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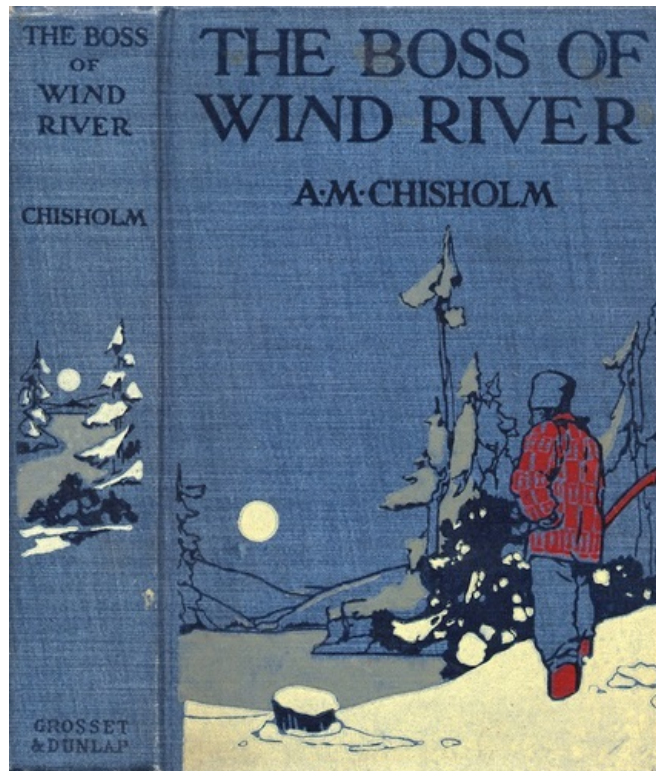
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The Boss of Wind River



The girl caught Joe's arm. "It's going out, Joe! It's going out! Oh, see it pull!"

THE BOSS OF WIND RIVER

BY

A. M. CHISHOLM

ILLUSTRATED

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ILLUSTRATIONS

[The girl caught Joe's arm. "It's going out, Joe! It's going out! Oh, see it pull!"](#)

[Miss Crooks came down the walk to meet him ... "I'm so glad to see you, Joe. I've been looking](#)

for you for days”

Haggarty and Rough Shan, locked in a deadly grip, fought like bulldogs

“There’s the line. Cross it to-night or try to scrap with McCane’s crew before I tell you to, and I’ll shut down”

I

As young Joe Kent entered the office of the Kent Lumber Company at nine o'clock he was conscious of a sudden pause in the morning's work. He felt rather than saw that the eyes of every employee were fixed upon him with an interest he had never before excited. And the quality of this interest, as he felt it, was curiously composite. In it there was a new respect, but mingled with misgivings; a sympathy repressed by the respect; a very dubious weighing of him, a comparison, a sizing up—a sort of mental shake of the head, as if the chances were in favour of his proving decidedly light in the balance; and running through it all was a waiting expectancy, frankly tinged with curiosity.

Kent nodded a somewhat embarrassed, comprehensive good morning, and as he did so a thick-set, grizzled man came forward and shook hands. This was Wright, the office and mill manager.

"The personal and important mail is on your desk, Mr. Kent," he said. "Later I suppose you will want to go into the details of the business."

"I expect Mr. Locke about ten o'clock," Kent replied. "I thought we might have a little talk together then, if you have time."

Wright smiled a little sadly. "My time is yours, you know. Just let me know when you want me."

Kent opened the door of the private office that had been his father's, stepped in, and shut it. He glanced half expectantly at the big, leather-cushioned revolving chair behind the broad, flat-topped desk on which the morning's mail lay neatly stacked. The chair was empty. It came to him in a keen, stabbing pain that whenever in future he should enter this office which was now his, the chair would be empty—that the big, square, kindly, keen-eyed man whose business throne it had been would sit in it no more.

He seated himself at the desk, branded to right and left by countless cigars carelessly laid down, and drew the pile of correspondence to him. The topmost envelope bore no stamp, and as he saw his name upon it in the familiar, bold handwriting, his heart pounded and a lump rose in his throat. The fingers which slid a paper cutter beneath the flap were a trifle unsteady. He read:

MY DEAR BOY: Locke will see that you get this when I have gone out. It is just a little personal note which I like to think you will be glad to read.

I am not going to begin by apologizing for the fact that I leave behind me less money than most people, including myself, expected. There will be enough to give you a start and keep you hustling, which will do you no harm. You'll find it easier to hustle now than later. But, nevertheless, a word of explanation is due you.

