," urged Hippy. "Nora, if you will kindly hold Hindenburg, Tom and I will unload the ponies. Ready, Thomas?"

Tom said he was. The palace horsecar attached to their train had already been shunted to a siding, and the ponies of the Overland Riders were found to have made the journey from the east without injury. Quite an assemblage of villagers had gathered to witness the operation of unloading the ponies, and they gazed with interest as each Overland girl in turn stepped up to claim her mount as it was led slipping down the gangway. Hippy Wingate's pony, a western bronco that he had acquired that summer, was the last of the ponies in the car. "Ginger," as its owner had named it because of its fiery temper, being unusually free with his heels, had been separated from the other animals in the car by bars, the bars now bearing marks made by his sharp hoofs.

"Tom, please fetch out my educated horse," urged Hippy, winking wisely at the crowd of spectators.

"Why not fetch him out yourself? He isn't my horse," laughed Tom.

"Oh, very well," said Lieutenant Wingate, stepping into the car, removing the bars and reaching for the pony's headstall. That was the beginning of what proved to be an exciting time for Lieutenant Wingate and a most enjoyable entertainment for the villagers. The next act was when Hippy was catapulted from the car door by the heels of the untamed bronco and landed in the street. Fortunately for him, Lieutenant Wingate, instead of jumping back when the pony began to kick, threw himself towards the animal, a trick that handlers of ugly horses quickly learn to do. He was thus, instead of being hit by the heels of the bronco, neatly boosted through the open door of the car.

The villagers howled with delight as the Overland Rider got up and brushed the dirt from his uniform.

"I have heard it said that incorrigible horses are sometimes made docile by sprinkling a pinch of salt on their tails," observed Elfreda Briggs to her companions.

"Remonstrate with the beast, Hippy. He is educated," suggested Emma Dean.

"Hippy, my darlin', do be careful," begged Nora as her husband limped up the gangway, jaws set, the light of battle in his eyes, his anger rising with every step he took.

Hippy clasped the pony's neck, the rat-tat-tat of the animal's heels against the side of the car being somewhat reminiscent of machine-gun fire to the Overland girls.

"He'll be killed!" wailed Nora.

"Who? The pony?" asked Emma in an unruffled voice.

"No! What do I care about the pony? It's my Hippy."

A yell from the villagers brought others running to the scene, but no one offered assistance. Hippy and the bronco were tussling on the threshold of the car with Hippy's feet in the air most of the time.

"Tickle him in the ribs," suggested a villager. "That'll make him laugh and he'll fergit to kick."

The villagers howled with delight.

"Tickle him yourself," retorted Nora.

"Jump!" urged Miss Briggs.

"No! Hang on!" shouted Tom Gray. "If you let go he'll kill you! Urge him down the gangway and I will grab him when he makes the rush."

At that instant the pony leaped. Hippy lost his foothold on the edge of the doorsill, and the pony, unable to bear the additional weight on its neck, stumbled and went down on the gangway. The animal's hips struck the railing, burst through it, and man and horse rolled off to the ground, Ginger kicking and squealing, with Hippy Wingate clinging desperately to his neck.

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CHAPTER II

THE VOICE OF NATURE

The bronco was on his feet instantly, with Hippy still clinging to the animal's neck. All the villagers scattered as Ginger bolted across the street.

"Why don't *you* tickle his ribs?" cried Emma to the spectators.

For a few moments it looked as if man and bronco would land in the village postoffice by way of its large front window.

"Whew!" grinned Hippy, mopping his brow after he had conquered and tied the pony to the tie-rail in front of the postoffice.

"I—I thought you said that Ginger was an educated horse," reminded Emma.

"He is. That is what is the matter with him. Like some persons, not far removed from me at the present moment, he knows *too* much for the general good of the community. What Ginger needs is a finishing school, and he's going to start right in attending one this very day. You watch my smoke."

"Smoke!" chuckled Elfreda Briggs. "I don't mind it at all ordinarily, but I do wish that, when you get excited, you wouldn't insist on burning soft coal."

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"Say, Mister! Why don't yer feed the critter some soothin' syrup? They got it in the store there," urged a spectator. "Good fer man er beast."

Hippy grinned at the speaker, and the villagers roared.

"Good idea, old top. We will pour a bottleful down your throat at the same time. It is good for all animals, you know. Why don't you roar, you folks? All right, if you won't, I'll roar." Hippy haw-hawed and the villagers grinned.

"Come, come. Please do something, Hippy," begged Grace laughingly.

"Sure thing. What do you want me to do?"

"If you and Tom will roll and tie the packs, you will be doing us a service. I imagine we girls are a bit out of practice in lashing packs, and, as we have quite a bit of equipment to carry, and a long ride ahead of us to-day, we must have everything secure, and start as soon as possible."

"Want a guide, Mister?" questioned a young man dressed as a lumberjack, lounging up to Lieutenant Wingate. "I kin take ye anywheres."

"We have one," replied Hippy briefly.

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"I don't see none. Who be he?"

"Name's Hindenburg," said Hippy, pointing to the bull pup. "Greatest little guide west of the Atlantic Ocean. I paid a thousand dollars for his bark alone. The breeder threw in the rest of the dog because, when you peel the bark off a tree, it dies."

Emma Dean uttered a high, trilling laugh, and the other girls joined in so heartily that, for a moment, or so, work came to a standstill. Hippy then briskly attacked the packs, while Tom secured them to the backs of the ponies.

While this was being done Grace left the party to buy food sufficient to last for at least a two-days' journey, and returned with her arms full of bundles, the contents being transferred to the mess kits of her companions.

"Are you going to let the dog run?" questioned Anne.

"I am not. He rides horseback," replied Hippy briefly. "I am a man of resources."

"Especially in leading educated ponies," murmured Emma.

In the meantime, Hippy had taken a canvas bag from his pack and hung it over the pommel of his saddle.

"Come, Little Hindenburg. We will now go bye-bye," cooed Hippy, lifting the bull pup, depositing it in the open bag, and tying the dog's lead string to the saddle. 21

"Hippy darlin'!" cried Nora. "If Hindenburg jumps out he will hang himself and choke to death."

"Sure he will. That is why he isn't going to jump out."

Hindenburg stood up in the bag and barked in apparent approval of Hippy's assertion.

"Listen!" exclaimed Emma, holding up a hand. "Bark again, Hindenburg."

Hindenburg did so, Emma Dean giving close attention.

"What is the big idea?" demanded Lieutenant Wingate.

"I wished to listen to this voice from the canine world because it carries a message to us," answered Miss Dean gravely.

Hippy gave her a quick keen glance, but Ginger, taking sudden umbrage at a dog barking at his side, demanded his rider's exclusive attention. By the time Hippy had subdued the bronco, Emma's peculiar remark had passed out of mind. Soon after that, with packs neatly lashed, each rider in the saddle, the Overland Riders wheeled their ponies and jogged along the village street on their way to the Great North Woods where Tom Gray, as an expert forester, was to "cruise" or estimate the amount of timber standing on the thousands of acres in the huge timber tract, the largest tract of virgin timber east of the Rocky Mountains. 22

The Overland Riders, who, for the previous three summers, following their return from France where they had served in various capacities during the war, in the Overton College Unit, had decided to accompany Tom to the Big Woods, seeking such adventure as the northland might afford.

As they started away on the first leg of their journey, none was more joyous than the bull pup, who barked at the villagers, barked at every dog and cat within sight, and, after the village had been left behind, entertained himself by barking at imaginary cats and dogs, Emma Dean being his most interested listener. Emma's quietness attracted the attention of her companions, and they wondered at the change in her, for, on previous journeys, there was seldom a time when Emma did not have a great deal to say.

Not until after five o'clock that afternoon did the party halt to rest the ponies and have luncheon, the latter consisting of hot tea and biscuit, the Riders having planned to eat their supper at Bisbee's Corners.

Most of the girls were quite ready for a rest, but, this being their first long ride of the season, they found, upon dismounting, that they could hardly walk. Grace, being the least disturbed of the party, volunteered to get the fire started and brew the tea, while Lieutenant Wingate and Tom Gray watered the horses and staked them at the side of the road for a nibble at the grass that grew there. Then all hands sat down with their feet curled under them and held out their tin cups for a drink of hot tea. 23

Emma Dean poised her cup in the air, and, with a far-away look in her eyes, listened intently to the solemn bell note of a hermit thrush.

"What *is* on your mind to-day, Emma Dean?" laughed Anne Nesbit. "Is it possible that you are in love or something?"

"I am listening to the voices of nature," replied Emma solemnly, shaking her head slowly and taking a sip of tea.

"This is something new, isn't it?" twinkled Grace Harlowe.

"Yes," agreed Elfreda. "Only a few hours ago you were listening to a 'message' from the throat of the bull pup, and now I suppose you are turning your attention to that hermit thrush for the same reason."

"I am listening to the voices of nature," returned Emma. "Listening for the messages that, when once rightly interpreted, will open up the vast realm of the unknown to us mortals. If we would but listen we should hear many mysteries explained and—" 24

"Speak, Hindenburg!" interjected Hippy, giving the bull pup a push with the toe of his boot and bringing a growl from the animal. "How long has she been this way, girls?"

"Make fun of me if you wish. I am used to it."

"I agree with Emma that there is much in nature that we might do well to consider, suggestions that it would be to our everlasting advantage to adopt," spoke up Tom Gray. "So far, however, as being able to read the notes of the birds or the growl of a bull pup—piffle!"

"I agree with you," nodded Elfreda.

"Emma, where do you get all that dope?" questioned Hippy. "I am beginning to believe what I

suspected last season, when you were riding that 'con-centration' hobby, that your war service has unbalanced your mind."

"No, no! He is only joking, Emma," protested Nora.

"It matters little to me what Hippy Wingate says or thinks. I belong to the 'Voice of Nature Cult.'"

"What's that? A breakfast food?" laughed Anne.

"The 'Cult' is an organization of advanced thinkers, presided over by Madam Gersdorff, an adept who can converse with the birds of the air, the animals and—"

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"I wish she were here," declared Hippy with emphasis. "I should like to have her tell that bronco what my opinion of him is and hear what he says in reply," added Lieutenant Wingate, flipping a biscuit, which Hindenburg deftly caught and gulped down at a single swallow.

"Madam Gersdorff gave some remarkable demonstrations of her power in the direction of interpreting the voices of nature last winter," resumed Emma. "She is giving me a correspondence course at five dollars a lesson, which I consider a remarkably low price. I wish I might induce you girls to take the course, but I don't suppose any of you have the nerve to do so in the face of Hippy Wingate's unkind criticisms. Let me tell you something. A medium that I went to in Boston a few weeks ago told me some remarkable things about myself. I had been telling her of this 'Voice of Nature Cult.' 'How strange,' answered the medium. 'I see birds all about you. A whole flock of them accompanied you into this very room. See! They are hovering over you at this very moment.'"

"I'll bet they were a flock of crows," murmured Hippy.

"Did you see them, darlin'?" begged Nora in an awed tone that brought smiles to the faces of her companions.

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"No. I was not sufficiently in tune with nature to see them, especially in daylight."

"Good-night!" muttered Hippy Wingate.

"And what do you think the medium also said?" asked Emma.

"Five dollars, please," laughed Grace.

"She did not. All she would consent to take from me was a dollar, and she said that, if I would come to her twice a week regularly, she would promise that, in a few weeks, I could see the birds as well as she could. But I didn't tell you—what the medium said of even greater importance was that the explanation was that some of my ancestors, far back in the dim shadows of the early hours of the world, were birds of the air. Just think of it, girls! Birds! Flying through the air and—"

"Darting yon and hither," finished Hippy.

"*Alors!* Let's fly," cried Elfreda Briggs amid a shout of laughter from the Overland Riders.

"So say we all of us," answered Grace, springing up and beginning to pack away her mess kit. "It will be long after dark before we reach Bisbee's Corners."

The girls were still laughing as they rode away, Emma Dean silently resentful, her chin in the air, her face flushed.

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"Do you really think she is in earnest about that nature stuff?" questioned Anne.

"She thinks she is, but of course she isn't. Emma, like many others, must have a hobby to ride. She, fortunately, is fickle in her hobbies, and rides one but a short time before she tires of it and casts it aside. What would we do on these journeys without her?" laughed Grace.

"Yes. Our Emma is a joy and a delight," nodded Anne.

After a brisk ride at a steady gallop, the Overlanders jogged into the one street that Bisbee's Corners possessed shortly after nine o'clock that evening, all thoroughly tired but happy, with Hindenburg sound asleep in the saddle bag.

The streets, they saw, were thronged with men, mostly lumberjacks, some singing, others shouting, and here and there a pair of them engaged in fist battles.

"Must have been paid off," observed Tom Gray. "We are getting near the Big Woods, folks."

"I should say we are," replied Grace, taking in the scene with keen interest. "I hear a fiddle. There must be a dance going on."

"A dance? Oh, let's go," cried Emma.

"Better listen to the voices of nature," answered Tom laughingly. "A lumberjack dance is no place for a refined woman, or man either, for that matter. Where to, Grace?"

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"The general store. I'll go in. The girls had better stay on their horses, for I don't like the looks of things in Bisbee's."

"Lumber-jacks are rough, but let them alone and they will let you alone," said Lieutenant Wingate.

Tom Gray said this might be true in theory, but that it was not always true in fact.

Pulling up before the general store, Grace dismounted and elbowed her way through a crowd of men, smilingly demanding "gangway," which was readily granted, though accompanied by quite personal remarks about her, to which, of course, the Overland girl gave not the slightest heed.

"Joe Shafto bought the supplies for you, Mrs. Gray," the owner of the store informed her after Grace had introduced herself and stated her mission. "Joe packed the stuff home on the mules and said you'd pay for it when you come along. That alright?"

"Perfectly so, and thank you ever so much. What is the excitement out there?" with a nod towards the street.

"Jacks comin' in for the early work in the woods. The foremen are hirin' 'em here and sendin' 'em on to the different camps. The whole bunch is just spoilin' for fight. Better not stir 'em up unless your crowd is lookin' for trouble," advised the storekeeper.

"Oh, no. Nothing like that," laughed Grace Harlowe, laying the money for their supplies on the counter. "Nothing wrong outside, is there, Hippy?" she asked quickly as the lieutenant came in rather hurriedly.

"No. I'm after candy."

"That is fine. Buying candy for Nora and the girls," glowed Grace. "My husband seldom thinks to bring me candy, and—"

"For Nora? No. I'm getting the candy for the bronco and the bull pup—trying to buy my way into their good graces, as it were. Neither one of them takes to the uproar in the street. The bronc' is threatening to bolt, and Hindenburg has declared war on the lumberjack tribe because one of them poked a stick in his ribs just now."

Grace, after thanking the storekeeper for his courtesy, went out laughing, but the instant she stepped into the street she intuitively sensed a change in the spirit of the crowd there. The jacks had fallen silent in comparison with their previous uproarious attitude—sullen and threatening, it seemed to her.

"What's wrong here, Elfreda?" she asked, stepping up beside Miss Briggs' pony.

"A jack tried to pull Emma from her horse, probably out of mischief. Tom jumped his pony over and knocked the fellow down with his fist. Three or four others started for him. Tom rode one of them down and the others ran into the crowd for protection. I think we are headed for trouble," prophesied J. Elfreda.

"Grace, where is Hippy?" called Tom Gray anxiously.

"In the store buying candy for the pup."

"Stand back, you fellows!" commanded Tom sternly as he discovered that the jacks were crowding closer and closer to the little group of horsewomen. "We don't mind sport so far as the men are concerned, but you must let these young women alone. Hurry, Hippy!" he urged, as Lieutenant Wingate appeared at the store door.

"Overland!" called Grace, which was the rallying hail of the Overland Riders, and by which signal Lieutenant Wingate knew that all was not well with his companions.

Hippy jumped from the store porch and strode to his pony.

"What is it?" he questioned sharply, taking Ginger's rein from Nora and vaulting into his saddle to the accompaniment of joyous barks from Hindenburg.

"Reckon these wild jacks are getting ready to rush us. Keep your eyes peeled," warned Tom Gray.

"Here they come! Look out!" called Grace.

"Let go of my bridle, you ruffian!" they heard Anne Nesbit cry, and as they looked they saw her bring down her riding crop across the face of a lumberjack who had grasped her pony's bridle and was trying to separate the animal from the others of the party.

CHAPTER III

THE CHARGE OF THE JACKS

"Get out of this! Lively!" shouted Tom to the girls.

"Keep together!" added Hippy.

The two men forced their ponies between the girls and the lumberjacks, the girls using their crops on their ponies and urging them on.

The Overland girls cleared the scene in a few seconds, and halted a short distance up the street to wait for Hippy and Tom, who were having difficulty in extricating themselves from the mob. They did not succeed in doing this until Hippy began to belabor Ginger over the rump, at the same time pulling up on the reins. This caused the animal to whirl and buck and kick. Every volley from Ginger's lightning-like kicks put several members of the mob out of the fight. Tom was using his crop, but without much effect.

32

A rough hand was laid on Hippy's leg, and a mighty tug nearly unhorsed him. It probably would have done so had not Hindenburg at that juncture taken a bite of the lumberjack's hand and caused the fellow to let go without delay.

The jacks by this time had begun to fight among themselves. Single and group fights suddenly sprung up all over the street. The jacks, for the moment, had lost their interest in the newcomers, and the two Overland men, taking advantage of the opportunity, galloped down the street, passing scattered groups of brawlers who were too busy with their own affairs to heed them.

The Overland men were almost clear of the mob when yells ahead of them attracted their attention to a fresh disturbance. A man, who, as they drew near, was seen to be an Indian standing at the side of the road, taking no part in the disturbance, was the object of the uproar. A crowd of half a dozen jacks had pounced on the Indian. He went down under the rush. Hippy saw them grab the fellow and hurl him into the middle of the street. The Indian was on his feet in an instant, and, from the light shed through the windows along the street, Hippy saw a knife flash in the Indian's hand, saw the red man's arm shoot out, and a man fall, uttering a howl.

33

The jacks hesitated briefly, then uttering angry yells they hurled themselves upon the Indian, bore him to the ground, and began to kick at him with their heavy boots.

Tom turned his pony and rode into the crowd at a gallop. Three lumberjacks went down under his charge.

"The cowards!" raged Hippy, also charging into the group and completing what his companion had begun.

"Run, you poor fish!" he yelled at the Indian, who had got to his feet and stood dazedly gazing at his rescuers. "Run!"

The Indian, suddenly recovering himself, darted between two buildings and disappeared.

"Good work!" chuckled Hippy, galloping up the street with Tom to join the girls, who were waiting for them.

"Oh, that was splendid!" cried Anne Nesbit as Tom and Hippy rejoined the party of Overland girls.

"It won't be splendid unless we step lively," answered Tom.

"Keep going, girls, keep going," urged Hippy.

34

"I hate to run away, but being a peace-loving person I run away whenever a fight is suggested to me."

"We know it," observed Emma.

"Thanks! Which way do we go?" questioned Hippy.

"Straight ahead and take the first right-hand turn about a mile from the village to reach Joe Shafto's place, the storekeeper told me," Grace informed them.

The party galloped on until they reached the turn indicated by Grace where they halted and consulted, deciding that the road to the right was the one they should take. This road, according to Grace's information, should lead them to Joe Shafto's place, ten or fifteen miles further on, though it was not their purpose to go on to Joe's that night.

The Overland Riders walked their horses after making the turn, there being no need for haste, as no one believed that the lumberjacks would follow, and further, the Overlanders were looking for a suitable camping place for the night.

"This appears to be a good place to make camp," finally called Tom Gray, who was riding in the lead of the party. Tom pulled up and looked about him, the others riding up to him and halting.

"No good!" answered a strange voice.

35

"What? Who said that?" demanded Hippy.

A man stepped out from the shadow of the trees and stood confronting the peering Overlanders.

"It's Lo, the poor Indian!" cried Hippy. "Hello, Lo!"

"So it is," agreed Tom. "How did you get here ahead of us?"

"Come 'cross," answered the man, indicating with a gesture that he had taken a short cut through the woods, though how he knew where they were going, unless he had heard their discussion at the point where they took the right-hand road, the Overlanders could not imagine.

"You say this is 'no good' as a camping place. What is the matter with it?" demanded Tom Gray, regarding the Indian suspiciously.

"No water. You come, me show."

"Let him lead the way," suggested Elfreda.

"Yes. Give the poor red man a chance," urged Hippy.

The Indian, without asking further permission to lead them, turned and trotted along ahead at a typical Indian lope, and at a rate of speed that necessitated putting the ponies at a jog-trot in order to keep him in view. The Indian proceeded on for fully half a mile, then, turning sharply to the left, led them on until he reached the bank of a stream, to which he pointed as indicating their camping place.

36

The site was hidden from the road by which they had arrived by trees and a bluff, thus protecting the party from discovery by persons passing along the road, which they readily understood the Indian had purposely planned.

"Fine! Fine!" glowed Tom.

"We are much obliged to you, and thank you," added Anne.

"What is your name?" asked Elfreda as the girls began to dismount.

"Willy Horse."

"Ho, ho, ho!" exclaimed Hippy Wingate. "That's a horse of another color. Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to introduce to you Chief Willy Horse, and believe me he is some horse to stand the punishment those lumberjacks gave him and still be able to talk horse sense."

The Overlanders acknowledged the introduction laughingly, and shook hands with the Indian, at the same time giving him their names.

"Where you go?" demanded the red man, addressing Tom Gray.

"To the Pineries in the north."

"Good! What do?"

"Cruise them, Willy. Do you know what that is?"

37

The Indian nodded.

"Good! What you do?" he questioned, turning to Lieutenant Wingate.

"Oh, most any old thing, Willy old hoss," answered Hippy jovially. "It is mostly other persons who do the doing, in my case. They do me instead."

"Good! You Big Friend—big medicine. You help Willy Horse. Willy not forget. Mebbly kill lumberjacks one day, too."

"Don't get naughty. They hang naughty Indians," reminded Hippy.

"Oh, Mister Pony—I mean Mister Horse—won't you sit down and have a snack with us?" invited Emma Dean.

"Of course he must," insisted Tom, pausing at his work of starting a cook fire.

The Indian shook his head.

"Me go," he announced briefly.

"Sorry. Hope we see you again," said Hippy.

"Me see. You Big Friend. Bye," he said, halting before Lieutenant Wingate. With that he trotted away.

"What a queer character," exclaimed Nora Wingate. "He loves my Hippy, because my Hippy is a brave man."

"Who runs away to fight another day—not!" added Emma mockingly.

38

"He must have run very fast to catch up with us," suggested Anne.

"An Indian can outdistance a horse, as horses ordinarily travel," answered Tom. "Then, too, he probably knew a shorter cut."

"Did you notice how bruised and swollen his face was, and how indifferent he appeared to be

about it?" questioned Grace solicitously.

"Probably not so indifferent as he seemed to be," laughed Hippy. "You know an Indian forgets neither a kindness nor a wrong, and you see how my magnetic personality led this particular Indian to love me."

"All Indians do," observed Emma.

"Let's make camp and eat," urged Anne. "I am nearly famished."

Hippy most heartily approved of Anne's suggestion. Every member of the outfit assisted in "rustling" the camp and the food. Ginger got a whole handful of candy for his part in the routing of the lumberjacks, and Hindenburg also helped himself liberally from the bag when Hippy put it down on the ground.

While eating their supper the Overlanders talked over their experiences of the day and the evening. Miss Briggs declared that she would have been keenly disappointed if something had not occurred to stir them up at the outset of their journey.

"This getting into difficulties became a habit with this outfit on the very day that it set sail for France and the great world war," she said.

"I thank my stars that we are going into the woods where peace and the voices of nature reign supreme," spoke up Emma.

"Sometimes the voices of nature have a savage growl in them," reminded Tom Gray laughingly. "Who is going to stand guard to-night?"

"No one," answered Grace, nodding to Hippy.

"Righto! The bull pup is the guard for this journey. I brought Hindenburg along so that I might not lose sleep," answered Hippy, which stirred the Overland girls to laughter. They had not forgotten that it was a habit with Hippy Wingate to go to sleep when on guard and leave the camp unprotected.

All hands being tired and stiff after their long ride, they turned in as soon as the supper dishes were washed and laid out to dry. Hindenburg was tied to a tree on a long leash so that he might not stray away, and the camp quickly settled down to slumber, a slumber that was uninterrupted until some time after sun-up, when the bull pup awakened them with his insistent barks. Hindenburg wanted his breakfast.

They took their time in breakfasting, knowing that nothing was to be gained by haste in view of the fact that Joe Shafto would be engaged in ironing the family wash, and that they probably would not get started on their journey to the Big North Woods before the following day.

Stiffness of joints from the previous day's ride was soon forgotten in the crisp morning air and the flame of color of the foliage, for they were now entering a scattering growth of forest. As they progressed, however, the trees were of larger and sturdier growth and the road became merely a wagon trail leading to the northward.

Luncheon was eaten by the roadside and the journey resumed immediately afterwards. An hour later they came upon a clearing of about an acre, with a small space occupied by a garden in which stood a log cabin of comfortable dimensions.

"Grace, is this the place?" called Tom Gray as they slowed down.

"I don't know, but it seems to answer the description."

"Anybody living up here would need to be a guide or he never would be able to find his way home," declared Lieutenant Wingate.

"Hoo—oo!" hailed Emma.

After a few moments of waiting the Overlanders were gratified to see the cabin door open and a woman step out, shading her eyes with a hand. She was tall, thin and angular, the thinness of her face accentuated by a pair of big horn-rimmed spectacles through which she glared at the newcomers.

"Who be ye?" demanded the woman in a rasping voice.

"We are the Overland Riders, and we are looking for Joe Shafto's place," answered Grace pleasantly.

"I reckon ye ain't lookin' very hard," snapped back the woman.

"Is this Joe's place?" interjected Tom Gray.

"It be, I reckon."

"Is Joe at home? I am Tom Gray. I arranged to have him act as our guide."

"I reckon he is."

Tom dismounted and led his pony to the gate, irritated at the woman's abrupt manner and speech, but this feeling was not shared by the others of his party who were greatly amused at

the brief dialogue.

"I say, I am Tom Gray. May I see Joe?"

"I reckon ye kin if ye've got eyes."

"Then please ask him to step out. Or shall I go in?"

"Yer lookin' at Joe Shafto. If ye don't like the looks of me look t'other way!" she fairly flung at him.

"You don't understand, Madam. We engaged Joe Shafto, a man, to guide us through the North Woods and—"

"I tell ye I'm the party, and I'm man enough for any bunch of rough-necks in the timber," retorted the woman.

"A woman guide! Good night!" muttered Hippy Wingate under his breath.

CHAPTER IV

A HUMAN TALKING MACHINE

"Of course, of course. I—I—well, I'll talk to my friends about it," answered Tom lamely. He was frustrated and flushed, greatly to the enjoyment of the Overland girls.

"That's all right, Tom," soothed Grace. "I am positive that Miss Shafto—"

"Mrs. Shafto," corrected the woman. "Mrs. Joe Shafto. Git the handle right."

"I am positive that Mrs. Shafto will answer our purpose very nicely," finished Grace.

"Yes, yes. I—I agree with you," mumbled Tom. "If you have time, or when you do have time, we shall have to talk over our plans with you and—"

"Ain't got no time for nothin' to-day. Had yer dinners?"

"We had luncheon on the way," replied Grace.

"Lucky for ye. I'll go work at the ironin'; then I've got to clean house. Mebby then I'll talk to ye."

Joe stamped back into the house, slamming the door behind her, and the Overland Riders lost themselves in gales of laughter, galloping their horses on beyond the house so that Joe might not hear. Tom followed along slowly, considerably crestfallen.

"Tom Gray, you surely have distinguished yourself," declared Anne Nesbit.

"My Hippy couldn't have done worse," added Nora.

"It gives me a pain in my back just to look at her," averred Elfroda. "Listening to her is worse."

"I shan't listen at all. Thank goodness I have the voices of nature to listen to," observed Emma.

"Girls, I admit that I have made a mess of it. I suppose we can go on without a guide, but really it is not wise for you girls, inexperienced as you are in woodcraft, to venture into the Big Woods."

"I do not agree with you folks," interjected Grace. "That woman is sharp-tongued, but she is a sturdy and dependable character. It is my opinion that we might have done a great deal worse in selecting a guide. Let's go back to the house, make camp nearby, and wait until the sturdy warrior is ready for us. She will be out again to talk to us soon enough, if I am a judge of human nature."

The Overlanders acted upon the suggestion and pitched their little tents among the trees across the trail from Joe Shafto's home. While they were thus engaged Joe came over and watched the operations, but without uttering a word until the camp was made and a little cook fire started for a cup of afternoon tea.

"What's that for?" she demanded, pointing to the fire.

"Afternoon tea now, and to cook our supper on later," answered Grace.

"Yer all goin' to eat supper with me."

The girls protested, but Joe, when once she had made an assertion, would brook no opposition.

"Six o'clock; no earlier, no later. To-morrow mornin' we start at four o'clock. I've got all yer fodder, which-all I'll carry on June and July. Them's my pack mules. Work singly or in pairs. Kin

kick like all possessed. No great scratch whether there's anythin' to kick at or not, but they know better'n to kick me, though they ain't no love for Henry, and he gives them heels plenty of room, 'cept one time when he forgot hisself and got kicked clear out into the road, and nigh into kingdom come, and I'll bet the pair of 'em that ye folks ain't got a hoss in the outfit, not even that bronco with the glassy eye, that kin kick once to June or July's twenty kicks, and, if you don't believe it, just heave a tin can at one or t'other of 'em and see if ye can count the kicks, but keep the road between ye and the kicks or I shan't be responsible for what happens to ye, because I know them mules and I know what they can do, and then agin—"

45

"Oh, help!" wailed Emma.

"The voice of nature," chuckled Hippy. "And to think we've got to listen to it for weeks to come."

"What's that ye say?" demanded Joe.

"I—I think I was thinking out loud. I didn't mean to say anything. Honest to goodness I didn't," apologized Hippy lamely.

Joe fixed him with threatening eyes, then launched into another monologue on mules, which wound up with some remarks on lumberjacks, and a leaf from her family history.

The Overland Riders learned that Joe's husband, who was a timber cruiser, had been killed by lumberjacks, and that she was the sworn enemy of every man who wore a Mackinaw coat and worked in the woods.

"Since my man's death I've been livin' up here in the woods, guidin' huntin' parties, makin' an honest livin' and layin' for the men who killed my man. I'll find 'em yet. Now who be ye all? I hain't had no interduction except as Mister Gray interduced himself to me, and—"

46

"This is my wife, Grace Harlowe Gray," said Tom.

The forest woman shook hands and glared into Grace's smiling eyes.

"Glad to meet ye, Miss Gray. Ye look like one of them boudwarriors that I seen pictures of in the high society papers."

"Miss Emma Dean," announced Tom, pointing to Emma.

"Glad to meet ye." Joe gave Emma a searching look. "Pert as a bird, ain't ye?"

"Some of my ancestors, I have reason to believe, were birds, and it is quite possible that I have inherited some of their traits," answered Emma airily.

"Sparrows! No good. Don't git swelled up over some of yer folks wearin' feathers. The kind ye belong to they shoot on sight. And now who be *ye*?" demanded the woman, stepping up to the dignified J. Elfreda Briggs.

Elfreda introduced herself.

"Glad to meet ye. Yer quite set up, but I guess ye might come down a peg after ye git acquainted."

47

Nora Wingate and Anne Nesbit then introduced themselves, and Joe was "glad to meet" them, but she forgot to address personal remarks to them, for her eyes, glaring through the big spectacles, were fixed on Hippy Wingate's grinning face. All this was "a powerful good joke to him," as Emma confided to Grace in a loud whisper.

Joe strode over to Hippy and peered down into his face as he sat playing with Hindenburg.

"I reckon some of yer ancestors must been monkeys, judgin' from that monkey-grin on yer face. What's yer name?"

Hippy told her, adding that he had been a flying ace in the world war, which announcement he made pompously.

"Glad to meet ye, Lieutenant; but look smart that ye don't try any of yer flytricks on Joe Shafto. Six o'clock, folks. Remember!" was Joe's parting word as she strode swiftly from their camp, screwing up her face into a long-drawn wink as she passed Grace Harlowe. In that wink Grace read what she had been searching for. Joe Shafto was human and a humorist, crude, but with a keen mind and a love for banter that promised much enjoyment for the Overland Riders.

"I wonder who is the Henry that she mentioned?" reflected Grace out loud.

48

"Perhaps Henry may be a tame goose. Think of 'June' and 'July' as names for mules," chortled Hippy. "Oh, we're going to have a merry, merry time this coming two months—especially Hindenburg and myself."

Afternoon tea was an enjoyable occasion that day, at which the principal topic was their new guide.

At five minutes before six, after stamping out their little campfire, the Overland party started for the log cabin. As they crossed the road Hippy sniffed the air.

"I smell food!" he cried.

"Onions! Save me!" moaned Emma.

"No. It is something far and away ahead of mere onions," answered Hippy. "I don't know what it is, but were this not so formal an occasion, I should break into a run for it."

The door of the cabin stood open, so the party filed in unbidden. The table was long enough for a lumberjack boarding house, constructed of boards nailed together with cleats and placed on two boxes. Oilcloth covered the boards and hung clear to the floor on either side. The ends were open. There was a freshness and wholesomeness about the place that attracted the girls at once.

"Set down!" commanded Joe, entering with a heaping platter of meat. 49

"That is what I smelled!" exclaimed Hippy. "May I ask what that meat is, Mrs. Shafto?"

"Venison."

"Eh? Don't wake me up," murmured Hippy.

"Is the deer season on?" questioned Tom.

"No. Not till November fifteenth. This is smoked venison, killed last season. I put down a lot of it in caches where the water will keep it cool."

Another dish, a tinpanful of baked potatoes, came on with other smaller dishes of vegetables; then the coffee was poured into the thick serviceable cups that had already been placed by the plates, which, together with two loaves of bread, comprised the meal. Appetites were at concert pitch and it was with difficulty that Hippy Wingate restrained himself until the girls were seated.

"Miss Dean, set down at the end where I can watch ye that ye don't fly away. Sorry ye have to set on a box, but there ain't chairs enough to go around. I give the Lieutenant a chair 'cause a box ain't safe for him. He's a big feeder and the box ain't strong. Dip in, folks. Get started. Help yourselves. This ain't no society tea."

The food was passed along and each Rider helped herself from platter and pan, and every plate was heaped under the observant eyes that were glaring through the big horn-rimmed spectacles to see that each person helped herself to liberal portions. 50

Exclamations were heard all around the table when the girls had tasted of the smoked venison. Hippy, however, was too busy to talk or exclaim unless he were forced to do so.

"Lieutenant, did ye et like that when ye was chasin' the flyin' Dutchmen in France?" demanded Joe.

Hippy nodded.

"It's a eternal wonder ye didn't fall down then."

"I couldn't. I lived on angel food most of the time, and, after a while, I could fly. See? You live on angel food long enough and you can fly, too," promised Hippy gravely.

"I reckon I would at that," answered the forest woman, pursing her lips, the nearest thing to a smile that the Overland Riders had seen on her stern, rugged face.

The girls laughed merrily, and Nora turned a beaming face on her husband.

"Hippy, my darlin', you've met your match this time," she said.

"I met you first, didn't I?" retorted Hippy, then returned to his absorbing occupation and shortly afterwards passed his plate for another helping. 51

"My land!" exclaimed Joe. "Ye do beat the bears for eatin'. Never seen one that could stow it away the way ye do."

"You should see him when he is hungry," advised Emma. "Why, when we were riding in the Kentucky Mountains last year we—"

"Well?" demanded the guide.

Emma had abruptly ceased speaking as she felt something rubbing against her foot. At first she thought it was Hindenburg who had slipped into the house and crawled under the table to salvage the crumbs. Now something surely was nosing at her knee.

Emma Dean's face contracted ever so little when a cold something brushed the back of the hand that hung at her side.

"Hi—Hippy, where's the pup?" she questioned weakly.

"Tied to a tree out yonder. Why?"

Emma groped cautiously with the hand, first wishing to assure herself that she was not imagining, before making an exhibition of herself. The hand came in contact with what she recognized instantly, as a cold nose. Light fingers crept gingerly along the nose and paused at a huge, furry head, now well at her side. She gave a quick, startled glance down at what lay under

her hand, and her face went ghastly pale.

Uttering a hysterical scream, Emma Dean toppled over backwards, crashing to the cabin floor.

52

CHAPTER V

OVERLANDERS GET A JOLT

As she went over, Emma Dean's feet hit the under side of the table. Her plate of venison slid off to the floor, and Hippy Wingate's coffee landed in his lap. The Overlanders sprang to their feet, but Joe Shafto sat glaring from one to the other of them in amazement.

"A bear! A bear! A bear under the table," screamed Emma and sank back in a dead faint.

It was then that the Overland Riders saw what had so frightened her, for a black bear ambled out from under the table and began gulping down the venison from Emma's overturned plate. To the eyes of the girls he appeared to be a huge animal, and his growls, as he swallowed choice morsels of venison, were far from reassuring.

"Don't be skeert! It's only Henry," cried the forest woman. "Set down!"

No one heeded her advice. Elfreda Briggs was standing on a chair, Anne Nesbit had run into the garden which she had reached by a short cut through an open window. Tom and Hippy, having sprung back, were gazing on the intruder in startled amazement, while Nora Wingate, standing on the table with one foot in the platter of venison, was screaming.

53

Grace, who had backed into a corner, was trying to subdue her own individual panic sufficiently to reason out the situation. Joe Shafto's words, when Grace finally absorbed them, brought enlightenment.

"Will he bite, Mrs. Shafto?" she called.

"Won't bite nothin' if ye don't bother him."

Grace ran to Emma and bathed her face with water.

"Get down!" commanded Lieutenant Wingate, holding up a hand to Nora. "Don't you see you're spoiling a perfectly good lot of venison? I never saw such a parcel of 'fraid cats in all my life."

"Neither did I," grumbled Mrs. Shafto. "I didn't know Henry was down there or I'd a shoed him out before ye set down."

"I won't get down until that beast is out of the house," declared Nora. "Whoever heard of such a thing. Don't!"

Hippy pulled her down without ceremony and placed Nora in a chair.

54

"Behave yourself! You will see more bears, and then some, before you finish this journey."

Joe took a broom and shoed Henry out into the yard. A scream out there followed almost instantly, for Henry had ambled around the house to make the acquaintance of Anne Nesbit.

"The beast is chasing me!" she panted, as she ran back into the house.

No one gave heed to her, so she ran to Nora and the two consoled each other. In the meantime, Grace had revived Emma.

"Ha—as he gone?" she wailed weakly.

"Yes. That is Mrs. Shafto's tame bear, you silly."

"Merely a voice of nature that you heard, Emma," reminded Hippy. "By the way, what message did Henry convey to you?"

"Henry is the name of Mrs. Shafto's pet," explained Grace.

"Fright!" moaned Emma in answer to Hippy's question.

"Mrs. Shafto, if you don't mind, I believe I will have another piece of deer," said Hippy.

"Yer wife stepped in it," replied Joe.

"It's all in the family," observed Hippy, holding out his plate.

One by one the Overlanders returned to the table, with the exception of Emma, whose appetite had left her, but Hippy had the rest of the venison all to himself. The meal was finished off with apple pie, and the girls said they had not eaten so much since their first meals at home on their return from service in France.

55

Following the meal, the Overland Riders discussed their proposed journey with the forest woman, looked over the supplies she had bought and pronounced themselves satisfied, not only with her purchases, but with Joe Shafto herself. Nothing more was seen of Henry that evening. The woman said he probably had gone into the woods to sleep or to forage for food.

"Where did you get the beast?" questioned Emma.

"When he war a cub. I shot his mother and brought the cub home, and he's one of the family. I kin make him mind just like a dog, and sick him on like a dog. I'll call him in and show ye."

"No, no," protested Emma and Nora in chorus.

"I shall dream of bears all night, but don't you dare let him out while I am here," begged Emma.

"Henry's my watchdog. He sleeps on the front steps, and he'll chaw up anything that comes in the yard after I git to bed, so keep out or you'll git bit."

"Oh, I shall keep out, never fear," answered Emma in a tone of voice that brought a laugh from everyone at the table.

Before leaving Mrs. Shafto that night the Overland girls acquainted her with such plans as they had made for their outing, Tom telling her of the work that lay before him and expressing his wish to have the party as near to his work as possible. "Good nights" finally were said, and the guests departed for their little camp among the trees. A fire was built to light up the tents while the girls were arranging their blankets and preparing themselves for bed.

"Hindenburg gets free range for the night," volunteered Hippy. So, with the bull pup on watch, all hands turned in, for an early start was to be made on the following morning. They were awakened by his barking at daybreak.

Joe Shafto was hallooing to them.

"Git a hustle on ye," she called in answer to Tom Gray's answering hail.

There was a scramble in the camp of the Overlanders, for they desired to show their guide that they were no novices at breaking camp and getting under way. Just as they were finishing their breakfasts Joe led over June and July, and waited observantly while Tom and Hippy rolled their belongings into packs which Mrs. Shafto lashed to the mules with her own hands.

"Ye see the twins don't like to have strangers monkeyin' around 'em," she explained. "I'll git goin' now and ye kin foller along. I've got to git Henry first."

"Eh? What's that?" demanded Hippy.

"I don't go nowheres without my Henry."

"You—you aren't going to take that beast with you, are you, Mrs. Shafto?" cried Emma.

"I sure be, and I reckon ye'll be mighty glad to have him along before we git through with this here hop into the Big Woods."

Emma groaned dismally.

"Never mind," soothed Hippy. "You can practice your nature reading stunt on him. Who knows but that you may learn the bear language, so that by the time we finish our work up here you will be able to go out in the forest and tell the bears your life history, and listen to them telling you theirs. Of course they might eat you, but that would not matter."

"Huh!" grunted Miss Dean, elevating her nose and turning her back on him.

"Mount!" ordered Hippy, after each girl had saddled her pony and stood waiting for the start. They swung into their saddles with agility, and jogged out into the road with Hindenburg racing ahead and darting back, barking joyously. He was already feeling the call of the wild.

"There's Joe," called Emma, as they rounded a bend in the road.

"I do not see the bear," wondered Tom.

"Perhaps she decided to leave him at home to shift for himself. I hope so."

Grace said she hoped *not*, for the bear would make life interesting for them.

Joe was sitting on the back of one of her pack mules jogging along, leading the second mule behind, but, though she must have heard the Overlanders shout to her, she neither replied nor looked back. Hindenburg, however, darted ahead and began barking at the mules, dodging their heels successfully for several minutes, much to the amusement of the party following. At last, however, he caught a glancing blow from a mule foot that sent him rolling into the bushes. In a few moments he was out again, circling mules and rider, barking his angry protests, then dodging off the trail into the bushes where they heard him barking with a different note in his voice.

"There comes the bear!" cried Nora. "Look at him!"

"Yes, and there comes Hindenburg bucking the line," added Hippy.

The bear, followed by the dog, burst into sight just at the moment that Hindenburg nipped the bear's hind leg. Henry whirled, made a pass at the pup, and missed him. The bear then charged Hindenburg with mouth wide open, and the battle was on.



The Bear Advanced, Sparring Like a Prize Fighter.

"Call off yer dog," shouted Joe.

"Call off your bear," answered Hippy Wingate.

The guide tried to do so and failed. Hippy's efforts to draw Hindenburg from the fray met with no better success.

It was at this juncture that the bear scored first blood. With a well placed blow of his paw he knocked the pup into the middle of the road, and the lead mule, at whose heels Hindenburg had fallen, kicked him the rest of the way into the bushes.

"Sick 'im, Henry!" yelled Joe.

"No you don't," shouted Hippy as the bear ambled across the road in pursuit of the injured pup.

"I'll learn that fresh pup to bite my bear," flung back the forest woman.

"And I'll kill that brute of a bear if he gets the pup," retorted Hippy, galloping his pony to the point at which the two animals had disappeared, and leaping from Ginger's back, regardless of the risk of losing his mount.

Hippy plunged into the bushes to the rescue of the bull pup. The dog's yelps indicated that he was in further trouble, which Hippy discovered to be the fact when he came in sight of the combatants. Henry was boxing the unfortunate dog with both fore paws. Hindenburg, from whose mouth and nose the blood was running, was staggering about weakly, but trying his utmost to get a hold and hang on.

"Let go, Henry, you brute!" commanded Hippy.

Henry, however, instead of letting go, ambled at the dog with wide open mouth, thoroughly angered and determined to finish with his teeth the battle he had begun with his paws.

Lieutenant Wingate sprang into the fray and delivered a kick on the side of the bear's head with all the strength he could throw into the blow.

Henry rose in his might, rearing on hind legs, and advanced on Hippy, snarling and showing his teeth, and sparring like a prize fighter.

"That's your game, is it?" jeered the Overland Rider.

Whack!

Hippy planted a blow with his fist full on Henry's nose, the most tender part of a bear's body. Henry reeled, backed away, followed by Lieutenant Wingate who sparred skillfully, frequently planting other blows on the tender nose of his adversary.

Boxing with a bear was a new experience for him, but his success thus far made Hippy careless, and in a particularly savage blow he threw his body too far forward, missed the nose, and was obliged to spring towards the animal to save himself from falling.

Henry, despite his rage and aching nose, did not miss his opportunity. Both powerful front legs closed about Hippy Wingate like a flash, and the man and the bear went down together.

CHAPTER VI

CAMPING UNDER THE GIANT PINES

Tom Gray heard the two crash into the bushes, as he was on his way to the scene followed by Joe Shafto and part of the Overland outfit.

As he went down Hippy had the presence of mind to thrust both hands under the bear's chin and press upward with all his strength, though, in that tight embrace, it was difficult to do anything except gasp for breath and wonder how long it would be before he heard the snap of his ribs breaking in.

With the bear's breath hot on his face, Lieutenant Wingate afterwards remembered wondering why it was that Henry did not bite when the biting was good. Never having bitten a human being and having no recollection, in all probability, of any associates outside of human beings the bear may not have been inclined to bite.

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On the other hand, the bear's temper appeared to be rising, for his growls were growing more menacing with the seconds.

"Hindenburg! Sick 'im!" gasped Hippy.

He heard the pup, weak from loss of blood, give a feeble yelp, then a snarl, and in the next second Hindenburg had fastened his teeth in Henry's neck.

A heavy paw swept Hindenburg away and left him quivering and moaning. The respite had been sufficient, however, to enable Lieutenant Wingate to roll out of the clutches of the beast, but his freedom was brief. Hippy had hardly sprung to his feet when the bear rose and snatched him again.

It was at this juncture that Tom and the guide arrived, just in time to see Hippy Wingate deliver another blow squarely on Henry's all too tender nose.

"Henry!" yelled the woman. "Let go, Henry!"

Henry plainly was in no mood to let go, and it was evident that it was now his intention to bite and bite hard, for the snarling mouth was wide open when Joe Shafto sprang to the rescue. Joe carried a hardwood club, which she evidently carried as a handy weapon.

"Now will ye mind me!" she shrieked, bringing the club down with a mighty whack on the bridge of Henry's head. "Take that, and that, and that!" she added, delivering three more resounding whacks.

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Henry uttered a howl, released his hold on Hippy Wingate and rolled over on his back, feet in the air, where he lay whining and plainly begging for mercy like a child that was being punished.

Hippy had quickly rolled out of the way and jumped up, his face bloody, and his clothes showing rents where Henry's claws had raked them. Hippy ran to Hindenburg whom he found whimpering and licking his wounds.

"You poor fish! Why did you do it?" rebuked Lieutenant Wingate.

"Git up!" commanded Joe Shafto, poking Henry in the ribs with her stick. "Come with me and behave yerself, or I'll wallop ye till ye won't be able to smell venison for a year of Sundays." The guide fastened on one of Henry's ears and started for the trail, Henry ambling along meekly at her side. "Lieutenant, keep that pup away from my Henry," ordered Joe.

"Joe, keep that bear away from my pup," retorted Hippy, carrying Hindenburg in his arms and gently depositing him in the saddle bag.

"Oh, Hippy, what happened to you?" cried Emma.

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"I've been communing with nature," he answered briefly.

"Darlin', let me wipe the blood from your face," crooned Nora. "Did the naughty bear scratch oo bootiful face?"

The Overlanders shouted and Hippy, very red of face, sprang into his saddle with such a jolt that Ginger gave him a lively minute of bucking in which poor Hindenburg got a shaking up that made him whimper.

The forest woman with her mules had already started and was now some distance in the lead, with her pet bear shuffling along at the edge of the road abreast of the leading mule.

"Ye git nothin' to eat to-day, Henry. I didn't bring ye up to brawl and to fit with yaller dogs, ye

lazy lout," scolded Joe.

When the party halted for its noon rest and luncheon, Henry sat morosely at one side of their camping place, now and then licking his chops, while Hindenburg, performing the same service for his wounds, occupied a position on the opposite side of the camp. Neither animal appeared to be aware of the other's existence.

"Behold the forest," said Tom Gray later in the afternoon, halting his pony on a rise of ground, and encompassing a wide range of country with a sweep of his arm.

It was an undulating sea of deep green, almost as limitless as the sky itself, that the Overland Riders gazed upon.

"Them's the Big North Woods," Joe informed them. "We take a log trail just beyond here, and to-night we'll be in the 'Pineys.'"

"And to-morrow I shall be off and at work," announced Tom.

They were soon picking their way along a shady fragrant trail, tall, straight, noble pines about them seeming to be vieing with each other in their efforts to reach the blue sky. The wind now bore a new fragrance, and the air was heavily pungent with the odor of pine.

"Emma, does your nature cult explain to you why the trees grow so tall and so straight?" asked Tom, riding up beside Miss Dean.

Emma shook her head.

"Because they are fighting the battle of nature—fighting for existence, for their very lives, just as all the world of humans is fighting its battle. A tree must have light and air, or it dies. To get these it must grow up, it must keep up with its competitors, the trees about it, and forge ahead of them if possible, ever reaching up and up for sunlight and air. Once let it fall behind and it is lost; it is overwhelmed by the sturdier giants; it pales and pines and seems to lose its ambition. The tree, knowing it has lost its grip, then seems to grow thin and gaunt, and one day it goes crashing down, to rot and furnish nourishment for the giants that overwhelmed it. The tree's life, like ours, is a struggle for existence, with the survival of the fittest."

"Were I a tree I think I should prefer to grow alone out in an open field," decided Emma.

"Not if you were a wise tree, you would not," laughed Tom. "Out there you would be the plaything of the winds. Your body would be exposed to the glaring sun, the full blast of every passing storm, and the bitter cold of winter, which would, unless you were very hardy, have a tendency to retard your growth and weaken your vigor. Trees, like humans, do not enjoy a lonely life, but when they get together they immediately enter into bitter competition. Isn't that quite human?"

"Where are you heading, Mrs. Shafto?" interrupted Grace, as the guide struck off, leaving the trail and entering the dense forest.

"Goin' to find a campin' place while I kin see," she answered. Now and then Joe would halt to examine an old blaze on a tree, occasionally making a new blaze with her short-handled woodsman's axe on the opposite side of the tree so that, upon returning along that trail, the new blaze might be easily seen.

"I fear that I was not born with a woodsman's sense," complained Anne.

"No one is. That is why a woodsman blazes trees," answered Tom. "I do not know whether you people are familiar with 'blazes.' Grace knows something about them."

"The only 'blaze' I know anything about is the blaze I make when I try to start a cook fire," laughed Hippy.

"You will need more knowledge than that if you stray a hundred yards from camp in the Pineries," replied Tom as they rode along. "A blaze is made by a single downward stroke of the axe, the object being to expose a good-sized spot of the whitish sapwood, which, set in the dark framework of the bark, is a staring mark that is certain to attract attention."

"Yes, but suppose the traveler tries to find the trail a year or so later?" questioned the practical Elfreda. "Hasn't it grown up so high that he can't see it?"

"No. A blaze always remains at its original height above the ground, because a tree increases its height and girth only by building on top of the previous growth. There is much of interest that I could tell you along this line, but I will merely describe the various blazes and their meanings, leaving the rest until some other time. It is well to remember that a trail blazed in a forest is likely to have been made either by a hunter, a lumberman, a timber-looker, or a surveyor. A hunter's line is apt to be inconspicuous. So is a timber-looker's, because he is searching for a bonanza and doesn't wish anyone else to discover it. A surveyor's line is always absolutely straight, except where it meets an insurmountable object, when it makes a right-angle turn to avoid the object, then goes straight ahead again.

"All trees that stand directly on the line of a survey have two notches cut on each side of them and are called 'sight trees.' Bushes on or near the line are bent by the woodsman at right angles to it.

"When a blaze line turns abruptly so that a person following it might otherwise overlook it, a long slash is made on that side of the tree which faces the new direction. There are other forms of blazes, such as marking section corners, boundaries and the like, which it is unnecessary for you to know now, but with which it might be wise for you to familiarize yourselves as you go along. This is the end of your first lesson."

"There's the fork of the river that we are goin' to camp on," called Joe, riding down a steep bank, followed by the Overlanders, their ponies slipping and sliding until they had reached the more level ground near the stream.

"We camp here," announced the forest woman. "If ye don't like it, pick out yer own camp. The bear and I stay right here." 71

Dismounting, Tom strode over to the tree under which Joe had announced her intention of making camp, and, placing a hand on it, gazed up along its length, then at the adjacent trees.

"She's stood here for a hundred years or more, and I reckon no wind will blow her down to-night. All right!" announced Tom.

"Get busy, girls," called Grace.

The Overlanders, dismounting, inhaled deeply of the air, heavily pungent with the odor of the pine, then set to work with a vim to pitch their camp. Tom, in the meantime, climbed the bank to look at a huge pile of logs that lay on a skidway above their camping place.

"Someone got left last spring," he said upon his return to his companions. "Those logs were cut last winter, but the water in the river last spring was evidently too low to float them down, so they must stay where they are until next spring awaiting the freshets. The blocks will then be knocked from under the skidway and those hundreds of thousands of feet of timber will go thundering down into the river. You will observe that they have cut a channel or 'travoy,' as it is called, through which the logs will roll after leaving the skidway, and pass on to the stream. This 'travoy' is pretty well grown over with second growth, but the logs will roll the growth down, and when they do you would think that all the tremendous forces of nature had been let loose." 72

By this time the camp was nearly finished, and the tents of the Overlanders looked like tiny doll houses under those giant pines, and in this, the very heart of nature, in the silence and the grandeur of it all, the girls felt a deep sense of something that they could not define, which left them disinclined to laugh or chatter.

Soon after dark the sky became overcast, the pines began dripping moisture, and a gentle breeze was heard murmuring in the tops of the trees.

"Come, little nature child! What are the wild winds in the tree-tops saying?" teased Hippy, breaking an awed silence of several minutes.

"I—I don't rightly know," answered Emma, after listening intently to the whisperings in the pines. "I—I think that the message they are trying to convey to me—to us—is a warning of something to come, something that is near at hand. I wish Madam Gersdorff were here. She could read the warning and tell us what peril it is that is hovering over us."

Nora uttered a shrill peal of laughter. 73

"Don't," begged Anne.

"You've got a bad attack of the willies," groaned Hippy in a tone of disgust that brought a half-hearted laugh from his companions, though, had they been willing to admit it, they too felt something of the depression that was reflected in Emma Dean's face and voice.

Work on the camp finished, the Overland Riders put out the fire and turned in, Henry rolling himself up into a furry ball, Hindenburg snuggling down between Tom and Hippy. Only forest sounds, now faint and far away, marred the solemn impressive stillness of the Big North Woods, a stillness that was destined to be rudely interrupted ere the dawn of another day.

CHAPTER VII

FELLED BY A MYSTERIOUS BLOW

When Grace awakened late in the night the feeling of oppression with which she had gone to sleep still lay heavy upon her. The faint soughing of a breeze in the tree tops, the light thuds of falling pine cones, were the only sounds to be heard outside of the breathing of her companions who were sleeping soundly.

Suddenly her ears caught a distant roar, and a few drops of rain pattered on the tent. 74

"It is going to storm," murmured Grace. "I hope no dead limbs fall from the trees on our camp." Pulling the blankets over her head to shut out the sounds she tried to go to sleep, but sleep would not come, so Grace uncovered her head and lay listening.