As you grow older you will observe that when the ordinary man acquires a comfortable stack at his own game he is seized with an unaccountable desire to play another man's game, at which he usually loses. It turned out so with me. I know the logging business; but I didn't know, and don't know, the stock market. I lost and I have no kick coming. It serves me right, but it may be a little hard on you. If that Power which put me in this world had seen fit to allow me to remain in it for a few years I would have stuck exclusively to my own last and repaired the damage. As it is I am warned that I must go out inside six months, and may do so at any earlier moment. It is in contemplation of the latter possibility that I write you now. Afterward I intend to go into business details with Locke. You may tie to him and Crooks. They are both white men. Don't be too proud to consult them occasionally. And if they both think one way and you think the other, make up your mind you're wrong.

At a rough estimate, setting the present value of my assets against my liabilities, there should be a credit balance of fifty or sixty thousand dollars. That is lumping the whole thing—mills, timber limits, camp equipments, real estate, and so on. If you sold out everything you should get that much clear cash, perhaps more. But I hope you won't sell. For one thing the assets will increase in value. The water powers I own will be worth a fortune some day. And then I want you to carry on the business because I think you'll like it. You'll make mistakes, of course; but in a few years or less I am certain you will have lifted the incumbrances with which my folly has saddled the concern, and you will begin to lay up a competence against the time when your chief regret at leaving this world will be that you must become only a memory to some one whom you love.

Preaching isn't my forte, and I am not trying to write a letter which shall be a

guide through life under all conceivable conditions. But one or two hints may not be amiss. Such as they are I've bought 'em with my own money and paid mighty dear for some of them.

Remember this: Straight business is good business, and crooked business isn't, no matter how much money you make at it. Apart from ethics there's a come-back with it, every time. A very fair test of the rectitude or otherwise of any deal is this: How will it look in print beneath a good scare head? If you don't mind the answer, it's probably all right. If you do, it's apt to be mostly wrong, no matter how expensive a lawyer drew the papers.

Be steady. Don't let any man or thing rattle you into unconsidered action. Take your own time; it's just as easy to make other people wait for you as to wait for them, but don't keep them standing. Know as much of other people's business as is consistent with minding your own. When any man offers you a gilt-edged snap, try to figure out why he doesn't keep it all for himself; and if the answer is that he likes you, guess again. If you ever feel that you're beaten and want to quit, make sure that the other fellow isn't feeling worse; one more punch will help you to make sure. Get your fun as you go along. And now and then, Joe, old boy, when the sun is bright on the river and woods and the fish are leaping and the birds are flying and the tang of the open air makes life taste extra good, take time for a thought of him who was your loving father.

— William Kent.

Young Kent choked suddenly, put down the letter, and stared out of the window at a landscape which had become very indistinct and misty. Before him lay the silver bosom of the river, checkered with the long, black lines of the booms stretching from shore to anchor-pier, great water corrals for the herds of shaggy, brown logs that were driven down from their native forests every spring. The morning breeze, streaming through the open window, was laden with the clean, penetrating, never-to-be-forgotten odour of newly cut pine. The air was vibrant with the deep hum of distant machinery. The thunderous roll of the log-carriages, the high-pitched whine of the planers, the sharp notes of edgers and trimmers, blended into one grand harmony; and shouting through it at exactly spaced intervals came the sustained, ripping crash of the great saws as their teeth bit into the flesh of some forest giant, bound and prostrate on an iron bed of torment.

As he looked and listened, his eyes cleared of mists. For the first time he realized dimly that it was worth while. That the sounds he heard were part of a great song, a Song of Progress; the triumphant, virile song of the newest and greatest of nations, ringing from sea to sea across the breadth of a continent as it built itself, self-sustaining, strong, enduring.

And young Joe Kent, standing by the window facing his inheritance, was a fair representative of the average young American who works with his hands or with his head, and more often with both. There was nothing striking about him. He was of medium height, of medium weight, of medium good looks. From the top of his close-clipped brown head to the toes of his polished brown boots he was neat and trim and healthy and sound. Only, looking closer, an accurate observer might have noticed a breadth of shoulder and a depth of chest not apparent at first glance, and a sweep of lean jaw and set of mouth at variance with the frank, boyish good humour of the tanned face and brown eyes.

Kent left the window, settled himself in his father's seat with as business-like an air as he could assume, and proceeded to wade through the pile of correspondence.