The wind seemed to die down for a while, but it soon sprang up with renewed strength, and was sweeping violently over the tops of the pines, which were creaking and groaning under the strain. A distant crash told of some forest giant that had gone down under the blast; then the rain fell, a deluge of it, which finally beat through the little tents and trickled down over the sleeping Overland girls.

"Are you all right in there?" called Tom from the outside.

"Yes, but we are getting wet. Is it going to last long?" asked Grace.

"Not being able to get a view of the sky, I can't say positively. It seems like only a shower to me."

"Wait a moment. I'll join you."

Grace hurriedly dressed and, throwing on her rubber coat, stepped out.

"I don't just like the way some of these trees are acting," said Tom. "Perhaps you haven't noticed how the ground is heaving."

"Yes I have, but I did not know that it meant anything alarming."

"It shows that the wind is throwing a great strain on the trees and that there is too much play in the roots for the good of the trees—and ourselves," he added. "I hope our supplies do not fall down under the whipping they are getting."

The provisions had been slung in sacks from a rope strung between two trees, about ten feet above the ground, to keep them out of reach of Henry and other prowling animals.

"How long have you been up?" asked Grace.

"Half an hour or so. I went up to the ridge to the rear of the camp, thinking that I had heard something unusual going on up there, but hurried back when the rain started. What I heard must have been the trees creaking."

They listened to the storm for several minutes, Tom Gray trying to interpret the sounds.

"Awaken the girls!" he directed, acting upon a sudden resolution. "Get them out as quickly as possible." Tom had heard a sound coming from the ridge that stirred him into quick action. "Tell them to fetch the blankets and our rifles. We mustn't lose any of those things."

"Will you call Hippy and Joe?"

"Yes, yes. Hurry!"

"Turn out!" shouted Tom at the opening of Hippy's tent. "Be lively. Blankets and weapons with you."

"Wha—at, in this storm?" wailed Hippy.

"Better get wet than get killed," retorted Tom, springing over to Joe Shafto's tent. Joe answered his hail with a sharp demand to know what he wanted.

"Pile out as quickly as possible. We are likely to have trouble. And call your bear off."

Henry was sniffing at Tom's heels and growling ominously, but he obeyed the incisive command of his master and retired to his position in front of her tent.

The girls, he found, were already out of their tents, blankets over their heads, all shivering in the chill rain, all too cold to speak except Emma Dean.

"I—I to-o-old you something was go-going to happen," she stammered. "The v-v-v-voice of nature to-o-old me so."

"N-n-n-nature is an old foggy," jeered Hippy mockingly. "Nothing has happened and I don't know why we have been dragged out into this rotten storm."

"Follow me and watch your step," directed Tom tersely. He led the way to the river and along its bank to the tethering ground. "Lead your ponies to a safer place, further up the stream," he ordered.

This hurried departure from their camp was a good deal of a mystery to the Overland Riders. They did not understand why, nor did Tom Gray tell them.

"Hippy, help me tie the horses," he said, after having gone several rods further up stream. "One at a time with the ponies, folks, then go make yourselves as comfortable as possible under the bluff of the bank. The bushes there will offer you more protection from the wind and rain than the trees would."

Shortly thereafter Tom and Hippy joined their shivering companions, and the party, with blankets stretched over their heads, huddled miserably as they sat on the wet ground under the

blanket roof, Hindenburg on Hippy's lap, and Henry outside in the rain licking the water from his dripping coat of fur.

"How are you, J. Elfreda?" teased Grace.

"Saturated and satiated," answered Miss Briggs briefly.

"I wonder what the voices of nature are saying at the present moment?" mused Hippy. "If they feel anything like I do, their remarks are more forceful than elegant."

"Even if you were to hear them you would be no wiser," observed Emma. "Only persons with unusual minds can read the messages that nature conveys."

Someone under the blanket roof giggled, and Hippy articulated "Ahem!"

"As I was about to say—What's that?" he exclaimed sharply.

A boom, that reminded all who heard it of the explosion of a high-powered shell at a distance, smote the ears of the Overland Riders. Then a succession of resounding reports and terrific crashings shook the earth.

"Stay where you are!" shouted Tom Gray as, with single accord, the girls sprang to their feet and started to run. They halted at sound of Tom's voice.

Something from the air struck the ground with a thud, and Hippy Wingate toppled over against Elfreda Briggs and sank down, uttering a faint moan.

"Hippy's hurt! Something hit him. Quick, Tom! Show a light!" cried Miss Briggs.

Tom Gray flashed a ribbon of light from his pocket lamp and sprang to his companion.

"Hippy! Hippy!" he begged.

Nora uttered an anguished wail, and in an instant her arms were about Lieutenant Wingate's neck.

"Let go and give him air," commanded Tom.

Hippy lay as he had fallen, half on his side, one arm doubled under his head. A red welt across his forehead showed where the blow that felled him had fallen.

The reverberating crashes that had shaken the earth were dying out and now seemed much further away than at first.

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CHAPTER VIII

THEIR FIRST DISASTER

"Oh, what has happened?" begged Anne tremblingly.

"The logs went out," answered Tom briefly.

"Di—did a log hit Hippy?" questioned Emma.

"I don't know what hit him. Fetch water," directed Tom, who was fanning the unconscious Hippy with his hat.

Joe Shafto had run down to the stream and, at this juncture, came up to them with a hatful of water, which she handed to Tom. Grace took Tom's hat from him and did the fanning while her husband was bathing Hippy's face. The rain had become a misty drizzle and the wind had died out entirely, but the trees were dripping moisture that soaked into the clothing of the Overland Riders more effectively than had the downpour of a few moments before.

It was nearly half an hour before Lieutenant Wingate regained consciousness, and it was some little time later before he could hold a sitting position, for his head was swimming.

"Had we better not get him under his tent?" asked Grace.

"If there is a tent left, yes. You folks will remain right here until I return. I am going over to the camp," replied Tom.

"Is there danger?" questioned Grace anxiously.

"I think not. I shall not be gone more than a few minutes."

Tom took his pocket lamp with him, leaving the Overlanders in the dark, for their own lamps were in their packs in the tents. Tom, however, came back inside of fifteen minutes.

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"How is the camp?" asked Elfreda.

"There isn't any camp," answered Tom.

"Wha—at?" gasped the Overlanders.

"It hit me and went on into the river," groaned Hippy. "Voice of nature," he added in a mutter, but no one laughed.

"Our camp was pitched in the travoy way. The storm loosened the supports of the skidway and let the logs down. Several hundred thousand feet of them rolled over our camp and mashed it flat. A good part of the timber went on into the river. The rest of it is scattered all the way along the travoy."

"What! All our provisions gone?" wailed Hippy.

"No. They were strung up high enough to be out of the way," spoke up Grace.

"You are wrong, Grace," differed Tom. "A log must have ended up and broken the rope. At least the rope is broken and most of our supplies appear to have been carried away. We are now back to first principles. We must either go back for fresh supplies or live as the forest wanderer lives, rustling for our grub as we go along. The first thing to be done is to build a fire."

"Fine! I should like to see you do that with everything soaking wet," laughed Elfreda.

"We shall see," replied Tom. "What we need first of all is light so we may see what we are about."

After searching about, Tom found an old uptilted log which he proposed to use as a "backlog" for a fire. He next roamed about with his lamp, hunting for a dead pine tree leaning to the south. He explained that the wood and bark on the under side of such a tree would be reasonably dry and would make excellent fuel. He found one that had been shivered by lightning, and from the south side of this he chopped off bark and chips. The girls carried these to the fallen uptilted tree.

In the meantime, the guide had searched for and found several pine knots. From these Tom whittled shavings from their less resinous ends, leaving the shavings on the sticks. He set these knots up like a tripod under the fallen tree, small ends down and the shavings touching.

"We will now strike a match and you shall see whether or not we know how to build a fire under present conditions. Grace, how do you think you would strike a match with nothing dry to strike it on?" he teased.

"I do not believe I should strike it," answered Grace.

"Hold your hat over me," he directed, getting down on his knees. Tom placed the head of the match between his teeth and jerked the match forward through the teeth, cupped the match in his hands until the flame of the match ran up its stick, whereupon he applied it to the shavings.

The pine knots flickered, then flamed up, snapping and shooting out little streamers of reddish fire. Bark and splinters from the leaning tree were placed about the knots, and in a few moments they had a cheerful fire.

"Cut two saplings and spread the blanket for a backing," said Tom, nodding to the guide.

Joe sharpened one end of each sapling and forced them into the ground back of the log, and on the saplings she stretched one of the wet blankets.

"Girls, in all our campaigning we haven't learned much, have we?" demanded Anne. "Had it not been for Tom we should have sat all night in misery and wetness. I think we are going to learn something on this journey."

"It strikes me that we have already learned a few things," observed Miss Briggs.

Lieutenant Wingate recovered rapidly, and when able he began searching about to discover what had hit him but could find nothing.

The clothing of the party under the influence of that red-hot fire soon dried out, and the spirits of the Overland Riders rose in proportion. Acting upon Elfreda's suggestion that they make an effort to salvage their supplies, Tom and Hippy prepared pitchpine torches, and all hands repaired to the scene of their late camping place.

"Look! Oh, look!" cried Emma, as they came within sight of it. Not a vestige of the camp was left. Logs lay about everywhere, some almost standing on end. Young trees were broken off short, bushes laid flat as if a tornado had swept over the scene, and here and there the trunks of giant trees were scarred where the bark had been torn off by logs coming in contact with them.

"Think what might have happened to us had we not got out in time," murmured Anne.

"We should have been mashed flat," agreed Emma. "How terrible!"

"That is what comes from listening to the voice of nature," chuckled Hippy.

"Here are some of our provisions," called Grace, who had been clambering over the logs,

peering under them and feeling about among the pine cones. She uncovered a dozen or so cans of food, all dented, some mashed out flat, and while she was doing this Elfreda discovered some badly battered mess kits.

Hippy salvaged a chunk of bacon on the river bank, and others found widely scattered remnants of their supplies, including some that had been swept into the river which had not floated away.

"This will keep us going until we can replenish our larder," finally announced Grace. "After daybreak we shall undoubtedly find more of our belongings. The tents, however, seem to have been destroyed. I found a few pieces of canvas, but that was all. I am glad we saved our blankets."

"By the way, Mrs. Shafto, where is Henry?" asked Nora.

"Henry!" cried Joe.

"If Henry is wise he will be found up a tree," chuckled Hippy.

"Henry! Henre-e-e-e-e!" called the forest woman. "Oh, Henre-e-e-e-e! Here, Hen, Hen, Hen, Hen! Come here, I tell ye! Hen, Hen, Hen, Hen, Hen!"

"Crow! Maybe that will fetch Hen," suggested Hippy, and the Overland girls shouted.

"Don't ye make fun of me!" raged the forest woman, striding over to Hippy and shaking a belligerent fist before his face. "I give ye notice that Joe Shafto kin take care of herself and her bear, and she don't need no advice from a greenhorn like yerself." Hippy backed away, the woman following him and still shaking her fist, and the more the girls laughed the angrier did Joe get.

"That's all right, old dear. Don't get excited," begged Hippy, trying to soothe the irate woman.

"What? Old dear! Don't ye call me old dear. I ain't yer old dear nor yer young dear. Ain't ye ashamed of yerself to speak to yer betters that way, and 'specially to a woman of my years? I'll larn ye to be civil and to mind yer own business!" Joe gave the embarrassed Hippy a sound box on one ear, then on the other. "Take that, and that," she cried. "Next time I'll use the club on ye!"

Each blow jolted Hippy's head.

"Mrs. Shafto! Please, please! We can't have any such actions in this outfit," rebuked Grace. "Lieutenant Wingate did not mean to offend you, and you must learn to be a good fellow and take as well as give if you are going to stay with this outfit. If you think you cannot, now is the time to say so."

"Do ye want me to git out?" demanded Joe, glaring at Grace.

"Indeed we do not. We wish you to remain, to be a good fellow, to share in our pleasures and take the unpleasant features in the spirit of the Overland Riders. Do you think you can do this?" Grace smiled as she said it.

"I reckon yer right, Miss Gray," decided the forest woman after a moment's pondering and glaring through her spectacles at Grace.

"Thank you. Nora, suppose you lead Hippy to one side—by the ear—and read him a little lecture," suggested Grace.

"I'll do that," agreed Nora Wingate. "Hippy, my darlin', you come with me. I'll fetch a stout stick and I'll make you think of home and mother."

Even Joe Shafto laughed as Nora playfully led Hippy away by an ear. They found them half an hour later sitting by the fire where Nora was still lecturing her irrepressible spouse.

"I've reformed, Mrs. Shafto," called Hippy as he saw them approaching. "I was mistaken in thinking you were my dear. You aren't. Henry is your dear."

"I don't know whether he is or not. I'm afraid Henry loped away when the logs came down. I'll track him when it gets light enough to see."

All was peace in the Overland camp again, and, while they were waiting for daylight, Tom and Hippy hammered their mess kits back into shape with an axe, greatly to the amusement of their companions. As the graying skies finally brought out in relief the tops of the trees, Elfreda, who had been gazing up at them, uttered a sudden exclamation.

"What is that up there?" she exclaimed. "It looks like an animal."

"It's my Henry!" shouted the guide. "Come down here, ye beast! Come down, I say. Henry, do ye hear me?"

Henry plainly did, but he took his time about obeying, and it was not until the light became stronger that he made a move to descend. After reaching the last of the lower limbs of the tree, Henry slid the rest of the way down, dislodging the bark with his claws, a little shower of bark sifting over Joe, who was waiting at the base of the tree to welcome her pet. This she did in characteristic fashion when he reached the ground, by giving him a few light taps with her ever-

ready club.

Henry slunk away and sat down by himself to brood over his troubles, Hindenburg from a safe distance eyeing the bear, a dark ruff showing along his pugnacious little back.

Mrs. Shafto began the preparation of breakfast immediately after recovering her bear. While she was doing this, the light now being strong enough to permit, Tom climbed the bank to examine the skidway from which the logs had swept down over their camp. Tom remained up there until the loud halloos of his companions informed him that breakfast was ready. The forester returned to his camp slowly and thoughtfully.

"Find anything up there?" questioned Hippy, giving him a quick glance of inquiry.

Tom nodded.

"The tents?" asked Elfreda.

"Naturally not up there," he replied, sitting down on a blanket and taking the plate of bacon that Elfreda handed to him.

"Out with it," laughed Grace. "It always is reflected in your face when there is anything weighty on your mind."

"Having something on one's mind is more than all of us can boast," chortled Hippy. "I might mention names were it not that I am too polite to do so," he added, grinning at Emma, who flushed.

"At least I did not get my ears boxed," she retorted. "Mrs. Shafto served you just right, though I think we all regret that, while about it, she did not make a finished job of it."

"That subject is closed," reminded Miss Briggs.

"Hippy, don't you say another word," warned Nora Wingate, and, after the laugh had subsided, they looked at Tom.

"I went up to examine the skidway," he said. "What I found there fully confirmed the vague suspicions that were already in my mind."

"Eh?" interrupted Hippy, leaning forward expectantly.

Elfreda nodded, as if Tom had confirmed her own conclusions.

"It was not wholly the rain that dislodged the supports of the logs, folks," resumed Tom.

"No—ot rain?" exclaimed Hippy, blinking at his companion.

"Not rain," repeated Tom. "Human hands loosened the supports that sent the great pile of logs down on the camp of the Overlanders," he declared impressively.

CHAPTER IX

LUMBER-JACKS SEEK REVENGE

"Same old game," grumbled Hippy.

"What makes you think that the skidway was tampered with?" questioned Anne, after the exclamations following Tom's startling assertion had subsided.

"Because the evidence is there. Even a novice could read the signs left there. In spots, I found the imprints of rubber boots. I also found four canthooks, used for rolling logs."

Hippy suggested that these might have been left when the lumbermen stopped work in the early spring, but Tom shook his head.

"No. They were new, which indicates that they were brought to this place within a few days—probably within the last few hours, for the hooks did not have a single point of rust on them."

"But, Tom! I cannot understand how moving that tremendous weight in bulk was possible for a handful of men," wondered Grace.

"Jacks can do anything they wish with logs," answered Tom Gray. "In this instance they called on nature for assistance, and fickle nature lent them a hand by sending them rain. The ground too, I discovered, had been dug out under the lower side of the skidway and the supports knocked out."

"The varmints!" growled Joe Shafto, who had been an attentive listener to Tom's story.

"The jacks shifted some logs around to act as a track to give the logs on the skidway a good start down the bank; they further cleared a channel lower down so that the water might undermine the skidway still more, then, when the trap was properly set, undoubtedly gave the top of the pile a start with their hooks. I can't describe it so you people, unfamiliar with logging operations, can get the picture clearly."

"I think you do very well," answered Emma wisely. "Of course, Hippy could improve upon it, but fortunately he is not telling the story."

"Do you know of any early lumber operations near here, Mrs. Shafto?" asked Tom.

The guide said she did not, but that the woods were often full of cutters late in the fall and in the early winter.

"Section Forty-three was goin' to start cuttin' on the first of this month I heard, but I don't know whuther they did or not," she said.

Tom Gray consulted his forestry map and nodded.

"We will look in on them, so I believe I shall stay with you until the day after to-morrow. In the meantime I shall have another look at the skidway while you people are packing up," he said, rising.

"What shall we do without tents?" questioned Anne anxiously.

"Do nicely. When we make camp this afternoon Mrs. Shafto and I will show you. I do not think it advisable to head directly for Forty-three, but to camp in the vicinity of that section, as I shall wish to speak with the foreman of the gang there."

"Reckon ye know what ye wants to do," nodded the guide.

When Tom returned from the skidway he smiled and shook his head in answer to the question in Grace's eyes.

"Nothing further," he said briefly.

"You should have been an Indian," laughed Grace.

"Should have been? He is," averred Hippy.

Not a shred of canvas large enough to cover a mess plate was found in the ruins of their camp, and, as soon as they had assembled and packed what was left of their equipment, the party went on without tents. After luncheon that day they turned off from the lumber trail and struck out into the densely timbered land, Joe following her course by certain old blazes on trees. Traveling there was much slower than it had been on the open lumber trail, but the Overlanders made satisfactory time, and covered nearly twenty miles before they halted to prepare their camp for the night.

It lacked three hours of nightfall then, so Tom Gray decided to go over to Section Forty-three and have his talk with the foreman of that lumber camp. It was an hour-and-a-half later when he returned, flushed and angry.

"Well?" questioned Grace.

"I learned that a dozen jacks came in from Bisbee's Corners last night, but when I asked that they be lined up to see if I could identify any of them as belonging to the mob that attacked us at Bisbee's, the foreman threatened to set the whole outfit of jacks on me. He said he was not running a detective bureau and that he didn't give a rap what his jacks did so long as they got out timber."

"What's his name?" interrupted the guide.

"Tatem, he said."

"Feller with a wooden leg?" demanded Joe.

"Yes."

"That's Peg Tatem, the biggest ruffian of 'em all. He'd brain ye with a peavey if you give him any back talk. I've always thought that Peg knew the devils who killed my man. Oh, I hope the time comes when I get a chance to set Henry on him. Henry'd make toothpicks of that peg-leg. I promise ye that. His outfit ain't any better'n Peg himself."

"Who is the contractor?" asked Tom.

"It's the Dusenbery outfit. Dusenbery is always timber-lookin', peekin' about the Pinies to find a cuttin' that he kin steal, and he's stole a lot of it, Cap'n Gray. Ye lookin' for timber thieves?"

"That is a part of my job up here," answered Tom smilingly.

"Git Dusenbery and ye'll have the biggest stealer of these Big North Woods, but have yer gun handy when ye git him or he'll git ye first." With this parting admonition, Joe took a currycomb and brush from her kit bag and began grooming Henry's coat, which, from contact with brush and thorns, and the wetting he had received the night before, looked as if it needed it.

"The burning question of the moment is, do we sleep on feathers or firs to-night?" inquired Hippy.

"We will get at that right away. Mrs. Shafto, please show Lieutenant Wingate how to pick a backlog and let him get spruce boughs for two lean-tos and wood for the night's fuel," directed Tom.

While this was being done, Tom selected the camp site; then cut and set four poles, the rear pair lower than the front, and across these he laid ridge poles. When the spruce boughs were brought in they were placed on top of the framework thus erected, and in a few moments the roof was on. The ends of the lean-to were closed by hanging spruce boughs over them. The roof boughs were all laid in the same direction, butts towards the front, tops towards the rear.

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This accomplished, a little green house had appeared like magic, but it was not yet complete. Spruce boughs were brought and spread over the ground under the lean-tos to the depth of about a foot, all laid one way, smooth and springy and so sweetly odorous that the air in the little house seemed intoxicating.

Emma Dean dove in headfirst.

"Stop that! This house is not intended to be a rough-house," protested Hippy, coming up at this juncture with an armful of boughs.

"I can't help it. It is so perfectly stunning. Do you know what its name is? Why, Green Gables, of course, and—"

"What are the wild birds saying?" mocked Hippy.

"They will be crooning a good-night lullaby the instant I lay my weary person down," declared Elfreda Briggs.

97

A second lean-to, much smaller than the first, was erected. Then preparations for the campfire were begun. This was laid on sloping ground a little lower down than the lean-tos. First, a log was placed and stakes driven behind it to keep it from rolling down the slight decline, its purpose being to supply the backlog of the fire, which, when started, would be almost on a level with the lean-tos, and about four feet from them. Evergreen boughs were cut and laid lengthwise in front of the lean-tos, to be planted between the houses and the fire, in case the fire might be too hot for the occupants.

Hippy was now bringing in the night-wood and complaining bitterly about having to do all the work.

"Why not harness up that lazy bear and make him draw in the logs?" he demanded.

"If ye'll harness the pup and snake in a log with him, I'll make my Henry snake two logs," retorted the forest woman.

Hippy went back for another load of wood, his shoulders jogging up and down with laughter.

"This is all very fine, Tom, but what are we going to do after you have left us?" wondered Anne.

"Grace knows how to build a lean-to, and I am positive that Mrs. Shafto does," answered Tom.

Joe nodded.

98

"When you go into permanent camp you will require a different construction to keep the rain out. Bark stripped from trees will answer the purpose," Tom informed them.

The small lean-to was for the guide, and another of about the same size was later erected for Tom and Hippy, though further from the fire than the little green houses for the girls and the guide.

Night was upon them by the time they had finished, and Mrs. Shafto already had built a small cook fire and was preparing supper. About the time it was ready Tom put a match under the larger pile of wood, and a cheerful blaze flamed up.

"Try the house and see how warm it is, girls," suggested Grace.

Exclamations of delight and gurgles of satisfaction followed their trial of the lean-to.

"Why, it is as warm as a steam-heated house," cried Nora.

"That is because the rear side of the lean-to is closed and the front open. The heat therefore remains in the lean-to. Even a low fire will keep one warm in such a shelter in the coldest of winter nights," Grace explained to her companions.

In the meantime Tom and Hippy were discussing the attack of the previous night, and Tom Gray was cautioning Hippy to be on the lookout all the time and see to it that the Overland girls were protected.

99

"We are getting into rough country. I don't need to tell you that," said Tom. "Law is quite a way removed from us, and it takes time to get the law operating in the Big Woods country. By the time it does get working, the guilty ones generally are out of reach. I wish we had got in touch with Willy Horse and hired him to join the outfit."

"Leave it to Henry and Hippy," laughed Lieutenant Wingate. "What those two 'H's' can't do, he couldn't. Then again, we have Hindenburg. Do you think that fellow Tatem had anything to do with what happened last night?"

Tom said he knew of no good reason why the foreman of Forty-three should have wished to injure them.

"The attack looks to me like a lumberjack's revenge but I can't account for it. I have decided to leave you in the morning. Grace has a duplicate of my forestry map, and will know where I am most of the time. I'll look in on you from time to time, and about the first of the month I shall make my headquarters on the Little Big Branch where you folks are going to camp for a few weeks. Be careful of fire, and if you are visited by a fire warden tell him who you are. One cannot be too particular about saving the forests, and a little carelessness might cause a fire loss of thousands of dollars before the blaze could be stopped."

100

"We want to go to bed," interrupted Emma. "How are we going to do so with one side of the house out?"

"Hang two blankets over the front, please, Hippy. Take them down after the girls have turned in. I will look after the ponies; then you and I will hit the pines," directed Tom, rising.

The forest woman was hanging up the mess kits to dry when Tom and Hippy went out to water and rub down the ponies. She beckoned them to wait.

"I been thinkin' 'bout what ye said of Peg Tatem, Cap'n Gray, and I don't like it," she said in a tone low enough to prevent being overheard by the girls, who were preparing for bed. "Peg must have been mad 'bout somethin' and I reckon it would be healthy for us to git out of here in the mornin' and camp as far away from Forty-three as we kin. What do ye say, Cap'n?"

"Don't worry about Peg. We shall be out of this in the morning, anyway. I have to leave you tomorrow, so take good care of the girls and don't let Henry eat the bull pup."

101

"He had better not," growled Hippy.

The two Overland men went to their lean-to laughing, Mrs. Shafto feeding the night logs to the fire before seeking her own browse-bed, Henry taking up his resting place a little distance from her in the shadows and away from the fire. His fur coat was sufficient protection against the evening chill, but Hindenburg's hair was short, and he was shivering when he crawled in and nosed his way under Lieutenant Wingate's blanket.

It did not seem to the Overlanders as if they had more than dropped to sleep, though they had been asleep for hours, when they were startled by a terrific explosion, an explosion that shook the earth and made the forest trees above them tremble and a shower of pine cones rain down on them in a perfect deluge.

"Tree coming! Run!" shouted Tom Gray, at the same time firing his revolver into the air to urge the Overlanders to greater haste.

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CHAPTER X

MYSTERY IN THE FALL OF A TREE

"Run to the river!" It was Hippy's voice, this time raised in warning. He feared that the wide-spreading branches of the falling tree might hit some of the party of Overlanders.

A branch from a smaller tree, knocked down by the larger one in its fall, gave Hippy a sidewise and sent him flying down the bank.

"Jump inter the river!" screamed the forest woman. "It ain't deep." Joe led the way, shouting as she leaped for the water. Had there been light, it would have been easy to see which way the tree was falling, but in the darkness one could only guess from the sound the direction in which the tree was falling. It landed with a mighty crash just as the Overland Riders leaped into the river, and for a few seconds it sounded as if the forest itself were going down. The girls listened to the crashings and the reports in awesome silence.

"All over!" announced Tom, in a tone of relief.

"I—I don't see anything about a falling tree that necessitates scaring a person out of a year's growth," complained Emma.

103

"You don't, eh? Then you have something to learn," answered Tom rather shortly.

"At least there is nothing to prevent our going back and getting to sleep, is there?" questioned Nora.

"There is!" said Tom.

"Wha—what do you mean?" demanded Hippy, but Tom made no reply.

Grace found herself wondering what had caused the tree to fall. There was no wind, other than a gentle zephyr; the ground was dry and the tree was not a dead tree, as she discovered when she found that its foliage had blotted out the campfire. Either she had not heard the explosion as the tree burst from the ground, or else she had forgotten that circumstance altogether in the excitement of the moment.

"All right. We can go back now," said Tom.

"And to bed for mine," promised Elfreda.

"If my eyes serve me right, you have no bed," answered Grace laughingly.

"I don't understand," wondered Miss Briggs.

"From its position, I should say that the fallen tree pretty well covers our camp," replied Grace.

"Yes, it fell on the lean-tos," Tom informed them.

The Overland girls groaned.

"The voices of nature seem to be trying to tell us something. Perhaps they are inviting us to get out," suggested Hippy whimsically. "What is your interpretation of the tree's fall, you Nature-Cult Person?" he questioned teasingly, nodding at Emma.

"I think they are seeking to advise us to rid ourselves of one Lieutenant Wingate if we expect to be permitted to proceed in peace," answered Emma. "Why don't you go home?" teased the little Overland girl.

"My wife won't let me. Of course you are not bound by any such restrictions," reminded Hippy.

Tom suddenly broke into a run. The others followed, calling to him to know what was wrong, but the forester did not at first answer, as he sped towards their camp, leaping logs and other obstructions in his path.