In five minutes he was hopelessly bewildered. It was much less intelligible to him than Greek, for he was beautifully ignorant of the details of his father's business. It had been an understood thing between them that some day, in a year or two—no hurry at all about it—he should enter that office and master the details of that business against the time—how far off it looked then!—when it should devolve upon him to conduct it. But they had both put it off. He was young, just through college. A year of travel was merely a proper adjunct to a not particularly brilliant academic degree. And in the midst of it had come the cablegram summoning him home, where he arrived a scant twenty-four hours before his father's death.

And now, William Kent having been laid to rest on the sunny slope where the great, plumed elms whispered messages with every summer breeze to the dead below them, his son was called to con the business ship through unknown waters, without any knowledge of navigation or even of ordinary seamanship.

The letters which he scanned, reading the words but not getting the sense because he had not the remotest idea of what they were about, were for the most part exceedingly terse and business-like. They were the morning cream of the correspondence, skimmed from the mass by the practised hand of Wright, the manager; letters which, in the ordinary course of business, go direct to the head of the house to be passed upon.

But in this case the head of the house had rather vaguer ideas than his office boy as to how they should be handled. They dealt with timber berths, with logs, with lumber, with contracts made and to be made; in fact with almost everything that Joe Kent knew nothing about and with nothing that he knew anything about. And so, in utter despair, he was on the point of summoning Wright to elucidate matters when, after an emphatic rap, the door opened, admitting a burly, red-faced man of fifty.

This was Locke. He had the appearance of a prosperous farmer, and he was an exceedingly busy lawyer, with the reputation of a relentless fighter when once he took a case. He had been William Kent's friend as well as his legal adviser.

"Well, Joe," said he, "getting into harness already?"

"I can get into it easy enough," Joe replied; "but it's a lot too big for me."

Locke nodded. "You'll grow. When I started I didn't know any more about law than you do about logs. You got that letter?"

"Yes, thanks. He said I might tie to you and Crooks."

Locke looked out of the window because his eyes were filling. To disguise the fact he pretended to search his pockets for a cigar and growled:

"So you may, within limits. Got a smoke there? I'm out." He lit one of William Kent's big, black cigars, leaned back in his chair, and crossed one leg over the other. "Now, then, Joe, where shall we start?" he asked. "I'm busy, and you ought to be. What do you know of your father's affairs, anyway?"

"Almost nothing," young Kent admitted. "Say I don't know anything, and it will be about right. This letter hints at debts—mortgages and things, I suppose."

"Mortgages and things!" repeated the lawyer. "Lord, what an unsophisticated young blood you are! I should say there were. Now here it is, as your father explained it to me."

Kent tried to follow the lawyer's practised analysis, but did not altogether succeed. Three things emerged clearly. The mills, plant, and real estate were heavily mortgaged. There was an indebtedness to the Commercial Bank on notes made by William Kent and endorsed by Crooks. And there was a further indebtedness to them on Kent's notes alone, secured by a collateral mortgage on certain timber lands.

"Now, you see," Locke concluded, "setting the assets against the liabilities you are solvent to the extent of sixty or seventy thousand dollars, or perhaps more. In all probability you could get that clear if you sold out. Properly managed for you by somebody else, it would yield an income of between three and four thousand dollars per annum. On that you could live comfortably, be free from worry, and die of dry-rot and Scotch highballs at about my age."

"I'm going to run the business," said Joe. "My father wished it; and anyway I'm going to."

Locke smoked thoughtfully for some moments. "That's good talk," he said at length. "I understand your feelings. But before you come to a definite conclusion take time to look at all sides of the question. The cold fact is that you have had no experience. The business is solvent, but too involved to give you much leeway. It is an expensive one to run, and you can't afford to make many mistakes. For seven months in the year your payroll and camp supply bill will run into five figures. Your father intended to make a big cut next winter and clear off some of the debt. Suppose you try that yourself. It means a big outlay. Can you swing it? Remember, you haven't got much rope; and if you fail and smash it won't be a case of living on three or four thousand a year, but of earning five or six hundred a year to live on."

"I hadn't thought of it in just that way," said Kent. "You see it's all new to me. But I'm going into it, sink or swim. My mind's made up."

"I thought it would be," said Locke with satisfaction. "If I were you I'd take Wright into my confidence from the start. He is a good man, and thinks as much of your interests as if they were his own."

Wright, called in, listened to Locke's succinct statement without much surprise. "Of course, I knew these things already in a general way," he commented.

"I have decided to carry on the business," Joe told him. "What do you think of it?"

"The carrying or the business?"

"Both."

"Well," said Wright slowly, "the business might be in worse shape—a lot worse. With your father handling it there would be no trouble. With you—I don't know."

"That's not very encouraging," said Joe, endeavouring to smile at Locke, an effort not entirely

successful. Locke said nothing.