"Hurry!" he shouted, upon reaching the scene.

"What is it?" called Hippy.

"We have set the woods on fire!" answered Tom.

What the party had supposed to be only the campfire blazing under the tree that had fallen across it, in reality was a forest fire in the making. In falling, the tree had scattered the burning embers of the campfire, and set fire to the leaves and pine boughs that covered the ground. By the time Tom Gray reached the scene the fire was running up the little saplings, tracing out their limbs until they resembled decorated Christmas trees, and leaping from tree to tree.

"Isn't it beautiful!" exclaimed Emma enthusiastically, as the spectacle burst into view.

"You won't think so before many hours have passed," answered Grace, who, as well as her husband, fully understood what this blaze with so good a start might mean.

"Grab those spruce boughs near the lean-tos and follow me!" shouted Tom. "Every one of you get to work. Stamp out what is left of the campfire, Hippy, so that it doesn't spread towards the river and get away from us along the bank. Stir yourselves!"

Through the smoke, the flying sparks and the pungent, almost overpowering odors, the Overland Riders ran with their arms full of spruce boughs.

"What are we to do?" cried Elfreda. "I feel as helpless as a child."

After they had hurried around the outer edge of the fire, which was rapidly reaching towards them in little wriggling, snake-like streams of fire, Tom directed the girls to spread out, each taking several rods of front to protect.

"Beat it out as fast as you can. When you see a wriggler reaching for a tree, beat it out with your spruce boughs," he ordered. "Don't try to put out a tree on fire. You can't do it, and may set yourselves on fire. Grace, you take the lower end of the line and keep the girls at work. I will look after this end. Should assistance be needed at any one point, shout and we will all concentrate on it. All of you be careful that you don't get burned."

The girls quickly took up the positions assigned to them, and began beating and whipping the "golden serpents," as Nora characterized them. In a few moments each member of the party was coughing and choking, their arms were aching and tears were running from their eyes. In spite of their efforts, however, the advancing fire drove them steadily back.

The big trees soon began to char, and, within an hour, were glowing pillars of fire, as one after another broke into flames that mounted higher and higher. Had there been leisure to view it as a spectacle, the sight would have been a magnificent one, but the Overlanders had other things to occupy their attention. While in no way to blame for the fire, they felt that this was their responsibility, theirs the duty to stop it, and so they worked and fought, gasping for breath, now

and then retreating for fresh air.

"Lie down every little while!" shouted Tom. "The air is better near the ground. Pass the word along."

107

His orders were shouted from one to the other and so reached the extreme end of the fighting front.

What at first had seemed an easy task had grown to an almost insurmountable one. Now they would check the fire at one point, only to discover that it had leaped over the line at another. By the time they had conquered the second one, the first blaze generally would be found to have taken a new start.

A canopy of fire and smoke covered the scene high overhead. Tom hoped that a forest lookout might discover the blaze and send assistance to them, though he knew that much territory might be burned over before help could reach them.

Leaving his own position for a survey of conditions, Tom ran along the line of fire-fighters, giving an encouraging word here and there while his experienced eyes sized up the situation.

"How is it?" gasped Grace when he reached her end of the line.

"Serious! We must fight as long as we have an ounce of strength or a breath left in our bodies," he added, starting back towards his position.

"Keep it up! It's getting the best of you!" he shouted to each Overlander in turn as he passed.

108

"Can't we send to Forty-three for assistance?" called Hippy.

"No. You or I would have to go. Neither of us can be spared."

"We'll have to be spared if this keeps up much longer. Do you think the horses are safe?"

"Yes. They are on the river side of the fire. The breeze is carrying the fire the other way," answered Tom.

Three hours after the discovery of the fire found the Overland Riders still fighting, to all appearances, just as stubbornly as when they began. Their faces were almost unrecognizable, blackened as they were with smoke and streaked with perspiration. In places, their clothing showed black where it had been seared or scorched. Emma Dean had, for the time being, forgotten to listen to the voices of nature, even though they were sizzling and roaring at her from the far-flung tops of the giant pines.

At the end of the fourth hour, a great tree came crashing down with a ripping, rending roar. Another followed it soon after, and at intervals still other trees lost their foothold and surrendered to their implacable enemy, *fire!*

It was an awesome sight and the air was full of thrilling sounds. There was not one of that party of fire fighters that did not feel the awe. Henry disappeared, and his mistress had no thought for him. She had been through other forest fires, and, though she worked desperately, she did so without emotion so far as external appearances indicated. Hindenburg, on the contrary, was very much in evidence, running up and down the line, barking at each individual fire fighter and sneezing as he breathed in the pungent smoke.

109

The graying dawn found the Overlanders still beating at the flames that still kept them on the retreat, driving them deeper and deeper into the forest.

About this time Tom Gray made his second survey. What he found raised his hopes and his spirits.

"We've flanked it!" he cried. "That old cutting to the left has saved us on that side."

"Thank Heaven!" answered Grace in a choking voice. "Te—ell the others!"

"We aren't through yet," reminded Tom, hurrying back to give the others the encouraging news and to urge them to continue their efforts.

Shouts, choking, gasping shouts, greeted the announcement. Then how they did work, the girls with handkerchiefs stuffed in their mouths, and Hippy Wingate with a piece of his khaki shirt gripped between his teeth and partly covering his nostrils as an aid in keeping the smoke out of his lungs. The throats of all were parched and aching for water, but there was none to be had near at hand, and no time to go to the river for it.

110

At nine o'clock in the morning the forest fire was conquered, after having burned over several acres of timber. Here and there little blazes were fanned into life by the morning breeze, but alert eyes discovered, and ready hands quickly whipped them out.

"Done! But it will have to be watched. You girls go back to camp and make some coffee. I don't believe that much of our belongings have been destroyed," said Tom.

Instead of starting for camp, the girls sank down in their tracks, and dropped instantly into a sleep of exhaustion. Neither man made an effort to arouse them.

"I wish I might do that too. What do you say if we take just one little cat-nap, Tom?" urged

Hippy.

"Can't be done. The fire might start again."

"Oh, hang the fire!" growled Lieutenant Wingate.

"It might 'hang' you; in other words, we should be in danger of being burned, for we surely would sleep all day, once we permitted ourselves to drop off!"

"All right. Carry on! If I could have a nip of sleep I know I should dream of food, which would fix me up all right. How long are we going to let them sleep?" asked Hippy, pointing to the sleeping Overland girls. 111

"Until we make certain that the fire isn't going to break out afresh. We will then shake the girls up and go back to camp. It doesn't look as though I should get away to-day, does it?" grinned Tom.

"We can sit down, can't we?"

"Not yet! Not for another two hours."

The men separated and began a steady patrol of the fire-line, dragging themselves along wearily until the two hours had lengthened into three. Hippy then declared himself and announced his intention of going straight back to camp for something to eat and a sleep.

Tom, after a final look about, agreed. It took some little time to get the girls sufficiently awake to enable them to stand on their feet, but finally the men had marshalled them all and the journey to camp began.

It was blackened and cheerless acres of bare and fallen trees that their swollen eyes gazed upon on the way back to camp. Thousands of feet of virgin timber had been burned. Tom Gray, whose love of the forest was almost a passion with him, gazed on the wreckage sadly.

"Let this be a lesson to all of you. Always be careful with your campfires," he warned. 112

The girls were too tired to eat when they reached camp. All they desired was sleep and rest. Hippy's crying need was food, and that was what he proposed to get first, but Tom would not hear to either of them sitting down until the horses had been looked after and watered.

While they were doing that, the forest woman made coffee and fried bacon, which was ready for Tom and Hippy upon their return. The Overland girls had found their blankets, and, rolled tightly in them, lay sound asleep on the bare ground.

"Poor kids! Aren't you proud of each and every one of them, Hippy?" glowed Tom.

"Oh, I suppose so. That is, I presume I should be if I weren't famished."

Henry came ambling in at this juncture and, sitting down, began washing his face with his paws, giving not the slightest heed to the tirade that Joe Shafto was hurling at him.

"Ye git no breakfast to-day," raged the forest woman.

"Oh, don't be so hard-hearted," begged Hippy. "Give the poor fish a rind of bacon at least. You don't know what it means to have an appetite."

Hippy's urgings bore fruit, and Henry got his breakfast, as did Tom and Hippy, and their appetites fully equalled that of the bear. 113

"Come along, Hippy," urged Tom after they had finished breakfast.

"Wha—at? Where?"

"Let's have a look at the tree that so mysteriously fell on our camp."

"Have a heart! Have a heart, Tom! I want to lie down and sleep."

"So do I, but I cannot until I have learned why that tree came down as it did, and what caused the report just before it fell. Come! The sooner we start, the quicker we shall be in dreamland."

Hippy followed his companion begrudgingly.

"Look at that, will you?" demanded Captain Gray, pointing to the ground about the hole which had so recently held the roots of the great tree that had fallen on the lean-tos. The ground had been torn up for some yards from the true base of the tree, and dirt and pieces of roots hurled in all directions.

Lieutenant Wingate was instantly galvanized into alertness. The scene reminded him of France where he had seen so many similar holes, the result of the explosion of shells. He was down on his knees in a second, crawling about in the hole, feeling and smelling the ground.

"Smell this, Tom," he said, handing up to his companion a bit of cardboard. "What does it suggest to you?" 114

"Powder, I should say," answered Tom.

"Exactly. It is my opinion that our tree was dynamited. That's what caused the explosion!" cried

Hippy. "I wonder I didn't recognize it at the time. Now what do you make of that?"

"I suspected as much, old man. I knew when I heard it that there had been an explosion, and I suspected the reason," answered Tom gravely. "I am glad the girls are not awake. This is serious, and the end is not yet!"

Tom Gray's prophecy came true before the end of that already eventful day.

CHAPTER XI

THE THREAT OF PEG TATEM

The shadows were heavy in the Big Woods when the two men awakened from their afternoon's sleep, into which they had sunk while discussing their discovery. Joe Shafto was getting supper, and it was the odor of her cooking that aroused Lieutenant Wingate to full wakefulness. Hippy routed out the rest of the camp without delay.

They discovered Henry asleep high up in one of the virgin pines, Hindenburg having found warmth and a less perilous position on the blankets of the Overland girls.

"I seen ye folks over by the hole in the ground yonder," the forest woman confided to Tom as he greeted her and asked how she felt. "I took a look for myself this evenin'. Fine kettle of stew, hey?"

"Meaning what?" questioned Tom smilingly.

"I reckon some varmint give that air tree a kick over, eh? Who do ye reckon the varmint was who did that, Cap'n Gray?" demanded Joe, glaring at him through her spectacles.

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, Joe. I wish I did," he replied. "Please say nothing about it to the girls. I shall tell Mrs. Gray, of course. Being in charge of the party she should be told of our suspicions."

"Sure. What do ye reckon on doin' to-night?"

"Make a new camp and watch it. Where was that bear of yours while all that uproar was in progress?" demanded Tom.

"Same place the Lieutenant's pup was at—sleepin'!" returned Joe dryly.

Tom turned away laughing. He and Hippy rustled boughs for new lean-tos, chopped wood for the night campfire, and began making a new camp a few rods from the one that had been destroyed by the falling tree and the forest fire. The girls volunteered to assist in the work, but Hippy declared that they looked as if they needed sleep more than work.

The work on the lean-tos had not been finished when the Overlanders were summoned to supper. There was little conversation until they had dulled the sharp edges of their appetites; then their drooping spirits revived and they began bantering each other.

Henry had come down to be on hand when the food was distributed and got many morsels during the meal.

The bear suddenly bristled, swayed his head from side to side, and began to growl. At almost the same instant Hippy Wingate's bull pup was galvanized into life. He began to utter deep growls and resentful coughs.

"Some varmint hangin' around, I reckon," nodded the forest woman in answer to a look of inquiry from Grace. "Be still, Henerey!"

"I hear something coming," declared Tom.

Hippy fastened a hand on Hindenburg's collar, and Joe threatened the bear with a club until he slunk away and disappeared, then, to their amazement, Peg Tatem stamped into camp, followed by a group of lumberjacks.

The Overland Riders gazed questioningly at his scowling face. Tom Gray was the only member of the outfit who knew him, but they instantly recognized the foreman of Section Forty-three, from the descriptions of him given by Tom and Joe Shafto, who now stood glaring angrily at him through her big horn glasses.

Tom greeted the newcomer cordially.

"Won't you sit down and have a snack with us?" he asked.

"Don't want nothin' t' eat with the likes of ye, thankee," growled Peg.

"Oh, that's all right, old top," observed Hippy cheerfully. "We aren't particularly eager to have a rough-neck sit down to mess with us."

"Hold yer tongue, ye cheap dude!" snarled Peg, shaking the heavy stick, that he carried as a cane, at Lieutenant Wingate.

"Don't get rough," grinned Hippy. "What do you want here anyway?"

The lumberjacks, who had accompanied the foreman, halted a few paces to the rear of their superior, and neither their appearance nor their expressions were reassuring.

"What is it you wish?" demanded Tom.

"What ye got to say about this?" snorted Peg, taking in the burned area with a sweep of his stick.

"As a forester, I am very sorry that this has happened, though it was through no fault of ours," answered Tom.

"Ye lie!" exploded the foreman.

"Tatem, you will please drop that sort of talk here. Remember there are ladies present. Besides, I don't take that word from anyone. I said, the fire occurred through no fault of ours. A tree fell on our campfire and scattered the embers, and, before we realized it, the forest was on fire. We worked all night and all the forenoon trying to head the fire off, which we finally succeeded in doing. Had we not done our part, this whole section would long since have been entirely burned off. Why are you taking it upon yourself to come here and interfere with us?"

"Why? Ye bloomin' idiot! I'm talkin' because ye've burned off a few hundred thousand feet of timber from our section. That's why, and yer goin' to pay for every stick of it. Do ye git me?"

"Oh, perfectly, perfectly," interjected Hippy.

"Your section, did you say?" demanded Tom.

"That's what I said," leered Peg.

"You are mistaken. This is not your section. It is possible that you may have intended to crowd your boundaries and steal a few thousand feet of state timber, but so far as its belonging to you or to the people you represent, I know better."

"Ye—ye say I'm a thief?" demanded Peg, the words seeming to stick in his throat.

"No. You may intend to be one, but I have not said that you are. You may be for all that I know. If you have nothing more sensible to say than to accuse us of burning your property, move on! Before you go, however, I wish to say that I believe that, if the truth were to come out, you know more about what caused that fire, and how it was caused, than anyone else. You know what I mean, Peg Tatem."

Only Hippy understood to what Tom Gray referred. That Peg Tatem did, Lieutenant Wingate had not the least doubt, for the foreman's face flushed a violent red under his tan, and his eyes narrowed, as he gripped his club-like cane.

"Get out of here, you and your jacks!" commanded Tom savagely.

"Yes, skip, vamoose, articulate your joints. In other words, shoo!" jeered Hippy. "If I ever see you around our camp again I'll slap your wrist. What!"

Peg Tatem, throwing his weight on the clumsy piece of wood that did duty as a leg, made an almost unbelievable leap towards Tom Gray and brought his club-cane down with all the powerful strength that the man possessed.

"I'll kill ye fer that!" raged the foreman of Forty-three as his club descended.

CHAPTER XII

A SHOT FROM THE FOREST

Tom leaped back and the stick hit the ground instead of the mark that it was intended to reach.

Before the foreman could recover himself, Tom Gray was upon him, and a blow from the Overlander Rider's fist sent Peg Tatem reeling, but before Tom could follow up his advantage, the lumberman collected himself and began leaping around Tom, now striking with the club, then kicking out with the wooden leg. It was impossible to get close enough to the fellow to give him the knock-out blow that Captain Gray was hoping to land on his adversary.

Thus far neither side had made a move to interfere with the combatants, but a movement on the part of the lumberjacks, a gradual edging up, warned Hippy that his opportunity to get into the scrimmage was near at hand.

"Prepare to defend yourselves, girls," he said in a tone that carried to their ears only. "If the worst comes, shoot! Tom and I may get knocked out, for these fellows are tougher than the trees they cut." 122

"Don't worry, Hippy. We will take care of ourselves," said Grace calmly. "Trust us to defend ourselves."

"With what?" questioned Elfreda.

"There are plenty of good stout sticks on the ground. If you see that these jacks mean to attack us, each of you grab a club and let them have it on their heads. See! Joe is holding her club behind her."

The forest woman was waiting grimly for an opportunity to crack a lumberjack's head. That opportunity came sooner than she expected. Two jacks, having crept around behind the lean-tos, suddenly lifted the rear supports and turned the structures over into the fire.

"Beat it, ye varmint!" screamed the woman, making a rush for the men. One of them struck her, but fortunately for Joe it was a glancing blow, and merely turned her around facing away from them. Joe kept on turning until she was again facing the jeering lumbermen.

"Take that, ye varmint!" The forest woman's club descended on a lumberjack's head. "And ye, too!" she shrieked, hitting the other man across the bridge of his nose.

"Come on! Come on, and I'll wallop the whole pack of ye!" 123

"Steady, Joe," warned Grace Harlowe. "Don't lose your head."

Tom and Peg were still at it, the foreman growing more and more ferocious as the moments passed and knowing that he had the Overlander at a disadvantage, for Tom was fighting with his fists only, while Peg was using his stick and his wooden leg, and it were difficult for any person, no matter how skillful a boxer he might be, to get under those two dangerous guards. Once Tom succeeded in doing so. His blow knocked the foreman down, but Peg rolled away and was on his feet again with remarkable quickness, and went at his adversary determined to brain him.

"Ready, girls!" called Hippy.

"They are going to rush us," warned Grace. "When I say 'Clubs!' you girls grab sticks, keep together, and stand your ground. Don't run at them."

Each Overland girl carried an automatic revolver, and there were rifles within easy reach, but it was not their intention to use either, unless the necessity to do so became imperative. The rifles had been brought on this journey largely because the party hoped to do some hunting in the North Woods. The revolvers were, as on previous journeys into the wilder sections of their native country, a part of their regular equipment and for use in great emergencies only. 124

The lumberjacks with one accord rushed at the Overland Riders, uttering yells and jeers. They carried no weapons in their hands, but, as Grace knew to be their practice, each jack wore a lumberman's knife.

"Clubs!"

At the signal, each Overland girl snatched up a stick and stood her ground with set lips and a face from which most of the color had fled, realizing fully the seriousness of the situation.

Lieutenant Wingate waited until the lumberjacks were almost upon him, waited lounging indolently, his face wearing a grin.

"Oh, don't hurry, children," he admonished. "Save your wind for the flight to the rear." Suddenly, Hippy bent forward and when he rose his hand held a pine knot fully five feet long, the limb ablaze almost from end to end. Not more than two feet separated the burning part from his hands.

The limb was heavy, but Lieutenant Wingate was far from delicate, and when he swung the burning limb it had power and speed behind it. The limb burned and bruised the faces of three lumberjacks in its first swing. Hippy plunged at the mob and belabored them right and left with the blazing torch. More than one jack had to stop fighting long enough to put out the blaze that singed the hair off his head. 125

Other jacks had run around one end of the camp to rush it from that vantage point. Joe Shafto and her club met them, and so did the Overland girls. Without uttering a sound they belabored the ruffians, beating, whacking, prodding and swinging their clubs to good purpose.

"Help! Oh, help!" screamed Emma Dean.

A thrown club had hit her on the leg and felled her. Emma was out of the fight so far as further defense was concerned, holding her aching limb and moaning as she rocked back and forth.

Hippy turned for a quick glance in her direction.

"Look out, Hippy!" warned Nora, but her warning was too late. Several of the attackers, taking advantage of his attention being drawn away from them, leaped on him. They bore Hippy to the ground. He was mauled and thumped, but not for many seconds, because the girls rushed to his rescue and clubbed his attackers off. The jacks, returning, picked Lieutenant Wingate up and tossed him into the campfire.

Emma screamed at the sight, but Elfreda Briggs grabbed his protruding feet and hauled him out, while Grace and her companions beat back the jacks who had done the cruel thing. Elfreda put out the flames and assisted Hippy to his feet.

"Go in and fight!" urged J. Elfreda. "They're getting the best of us."

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At that instant, Tom Gray, turning his head to see how it fared with the girls, was hit on the head by Peg Tatem's club and knocked unconscious. As it proved later, the blow was a light one and Tom was not seriously hurt.

The foreman, uttering an exultant yell, aimed a kick at Tom's head with his peg leg.

Grace Harlowe hurled her club at the foreman's head, but missed the mark.

Bang!

A bullet hit Peg's wooden leg, and the leg went out from under its owner like magic. Peg landed on the ground but he was up in an instant, raging and springing for Tom. A second bullet hit the wooden leg and split it.

The Overlanders were amazed.

"Who shot?" cried Anne.

"Don't know," panted Elfreda as she and Hippy charged two jacks who were trying to reach Emma.

Peg, frantic with rage, turned his attention to the others of the party, apparently believing that one of them had fired the shots. He raised his club to strike Grace who was bending over Tom.

Bang!

The club dropped from Peg's hand, and the arm fell to his side with a bullet hole through it.

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The Club Dropped from Peg's Hand.

"I'm hit! Kill 'em!" he screamed. Grabbing up the stick with his left hand, the foreman again started for Grace, his eyes bloodshot, his lips purple.

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Grace grabbed what was nearest to her hand, a pine knot, and hurled it at the ruffian. It hit him full in the face, and the sharp protuberances on the knot drew points of blood.

A blow from a lumberjack's fist, at this juncture, knocked Joe Shafto flat on her back. She was up with a bound.

"Henerey! Henere-e-e-e-e!" There was a wild note in her voice, a note of alarm and command. "Henere-e-e-e-e-e!"

They heard Henry sliding down a tree—heard his paws raking the bark as he slid. Joe heard it too.

"Sick 'em! Sick 'em! Sick 'em!" she screamed, giving Henry a violent prod with her club and driving the bear towards the lumberjacks. One of them struck the beast with a club, hitting

Henry over the shoulders.

Henry made a pass at the man, bringing away a section of the fellow's coat in his claws which dug into the jack's flesh with their sharp points. The man howled and fled from the beast.

Alternately prodding the bear with her club, and cracking a lumberjack head wherever possible, the forest woman fought her way ahead, backed by Tom and Hippy.

Thus goaded, Henry rose on his hind legs and went through that party of rough-necks like one of his kind cuffing its way through a flock of grazing sheep. Henry bit where he could, but his greatest execution was done with his powerful paws.

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The Overland Riders, though angry, weary and perspiring, unable to resist the humor of the ludicrous sight, broke into shouts of laughter.

"Henry has them on the run. Sail in!" bellowed Hippy. "Run, you ruffians, before I turn the rest of our menagerie on you!"

The lumberjacks were now giving ground rapidly, though Peg, wounded and, judging from his expression, suffering, was not further punished. When he saw his men running away, the foreman of Section Forty-three hopped off as best he could, shouting angry threats. The victorious Overlanders with the assistance of Henry chased the lumber outfit to the river, into which the jacks plunged and waded across with all speed.

"Don't you ever show your face in our camp again! Next time, if you do, it will be bullets, not clubs," Lieutenant Wingate shouted after the retreating attackers.

Henry was restrained from following the lumbermen across the river only by heroic measures. The forest woman headed him off and clubbed him back towards the camp, her clothing torn, her hair down her back, her face red and angry.

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"Splendid!" cried Grace Harlowe, running to meet her. "You are wonderful."

"I say, Joseph, if that's your name, may I address you as 'Old Dear' without imperilling my life?" teased Hippy.

"Ye kin call me anything ye like. After the talk of them varmints anything would sound as sweet as the harps of Heving in a thunder storm."

"All right—Old Dear," answered Hippy solemnly. "I was going to tell you that you are the apple of my eye, but, being a peach, you can't very well be an apple, so we will let it go at 'Old Dear.'"

Joe glared through her spectacles. The sharp lines of the rugged face of the forest woman gradually melted into a smile, the first smile that any member of that party had ever seen there.

"Go on with ye!" she retorted laughing despite her attempt to be stern. "I ought to sick the bear on ye, but I ain't goin' to."

CHAPTER XIII

A BLAZED WARNING

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"Well, we gave them a run, didn't we?" crowed Hippy.

"I reckon ye'd better pack and git out of here right lively," advised the guide.

Tom Gray agreed that Peg Tatem would miss no opportunity to take revenge on the Overland Riders for what they had done to him, and it was decided to break camp and move at once, the forest woman being confident that she could keep in the right direction once she found a lumber road that lay to the right of them a couple of miles away.

Weary as they were, the Overlanders were quite willing to get away without loss of time from the scene of their troubles. Their equipment had suffered some, but none was left behind. While they were packing, Tom, in order to make them understand that they had gained the ill-will of desperate men, decided to tell them of the dynamiting of the tree, and declared that it was his belief that Peg Tatem's lumberjacks had done the deed, intending that the tree should fall on the camp while they were asleep.

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"There are fellows in Forty-three's gang that were in the mob at Bisbee's Corners," declared Tom with emphasis.

"Are they likely to follow us?" asked Elfreda.

"I don't believe they will stray far from their own camp, but they may try to get us before we leave here. Therefore let's go. They have work to do in their own camp, you see," reminded Tom.

Packing and breaking camp were accomplished quickly. Ponies were saddled, packs lashed on, after which the party started away, the guide leading, carrying a kerosene dash-lamp to assist her in reading blazes on trees and avoiding obstructions, for the lamp had a reflector that threw a fairly strong bar of light.

Daylight must see the Overland Riders some miles from the scene of their fight with the men from Forty-three, and there must be as little trail left as possible. For the latter reason, Joe Shafto kept to such ground as was covered with a mat of pine needles. These, being springy, gave way under the hoofs of the horses, leaving no hoof-prints, no trail. Of the Overland Riders only two persons observed this—Tom and Grace, for, in her brief trips with him into the woods where he, as a forester, spent much time, Grace had learned a great deal about forestry work.

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No halt was made until midnight, when the forest woman reined in and directed a ray of light against a huge pine tree.

"A fresh blaze," said Tom, as he trotted up to her to see what the blaze indicated.

"A blaze with a bent arrow cut in it, the arrow smeared with dirt to make it stand out. Clever, but what does it mean, Mrs. Shafto?" he asked.

"It's a warnin', Cap'n."

"Of what?"

"That I don't rightly know. The arrow, I reckon, points at the danger."

"Is the arrow not pointed in the direction of our old camp?" asked Elfreda.

"Ye guessed it, Miss Briggs. That means we'd better be moseying along right smart."

"How long has that blaze been there?" asked Hippy.

"An hour, mebbby," replied Joe. "Come along, Henry."

A few strokes of her axe obliterated the arrow on the blaze, and the party pressed on.

"I wonder if that arrow-blaze was intended for us," murmured Tom, as they rode on in silence.

Soon, the guide's lamp revealed another blaze, but this was purely a direction blaze, which she mutilated and changed to mean a different direction, then made a sharp turn to the right. Other blazes encountered, all freshly made, led them straight to the lumber road for which she had been searching and would have missed had it not been for the friendly blazes that pointed the way.

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"What do ye 'low for that?" demanded the forest woman when they had emerged on the road.

"I believe now that the blazes were intended for us," answered Tom, his brow wrinkling in perplexity. "It is very strange."

"Why worry?" spoke up Hippy. "We are being led, but what's the odds who is doing the leading so long as we are led?"

"Pure logic," observed Miss Briggs.

"From an illogical source," added Emma in an undertone.

They proceeded along the lumber road for fully ten miles, fording two streams, then halting at a sawmill on the banks of a river. The mill had not yet started operations. Tom got off and looked the property over, consulted his map, then the journey was resumed. Just beyond the mill they came upon another of the now familiar blazes, directing them to proceed to the right and follow the river bank.

"The blazer fellow evidently knows where we wish to go. Do you know where we are, Mrs. Shafto?" called Tom.

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"Yes, I know now. It's the Little Big Branch River, though it ain't much of a river yit. We got a long ways to go before we git to the place where ye folks are goin' to hang out for a spell. I reckon we'd better make camp just before daylight."

No one offered objection to her proposal. All were weary and cold, as well as hungry and sleepy. Emma was swaying in her saddle, frequently catching herself napping and straightening up just in time to prevent falling from her horse, while the others, noses and lips blue, shivered and made no effort to control the chattering of their teeth.