"I don't mean to be discouraging," said Wright. "It's a fact. I *don't* know. You see, you've never had a chance; you've no experience."

"Well, I'm after it now," said Kent. "Will you stay with me while I get it?"

"Of course I will," said Wright heartily.

When Locke had gone Joe turned to his manager.

"Now," he said, "will you please tell me what I ought to know about the business, just what we have on hand and what we must do to keep going? I don't know a thing about it, and I'm here to learn. I've got to. Make it as simple as you can. I'm not going to pretend I understand if I don't. Therefore I'll probably ask a lot of fool questions. You see, I'm showing you my hand, and I own up to you that there's nothing in it. But I won't show it to any one else. When I want to know things I'll come to you; but for all other people know to the contrary I'll be playing my own game. That is, till I'm capable of running the business without advice I'll run it on yours. I've got to make a bluff, and this is the only way I see of doing it. What do you think?"

"I think," said Wright, "that it's the best thing you can do, though I wouldn't have suggested it myself. I'll give you the best I've got. An hour ago I was rather doubtful, but now I think you've got it in you to play a mighty good game of your own one of these days."

Whereupon old Bob Wright and young Joe Kent shook hands with mutual respect—Wright because he had found that Kent was not a self-sufficient young ass, and Kent because Wright had treated him as a man instead of merely as an employer.

II

In the course of a few weeks Joe Kent began to feel that he was making some progress. The business was no longer a mysterious machine that somehow produced money for his needs. It became a breathing, throbbing creature, sensitive to the touch, thriving with attention, languishing with neglect. It was a delicate organism, wonderfully responsive to the handling. Every action, every word, every hastily dictated letter had far reaching results. Conscientiously and humbly, as became a beginner, he came to the study of it.

He began to meet his men. Not those with whom he came in daily contact in the office; but his foremen, tanned, weather-beaten, level-eyed logging bosses, silent for the most part, not at all certain how to take the "Old Man's" son, and apparently considering "yes" and "no" perfectly adequate contributions to conversation, who consumed his proffered cigars, kept their own opinions, and went their several ways.

Kent was conscious that he was being held at arm's length; conscious that the steady eyes took note of his smart shoes, his well-pressed clothes, and his smooth cheeks. He did not know that the same critical eyes also noted approvingly his broad shoulders, deep chest, and firm jaw. He felt that the questions he asked and the conversation he tried to make were not the questions and conversation which his father would have addressed to them. But he was building better than he knew.

Many old friends of William Kent dropped in to shake hands with his son, and one morning Joe was handed the card of Mr. Stanley Ackerman.

"Tell him to walk in," said Joe.

Mr. Ackerman walked in. He was tall and slim and gray and accurately dressed. Mr. Ackerman's business, if his varied pursuits might be thus consolidated, was that of a Director of Enterprises. He was on all sorts of directorates from banks to hospitals. He had promoted or caused to be promoted many corporate activities. He was identified in one way and another with a dozen financial and industrial concerns. He was the confidential friend and twin brother of Capital; and he was smooth, very smooth.

His handshake expressed tender, delicate sympathy.

"I should have called sooner, Mr. Kent, after the recent melancholy event," said he, "but that I feared to intrude. I knew your father very well, very well indeed. I hope to know his son as well—or better. These changes come to us all, but I was shocked, deeply shocked. I assure you, Mr. Kent, I—was—shocked."

"Sit down, won't you?" said Joe. "Have a cigar?"

"Not in the morning, thank you," said Ackerman. "My constitution won't stand it now. Don't mind me, though."

He watched Joe strike a match. His gaze was very keen and measuring, as if the young man were a problem of some sort to be solved.

"And how do you find it going?" he asked. "Quite a change for you, to be saddled with a big business at a moment's notice. If I recollect, you were at college till very recently. Yes? Unfortunate. Not that I would deprecate the value of education. Not at all. A most excellent thing. Fine training for the battle of life. But at the same time scarcely a practical preparation for the duties you have been called on so suddenly to assume."

"That's a fact," said Joe. "Just at present I'd trade a couple of the years I spent there for one in the office. However, I'm learning slowly. Doing the best I can, you know."

"No doubt, no doubt," returned Ackerman cordially. "If I had a son—I am sorry I haven't—and Providence in its inscrutable wisdom saw fit to remove me—we never can tell; as the Good Book says, Death comes like a thief in the night—that is how I would wish him to face the world. Bravely and modestly, as you are doing. No doubt you feel your responsibilities, eh?"

"Well, yes," Joe admitted. "I have my experience to get, and the concern is pretty large. Naturally it worries me a little."