"Oh, why was I ever induced to leave my happy home?" wailed Anne. "This is the worst of all."

Nothing more was heard from any of them until Joe Shafto finally announced that they had reached the end of their night's journey.

"Rustle something for the makin's, and we'll have heat and a hot drink right smart," she called.

While Hippy tied the ponies and fetched water for them, Tom gathered firewood and started the fire for breakfast. Tea, being the quickest drink to make, was brewed, and gulped down by the Overlanders almost as fast as Joe could, pour it.

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"How fu—fu—funny you look," chattered Emma, nodding at Miss Briggs.

"If I look as funny as I feel, I must be a scream," retorted Elfreda.

"Here, here! Don't I get any of that?" cried Hippy, coming up at a run.

Tea was served to him.

"Ah-h-h-h! Nectar of the gods! Now if some one will kindly prepare a little food, I shall offer deep and sincere thanks; then seek my downy couch for sweet repose."

"Hippy is the first to thaw out," chuckled Tom.

"He always was soft, anyway," reminded Emma.

"And we are all blue-noses this morning," added Nora laughingly.

Under the warming influence of the tea, their spirits soon revived, and when the campfire was laid and set going a little distance from the small cook fire, sighs of relief were heard on all sides.

Day was just breaking when the party laid down by the fire for a much needed rest. Pine needles were their beds that morning. No one had the ambition to help build a lean-to, nor did one care to wait for some one else to make it.

Noon found them still asleep, with the exception of Grace, who had risen two hours earlier to get breakfast for Tom who was about to leave for his work, perhaps not to return for some weeks. The Overlanders were to make a permanent camp further down on the Little Big Branch, and, when Tom Gray returned from his first "cruise," he was to follow the river until he found them.

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"Rather indefinite," laughed Grace. "However, you aren't much of a woodsman if you can't find us with such directions, though don't cut off the bends in the river or you surely will miss us. We do not intend that our camp shall be over-conspicuous."

Tom said his good-bye and, mounting, rode away and disappeared in the forest. Grace stirred up the fire and added fresh wood so that her companions might have warmth, for the morning was chill, and then called them.

Spirals of smoke were rising above the trees from the campfire. Joe Shafto looked up at it, and shook her head disapprovingly.

"If there's one low-down jack within fifty mile of us on high ground, he'll have us spotted for certain," she rebuked. "Great fire—great smoke for Indian signaling."

"Thank you. I had not thought of the smoke," answered Grace. "How shall I stop its smoking?"

"Pour water on it till it's out, then build a new fire. Never mind. Too late now. The damage's done, and a little smoke more or less won't matter no how."

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Breakfast, noon breakfast, proved to be so satisfying that no one felt inclined to pack up and move on.

"Girls, what do you say to the suggestion that we make camp here until some time to-morrow?" questioned Anne. "We are in no hurry, except that we do not wish to be overtaken by Peg Tatem's gang, which, it doesn't seem probable that we shall be."

"Yes! Stay!" cried the Overlanders.

"Is that satisfactory to you, Mrs. Shafto?" asked Grace, turning to the guide.

"I kin stand it if ye kin."

"We stay," announced Grace. "Let's build our sheds after we have settled our breakfasts and are able to summon some ambition."

Their sleeping quarters were finished before dark, and then the girls rambled along the river, here and there startling a buck or a doe into sudden flight. There were no man-made trails here, no sounds other than the murmuring waters of the Little Big Branch and the voices of nature, to which Emma Dean listened, nodded or shook her head as if she and those voices were holding converse. The laughing teasing of her companions failed to swerve Emma from her newfound hobby.

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That night, as they snuggled under their blankets, clear and cold out of the silence pealed a mournful howl, long-drawn, strange and full of the wild.

Nora and Anne buried their heads under the blankets to shut out the sound.

"What was that?" cried Elfreda.

"A wolf—an old she timber wolf—a varmint," answered the forest woman from her lean-to.

"And it bids us beware of perils near at hand," droned Emma in a far-away voice.

"Will you stop that?" demanded Elfreda. "You give me the creeps."

"I think it is perfectly wonderful," breathed Emma. Then with greater emphasis she exclaimed, "Such a voice in the wilderness is an inspiration. How I wish Madam Gersdorff might be here to hear it. Girls, you don't know, you cannot dream what a wonderful woman she is."

"I'd like to see *anybody* dream with you setting up such a chatter," complained Anne.

"Please, please, Emma, let the wolves howl if they wish. We can't stop them, but that is no reason why you should keep us all awake. We need sleep," begged Grace Harlowe laughingly.

After a few muttered protests, Emma subsided, and only the faint yelps of the dreaming bull pup and the noisy slumber of Hippy Wingate disturbed the deeply impressive silence of the great forest. That he might better guard the camp, Hindenburg had been tied out to a tree on his long leash. Lieutenant Wingate had built a miniature lean-to for the pup to crawl under in the event of rain, but Hindenburg was already under it, stretched out on the yielding browse bed, one little brown ear vigilantly erect to catch the slightest sound. Emma Dean declared that the dog must be deaf in that ear, for he never seemed to hear with it.

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The bull pup's slumbers were not disturbed that night, nor were Henry's. The bear lay at the rear of Mrs. Shafto's lean-to all night long, curled up into a furry ball, but with the break of day he was off in the forest for the choice morsels of food that he knew were there for him to pluck.

After the campers awakened, the forest woman's shrill call soon brought the bear ambling back to camp, but they observed that he was restless, now and then lifting his nose and sniffing the air, punctuated with an occasional throaty growl, but the bull pup, flat on his back, feet in the air, was sound asleep on his browse bed.

"Henry, what's the matter with ye? I reckon maybe ye smell some varmint that's hangin' 'round waitin' fer the leavin's of the breakfast," scolded Joe.

The bacon was on the fire and the aroma of coffee in the air when a loud hail warned the Overland Riders that they were about to receive an early morning call.

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Lieutenant Wingate answered the hail. A few moments later they descried a horseman riding through the forest towards the camp.

The newcomer was dressed in khaki, wearing an army hat and high lace boots. Grace recognized the uniform at once, having seen it before when foresting with Tom Gray. Her identification was confirmed when she caught sight of the bronze badge of the Forest Service, which the stalwart rider wore on his left breast. His face was rugged and weatherbeaten, and the strength of the wilderness was in his eye, though the man's facial expression, at that moment, was far from pleasant.

The forest ranger, or fire warden, halted and surveyed the camp with a slow, searching gaze, narrowly observing the crackling campfire, then suddenly bent a stern look on each member of the Overland party.

"Morning, Buddy. You are just in time to sit in with us for a snack of breakfast," greeted Lieutenant Wingate cordially.

"Put out that fire!" commanded the ranger sternly, pointing a lean brown finger at the cook fire that had grown into a lively blaze.

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CHAPTER XIV

THEIR DAY AT HOME

"What is wrong about the fire, sir?" questioned Grace pleasantly.

"Have you a permit to build fires in these woods?"

"We have not," spoke up Hippy. "Why?"

"Then put it out!"

"Just a moment, old top. Who sent you here?" demanded Hippy.

"The Dusenbery outfit that's cutting on Forty-three notified me by telephone yesterday that a party of campers had set on fire and burned off several thousand feet of timber. He said there were two men and a party of women—that they were rough-necks, and a lot of other things. I haven't anything to do with that, but I'm going to see to it that you don't do any more damage to the forest."

"Peg Tatem, eh?" reflected Hippy. "How did you find us? Did Peg tell you where we were?"

"I saw your smoke yesterday, but couldn't rightly place you till this morning when I smelled your

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smoke and found I was close to you. Are you going to douse the fire?"

"I think not, sir," answered Grace.

The ranger sprang from his horse and strode towards the campfire. Hippy stepped between him and the blaze.

"Don't do anything childish. Let the fire alone. When we want the fire out we will put it out ourselves," reminded Lieutenant Wingate.

The ranger drew back an arm as if about to strike at the Overland Rider when a menacing growl at his side caused the forest man to spring back. He had recognized that growl instantly. Henry, standing on his hind legs, "arms" extended, was ready for fight, following a gentle prodding and a "Sick 'im, Henry," from his mistress.

The ranger whipped out his revolver.

"Drop that gun!" yelled Joe Shafto. "That's my bear!"

"Don't shoot! He is a pet bear," admonished Lieutenant Wingate. "That is Henry. Oh, are you awake?" he added, as Hindenburg rolled over, blinked, and then dashed out and began barking at the stranger.

"What's this—a circus?" wondered the ranger.

"I give ye fair notice it'll be a circus if ye don't let that bear be," warned the forest woman in a shrill high-pitched voice.

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"Put away your gun, Mister Man. There's nothing to shoot here, unless you get too confounded obstreperous," urged Hippy, now smiling. "My name's Wingate, Lieutenant Wingate, late of the Army Flying Corps in our late unpleasantness with the Hun. What's yours?"

"Chatworth's my name. I'm the warden up here, and, not having a permit to have a fire in the forest, you'll have to hit the lumber trail for the open country."

"Nothing doing! You will have to dope out something better than that to induce us to leave," grinned Hippy.

Grace demanded to know where the ranger got his authority for stating that they should have a fire permit.

"It's my authority!" he answered brusquely.

"Who told you to assume such authority?" interjected Miss Briggs in the calm judicial voice that was hers when trying a lawsuit.

"I'm not answering fool questions. You heard what I said. Are you going?"

"Well—yes, of course we are going, but it may be a month or two before we do go. If you will kindly give me your address I'll drop you a picture card later on, telling you when we expect to leave the Big North Woods," drawled Lieutenant Wingate.

"Hippy, I do not believe that Mr. Chatworth fully understands who and what we are," interjected Grace. "We take such trips as this one every summer, sir, and we are not greenhorns in the forest. We realize the danger of fire to the forests as fully as well as you do. For your information, I will merely say that we were in no wise to blame for the fire at Section Forty-three. A tree fell over and scattered the embers of our campfire, thus starting the forest fire and —"

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"All the more reason why you're not fit to be in the woods," answered the ranger roughly.

"Cut the rough talk!" admonished Lieutenant Wingate severely. "Had it not been for us that blaze would have swept the whole state. We fought it all night and until nearly noon next day. Stop growling! If you keep on growling the bear and my bull pup will think you are an animal and sail into you for keeps."

"As I was about to say," reminded Grace, "my husband is a forester and is in the North Woods now on official business. He was with us when the fire occurred, and will join us further along in a few weeks."

"Eh? What's his name?" demanded the ranger sharply, eyeing Grace with new interest in his eyes.

"Tom Gray," answered Grace.

"Is he the fellow that's cruising the timber up here for the state?"

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"Yes."

"Humph! Why didn't you say so before?"

"I presume because you did not ask me," returned Grace demurely. "Now that you understand, won't you please sit down and have breakfast with us? We have plenty and really shall be glad to have you."

"Well, I reckon I might as well," decided the ranger, striding over and tying his horse to a sapling.

Hippy introduced him to the members of the Overland party, the ranger bowing awkwardly, but with the quiet dignity so characteristic of those who have learned their lesson from the heart of nature herself.

"Sorry, folks, that I had to be up a tree with you, but we must do our duty and protect this forest. There are not many of 'em left in these United States, and what there is, are going fast. I'll have a snack with you."

"Peace has been declared," murmured Emma.

"Keep that menagerie away! I don't like bears nosing around me any more'n I do wolves."

"Wolves!" exclaimed Nora. "We heard one last night."

"There are lots of 'em up here and they kill the game. The state offers a bounty of seven dollars and a half for every one killed—every full-grown critter; ten dollars for cubs."

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"You say the state desires to get rid of them?" questioned Emma.

"All states do. They're varmints," answered the ranger.

"Why don't they try dynamite?" asked Emma. "Perhaps the wolves might eat it and go off."

"Call the bear," suggested Hippy after a brief silence.

The Overland Riders shouted, and the forest ranger grinned, the bull pup joining in the merriment by barking and dashing about the camp, taking a gentle nip at Henry's flank as he passed that none too good-natured beast.

"I reckon this *is* a circus after all," choked the guide, trying to talk and eat a slice of tough bacon at the same time. "Tell me what happened about that fire. I reckon you haven't told the whole of it."

Hippy thereupon related what they had discovered after the fire, as well as the experiences they had gone through preceding the fire, to all of which the forest ranger lent an attentive ear.

"Hm-m-m!" he mused. "Reckon you haven't heard the last of that outfit. Tatem'll have it up his sleeve for you long as he lives. Keep your eyes peeled. That Dusenbery outfit is the biggest set of timber thieves in the North Woods and I hope we catch 'em. Do I understand that your husband is looking for 'timber-lookers' who are looking for easy money on the sly, Mrs. Gray?"

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"He may be," smiled Grace diplomatically.

"Mebby I'll run across him. Thanks for the snack. Thanks to you, Miss Dean, for the wolf suggestion. I'll pass it on to the Game and Fish Commissioner at St. Paul. I'll be off now."

"How about this campfire, 'Chatty'? Do you still insist that we put it out?" questioned Hippy solemnly.

"Well," answered the ranger, stroking his chin reflectively, "being as its you and further, being that I've broken bacon with you and heard a real funny joke from Miss Dean here, I reckon I don't. 'Bye, folks. See you some other time." The ranger led out his horse, mounted and rode away.

"That obstacle overcome," announced Miss Briggs in a tone of relief, "I wonder what next."

"If you will kindly cast your eyes downstream I think you will discover three more obstacles on the way to the Overland camp, and, from the look of them, I am inclined to feel that they are not harbingers of delight. Girls, this really seems to be our 'Day at Home,'" said Grace Harlowe laughingly.

"Good night!" exclaimed Hippy Wingate after a quick glance downstream. "Give Henry a poke in the ribs, Joe. Here's more trouble!"

CHAPTER XV

THE WAY OF THE BIG WOODS

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Three horsemen were seen approaching as rapidly as the uneven going would permit. Two of the trio were holding their rifles under their arms at a position indicating readiness for instant action.

The Overlanders were observing them narrowly, and especially Joe Shafto, who, having seen

them first, and being suspicious of the newcomers, had run for her rifle and thrown herself down behind a log, commanding Henry to follow. The only other member of the Overland Riders who had a weapon handy was Lieutenant Wingate, who wore the heavy service revolver that he had carried while a fighting air pilot in France.

Hippy's hand was close to the butt of his revolver, but he made no effort to draw it, even though he believed that he and his party were about to have trouble.

"Keep clear, girls, and give me room," he warned. "May have to shoot."

As the three strangers, one leading the way, reached the edge of the camp, the two rear riders threw up their rifles and covered the Overland party with them.

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"Put up yer hands!" came the command, sharp and incisive.

"Put up your own," flung back Lieutenant Wingate, and the newcomers found themselves facing his weapon. "Tag! You're it. What is this, anyway?"

"Drop that aire gun or I'll let ye have a hunk of lead!" threatened one of the strangers.

"No you won't. You haven't the nerve. I'll tell you what I will do. I will put my revolver back in its holster provided you put down your own weapons. If you make a move to shoot I will draw and wing you before you can pull a trigger. If you don't believe me, try it. At the same time, old tops, I would advise you that, though you don't know it, you are already covered by a repeating rifle, and further, that should you make a false move, the rifle is likely to go off." With that Hippy Wingate thrust his revolver into its holster. "Your move. What's the joke?" he demanded, casting a quick glance at the log behind which the forest woman was hiding, and observing that her rifle barrel protruded over the log ever so little, though the woman herself was not visible.

The men did not lower their weapons, but the rider in advance rode right into the camp.

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"You carrying guns? I mean game guns—rifles?" questioned the man in a tone of severity.

"Yes."

"Shot anything?"

"Not yet, but I came near shooting two men just now," answered Hippy, scowling as savagely as he knew how.

"Let me see 'em!"

"There's one of them. Look at it! On that log yonder," he added, pointing to Joe Shafto's rifle. "Want to see the rest of them?"

"I reckon that's enough," answered the stranger. "I've heard that ye folks was a tough bunch, and up here for a big killing. I'm the game warden. I don't suppose ye even went to the trouble to git a license to hunt in this state. Folks like you think they can git away with most anything, but ye can't do it in these parts."

"Game warden, eh? You guessed wrong, old Santa Claus. I have a license. We all have licenses and we propose to do some hunting when the season opens, though that is not the main purpose of our journey up here."

"Show me."

Hippy handed his license to the warden, which that officer read with frowning attention. Handing it back he demanded to see the licenses of the others, which Lieutenant Wingate had had the foresight to procure before the Overland Riders came west.

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"Reckon you're all right so far as licenses is concarned, but ye can't carry guns up here till the season—the game season's open," said the game warden, handing back the licenses.

"It's always an open season for the kind of game we are going to hunt," Hippy informed him.

"Eh? What kind's that?"

"Your kind," retorted Hippy sharply.

"That's all I've got to do with ye. I'd make ye give up the guns, but these gents have something to say to you folks. They'll take care of yer rifles and such."

The game warden backed his horse away. His two companions, taking their cue from his move, rode to the fore.

Hippy surveyed them narrowly.

"Here comes the rub," Miss Briggs confided to Grace.

"We're deputy sheriffs," announced one.

"Charmed, I'm sure," greeted Hippy, bowing with much dignity. "Making early calls seems to be the way of the Big Woods. What do you want? Let me see. So far to-day we have had two wardens and two deputy sheriffs. Speak your piece, but remember that you are covered. It's just as well while talking to me to keep your muzzles pointed towards the ground."

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"Are ye the fellows that burned up part of Section Forty-three?" asked the deputy.

"No. The fire did that. We are the fellows that put out the fire, or there would be nothing left of a good part of that section except blackened stumps and dead tree toads."

"Seeing as ye admit it, that's all right."

Hippy nodded. Grace and Elfreda had stepped up, just to the rear of Hippy, that they might miss nothing of what was being said. The second deputy kept a watchful eye on them, presumably to see that they played no tricks on his companion.

"The owner of that section, Hi Dusenbery, reckons as ye've got to pay fer the loss of the timber ye burned, and I'm here, fer one thing, to serve the papers on ye in the suit. Do ye accept service?"

Hippy reached for the papers that the deputy held out, and, without looking at them, tore them and dropped the fragments on the ground.

"You shouldn't have done that," rebuked Miss Briggs. "Grace, help me gather up the pieces. The idea!"

"Anything else?" demanded Lieutenant Wingate. "I have had about enough of this nonsense."

"I reckon there is something else. Ye're charged with bein' dangerous characters. Information has been laid against ye by one William Tatem, otherwise known as Peg Tatem, accusin' some person unknown, but belongin' to this party, of shootin' him through the leg." 155

"It was a wooden leg, and the shots were not fired by any person or persons in this party. We do not know who fired them," interrupted Hippy.

The deputy sheriffs grinned.

"Ye are further charged with causin' certain wild animals, to wit, a bear and a big ugly dog, to attack Peg Tatem and his men and do 'em injury, to wit, bites and scratches, not to speak of a bad scare."

"Well? There must be something more," urged Hippy. "What do you want me to do?"

"Peg opined that if ye would settle with him for the damages to his leg, and pay him for the scare ye give him, and settle with his jacks for what ye did to them, he might be willin' to let ye off."

Grace said something to Elfreda under her breath and Elfreda nodded. Both saw that Lieutenant Wingate's good nature was slipping from him, that his temper was rising.

"Don't do anything rash, Hippy," urged Grace in a low tone.

"If I refuse, what then?" he demanded belligerently, addressing the man. 156

"That's up to ye."

"I refuse to pay one copper cent!" roared Hippy. "Go tell that timber-legged friend of yours that if he bothers us again he will either get a bullet through his real leg or land in jail or both. Put that in your pipe and smoke it! I don't believe you are deputies at all."

"Then yer under arrest. The whole pack of ye is under arrest!" shouted the deputy, suddenly throwing up his rifle.

Bang!

A bullet whizzed past the deputy's head, fired from the ready rifle of Joe Shafto, who, with finger on the trigger, was glaring through her big horn-rimmed spectacles, alert for a suggestive move on the part of either of the three men, which would be the signal for another shot from her rifle.

CHAPTER XVI

WILLY HORSE SHOWS THE WAY

Elfreda laid a hand on Lieutenant Wingate's arm, then stepped between him and the deputy, who had lowered his rifle a little, hesitating, it appeared, whether to shoot and take his chances or to adopt the safer course. The fact that he chose the latter, and made no further effort to intimidate them with his weapon, was significant to Miss Briggs.

"Mister Man, I am a lawyer, and I will speak with you. I believe you just said that we are all under arrest," reminded Elfreda in an ordinary conversational tone. 157

"Ye are that, unless ye settle up," blustered the fellow.

"Then, of course, you have warrants. Have you?"

"Well, well, no, I reckon I hain't. Don't need none. I'm an officer of the law. This is my warrant," he said, tapping the rifle.

"We have similar arguments, arguments that are fully as potent," replied Miss Briggs significantly. "We decline to recognize any authority unless backed by proper credentials. What county are you from, may I inquire?"

158

"St. Louis County," grumbled the deputy.

"And your companion—is he from the same county?"

"Yes. Come! I ain't got time for per-laverin' around. Are ye goin' to pay up or go with us?"

"Neither! You have no warrant; you have no proof that you are officers of the law, and you admit that you are from St. Louis County. Grace, what county are we now in?"

"Beltrami County," replied Grace Harlowe, who had been consulting her map.

Miss Briggs nodded.

"Out of your jurisdiction, Mister Deputy! It might be in order for me to suggest that you remove your persons from our camp," finished Elfreda in the same even tone with which she had carried on the conversation throughout.

"I'll see whether ye'll go with us or not!" raged the deputy.

"Joe!" called Hippy sharply. "If these rough-necks don't go *instantly*, trim 'em right."

"Don't set Henry on them. They might hurt him," called Grace.

"Get out!" commanded Hippy.

The three men got, but before going they warned the Overland Riders that they would have the law on them for shooting at officers in the discharge of their duty.

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In reply, Hippy waved a hand and grinned, and the men rode away rather more rapidly than they had come into the camp.

"Great thought of yours, J. Elfreda," complimented Lieutenant Wingate.

"Elfreda uses her head, Hippy. How much better than flying into a rage and threatening your enemy with dire things," reminded Grace.

"You don't always do that yourself," retorted Hippy. "Thanks, Joe. Had it not been for you we might have had a disturbance."

"Aren't we ever going to have peace?" wailed Emma. "I know I shall have nervous prostration at this rate."

"Cheer up. Let the voice of nature soothe your troubled spirits and rise above such common things as mere officers of the law," comforted Hippy. "What next?"

"Suppose we break camp and move," suggested Grace.

"Yes, yes; let's do so," urged Anne.

"Do you think they will come back, darlin'?" questioned Nora anxiously.

"Not before it is time for the swallows to build their nests under the eaves."

Joe, muttering to herself, went out to fetch in her pack mules, June and July, preparatory to loading the equipment on them for the start. Joe was a little rougher with the animals than usual, and their ears, tilted back at a sharp angle, indicated their resentment, but the guide was too angry to notice this danger signal. A sharp slap on June's thigh to make the animal step over was followed by a lightning-like flash of two tough little mule heels, and Joe Shafto was lifted from her feet and hurled against July, and then July began to kick.

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The Overlanders, frightened for the safety of the guide, ran to assist her, when, out of the mix-up, leaped the forest woman, her hair tumbled down her back, and eyes blazing through the big horn-rimmed spectacles, she having rolled under July and out of the way with amazing agility.

"I'll larn ye, ye beasts!" she shrieked, running for her club.

June felt the sting of it, and July grunted as the club descended on the fleshy part of her hip, at the same instant shooting both hind feet into the air; but this time Joe was out of reach.

"Here, here!" cried Hippy, springing forward to interfere. "We don't permit any one to beat animals in this menagerie," he chided, grabbing the woman's club.

"Leggo!" shrieked Joe, wrenching the club from his hands. "No man ain't goin' to tell Joe Shafto what she kin do. Git out of here!" she raged, advancing threateningly on Hippy. "I'll paste them mules when I want to, and—"

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"That's all right, old dear," soothed Hippy, backing up laughingly, but Joe followed him, shaking the club before his face.

"Don't ye 'old dear' me. Mules is swine, and no better'n some men, and I give ye notice no man ain't goin' to come 'tween me and my mules. I'll paste 'em when I like, and I'll paste 'em like they did me, the varmints, and I won't have no animile that walks like a man interferin' 'tween me and the mules and tellin' me what ter do. Git out of here afore I give ye a wallop on the jaw, fer I'm goin' ter finish what I begun on June, and her name'll be December when I git through, and don't ye fergit it." Joe grabbed the mule by an ear, gave the animal a prod with her club, then slapped June's face.

"Consarn ye, ye pore insect that's tryin to look like a hoss, but that ain't even got the skin of one, I reckon ye'll be good arter this," she finished, and threw a pack over the back of the now thoroughly subdued pack-mule. "Git started, ye folks, and don't say nothin' to me, for I'm li'ble to git mad arter the stirrin' up them mules give me."

"*Alors!* Let's go," suggested Elfreda after the laughter of the Overlanders had subsided.

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They were on their way a short time later, laughing as they headed for the section on which they hoped eventually to meet Tom, and make permanent camp. The forest woman had never been in that part of the woods, but, knowing the general direction, thought she could hold to it and come out somewhere near the spot they desired to reach.

That night they lay down to sleep in the open, wrapped in their blankets. For the week following the Overland Riders camped out in the same way, and nothing occurred to mar the life of freedom and happiness that they were leading.

The river had been left to the right of them, for the sake of what Joe said might be better going, and a fairly direct course was followed for several days more. One night, however, they suddenly found themselves on the banks of the Little Big Branch where it had taken a deep bend. Hippy declared that it had made the bend to be near Emma and murmur sweet nothings in her ear.

"Listen well, little one," he admonished. "Tidings from the frozen north, as well as messages intended for our ears alone, may be borne to us through you. It is mighty fortunate that we have you with us."

The bank of the river was their camp that night. The party slept just under the bluff, protected by it and lulled to sleep by the gently rippling waters of the forest stream. Early on the following morning they were aroused by an uproar in the camp. Out of the uproar came the shrill voice of their guide.

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"Get out of here, ye lazy good-for-nothin'. Think this 'ere is a lumberjack hotel? Sick 'im, Henry! Sick 'im!" raged Joe Shafto.

Grace, hearing the bear growl, sprang up and ran out. Her companions were not far behind her.

Sitting crouched over the campfire, which he had built, calmly cooking his breakfast, was the Indian, Willy Horse, wholly undisturbed by the uproar that his presence had created.

"Call off the bear!" commanded Grace sharply. "The man is our friend."

"He's a lazy good-for-nothin' and he's stole yer breakfast," protested the forest woman, as she headed off Henry and drove him back with sundry prods of her foot.

"Good morning, Mr. Horse," greeted Emma.

"Mornin'," answered the Indian briefly.

Grace by this time was shaking hands with him; then the Overland girls surrounded him and demanded to know why he had not been to see them before.

Emma started to tell Willy what a lot of trouble they had been in when Grace interjected a remark that caused Elfreda to wonder.

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"Perhaps Willy Horse knows more about our late unpleasantnesses than you do, Emma," said Grace.

"Hello, old man. How are you?" cried Hippy, striding forward with outstretched hand.

"How do! You Big Friend. Me make breakfast fire here."

"Help yourself," urged the girls.

"All yours," added Hippy with a wave of the hand that encompassed the entire camp.

"Not includin' the guide," differed Joe Shafto.

Grace told Willy to wait until their breakfast was ready and eat with them, but the Indian shook his head and stolidly continued preparing his own breakfast. When it was ready he ate it, then sat back and smoked his pipe.

"See other Big Friend," he finally vouchsafed.

"Tom Gray?" questioned Grace, instantly divining who Willy meant.

The Indian nodded his head.

"Him say all right," he added after an interval of puffing. "Say him come along bymeby. Say Willy Horse show you place to camp. Me show."

"That will be fine. Did my husband say when he expected to join us?" asked Grace.

"Say him come along soon. You see other white men?" Willy bent a steady look on the face of Hippy Wingate.

165

"I should say we have. Deputy sheriffs, game wardens and a forest ranger."

"Yes, and we saw a fellow named Peg Tatem. We had a fight with him," Emma informed their visitor.

"So?"

"Yes, we did, Mr. Horse. And some one shot a hole through his wooden leg. Who do you suppose could have done that?"

"Big Friend, huh?" he questioned, looking up at Hippy.

"Not guilty," answered Hippy with a shake of the head.

"How come?" demanded the Indian.

Emma Dean told him the story, Willy listening gravely, puffing slowly at his pipe, eyes fixed on the campfire. He smoked on in silence for some time after the conclusion of her narrative.

"Mebby Willy find out," he grunted.

"You suspect, don't you?" demanded Elfreda, who had been narrowly observing the Indian.

"Make breakfast. We go soon. Willy show where make camp." With that the Indian rose, turned his back on them and loped into the forest. They saw no more of him for fully two hours, and were already packed up and on their way when they saw him standing with shoulder against a great tree, watching their approach.

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"You come along. Willy show," he directed as Hippy came abreast of him.

"How long will it take to reach this camp?" asked Lieutenant Wingate.

"Long time. Next sundown."

"To-morrow's or to-day's sundown?" demanded Emma.

"To-morrow."

Willy resumed his Indian gait, shoulders leaning forward, toes pointed inward, his center of gravity well forward, and in this position he trotted along for hours. The party halted at noon, but Willy Horse jogged on ahead and was soon out of sight. He rejoined them after they had resumed their journey and did not again stop until just before dark when he announced that they would camp where they were. The Indian then made browse-beds in the open for the Overland girls, and again disappeared.

"What's the matter with that pesky savage?" demanded the forest woman. "He's wuss'n the bear."

Hippy suggested that perhaps the Indian had gone off by himself to listen to the voices of nature.

"Perhaps he has gone away to shoot somebody's wooden leg," suggested Emma demurely.

Elfreda nodded, and said she too was convinced that Willy Horse had fired the shots that shattered Peg Tatem's wooden leg, and the girls agreed with her. They never got any nearer to the truth of that occurrence, for, when questioned later about it, Willy Horse seemed unable to understand what they were talking about.

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The Indian did not reappear until the following morning. That day he led them a long chase and kept the Overlanders at a fast jog. How he ever stood up under it they could not imagine, and when they stopped he was breathing naturally, and did not appear to be in the least fatigued.

"Come camp to-night," he told them when asked how near they were to their destination.

The woman guide had little to say, but her sour expression told the Overlanders that she was not pleased that the Indian was leading them.

The skies clouded over late in the afternoon, and later a drizzling rain set in, but they continued on, well protected by their waterproof coats, the hoods of which covered their heads. Henry, however, was a disconsolate-looking object, but Hindenburg, riding in Hippy's saddle bag, was dry and cosy, sleeping soundly as the rain pattered on his sleeping quarters.

Night found the party still some little distance from its destination, and Willy Horse was appealed to for encouragement. Emma wanted to camp where they were but the others

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outvoted her, so on they rode.

From then on the journey was an unpleasant one. The shins of the riders were barked from contact with trees. Low-hanging limbs of small second-growth trees slapped their faces and deluged the riders with water, and altogether they were experiencing about the most unpleasant ride that they had ever taken, except possibly that across the Great American Desert earlier in their vacation riding.

Grace, perhaps, was the only exception, in that she found herself enjoying the unusual experience and the excitement of it, for the stumbles of the ponies were frequent; here and there a tree was heard to fall crashing to earth, and, high and piercing on the soggy night air, they occasionally heard the mournful howl of a wolf.

"There goes seven dollars and a half," Emma would wail every time a wolf howled.

Willy Horse finally shouted and indicated by a gesture, which was revealed to the riders in the rear by Hippy's lamp, that he was about to change his course. The Indian turned sharply to the right, proceeded in a direct line for half a mile, as nearly as the Riders could judge, then threw his arm straight up into the air.

"Be we there?" yelled the forest woman.

"We be. That is, we're here, but whether here is there or somewhere else you will have to search the Indian for the answer. I don't know," answered Hippy.

169

"Wait! Me make fire," directed Willy.

The Overlanders, having sat their saddles so long, were literally sticking to the leather, but wrenched themselves loose, slid off and leaned against the steaming sides of their ponies, while water from the trees filtered over them and ran in rivulets down their coats.

The flame of a cheerful campfire showed through the mist and was greeted with a hoarse cheer by the cold Overland Riders.

"Is this the place where we are to stay until Mr. Gray joins us?" called Grace.

"Yes," answered the Indian.

"Land sakes! I never could have found it," exclaimed the forest woman. "Leastwise not in the dark. Reckon I might a follered the river and got here somehow, but not the way that pesky savage took us, and ter think I had ter be showed by a heathen how to get here."

The fire flamed into a snapping blaze, and then to the delight of the party, they saw near at hand a large lean-to and two smaller ones.

"Willy, did you make them for us?" wondered Anne.

"Yes. Me make 'em."

"But, they must be soaked through," protested Nora. "How shall we be able to sleep in a lean-to on a night like this."

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"No leak. Bark on roof," the Indian informed her.

"Come, girls. Let us stake down and get close to that fire. I am shivering," urged Elfreda.

"I expect my pup is too," said Hippy. "And the bear. Oh, where is he?"

Henry had disappeared and his master was too busy to bother about him.

After building a cook fire, Willy ran out into the forest, returning soon thereafter with several large slices of bear meat, from stores that he had safely cached, which he proceeded to fry over the fire while Mrs. Shafto was boiling water for tea and opening cans of beans. The girls threw off their wet garments and sank luxuriously into the browse floor of their lean-to.

"Oh, girls, this is worth all the discomforts we have been through, isn't it?" cried Anne enthusiastically.

"I don't know whether it is or not," answered Emma sourly. "Any port in a storm, you know."

Hippy came in wet and dripping after caring for the ponies, with Hindenburg tucked safely under his coat.

"Reminds me of France," he exclaimed jovially. "Say, children, may my Hindenburg sleep in your quarters to-night? It will be warmer and more comfortable for him than in mine."

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"No!" shouted the Overland girls.

"He may sleep in the attic," suggested Emma. "Otherwise, on the roof. Hippy, why do you keep that animal around? What is he good for except to eat and sleep?"

"Don't you malign my bull pup. He is a watch dog, the best ever, and—" Hippy's remaining words were lost in the shout of laughter that interrupted him.

"Oh, Hippy, you are a scream," exclaimed Grace. "You know very well that the only thing

Hindenburg has watched since we started, is the food, and always he has watched for us to throw some of it to him. Yes, he is a wonderful watch dog."

All were now crowded into the lean-to, except Willy, who, after cooking the bear-meat, said "Bye," and went away.

Good-nights were said early that evening and all hands turned in after Mrs. Shafto had fed what was left of the supper to Henry. The bear had come in immediately after getting the odor of one of his relatives being cooked over the Overland Riders' campfire.

Rain roared on the bark roofs of the lean-tos all night long, but the girls, dry and cosy, slept the night through without once awakening, with Henry on guard out there sitting under a tree in a disconsolate attitude, now and then wearily licking the water from his coat. Hindenburg, more favored, slept cuddled between Lieutenant Wingate's feet.

The present camp, it was understood between the Overlanders and Tom Gray, was to be a permanent camp for some time to come, and it was here that some of the most exciting scenes of their journey through the Great North Woods were to be witnessed by them.

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CHAPTER XVII

IN THE INDIAN TEPEE

The rain had ceased, when Grace, the first of her party to awaken, looked out as she lay on her browse bed. The river was shining in the morning sun, glassy, save here and there where its waters rippled over a shallow of gravel.

"Turn out!" she shouted. "This is too wonderful to miss. Oh, look!"

A canoe, with an Indian crouching in its stern wielding a paddle, was skimming across the stream, not a sound or splash of paddle, nor hardly a ripple from it to be heard or seen.

"It's Willy Horse. Hurry, girls! Don't miss this wonderful nature canvas."

Exclamations were heard from all the girls after they had rubbed the sleep from their eyes. By then Willy was nearing their shore, and the bow of his canoe, a real birch canoe made by himself, landed on the beach, whereupon, Willy threw out a mess of speckled trout, sufficient for breakfast for the entire party, amid little cries of delight from the girls.

174

"Hey there, Thundercloud! Are those all for my breakfast?" called Hippy from his lean-to.

"Hippy!" rebuked Nora.

"Oh, send him out in the woods to eat with Henry," advised Emma.

While the Overland girls were washing at the river, Willy cleaned the fish and handed them to the forest woman who already had the cook fire going. And such a breakfast as the Overland party had that morning! Following the meal they made Willy take them for a ride in his canoe, two at a time; then Hippy and the bull pup took a skim up and down the river with Willy at the paddle.

"All we need now to make us feel like real aborigines is an Indian wigwam or a tepee," suggested Grace to her companions.

"What is the difference between them?" asked Miss Briggs.

"A tepee is a temporary home; the wigwam is the Indian's permanent abiding place."

"Me make," announced Willy.

"Oh, Mister Horse! Will you really?" giggled Emma.

Willy grunted, and, shoving off his canoe, paddled swiftly away. He returned an hour later, the canoe loaded with strips of birch bark which he carefully laid on the shore. The Indian then trotted off into the forest. On this trip he fetched an armful of "lodge"-poles. After trimming them, he tied three together with a long deerskin thong, about eighteen inches from the tops of the poles, carrying the thong about them a few times and leaving the end of it trailing down. The rest of the poles he stood against the sides of the tripod at regular intervals all the way around.

175

"Oh, it's an Indian house!" cried Emma. "It really is."

Thus far the work had been quickly accomplished, and now came the enclosing of the structure. This Willy did by laying strips of bark on the sloping "lodge"-poles, carrying the leather thong about them to hold the bark firmly against the poles. The entrance, formed by spreading poles

apart, faced the waters of the Little Big Branch.

The tepee was finished shortly before eleven o'clock that morning, when Willy hung a blanket of deerhide over the doorway. As yet, none of the Overlanders had been permitted to look in and when they asked if they might do so, "You wait. Me fix," answered the Indian, ducking into the house he had created, and in a few moments they saw wisps of smoke curling up from the peak of the tepee through the opening left by the tops of the "lodge"-poles.

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"You come," announced the Indian as he stepped out.

The girls lost no time in crawling into the tepee. Cries of delight rose with the smoke of the lodge-fire that Willy had made with a few sticks and pieces of bark, as they found themselves in a circular room fully ten feet in diameter, in the center of which crackled a comforting little fire, the draft carrying the smoke straight up and out of the tepee.

"What if it should rain?" questioned Emma apprehensively.

"Me put cover over top," answered the Indian, whose stolid expressionless face was peering in at them. "No rain come along. You like?"

Miss Briggs got up and offered her hand to him.

"We do, Willy. But why do you do so much for us?" she asked.

"Willy's Big Friends," he answered gruffly, and started to back out, but the girls would not let him go until each had shaken hands with him and thanked him.

"By the way, where do you live?" wondered Nora.

"Summer time live on reservation. Hunting time live up here in tepee. Me show. Me go hunting, too. Mebby shoot deer, mebby big moose. Bye!"

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Grace Got One Spill and Essayed Another Attempt.

"Oh, don't go away," begged Grace. "We like to have you here, and I wish, too, that you would let me paddle that beautiful canoe. It is the first bark canoe I have ever seen. I know how to paddle a modern canoe, but I saw this morning that the bark boat is an entirely different craft. Will you teach me?"

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"Me show. Go meet Big Friend now."

"Bring him back with you, Willy," urged Grace, but the Indian already had withdrawn, and when they looked out he had gone.

"Hey, you folks!" called Hippy, who was grooming Hindenburg with a horse brush. "Where is the dinner?"

Grace said she had forgotten all about it, and that Mrs. Shafto had gone out to try to shoot a duck.

"In the meantime we starve, eh? Hindenburg is so hungry that his sides are caving in, and the bear has gone out into the woods to eat leaves. By the way, Willy Hoss's canoe is down yonder hidden under the bushes. He said you were to use it, Grace. He has gone away."

After dinner, which was more in the nature of a luncheon, Mrs. Shafto came into camp with three ducks which she had shot, and promised her charges that they should have stuffed roast duck for supper.

That afternoon Grace tried the canoe. She got one spill and was soaked to the skin, but crawled back to shore laughing at her mishap, and essayed another attempt.

"I thought my canoe was cranky, but this beats everything," she called to her companions as she again floated out on the stream in the bark canoe. The Overland girl practiced for half an hour, during which she got the hang of the cranky bark canoe and did very well paddling it.

"Let me try it," begged Emma.

"You will not," objected Hippy. "Think I want to plunge into that cold water and rescue you?"

"Do you think I am simple enough to fall in?" demanded Emma indignantly.

"Yes, and as often as I could pull you out. Then again, you would lose yourself listening to the voices of nature and get into a fine, wet mess. That nature stuff makes me weary."

Emma did not paddle the canoe that day, nor did any of the others express a desire to do so. They saw no more of the Indian that day, and that night the girls spread their blankets in the tepee.

"We must have a fire in here for the sake of cheerfulness," urged Anne.

"Yes. And burn ourselves up," objected Emma.

"There should be no danger unless we roll into the fire in our sleep," answered Miss Briggs.

A small fire was kindled in the tepee, and, for a long time after they had gone in for the night, the Overland girls sat with feet doubled under them, enjoying the novel sensation of having for their use a real Indian tepee, and listening to Joe Shafto relate some of her experiences in the Big North Woods.

The conversation was interrupted by Henry who poked his nose into the tepee and sniffed the air inquisitively. A slight tap on his nose by the guide sent the bear scampering away. After a hearty laugh at Henry's expense, the girls rolled up in their blankets and went to sleep not to awaken again until sunrise, when they were jolted out of their dreams by a loud halloo.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRAIL OF THE PIRATES

"Tom's here!" shouted Grace. "All right, Tom. We will be out as soon as we can find our way out of this roundhouse," she laughed, feeling for the opening that, in the subdued light, looked like all the rest of the tepee wall.

Tom was bronzed and happy, and after greeting the girls he inquired for Henry and Hindenburg.

"The bear's out lookin' for his breakfast," answered the forest woman.

"And the bull pup is asleep. He keeps bankers' hours instead of attending to his business," complained Emma.

After breakfast Tom told them of his work in the forest, adding that he had observed evidences of the recent presence of timber-pirates.

"That is, I have found their blazes, secret cuttings on trees in remote sections. This discovery I have marked on the map, and will inform the authorities after I have finished 'cruising' the Pineries. This afternoon I shall work north to look over some virgin forest ground near here. Come along with me, won't you, Hippy?"

"Sure thing. We'll take Hindenburg for protection," agreed Hippy.

"Why not take the rest of the party?" suggested Grace.

"This is a business trip," replied Tom. "Of course you can go if you wish, but it were better not, for we shall have to rough it in the real sense of the word. Willy wants to go out with me, and may join us up river sometime to-day."

"Where is the measly redskin, Cap'n?" demanded Joe.

"He has gone downstream. Willy has a camp a short distance below here. That Indian is a real man."

"We have found him so," agreed Elfreda.

Joe Shafto grunted disdainfully.

Tom remained at the camp until after dinner, replenished his supplies, including a stuffed duck which the forest woman prepared for him; then he and Hippy set out on their ponies for up-river points.

"What is in the wind, Tom?" questioned Lieutenant Wingate after they got under way. "I know you had some good reason other than merely desiring my company, or you would not have asked me to go with you."

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Tom laughed heartily.

"A little of both, Lieutenant. I hear that timber-pirates have been making some cuttings above here, and I wish you to go along as a witness to what I may find. That's all."

"No scraps in sight, eh?"

"Oh, no."

Hippy sighed.

"Tell me about it."

"Timber thieves seek the remote places and look for suitable plots that can be cut off and floated downstream to the mills. There the logs are thrown in with other logs, and branded on one end to correspond with such logs as have been procured in a legitimate way. Should the pirates be discovered, they frequently buy the plot, if they represent a big concern, and nothing more is done so far as the authorities are concerned."

"You don't mean to say that reputable lumber companies go in for anything of that sort, do you?" wondered Hippy.

"I did not say 'reputable.' Of course not. All big concerns are not necessarily reputable in the sense you mean, but there is many a man to-day who holds his head high in the world, though the foundation of his business was stolen timber."

Hippy uttered a low whistle of amazement.

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"Look there!" exclaimed Tom Gray late in the afternoon as they rode into a "cutting" from which the timber had been removed. Several acres had been cut off, and skidways built up for more extensive operations, probably for that very season.

Upon consulting his map, the forester found, as he had expected, that the timber was not charted as belonging to private individuals. Tom pointed to a man-made dam in the river. It had been constructed of spiles—small logs, driven in like posts, set so that they leaned upstream. The water gates were open, and, upon examination, showed that logs had been floated there, for the marks of the logs were visible on the sides of the gates and on the tops of the spiles. Added to this, the floor of the dam was covered with last season's logs, hundreds of them.

"Will you please tell me why a dam is necessary to lumbering?" questioned Lieutenant Wingate.

"To provide a good head of water on which to float logs down to the mills when the river is low. The logs are dumped into the dam until it is full; the gates are then opened and the logs go booming down towards the mills. To be fully equipped there should be a second dam above this one to wash down such timber as fails to clear. We will go on further and see what we find."

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They found the second dam, constructed across the river at a narrow spot. It had been quite recently built, as Tom Gray found upon examining the spiles and comparing their age with those of the lower dam.

"This looks to me like a fine piece of timber," he announced with a sweeping gesture that took in the great trees that surrounded them. "We will cruise as far as we can before dark and go over the rest of the section to-morrow."

"And you believe 'pirates' are trying to hog all they can of it, do you?" questioned Hippy.

"There can be no doubt of it. We have evidence of that."

"Suppose some one should step in and buy the section—what then?"

"It would serve the robbers right," declared Tom Gray with emphasis.

"What is the section worth?"

"Too much money for us. Say fifty to seventy-five thousand dollars, or even more if it is owned by private persons. If the state owns it, the latter figure probably would be about what one would have to pay for the timber rights."

"At the latter price how much could a fellow expect to clear on the deal?" persisted Hippy.

Tom said it would depend upon whether one sold the logs delivered at the mill, or worked them into lumber at his own mill. It was his opinion that the holder should earn a profit of a hundred thousand dollars or more, in the latter instance, provided he had proper shipping facilities.

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"Of course, here you have the river on which to float your logs down to the mill, which should be located at or near the lakes," added Tom.

"Look it over carefully to-morrow. I am getting interested to know more about the lumber business. One can't have too much knowledge, you know. Now that we have sold our coal lands in Kentucky, you and I are interested in high finance. Eh, Tom?"

"Thanks to you, Hippy, we are."

The coal lands to which Hippy referred were part of an estate that had been willed to him by an admiring uncle while Lieutenant Wingate was a member of the United States Army Air Forces in France. The Overland Riders had made the Kentucky Mountains the scene of their summer's outing the year before their present journey, and there experienced many stirring adventures. Hippy, at first, decided to work the mines himself, with Tom Gray as his partner, but that winter they received an offer for the property and sold it outright for a large sum of money, which Lieutenant Wingate insisted they should share equally.

The two friends, after sitting about their campfire until a late hour that night discussing the subject that had taken strong hold of Hippy's mind, lay down to sleep in the open.

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Immediately after breakfast next morning Tom and Hippy started out to make a thorough "cruise" of the pine trees in the section from which a few acres of logs had been cut. They finished their work late in the afternoon, but Tom did not venture a further opinion on what he had seen until they were on their way to their camp, where they had decided to remain another night.

"Well?" demanded Hippy finally. "Speak up! How about it, Tom?"

"Hippy, you have looked upon the finest plot of virgin timber to be found anywhere outside the states of Oregon and Washington. I wish someone would buy it and beat those pirates out. It is a burning shame to let them get away with it."

"Where would one have to go to find out about it?"

"St. Paul, possibly. Why?"

"I was just wondering, that's all," answered Lieutenant Wingate thoughtfully.

Hippy asked who owned the timber adjoining the section, but Tom did not know that any individual owned it because the map showed that it was still a part of the state forest reserve.

"You see these maps were issued some months ago, and many changes may have taken place in that time, though they are really supposed to be up to date."

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"Is Willy likely to be up here to-day, Tom?"

"No. I asked him to keep within easy reach of the Overland camp at night while we are away."

Willy, being a man of his word, guarded the Overland camp jealously for two nights, but on the morning of the next day, just before daybreak, he started to go upstream and look for the two absent men, his understanding being that they were to be away but one night. He was hiking along the river bank when Hippy, who had remained with the horses while his companion went into the forest for a final brief survey before starting for home, discovered the Indian who hailed him.

"How do?" greeted the Indian.

"Nothing wrong at camp, is there?" questioned the Overland Rider anxiously.

"No. Me come see where Big Friends go."

"That is fine. You are just the man I wish to see. Who cut off this timber, Willy?" indicating the cutting that he and Tom had first discovered.

"Not know. Somebody steal um."

"That is what Captain Gray says. Perhaps it was cut by a new owner—someone who has bought this plot, Willy."

The Indian, gazing on the stumps in the clearing with expressionless eyes, shook his head slowly.

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"This section belongs to the state, I think," ventured Hippy.

"No belong state."

"Who, then?"

"Belong Chief Iron-Toe. Him Chippewa chief—Big Chief."

Lieutenant Wingate became instantly alert.

"Are you positive of that, Willy?"

The Indian nodded.

"Do you know the gentleman with the iron toe?"

"Him my father."

Hippy was a little taken back by the answer, but his eagerness for more information overcame what might have become embarrassment.

"Your father! Do you think he would sell the section?" he asked eagerly.

"No sell."

"But I wish to buy it, Willy."

"You buy?" questioned the Indian, regarding Lieutenant Wingate thoughtfully.

"Yes."

"You Big Friend. Me fix."

"Do you mean it?"

"Me fix."

"Good. When?"

"Next sun-up. We go Chippewa Reservation."

"How far?"

"Two sun ride."

"Say nothing to anyone about this. I'll say whatever is necessary to my friends. You wake me when you think best to start for the Chippewa Reservation to-morrow morning and we will be off. Want a horse, Willy?"

"Me take pony."

It was settled, and on the way back to the camp of the Overlanders during that afternoon Hippy confided his plan to Tom Gray, but Tom was doubtful of its success. He said he already knew what Hippy had had in mind, and that if he were able to buy the section for anything within reason there would be a fortune in it.

"Will you go in on the deal with me?" asked Hippy.

"Yes, if you keep within my resources. Thanks to you for letting me in on your coal land deal in Kentucky I have some funds that I can use. That was like giving the money to me, and I have been ashamed of myself ever since for letting you drag me into any such deal."

"Chop it, Tom. As Willy would say, 'You Big Friend.' Say nothing to any of the folks, unless you wish to confide in Grace. I shall, of course, tell Nora where I am going and why."

During the rest of the journey back to the Overland camp, the two men discussed the plan of action that Hippy should follow—provided he got the timber plot—the hiring of men and the purchase of equipment, and, by the time they had reached the Overland camp, all details were settled. Nothing was said to either Grace or Nora until that evening, when the two Overland men confided their plans to their wives.

Next morning, before the camp was astir, the Indian had awakened Lieutenant Wingate and the man and the Indian had ridden away in the dark of the early morning.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

"What ye moonin' 'bout?" demanded Joe Shafto, giving Nora Wingate a prod with a long bony finger.

"I am worrying about Mr. Wingate, Mrs. Shafto. He was to have been back in two days, and here it is nearly two weeks since he and the Indian went away."

"Indians is all varmints, anyway, but don't ye worry 'bout that man of yers. Ain't worth it. None of 'em is."

"Don't you say that about my Hippy," rebuked Nora indignantly. "I love my husband, just as you loved yours."

The forest woman laughed harshly.

"Ain't no such thing as love. A man's just a man, kind of handy to do the chores and bring home the venison. Henry's worth a whole pack of husbands, and I kin wallop Henry when he don't mind. Best thing 'bout Henry is that he can't jaw back at me."

"He can growl at you, can't he?" returned Nora, laughing in spite of her worry.

"He kin, and he kin git a clip on the jaw, like I give my man once. No, sir. Bears is better company than is men. I know for I've tried 'em both. Take my advice and when ye wants to git another husband, jest git a bear instead."

"But bears are beasts," laughed Grace, who had joined the two in time to hear Mrs. Shafto's advice.

"So's men. Bears growl—so does men. Mules kick, like June and July—so does men. Animiles live for nothin' but to git fed and sleep. So does men. What's the difference?"

The girls laughed heartily.

"Your logic is excellent, but your philosophy is not sound," replied Grace. "There is such a thing as companionship and helpfulness, and the finer things of human association."

The forest woman sniffed.

"Ain't no such thing," she retorted. Joe stalked away to attend to her duties, and in a few moments the Overland girls heard her berating the bear.

Tom Gray, during the period of Lieutenant Wingate's absence, had made frequent trips to the section that Hippy wished to buy, and now knew to a certainty that it was a prize plot of timber. Tom was in the Overland camp on this particular day, mapping out the timber tract in detail, though with little idea that it could be purchased at a price within their means. He was at work on the map when he heard Hindenburg barking excitedly.

"Something unusual must be on to make the bull pup raise such a disturbance," muttered Tom, tossing his map aside and crawling from the tepee.

He saw Nora was running, crying out that Hippy had returned.

"Hooray! Meet me with food!" shouted Hippy. "I've been living on iron rations for two days because bears ate up our fresh stuff and tried to eat the mess kits too. Hulloa, Tom!"

"What luck?" asked Tom, after shaking hands.

"The best. We have met the enemy and he's 'ourn,' as Mother Shafto would say. Don't ask me a question until my stomach begins to function."

A luncheon was quickly prepared, and Hippy had plenty of attention, all the girls standing about while he ate, ready hands passing food until Hippy could eat no more.

"Where's that pesky Indian?" demanded the guide, frowning.

"He is coming along with a bunch of men and supplies to show them the way to our claim. Twenty jacks, a cook and a fiddler will be here late this afternoon, together with a knock-down bunk-house, sufficient food supplies for two weeks, tools, and I've got a supply of cash to pay the hands. Now what have you to say for yourself, Tom Gray?"

"I was waiting to inquire what sort of a deal you made."

"Say, folks! Had it not been for Willy Horse I should not have got the property at all. That chief with the iron toes is a shrewd old duffer. He has owned the property for some years, and all that time the Hiram Dusenbery Company has been trying, by fair means or otherwise, to buy it of him, but Old Iron-Toe put the price so high that they preferred to wait, hoping that when he got hard up he might be willing to sell for less."

"Did he know that timber-thieves had been helping themselves to trees?" questioned Elfreda.

"No. Willy told him. Willy saw the chief first and the deal really was made before I even saw the old fellow. Well, we smoked a pipe of peace together and he didn't say a word for a whole hour after I was introduced. Finally he grunted:

"You Big Friend Willy Horse. Big Friend me, too. What you give?"

"I told him to make his own price and I would consider it—that I wished to take no advantage, nor did I desire to pay a price that would not leave me a profit. Well, we sat and the chief smoked for another hour.

"You give ten thousand money. You give one-eighth what you make to Chief Iron-Toe. You Big Friend."

"It's a bargain!" I said, just like that. Old Iron-Toe handed me his pipe again. I took another pull at it. Bah! It was awful. It nearly strangled me, but it sealed the compact. We went to the county seat where the property was transferred to Wingate & Gray and the deed filed, after which I gave him my check for ten thousand dollars."

Tom, who had been doing some rapid figuring while Lieutenant Wingate was speaking, glanced up, smiling.

"I don't know how you did it, but you have a wonderful bargain. There is a fortune in those trees."

"I didn't do it at all. Willy Horse did it, and he is going to have the best job that can be dug up for him, provided my influence has weight with the firm of Wingate & Gray. Tom, it's up to you, now. You are the brains of this establishment. Go to it. I've done my share so far as it has gone."

"You have, indeed. How is the equipment being brought in?"

"By mule teams. I reckon, too, that they will have a fine tune getting in here on the trail that leads to the Dusenbery Company's works above our section and—"

"I say, Mister Lieutenant, do I understand ye to say that a pa'cel of lumberjacks is comin' here?" interrupted Joe Shafto.

"Yes."

"Then I quits right now. Don't want no truck with them critters."

"That's all right, old dear. You just keep right on with the outfit, and if a lumberjack so much as looks at you, set the bear on him. I know what Henry can do in that direction, having had a run-in with him myself."

"Don't ye 'old-dear' me!" growled Joe. "Started that agin, have ye? Miss Wingate, if ye don't tame that husband of yers with a club, I will." Joe winked at Nora as she said it.

"Leave him to me, Mrs. Shafto. Hippy, go wash your face. You are a perfect sight. I'm positively ashamed of you."

"That's all right, Nora. That relieves me of the necessity of being ashamed of myself. Joe, you merely imagine that you dislike lumberjacks. There are some good fellows among them. They aren't all so bad as you paint them," said Hippy soothingly.

The forest woman flared up.

"I hate the whole pack and pa'cel of 'em! I-hate 'em wuss'n a scalded pup hates vinegar on his back. I'll stay, of course, but I'll sick Henry on 'em if they bothers me; then I'll turn my back and fergit that Henry's chawin' up a human bein'. So there!"

The Overland girls laughed merrily, and Grace linking an arm into the guide's led her down to the river where the two sat down, Grace to give Joe Shafto friendly advice, and Joe to accept it as she would from no other member of the Overland Riders.

In the meantime Tom and Hippy were discussing their plans. They spent a good part of the day doing so. After dinner Grace and Elfreda paddled up the river in the bark canoe, returning just before supertime, faces flushed from their exercise, and eyes sparkling.

Early next morning Willy Horse and the advance guard of the timber outfit arrived on the scene, as was evidenced by sundry shouts up-river. Tom and Hippy hurried upstream to meet the party, and later in the day the Overland girls came up to watch the work already in progress. A knock-down bunk-house was rapidly going up, and the cook with pots and kettles over a brisk fire in the open was preparing supper for the lumberjacks.

The jacks were a hardy two-fisted lot of men, Swedes, Norwegians, French Canadians, half-breeds and a few sturdy Americans, though the latter were greatly outnumbered. Tom was bossing the gang and doing it like a man who had handled lumberjacks before.

"Why so rough with them?" remonstrated Grace.

"Because I know the breed. Be easy with jacks and they think you are afraid of them, and will promptly take advantage of you. One must, not for a moment, let them feel that he is not master of the situation and of them. You will discover that sooner or later."

By night the bunk-house was ready for occupancy, though the bunks were not yet in place and the men would be obliged to sleep on the floor for one night at least. After a hearty supper, well cooked under the observant eyes of Tom Gray, the lumberjacks retired to their shack, and the sound of the fiddle and the shuffle of dancing feet, accompanied by shouts and yells, rose from the bunk-house, which was located near enough to the Overland Riders' camp to enable them to hear, and to see, if they wished, what was going on.

Willy Horse was the guest of the Overlanders, though he refused to eat with them, and sat all the evening by the fire saying never a word, which is the Indian's idea of friendly conversation.

On the following day, under Tom Gray's supervision, the construction of the dam for the new owners was begun across a narrow part of the river, a little upstream from the Overland camp. In order to lower the water in the river while they were driving the spiles, Tom had the men put the gates in place in the dam built further up the stream by the timber-pirates. This, in the low condition of the river, would keep the water back for several days and give Tom's men a better opportunity to build his dam.

Henry had made several cautious visits to the scene of operations, which he viewed from the high branches of a tall pine, and, upon descending, soundly boxed the ears of a lumberjack who attempted to make friends with him.

"Tom," said Grace one evening after a few hours spent by her watching the work, "who is the short, thick-set lumberjack with the red hair?"

"The one with the peculiar squint in his eye?"

"Yes. That is the man."

"The men call him Spike. I don't know what the rest of the name is. Why?"

"I don't like his looks. Then again there is something about him that reminds me of someone that I have seen—I mean in unpleasant circumstances."

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"I fear our guide has prejudiced you against lumberjacks, and I know that she has taught Henry to hate the whole tribe. One shouldn't look for drawing-room manners in a lumberjack. We have a loyal gang of men, men who will fight for us, if necessary, and who certainly can work. That, it appears to me, is the answer."

"Very well. I shall keep my eye on him, just the same. Hark! I thought I heard someone coming."

Tom and Grace were sitting by the campfire. The others of their party, with the exception of Mrs. Shafto and the bear, were listening to the fiddle and the thudding of the hob-nail boots of the lumberjacks as they danced away the early hours of the evening.

"Never mind. The pup will take notice."

"The only thing the pup takes notice of is, as Emma Dean says, food!" laughed Grace. "Someone *is* coming, Tom."

"Hindenburg!" commanded Tom Gray sharply.

The bull pup, sleeping by the fire, roused himself, wiggled his stubbed tail, and, rolling over on his side, yawned and promptly went to sleep again. Tom Gray glanced quickly towards the shadows that lay to the rear of them, and, as he did so, a figure appeared.

"Willy, is that you?" he demanded, as a familiar movement revealed the identity of the figure.

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"Yes."

Grace asked the Indian where he had been. He mumbled an unintelligible reply, then turned to Tom.

"Two men come. They watch shack. Me want to shoot, but not do."

"Certainly not," rebuked Tom. "What do you think they want?"

"Come spy on camp. I spy on them. Fix guns and creep up. Look in windows and whisper. Bah! No good. What do?"

"Have they rifles? Perhaps they are hunters," suggested Tom.

"No hunt. Me watch." Willy Horse melted into the shadows.

"Who can it be?" wondered Grace.

"Hunters, of course. Willy Horse's zeal has run away with his judgment. I think—" Tom paused. Protesting voices were heard back in the forest, voices raised in angry resentment. Two men suddenly burst out into the light of the campfire, followed by Willy Horse close at their heels, his rifle pressed against the back of a panting man.

CHAPTER XX

PEACE OR WAR?

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"Here, here! What's this?" demanded Tom Gray, springing up. "Willy!"

"This is an outrage!" panted the man against whose back Willy Horse held the rifle. The stranger's red hair fairly bristled as he cautiously removed his hat and mopped the perspiration from face and forehead. "I'll have the law on you, you low-down redskin!"

"Easy there, pardner. This Indian is not low-down," retorted Tom Gray in a warning tone. "Willy is our friend. What is it you wish, sir?"

"Am I on the section recently purchased by Wingate & Gray?"

"You are, sir. I am Tom Gray. Mr. Wingate will be here shortly. Won't you sit down?" urged Tom. "That is all right, Willy. Please ask Lieutenant Wingate to come here," he added, nodding and smiling to the Indian, who backed away into the shadows.

"I am Chet Ainsworth, timber agent," said the stranger. "This is my guide, Tobe Skinner. I'm here to talk a little business with you. Tobe thought he knew the way, but we got a thousand

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miles out of it. While we were trying to decide whether this was a lumber camp or a state's prison colony that Indian ruffian got the drop on us and drove us in. Tobe would have shot him on the spot if the Indian hadn't beat him to it by getting the drop on him. I'll see the Indian agent 'bout that when I go back. I'll—"

"Hippy!" called Tom as he saw Lieutenant Wingate and others of the Overland outfit strolling towards camp. "Meet Mr. Ainsworth, and his guide, Mr. Skinner. They are here on a business matter, the nature of which I do not know. We are ready to hear what you have to say, Mr. Ainsworth."

Grace rose and said she would have Mrs. Shafto prepare food for the two men.

"I'm ready to hear the story, Ainsworth," announced Hippy, nodding.

"Are you the party that bought Section Seventy-two, Mr. Wingate?" asked Ainsworth.

Hippy nodded.

"Without wishin' to be personal, may I ask what you paid for it?"

"You have my permission to ask anything you wish. I reserve the right to answer or not. The answer is *not!* in this instance," replied Hippy.

"No offense, no offense," answered the agent, assuming a jovial tone. "I represent certain interests that have been negotiating for this very property, parties that already have large holdings in this vicinity, and who wish an uninterrupted stretch of timber and river to the lakes." 206

"Yes?" questioned Hippy.

"Of course they knew you bought on speculation, because you ain't lumbermen, and they reckoned they'd buy it from you so as to give you a fine profit on your investment. That's why I asked you what you paid for the property."

"Yes?" repeated Hippy.

"No man can say that ain't a fair offer. Now we'll get right down to business, Mister—Mister—"

"Wingate," assisted Tom.

"We'll get right down to business, Mr. Wingate. You will sell?"

"Sure thing. I'll sell anything I have except my wife and the bull pup."

"Good! I reckoned that was about the size of it," chuckled Ainsworth, passing a hand across his face to hide his expression of satisfaction. "What's your figger?"

"Half a million."

"Feet?"

"No. Dollars."

"Are you crazy?"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha! I see. You're one of those funny fellows," laughed the agent. "That's all right, Pard. Have your little joke, and now let's get down to business. What'll ye take cash down, balance ninety days, for the section?" 207

"Half a million. What will you give?"

"Twenty-five thousand," answered the agent quickly.

"The deal is off," said Hippy, rising.

"Wait a minute! You're too confounded sudden. I want to argue the question," urged the visitor.

"No. You have made your offer; I have made my offer. The subject is closed. Come, have a snack. I see the girls have it ready for you, and let's talk about the weather. I think it is going to snow."

Tom, though he had with difficulty repressed his laughter, offered their guests every attention, and so did the Overland girls, but the subject of the sale of the claim was not again referred to that evening, except just before bedtime. None of the girls was favorably impressed with either Mr. Ainsworth or his guide, and during the meal the forest woman glared threateningly at the pair through her big spectacles. Near its close, the visitors got a shock that nearly frightened Chet Ainsworth out of his skin, and at the same time sent the Overland Riders into unrestrained peals of laughter. 208

Henry, who had been out of sight ever since the arrival of the two men, had ambled into camp observed only by Emma Dean who hugged herself delightedly when she saw the bear's intention.

A yell from Chet Ainsworth when he felt the hot breath of the beast on his neck, as Henry sniffed at it, brought every one, including Chet, to their feet. Tobe Skinner whipped out his

revolver and would have fired at the animal had not Tom Gray gripped his wrist.

"He's tame. Don't be frightened," soothed Hippy. "All the animals in our menagerie are halter-broken and milk-fed. Sit down. Go away, Henry! The gentleman's nerves are a little upset after his sprint with Willy Horse."

Mr. Ainsworth sat down, but the guide did not do so until Mrs. Shafto had called off her animal and made him lie down.

"That was the voice of nature whispering to you, Mr. Ainsworth," suggested Emma demurely. "Henry had a message for you. You should have listened. Did you ever have the birds of the air, or the beasts or the trees, tell you their secrets, sir?" Emma's face wore a serious expression.

Chet and Tobe gazed at her with sagging jaws, then glanced at Hippy.

Hippy Wingate tapped his own head with a finger and sighed.

"They do get that way sometimes. We have others in our outfit who are similarly affected," he said sadly.

"So I have discovered," articulated Ainsworth. "I reckon we'll be going."

"Certainly not," interjected Grace. "Don't mind Mr. Wingate. He too is somewhat queer at times. You will stay here to-night, both of you. We could not be so inhospitable as to permit you to start out at this hour of the night. In the morning you will have breakfast and, if you wish, an early start."

"Sure," agreed Tom. "We have a lean-to that is not occupied. You can bunk in there."

"Thanks, but chain up that bear or I won't be responsible for what happens. Think over my offer to-night," he urged, turning to Hippy. "After you have slept over it you will see that it is to your best interests to accept."

"Thanks," answered Hippy. "Good-night."

After the visitors and the Overland girls had turned in, and the campfire was fixed for the night, Tom and Hippy had a confidential talk, their visitor and his proposals being the subject of the discussion; then they too sought their browse-beds.

Yells and a shot, punctuated by screeches from Joe Shafto, awakened all hands in the gray of the early morning.

"Is it peace, or is it war again?" mumbled Anne, sitting up and rubbing her eyes sleepily.

"It certainly does sound like war, but I think it is only the beginning of it," answered Grace, hurriedly throwing on her clothes and running out to see what the uproar was about. What she saw caused Grace and her companions, who had followed her out, to utter gasps of amazement.

CHAPTER XXI

A WISE OLD OWL

"What's the trouble, Tom? Oh, stop them!" cried Grace.

"Let her finish it," answered Tom briefly.

"Sick 'em, Henry!" shouted Hippy Wingate, who saw the black bear humping himself across the camp, not yet having discovered what the uproar was about. "What's this? What's this?" he cried, suddenly comprehending.

Tobe Skinner, with streaming face which Joe Shafto had hit with a pot of hot coffee, was sprinting for the timber, after having taken a shot at the bear with his revolver. Following him came Chet Ainsworth puffing and raging, with Henry on his hind legs in close pursuit, making frequent swings with his powerful arms and soundly boxing the head of the fleeing man, and Joe Shafto prodding the bear to urge him on to further effort.

Neither Tom nor Hippy made a move to interfere, but Grace sped forward and placed a firm hand on the forest woman's arm.

"Stop him!" commanded Grace sternly. "Stop him, I say! He will kill the man."

"Serve the houn' right if the bear did. I'll larn 'em to mind their business, the sarpints! Henry!" A sharp rap over the bear's shoulder slowed the animal down. A second tap brought him to all fours, with his mistress's hand fastened in the hair of his head.

"That'll do, Hen. These soft-hearted folk ain't goin' to let ye chaw the gentleman up to-day, but,

if ever I set eyes on either of the scum agin, I'll give the varmints what's comin' to 'em, and I'll do it sudden-like, and I'll do it so it stays done, and there won't be nobody to stop me next time. If ye don't believe it, jest give me the chance. And to think I had to waste a perfectly good pot of coffee on that timber-robber's head. He's a skin and a tight-wad, and I'll bet my month's wage that he robs the birds of their eggs to save the price of keepin' a hen of his own."

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"Please! Please," begged Grace laughingly. "Which one of the pair do you mean?"

"Both of 'em. They ain't here for no good. Wait till I tell ye what they did and ye'll see—"

"Just a moment. Tell it to all of us," urged Grace, leading the irate woman and her tame bear up to her companions.

"Why did you stop them, Grace?" growled Hippy. "First fun we've had since Emma discovered the animal under the table. What's the joke, old dear?"

The forest woman was so angry over her recent experience that she forgot to chide Hippy for his familiarity.

"Matter? Matter enough. As I was sayin' to Miss Gray, them varmints ain't here for no good, and ye ain't heard the last of 'em by a long shot. They'll be back. Take Joe Shafto's word for that, and they won't be back alone, 'cause they're too big cowards. Yaller streaks in both of 'em. I'll bet the pair of 'em was trying to get this timber lot away from ye. Don't ye have no dealin's with 'em. Don't want no truck with them kind of cattle, and I'll tell ye right now that if they show their yaller faces 'round here agin, I'll set my Henry on 'em for keeps." Mrs. Shafto gasped for breath preparatory to entering on a fresh tirade, when Tom Gray, embracing the opportunity, got in a question.

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"Suppose you tell us what the row was about. What was it?" he asked.

"The varmints tried to bribe me, that's what."

"Bribe you!" exclaimed the Overlanders in chorus.

"That's what I said."

"Why didn't you take it?" demanded Hippy. "That was easy money."

"To do what?" questioned Elfreda, her professional interest instantly aroused.

"To find out what ye paid for the section and just what ye opined ye'd do with it. They reckon ye're holdin' it on 'spec' and that they kin git it fer a little mor'n ye paid for it. If they can't do that, I opined from what the varmints said, that they'd git the property some other way. Wanted me to find out just what yer plans was and to writ' 'em down and leave 'em in a holler log up next the dam above the one ye're buildin'."

"What did you say to that?" questioned Elfreda.

"I sicked Henry on 'em and soaked the guide feller with part of the breakfast. I'd a done a heap more if I'd had the time."

"How much did they offer you?" inquired Emma interestedly.

"Two dollars and a half, and said they'd leave as much more after they got what they wanted."

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"Two dollars and a half!" exclaimed Hippy. "And you refused two dollars and a half? Why, old dear, that's a fortune. I am amazed that they should have been so liberal. Positively reckless, I should say. Discard such riches? It is unbelievable."

"When were they to call for this information?" questioned Miss Briggs.

"They didn't say. I was to leave it there, that's all," growled Joe, stalking to her breakfast fire and resuming her operations there.

"Would it not be a good plan to have Willy Horse watch the log and see if he can give our 'friends' a scare?" asked Grace.

"Yes, but Willy is inclined to be violent," laughed Tom. "You saw what happened to Ainsworth and his guide when they sneaked up to our camp last night, didn't you? Next time the Indian might do something rash. What do we care, who or what? The property is ours and we are going ahead with our plans. We shall soon put in a portable mill at the mouth of the river, float our logs down and saw them there where the lake steamers can pick up the lumber. Let the disappointed ones rage if they wish."

The forest woman, having pressed the dents out of her damaged coffee pot and prepared a fresh supply of coffee, now summoned the Overlanders to breakfast, which was a somewhat hurried meal, for Tom and Hippy were eager to get out to direct the work on their dam, which already was moving along satisfactorily, and which they hoped to finish in about another week.

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Following breakfast, the girls saddled their ponies, packed luncheons in their mess kits and started down the river for a day's outing by themselves, leaving Joe Shafto at home. The party returned just before dark, Elfreda Briggs proudly exhibiting a duck that she had shot on the lower river. After supper, for which all hands had keen appetites, Hippy announced that Willy

Horse had been appointed official hunter for the lumber outfit at seventy-five dollars a month, which meant riches to the Indian. It would be Willy's duty to provide fresh meat for the lumberjacks. Added to this, the Indian would shoot wolves and collect the bounty, and, when not otherwise engaged, act as the faithful watchdog for the Overland Riders.

"You Big Friend," was Willy's only comment when informed of his new job, but they observed that he puffed more vigorously at his pipe, and gazed more intently into the fire than usual.

"Do you see things in the fire?" questioned Emma, sitting down by the Indian.

He nodded.

"Tell me what you see," she urged in a confidential tone.

"See white girl fly like bird."

The girls broke into a merry peal of laughter.

"He has your measure," laughed Tom.

"See owl up tree. Mebby come see white girls," added the Indian, and then, to their amazement, the raucous voice of an owl was heard in the branches high above their heads. The owl continued his hoarse night song, the Overland girls interestedly watching Emma Dean's rapt expression as she listened.

"He is trying to say something," she half-whispered, holding up a hand for silence. "He is speaking, perhaps, of the mysteries of the universe—our immediate universe."

"Yus-s-s-s," observed Hippy solemnly. "Tell me, I prithee, little bird-woman, what is the wise old owl saying? Has he a message for me?"

"Yes. And I can tell you what it is. He says, 'you simp, you simp, you simp, you simp-simp.' Interpreted freely, this means, in addition to the truth of the owl's wise assertion, that you have gathered all the ingredients of a calamity, but you don't know it. Beware, Hippy Wingate, of dire things to come!" finished Emma, amid a shout of laughter. The Indian puffed on his pipe in stolid silence.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN THE DAM WENT OUT

In the two weeks that had passed since Wingate & Gray started their operations on the Little Big Branch, wonders had been accomplished. A modern camp for the lumberjacks had been constructed, and the dam had been completed to the extent of permitting them to close the gates and let water accumulate there.

On the day that marked the completion of the work, the Overland girls arranged to show their appreciation of what the jacks had done by giving them a surprise party. This party, first suggested as a dinner, after much discussion was changed to an old-fashioned dancing party, which the girls thought the men would enjoy more than they would a dinner.

Just before they sat down to their supper, the lumberjacks were "tipped" to finish the meal as quickly as possible and slick themselves up, because the Overland party was coming over to call, and Captain Gray to give them a brief "spiel," as Hippy expressed it in telling the men to get ready. The jacks received the word without comment; in fact they received it somewhat sullenly. Hippy, however, knew the lumberjack tribe by this time—knew their peculiar ways—and told the girls to go ahead with their plans.

Darkness had settled over the Big North Woods when Hippy rallied his flock for the party, each girl spruced up for the occasion, Emma Dean's face wreathed in smiles in anticipation of the good time that was in prospect. The only member of the outfit who remained behind was the forest woman, who flatly refused to associate with "them varmints," meaning the lumberjacks. Henry, laboring under no such scruples, followed the Overlanders as they set out for the lumberjacks' shack. Any unusual activity, especially one that gave promise of food, instantly aroused Henry's curiosity, so, in this instance, he was close at the heels of the party when they filed into the bunk-house, where he nosed about smelling of the bunks, of the tables and sniffing the air, following which he sat down where he could command a view of the entire room.

The lumberjacks shook hands awkwardly with their guests, except that Spike merely made a move to do so, then quickly withdrew his hand and shoved it into the pocket of his Mackinaw. Hippy acted as master of ceremonies, and, after waving jacks and guests to seats, cleared his throat, and made a complimentary speech.

"Captain Gray got stage fright at the last minute and told me that I must tell you what he wished

you to know," he said. "I'm not going to make a speech, but what I am to say is, that when we get through with this job Mr. Gray and myself have decided to declare a dividend. That is, we are going to give each one of you men who started out with us, and who have done such fine, loyal work, a good-sized cash bonus. I perhaps don't need to tell you that I never made a speech in my life—so my friends say—but money is a loud talker; so, at the end of the season, we'll let money tell you how much we appreciate the good work you fellows have done."

Henry, who sat blinking at Lieutenant Wingate, at this juncture rolled over, and, curling up, went to sleep.

"You see," cried Hippy. "Even the bear goes to sleep when I talk." The men gave three cheers for Wingate & Gray, and three more for the Overland girls. "Help us get these tables out of the way, you fellows. We are going to have some music. Speech making is ended."

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Nora Wingate was already conferring with the "fiddler." Then, as the tables were moved to one side, Nora launched into a lively song that she had sung to the doughboys in France, the fiddler accompanying her on his violin. There were rough spots in the fiddling, but these Nora submerged in the great volume of her fine contralto voice. The song finished, the men howled for more and stamped on the floor. Nora sang again.

"We will now have a dance," announced Grace. "You boys will please act natural, and for goodness sake don't step on our toes with those hob-nail boots. Choose your partners."

Not a jack moved.

"Help me haul 'em out, Tom," cried Hippy, yanking a big Canadian to the floor and standing him up beside Nora Wingate. Tom did a similar service for another one, and in a few seconds five lumberjacks, red of face, shifting uneasily on their feet, were standing beside their partners on the dance floor.

"Hit it up, Mr. Fiddler," called Tom, whereupon the fiddler began sawing the strings of his violin and calling off for the dance, a square dance, and soon the crash of hob-nail boots on the board floor made the shack tremble, the fiddler beating time with his foot.

Had it not been that the Overland girls knew the dance they never could have followed the fiddler's calls.

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"Shinny on the corners," "Gents all forw'd," "Sling yer pardner," "Up and down the travoy," "Dozey-dozey," "Smash 'em on the finish," was the way he called off, the latter call bringing the feet of the lumberjacks down in a series of bangs that threatened the collapse of the floor. Outside, hovering over a little Indian fire, Willy Horse smoked stolidly, his ears attuned, not to the music and the shuffling feet, but to the sounds of nature, and to sounds that did not belong in nature's scheme of things.

"Let's have a waltz," cried Hippy exuberantly.

Grace shook her head.

"No waltzes," she answered. "Square dances will do very well. The dancing is rough enough as it is without our being spun to dizziness," she added in a lower tone.

"What do you want, Hippy Wingate?" demanded Anne. "This surely is rough enough work, isn't it? The fellows are doing the best they can, but they are not used to dancing with women. It is a great party, just the same."

"Can't be beat," agreed Hippy.

"I think Willy is trying to attract your attention," interrupted Miss Briggs, as she swept past Hippy in the dance.

Glancing towards the door, Lieutenant Wingate saw the Indian framed in the open doorway. Willy Horse made no sign, but his intent gaze was full of meaning. Hippy strolled leisurely to the door.

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"Evening, Willy. Come in and have a dance or something to eat," greeted Hippy cordially. In a lower tone he asked, "Anything wrong?"

"Mebby! You come. No speak here."

The Indian turned away, and Hippy followed him casually until well out of sight of the dancers.

"Now what is wrong?" demanded the Overland Rider in a brisk tone.

"You hear big noise?"

Hippy shook his head.

"Can't hear anything above the smashing of the lumberjacks' boots."

"Me hear. Big noise up river—boom—boom—boom! Listen! What you hear?"

"It sounds like wind in the tops of the trees," answered Hippy after a moment of listening.

"No wind. Willy know."

"What is it, then?"

"Water! Dam up-river go out. Water come down! Mebby logs come down, too!"

"What! The dam built by the timber-thieves? It isn't possible. There is not enough water in the dam to cause the roar I hear."

"Plenty water. You fix gates so dam fill up. You know."

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"That's so." Hippy ran down to the river to listen, still doubting Willy's assertion that the timber-thieves' dam had burst out.

The Indian had followed and stood silently beside his listening companion, his own ears listening to the distant murmur. Willy, however, did not need to listen. He knew!

"I don't believe it is water that we hear," muttered Lieutenant Wingate.

"Him water," muttered the Indian. "Moon come up. Good!"

The moon at full, after being hidden from view for nearly a week, rose above the tops of the trees, thinning the darkness that lay heavy on the river, the full light not yet having reached the Little Big Branch at that point. Hippy shaded his straining eyes and gazed upstream. All seemed peaceful in that direction, but he suddenly realized that the sound he had heard was increasing in volume. He could now hear a succession of hollow reports, the meaning of which he could not fathom. He asked his companion what it meant.

"Logs him jump up in water. Knock together and make big noise."

Hippy suddenly visualized the scene that the Indian's brief words had pictured.

"Watch it! I'm going for help!" cried Hippy, sprinting for the shack. As he neared it the familiar sounds of the earlier evening greeted his ears. The fiddler was still sawing away; the bang of hob-nailed shoes on the floor of the shack resounded rhythmically, and Hippy thought, as he ran, of the weariness that the Overland girls must feel after their strenuous evening of constant dancing with the rough and ready lumberjacks who knew neither fatigue for themselves nor for their entertainers.

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Reaching the doorway, Hippy caught Tom Gray's eye and beckoned to him.

"Yes?" questioned Tom eagerly as he stepped over to Lieutenant Wingate.

"Willy says the dam has gone out. I can't tell whether it has or not, but it sounds that way."

"What dam?" demanded Tom Gray.

"That up-river dam of the timber-pirates. You remember we shut the gates to keep the water below it low while we were driving the spiles for our dam."

Tom ran out into the open and stood listening. A moment of it was all that was necessary to tell him what had happened.

"Quick! The gates. We must get our gates open or we're lost!"

The two men sprinted for the river, Tom in the lead, Hippy a close second. He wondered why he had not thought of the gates, and chided himself for his stupidity.

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"Come fast!" called Willy, referring to the rushing flood that now had become a sullen roar.

"Call out the jacks. Hurry!" ordered Tom.

Willy flashed away. Tom paused only for an instant to listen and estimate how much time they had before the flood would be upon them.

"Are you game for it, Hippy?" he demanded.

"For what?"

"To help me get the gates up?"

"Yes."

"Come on then, and watch your footing," shouted Tom, running out on the top log that formed the cap on top of the spiles. The footing was slippery, but not ordinarily perilous. Now, in the face of that which was hurtling down upon them, their undertaking was a desperate one. Neither had on his spiked boots, which, in a measure, would have aided them in keeping their footing, and they slipped and stumbled, and sprawled on all fours again and again.

Being so familiar with the operation of the gates that they had planned and built, they had no difficulty in finding the gate-levers, but these were heavy, necessarily so, operating somewhat after the manner of a sweep in an old-fashioned well.

Tom and Hippy threw themselves upon one of the two big levers that operated the gates, and began tugging with all their strength. In the meantime Willy Horse had reached the lumberjacks' bunk-house.

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"Dam go out! Water come down!" he shouted to make himself heard. "Big Boss say come quick."

The fiddler ceased playing, and the dancers gazed at the Indian, not fully understanding.

"Water come down! Come quick! Run!"

This time they understood. Uttering a shout the jacks burst out through the narrow doorway, and ran for the river, followed by the Overland girls on flying feet, and meeting Joe Shafto on the way to the scene of the disaster.

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE RIOT OF THE LOGS

"We'll have to be quick!" shouted Tom to make himself heard above the roaring of the waters. "Beardown hard!"

"I can't. I'm slipping!" gasped Hippy.

"The gates are moving! Keep it up!"

The two men struggled and fought, gaining a few inches at a time but not enough to permit the jam of logs that was rushing down the stream to pass through the gates in the flood.

At this juncture the Overland girls and the jacks came running down the bank. They saw the two men struggling with the gates, and at the same instant they saw something else. In the reflected light of the moon, they saw a white crest sweeping around a bend in the river, hurling logs into the air, which came tumbling and shooting ahead like huge black projectiles. A warning scream from the girls was unheard by either of the struggling men. A dozen lumberjacks leaped to the cap-log to go to the assistance of Tom and Hippy, who they knew were in great peril.

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"Come back! Boys, come back! You can't help them now," cried Grace in an agony of apprehension.

"The fools! Why don't they run?" raged Joe Shafto, and the pet bear growled in sympathy with her at the unusual sounds.

It was a terrifying moment for those who could do no more than stand helplessly watching. The jacks by this time were well out on the cap-log, with Willy Horse in the lead and red-headed Spike close at his heels. They were suddenly halted by a report that sounded like an explosion of heavy artillery.

An advance log, rushing straight towards the gates, swerved when within a few feet of them, and, rearing half its dripping length, hurled itself against the gate-lever at which Hippy and Tom were tugging.

Both saw the giant rise from the boiling flood.

"Too late! Save your—" Tom did not finish. Hippy and Tom at that instant were catapulted into the air, hurled by the gate-lever, and fell into the river below the dam with a splash.

Without an instant's hesitation, Willy Horse, followed by Spike, leaped to the rescue, knowing well that only a few seconds lay between them and the cataract of logs that was about to tumble over into the Little Big Branch below the dam.

The rest of the jacks hesitated only for an instant, then they too leaped into the river and made their way towards Tom and Hippy, both of whom were unconscious. Willy Horse grabbed up Hippy with apparent ease, and raised him to his own back just as he would shoulder a dead deer.

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"Git Big Boss!" he shouted, and began struggling shoreward with his burden.

In the meantime Spike had sprung to Tom Gray, but despite his great strength he did not succeed in shouldering Tom.

"Give a hand here!" he bellowed.

The lumberjacks reached him at this juncture and, together, Spike and his companions brought the unconscious man towards the shore.

Then the spiling gave way under the strain that for several minutes had been put upon it, and the dam went out with a crash and a roar, accompanied by a series of terrifying explosions.

It would have been an awesome sight to the Overland Riders had not their attention, at that moment, been centered on the lumberjacks. The jacks reached the shore only a few seconds before the structure gave way and the logs, hurtled into the air, fell splashing into the flood below the dam. Hippy and Tom were borne up the bank and laid on the ground.

"Are—are they dead?" gasped Emma.

"No," answered Miss Briggs, who had placed a finger on the pulse of each.

"Please carry them to the bunk-house," directed Grace in a strained voice, after Willy Horse had run quick fingers over the heads of the two victims.

"Big Friends bump heads! Much all right soon, mebby," he grunted, walking along beside Hippy as the jacks started with him and Tom towards the house.

It was but a short time after their arrival there, however, when both regained consciousness. Neither Tom nor Hippy knew whether they had been hit by the log that struck the gate-lever, or whether they had been made unconscious by their fall into the water. Both came to in a severe chill and were put to bed in the bunk-house, warmed with hot drinks and blankets, and soothed until they fell asleep.

The lumberjacks stood about awkwardly, and the Indian hovered near, his stolid face reflecting no emotion. Spike was the only jack present who apparently was indifferent to the scene. At midnight Willy motioned to the girls to go.

"Me watch. Big Friends wake up morning. No sick," he said.

"Willy's suggestion is a good one," agreed Elfreda. "There is little the matter with either except shock and exhaustion. Let's go!"

Grace nodded.

"Boys, we thank you very much," she said, turning to the lumberjacks. "Mr. Wingate and Mr. Gray would have lost their lives had it not been, for you and Willy. They will not forget. Neither shall we. Good-night."

At dawn when Hippy awakened, Willy Horse was still sitting by him, puffing his pipe.

"Dam go out," observed the Indian between puffs.

"So I heard it rumored," yawned Hippy.

"Big Friend go out."

"Seems to me that I heard something about that too. How is Captain Gray?"

"Other Big Friend all right."

"Are the jacks awake?" asked Hippy.

"Git up now."

"Tell them to come here."

When the half-dressed lumberjacks came over to his cot, Hippy eyed them sternly.

"You're a fine bunch of ladies' men, aren't you? Dance the light fantastic while your bosses are trying to save the dam."

The jacks grinned sheepishly.

"What are you loafing around here for? Why don't you get out and start work on a new dam? You needn't think a little thing like a busted dam is going to stop Wingate & Gray. Go on now! You know what to do. We two are the only ones who've got a right to be lazy this morning. Wait a moment! Come back here!" commanded Hippy as his men started to go away.

"I take back what I said. You aren't ladies' men at all. You are a bunch of confounded rough-necks. Shake paws!" Hippy put out a hand, but was sorry for it afterwards, for the bear-like grips of the lumberjacks left it a "pulp," as Hippy Wingate expressed it.

Work on a new dam was begun that very day. Tom and Hippy, though lame and sore, and, at odd moments, a little dizzy, were at the dam all day long directing the work of clearing away the wreck while part of their force cut fresh spiles in the woods. The lumberjacks, wet to the skin, worked with tremendous force and to good purpose, for the organization that Tom Gray had developed and systematized, was as near a perfectly working machine as it was humanly possible to make it.

Day after day the work progressed, but despite their best endeavors two weeks and a half had passed before the gates were again lowered to test the new dam's power to resist a full head of water. Several days more were required to fill the dam until the surplus water toppled over the "dashboard."

For another twenty-four hours the dam was watched for indications of weakness, but none developed. Now that the big work was completed Tom and Hippy journeyed to the wrecked dam of the timber-pirates. They examined what was left of it with great care. Finishing their investigation, the two men looked at each other with eyes full of meaning.

"Well, what do you think of it?" questioned Hippy.

"I think, Hip, that it was something more than structural weakness that caused this dam to go

out," answered Tom.

"What do you think did it—I mean how was it done?" wondered Lieutenant Wingate.

"Dynamite!" The word came out with explosive force. "The pirates don't like our presence here, so thought they would put us out of business. They didn't know us, did they, Hippy?"

"No. I wonder what they will think now—or do?"

"Nothing in the way of damaging our property, for we shall have our works watched after this. They might blow the upper dam, of course, but there are no logs being held there and the water would simply flow over our construction without doing damage. We must tell Willy what we suspect and assign him to guard duty. An Indian can sleep and yet be on watch."

"Like Hindenburg, who always sleeps with one ear awake," suggested Hippy.

"But never hears anything with it," laughed Tom. "We'll see."

Later in the day when Tom spoke confidentially with the Indian about what the Overlanders suspected, Willy evinced no surprise. He nodded in agreement with Tom that the new dam must be guarded.

It was. Willy slept near it in a lean-to down near the river. For several nights nothing occurred to indicate that there was anyone within miles of the camp. By day Willy hunted, often not coming in until after dark. It was on a Saturday night, however, that Willy failed to reach camp until nearly midnight. On his back he bore the carcass of a young deer that he had shot and dressed miles from the Overland headquarters on the bank of the Little Big Branch. He was nearly in when suddenly he raised his body to an erect position, listened for a few seconds, then dropped his burden and sprinted for home.

The Overlanders long since had turned in and the lumberjacks were in their bunks, comfortable, and as happy as a lumberjack permits himself to be, when suddenly their bunk-house seemed to be lifted free of the ground. It swayed and trembled as a terrific crash rent the air. The tepee toppled over at the same instant, leaving the Overland girls lying in the open. Tom and Hippy, at the time asleep in their lean-to, which was a few yards nearer the river, never were able to decide whether they had been hurled from their beds or had leaped out before they were fully awake. At least, they found themselves outdoors, and some yards from the lean-to.

"For the love of Mike, what now?" gasped Hippy.

Hindenburg was running about in circles, uttering dismal howls, and the pet bear was scrambling for the top of the highest tree in his vicinity.

"It's the dam!" shouted Tom Gray. "They've got us this time!" growled Tom, starting down the bank, followed by Hippy and the yowling bull pup. Hippy saw a figure running from the bank of the river a little further upstream. It was a man, and he was running in short hops, as if he were using a stick or cane to assist him in covering ground rapidly.

Behind the fleeing man Tom and Hippy discovered a second figure. It was Willy Horse. The first figure, as the two Overlanders started for him at a run, had dashed out over the broken and bent spiles of the dam, hopping from one spile to another with remarkable agility, with Willy Horse in close pursuit.

The hopping man, reaching the end of the spiles at the middle of the dam, halted, hesitated, and the Indian was upon him.

"It's Peg Tatem!" cried Hippy. "He's the scoundrel who did this thing."

A knife in Peg's hand flashed in the moonlight, another appearing in the hand of the Indian, and out there on their precarious footing the men stood, thrusting and parrying, with their two-edged blades, watched with breathless interest by the entire Overland party, who had rushed to the river's edge.

A sudden uproar was heard in the direction of the bunk-house. The lumberjacks having discovered that a fight was in progress were running towards the river to see if they too could not get into the fray, for a lumberjack loves nothing in the world so violently as he loves a fight.

"Keep out of it!" ordered Tom as he saw that the jacks were headed for the path that Peg and Willy had taken.

"Tom! Do something!" begged Grace. "Don't let those two men kill each other."

"We can do nothing. Even to call to Willy would take his attention from the battle. You know what that would mean."

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" moaned Emma, toppling over in a faint.

"Oh, Heavens! Look!" wailed Anne.

One of the combatants staggered and swayed. An arm was thrust out at him, but the blade that had been driven against him did not flash in the moonlight, for the body of the wielder was between it and the spectators. Even the jacks stood silent, they having halted at Tom Gray's command, but their breathing was heavily audible.

"He's killed! It's Peg!" cried Grace.

The Indian's victim, following the last thrust, had toppled over into the river below the dam. With a bound, Willy Horse cleared the spiling and leaped to the river bed to finish his victim.

"Willy! Stop!" Grace Harlowe's voice rang out shrill and penetrating, as Willy, the savage instincts of his race having taken possession of his soul, raised his knife-hand above Peg Tatem, who lay on his back on the river-bed.

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CHAPTER XXIV

CHRISTMAS IN THE BIG WOODS

Willy Horse, brought suddenly to his senses by Grace's scream, hesitated, got slowly to his feet, and stood narrowly watching his opponent who lay, nearly covered with water, moaning faintly. There was ferociousness in the heart of the Indian, but Grace's voice had stayed his hand.

Lumber-jacks, with Tom and Hippy, had plunged into the shallow stream the instant that Grace cried out, and were running towards Willy, now standing calmly awaiting them.

"Did you kill him?" shouted Hippy.

"No kill. Mebby kill bymeby," answered Willy Horse briefly as Tom and Hippy came puffing up to him.

"You have done enough. Let him alone!" commanded Tom, lifting the head and shoulders of the wounded man. "Fellows, carry this man ashore, but don't hurt him!"

Emma, having regained consciousness, was assisted up the bank by Anne and Nora, while Peg was being taken to the bunk-house by the lumberjacks. Elfreda, after a brief examination, did not believe that Peg's wound would prove fatal, but Hippy advised her not to tell the foreman of Section Forty-three of this, saying that he wished to make the man talk, which Peg probably would not do were he to think that his wounds were trivial.

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The lumberjacks were ugly, and, had they had their way, they would have promptly finished the job begun by Willy Horse, believing, as they did, that Peg Tatem was responsible for the present and previous disasters that had befallen the Overland Riders in the Big North Woods.

Peg Tatem regained consciousness after Elfreda and Tom had worked over him for more than an hour.

"Did the Redskin git me?" he demanded weakly.

"You're right he did," agreed Hippy. "You might as well tell us all about it now before it is too late. We know what you have done, and that's good and plenty, but you are now going to make a confession and swear to it."

Peg went into a violent rage at the suggestion and pounded the cot with his wooden leg until he was exhausted. Waiting until the fellow had quieted down, Hippy then informed him that in case he recovered, and had not confessed, they would see to it that he went to prison for a long term. After hours of urging, the foreman of Section Forty-three gave in and made a full confession. Elfreda wrote down his statement and made Peg swear to it, after Hippy had promised that, in the event of his recovery, there would be no prosecution.

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Tatem declared that he had acted wholly under the orders of Hiram Dusenbery, of the Dusenbery Lumber Company; that it was his jacks who had turned the skidway loose on the Overland camp, and that it was Tatem himself, acting under orders, who had dynamited the big pine and tumbled it over on the Overlanders. He said that Dusenbery and Chet Ainsworth were partners in the business of timber-stealing, and that the dynamiting was Ainsworth's scheme.

"Why did they wish to be rid of us?" asked Miss Briggs.

"They reckoned they'd spoil yer game. T'other reason was that they wanted this 'ere section fer themselves."

"Good! We will send both to jail," promised Elfreda. "Now what I wish are the names of witnesses who can verify at least part of your story."

After some thought Peg named several lumberjacks, fellows who were still in the employ of the Dusenbery Company. The Overlanders then ceased their questioning to give Peg a much-needed rest, and left him in the care of two jacks, with the reminder that they would be held fully accountable for the safety and good care of the prisoner.

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Willy Horse was started that night for the nearest fire warden's station, there to have the warden telephone for a doctor, and also for the sheriff of the county, as it was thought best to

hold Tatem as a material witness. The doctor and sheriff arrived late next day. Peg's injuries were found to be quite serious, and it was a full week later before he could be moved to the county jail where he was a prisoner under treatment for two more weeks.

Hippy accompanied Peg, and while at the county seat swore out warrants for Dusenbery and Chet Ainsworth. At the December term of court both men were found guilty and sentenced to serve terms in prison. Peg Tatem, according to agreement with the complainants, was released and advised to seek other fields, which he did.

In the meantime a new dam had been built by Tom and Hippy, and a sawmill established twenty-five miles further down the river. The sounds of the "swampers'" axes and the "saw-gangs" were now heard in the forest from daylight until dark, where huge logs were being felled, trimmed, skidded and rolled down into the new dam, to be "boomed," and released after every thaw in early spring, and sent on their way to the mill. 242

The Overland girls still lingered. After some discussion they had decided to remain in the woods until after Christmas. By Christmas time the ground and the trees were white with snow, and Tom closed his "cruising" for the season. Willy Horse was absent much of the time, trapping for himself and hunting game for the table of the lumberjacks. The girls were now living in a real log cabin which the jacks, hearing them express a wish that they might have one, had built. Logs blazed in the fireplace, and there the Overland girls, after long hikes in the forest, and occasional rides on their ponies, spent many happy hours.

At Nora's suggestion, an elaborate Christmas celebration, including a Christmas tree, was planned by the girls for the jacks and themselves. Tom, obliged to go to St. Paul on business, more than a week's journey in itself, was commissioned to purchase the supplies and Christmas gifts for the celebration, and returned in a sleigh from Bisbee's Corners, reaching the Overland camp by way of a new trail that his men had cut. He was a regular Santa Claus, except that he rode "behind mules instead of reindeers," as Emma Dean expressed it. Then began the real preparations for Christmas, with many conferences in the log cabin. 243

Two Christmas dinners were to be laid Christmas evening, one in the new modern bunk-house that had been recently erected, where the old original gang of lumberjacks and a few selected newcomers were then living. Many additional men had been taken on during the early part of the winter when the lumbering operations began on a large scale, and efforts were made to instill into the new men the spirit of the Overland outfit, which the old men long since had absorbed.

The great day arrived. The old and faithful jacks were to sit down with the Overlanders to the spread that was in preparation all that day, Joe Shafto, after much grumbling, laying aside her feud against all lumberjacks and helping the regular cook in his work of preparing the dinner. This was supervised by Grace and Elfreda, while their companions attended to laying the tables and decorating the bunk-house with greens brought in by the jacks.

At seven o'clock that evening, the jacks, who had been put out of the new bunk-house without ceremony, were told to enter. They thumped in, and gazed in amazement at the transformation of their home, at the festoons of pine cones and greens, at the gaily colored lanterns, at the red, white, and blue candles on the table, and at the big American flag suspended from the rafters at the lower end of the room. 244

The girls disposed themselves about the table so that they might sit with their guests. Hippy took the head of the table, with Spike, who was known by no other name, at his right. Grace had never been able to banish the disagreeable impression that she felt on first setting eyes on the big red-haired lumberjack, and that feeling now seemed to take hold of her more strongly than ever as Spike, shoulders slouched forward and eyes lowered, shuffled to the seat assigned to him.

"Sit down!" ordered Hippy, and all hands sat, Tom taking the seat at the lower end of the table.

There was real turkey, with cranberry sauce, squash, creamed onions, mashed potatoes, celery and a variety of other vegetables, brought from the city by Tom. Willy Horse acted as waiter, Mrs. Shafto declining to unbend to the extent of waiting on "them varmints."

"I'll fodder white folk, and I'll sling a bone to a bear or a bull pup, but no timber houn' of a lumberjack's goin' to git 'chuck' from the paws of Joe Shafto, and that's the end of the argefyn'," she declared, challenging the girls with a threatening glare through her big horn-rimmed spectacles. 245

There were only a few jacks present, outside of the "original" crowd, as Tom called them, all the others having a dinner of their own in the old bunk-house.

The "talk" at the table was mostly confined to the Overland Riders, their efforts to make conversation with their partners, the lumberjacks, eliciting little more than grunts. The jacks were busy, very busy, and when the time came for dessert, every platter and every plate was empty.

"Pudding! Fetch on the pudding," cried Hippy.

There followed a few moments of waiting while the girls were clearing the table of used dishes, then Willy Horse was seen entering, bearing a huge platter, on the platter a great mound of

blazing plum pudding.

The jacks gasped.

"Fire!" yelled a lumberjack.

Every jack in the room leaped to his feet and the next instant they were blowing great, long-drawn breaths at the blue flame that, as they thought, was consuming something that was good to eat. With strong breaths, and vigorous slaps from ham-like hands, they soon put out the "fire," Willy Horse, in a rage, kicking out with his feet at every shin within reach. The Overland Riders were convulsed with laughter, as the jacks solemnly filed back to their seats at the table.

246

"That's plum pudding, you poor fish!" groaned Hippy.

"Ain't nothin' now," grumbled Spike. "Purty nigh burned up."

Grace composed her face and tried to explain that burning the plum pudding was an old English custom, and that, instead of destroying the pudding, it added to its flavor, but the jacks shook their heads, probably thinking that she was saying this to make sport of them. After the pudding had been served, the jacks tasted it gingerly, then smacking their lips they quickly devoured it. Coffee and nuts followed, and the meal came to an end.

"We will now view the Christmas tree," announced Hippy. "Outside there are millions of Christmas trees, all dolled up with fancy spangles, but they aren't like this tree, as you will see. Pull the string, Emma!"

A real Christmas tree was revealed as Emma Dean draped back the flag, a tree decorated with lights and spangles, its branches bending low under the weight of gifts. A beautiful repeating rifle for Willy Horse brought a grunt from the Red Man, but nothing more. From the base of the tree Emma then picked up a bag, opened it and advanced towards the table.

247

"A little Christmas gift from Mr. Gray and Mr. Wingate," she said, depositing a ten-dollar gold piece before each lumberjack. Their amazement left them speechless. Some quickly slipped their gifts into their pockets, others merely sat and gazed at the shining pieces of metal for a moment before picking them up.

"Fellows, this is not the bonus we promised you," said Tom. "This is a Christmas present, just a little gift of appreciation on our part. There are socks and boots and other things on the tree for you, and when we have gone you will divide the stuff equally between you. Spike, what's the matter?" he demanded.

Spike had not touched his gold piece, but sat looking at it, drawing in deep labored breaths.

"It's real, better grab while the grabbing is good," urged Hippy.

Spike shook his head and shoved both hands under the table.

The Overland Riders saw instantly that the man was agitated.

"If you don't wish to accept our gift, you need not do so, Spike," said Tom. "We shan't lay it up against you if—"

"It ain't that!" exploded the lumberjack.

"Then what is it, old man?" questioned Hippy.

Spike, rising awkwardly, swallowed hard several times and essayed to speak.

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"Talk, if you feel like it. It will do you good," urged Tom kindly.

"It's 'cause I ain't fit ter touch it, that's why," blurted Spike. "Yer wants me t' talk. I'll talk. I ain't fit 'cause I ain't fit, that's all. I'm a thief, and I'm a skallerwag, and I served a term in Joliet prison. I ain't never had nuthin' but kicks and cuffs and dodgin' perlice afore I got inter this outfit. First off, I thought it was soft here—that ye folks was easy, but somehow it warn't. There was somethin' else in the kind o' treatment yer give me that I couldn't git through my haid."

The hair of Spike's head was now a bristling flame of red.

"You're excited. Hook your canthook on the other side and stop the log from rolling before it mashes you flat," advised Hippy.

"I got ter talk now, and then I'll quit and git out fer good. I took money fer ter do ye an inj'ry. I took it from that houn' Ainsworth. I was to tell him 'bout things that was goin' on here and—"

A low, rumbling, menacing growl, at first coming, it seemed, from the very boots of the lumberjacks, startled the Overland Riders. The growl suddenly burst into an angry roar. Acting upon a common impulse, every jack in the room sprang to his feet and made a savage rush for the red-headed Spike.

249

"Sit down, you rough-necks!" bellowed Hippy Wingate. "This is Christmas. Sit down unless you want me to give you a clip on the jaw!"

The jacks hesitated, drew back, then slouched to their seats, scowling threateningly.

"It'd serve me right if ye fellers beat me up," resumed Spike. "I'm no good. I never was and I'm

goin' ter quit unless ye fire me afore I've got through speakin', but I wants ye folks t' know that I throwed that dirty money away, I did. It burned me like no money I ever filched did; it burned me inside and out and I slung it inter the river. I meant ter do ye a measly trick, ye folks, and I did, but I wants ye ter know partic'lar that Chet Ainsworth and that gang of his'n didn't git no information outer me. That's more'n I ever done for anybody afore. Ye've treated me white, ye have, Boss," he said, looking at Tom, "and I've—I've—" Spike gulped and swallowed hard. "I've opined ter do ye dirt."

Spike struggled for more words, and then, to the amazement of his fellows, sank into his seat with tears rolling down his cheeks.

A jack laughed. Hippy fixed him with a stern look. Tom Gray rose gravely.

"Don't laugh, fellows," he admonished. "You have seen one of your own bare his soul, if you can understand what that means. It takes a brave man to do that, boys, a man of wonderful courage. I wonder how many of you would have the courage to do the same. I'll have more to say on the subject of Spike in a moment. First, I want to thank you for your loyalty to us. We could not have won out if you hadn't been loyal. We are going to make money, as I have told you before, and you boys who have helped to make it are going to get your share."

250

"Give 'em a little rough stuff. They'll understand that better than they do this soul business," suggested Hippy, and the jacks grinned.

"As for Spike, he forgot to carry out his threat to resign—" resumed Tom.

"I quit, and I—" interrupted Spike, flushing hotly.

"Sit down!" commanded Hippy, forcing him back into his seat, from which Spike had started to rise.

"Mr. Wingate and I have had several talks about affairs here," resumed Tom. "Among other things, we have decided that we have need of a foreman, a foreman who can get out the work with the new men—you fellows do not need a foreman—and carry out our orders in other directions. Before coming here for this little party, we had already decided on a man for the job of foreman, and I, for one, am glad we picked the man we did, but I want you boys to approve of our appointment. What you say *goes*. Stand up!" commanded Tom Gray sternly, fixing his gaze on the red-headed jack, who, from sheer force of habit, obeyed that tone instantly.

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"There's the man I've picked," announced Tom, pointing to Spike.

A dead silence greeted the announcement, a silence broken only by the heavy breathing of the lumberjacks, and the shrill voice of Joe Shafto back in the cook-house abusing Willy Horse.

"What do you say, fellows?" urged Tom quietly.

Something seeped slowly into the brain of those rough and ready two-fisted lumbermen. To advance a confessed crook to foreman, a man who had bargained to do a traitorous thing to his Big Boss—it was big, it was unheard of in their rough lives. Even the girls of the Overland party, not one of whom had known of Tom's and Hippy's purpose, felt a thrill, but no one spoke.

"Well, fellows?" urged Tom gently.

"Yes!" The word was uttered in a roar, a mighty roar that was heard in the cook-house and by the lumberjacks at their Christmas dinner in the old bunk-house.

Nora Wingate, carried away by her emotions, sprang to her feet and threw wide her arms.

"Boys! Boys!" she cried almost hysterically.

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"You're rough, but you're men—loyal, splendid fellows, and I love you, every one of you!"

Spike, with burning face, bolted for the door.

"Come back here!" bellowed Hippy Wingate. "You've forgotten something," pointing to the gold-piece that lay where Emma Dean had placed it before Spike's plate. "I never did see anyone so careless with money."

The red-headed lumberjack returned slowly, picked up the gold-piece and opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.

"Never mind. Don't say it," smiled Tom. "You may go now."

"Thankee," mumbled Spike, and made a hurried exit. Reaching the door, he broke into a run, never pausing until he had plunged deep into the forest, not to return until long after the jacks had turned in for the night.

Following the new foreman's departure the gifts for Overlanders and jacks were quickly distributed, and, half an hour later, on their way to their own camp, the Overland Riders stepped out into the sparkling night, where, as Hippy Wingate had said, every tree was a Christmas tree, dressed with snapping reflected lights from the moonbeams on the snowflakes. Elfreda Briggs called attention to a dark object at the top of a great pine. It was Henry—Henry in disgrace—Henry who had stolen a turkey from the cook-house and felt the sting of his master's club across his sensitive nose.

253

June and July disturbed the serenity of the night with two long-drawn, throaty brays.

A snow-bird chirped in the foliage somewhere above the Overlanders.

"What is the little birdie saying, Emma girl?" teased Hippy.

"What is he saying?" answered Emma thoughtfully. "I think, Hippy, that he is wishing us all a merry, merry Christmas and a happy, successful new year."

On the following morning Spike entered the office of the company where Tom Gray was at work on the books.

"Boss," he said, "it ain't right this thing that ye said last night. I been sittin' out thar in the woods all night thinkin'—"

"About being made foreman?" questioned Tom.

"Yes. An' 'bout that other thing. When the fellers laughed an' ye said I was 'barin' my soul,' I didn't have no such thing. But Cap'n! Out thar in the woods, an' God Almighty lookin' down and seein' me thar in the moonlight, I found one. Mebby ye told him to give it to me, but I got it. I didn't un'erstan' then what ye meant. I do now, an' wanted ye to know it. Cap'n! I got er soul!"

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Without giving Tom Gray opportunity to make fitting reply, Spike squared his shoulders and shuffled out and called his gang together.

Spike's confession and his new job worked a transformation in him. He no longer wore the surly, hang-dog expression of former days; he walked more erectly and his gray eyes boldly met those of any person who addressed him. The manner in which the red-headed foreman drove the work along throughout the winter, overcoming obstacles and winning and holding the respect of the men, confirmed the judgment of Tom and Hippy that Spike was the right man for the job.

The girls of the Overland party, with Joe Shafto, Henry and the mules, started for home two days later, leaving Tom, Hippy and the bull pup to remain in the woods until spring.

All that winter the big circular saws in the mill far down on the Little Big Branch sang their way through millions of feet of huge logs, cutting them into lumber, and piling up profits for the firm of Wingate & Gray, while the jacks toiled and abused each other, and all bosses—especially their own—and fought with the jacks from rival lumber camps until the end of the season. Each man then received a cash bonus that brought from him a gasp of amazement and a growl of appreciation. Willy Horse and most of the "original" party of jacks were kept at work on the section all during the next summer, again to resume lumbering operations in the early fall.

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The further adventures of the Overland Riders will be related in a following volume, entitled "GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS IN THE HIGH SIERRAS," the story of an eventful summer's outing. The hold-up of the Red Limited, the capture of an Overlander, strange adventures in the Crazy Lake section, the bowling game above the clouds, the battle with the mountain bandits, and the solving of the mystery of Aerial Lake, make a story of unexcelled interest and swift action.

THE END

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