"Ah," said Mr. Ackerman thoughtfully, "it's a pity your father never took action along the lines of a conversation I had with him a few months ago. I expressed surprise that he had never turned his business into a joint stock company, and—rather to *my* surprise I confess, for he was a little old-fashioned in such matters—he said he had been thinking of doing so. He observed, and very truly, that he was as capable of managing his own affairs as any board of directors, but that if anything happened to him, such experienced advice would be of inestimable benefit to you. And

then he spoke of the limited liability feature as desirable. Looking back at that conversation," said Mr. Ackerman with a gentle sigh, "it almost seems as if he had a premonition. I assure you that he spoke with the greatest earnestness, as if he had thought the matter over carefully and arrived at a definite conclusion. And yet I suppose nothing has been done in that direction, yet?"

No, nothing had been done, Joe told him. In fact, this was the first intimation he had had that such a thing had entered his father's thoughts.

That, said Mr. Ackerman, was too bad. It was a great responsibility for a young man—too great. Now, a board of experienced directors would share it, and they would have an active interest in advising properly.

"Meaning that the advice I get now isn't proper?" asked Joe, with just a little tightening of the mouth.

"Meaning nothing of the sort," Ackerman hastened to disclaim. "Don't misunderstand me. But you must admit that it is irresponsible. In the long run you pay the piper."

"That's true enough," Joe admitted. "In the end it's up to me, of course."

"Just so," said Mr. Ackerman. "That is what your father foresaw and intended to provide against. If he had been spared a few months longer I believe he would have formed a company, retaining the controlling interest himself, so that you might have had the benefit of the advice of a board of experienced directors."

Joe Kent was quite sure his father would not have done anything of the kind, but he did not say so.

Ackerman bestowed on him another measuring glance and proceeded:

"You see, Mr. Kent, business history shows that, generally speaking, the collective wisdom of half a dozen men is greater than that of the individual. The exceptions only prove the rule. The weak points in any proposition rarely get past half a dozen experienced men. And then we must remember that influence makes for success. Naturally the influence of half a dozen representative men helps to get business as it helps the business to buy cheaply, and as it helps to transact business properly. Why,"—here Mr. Ackerman became prophetic—"I venture to say, Mr. Kent, that if this business of yours were turned into a joint stock company and the proper gentlemen interested, its volume would double in a very short time."

"Perhaps so," said Joe doubtfully.

"Why not do it?" said Mr. Ackerman, seizing the psychological moment. "I would take stock myself. I think I know of others who would. And as to forming and organizing the company, I need not say that any small knowledge I may have of such matters is entirely at your service."

"Very good of you," said Joe. "It's a new idea to me. I don't think, though, that I quite like it. This is my business now, and I run it. If a company were formed I couldn't do that. I'd have to do as I was told. Of course I understand I'd have votes according to what stock I held, but it wouldn't be the same thing."

"Nominally different only," Ackerman assured him. "Very properly you would retain a majority of the shares—that is, a controlling interest. Then you'd be made managing director, at a good salary. No doubt that would be the arrangement. So that you would have an assured income, a dividend on your stock, and practical control of the business, as well as the advice of experienced men and consequent freedom from a good deal of worry. If I were in your place—speaking as one who has seen a good many ups and downs in business—I should not hesitate."

But in spite of this personal clinching argument young Kent did hesitate. And this hesitation so much resembled a plain mulish balk that Mr. Ackerman was a trifle disconcerted. Nevertheless he beamed upon the young man with tolerant good nature.

"Well, well, a new proposition," said he. "Take time to think it over—take plenty of time. You must see its advantages. New capital brought in would permit the business to expand. It would pay off the debts——"

"Debts!" said young Kent icily. "What debts?"

"Why—ah"—Mr. Ackerman was again slightly disconcerted—"you must be aware of the mortgages existing, Mr. Kent."

"I am," said Kent, "but how do you know about them? What business are they of yours?"

"Tut, tut!" said Ackerman reprovingly. "I read a weekly commercial report, like other men. The mortgages are no secret."

"I beg your pardon," said Kent. "I shouldn't have spoken as I did. Fact is, I'm a little touchy on that subject."

"Needlessly so," said Ackerman. "Most of my own property is mortgaged, and I don't consider it a disgrace. I can use the money to better advantage in other ways. Well, as I was saying, the new capital would expand the business, the advice of experienced gentlemen would make things easy for you; and if the property was put in at a good, liberal valuation—as of course it would be—your holding would be worth more than it is to-day."

"That is, the experienced gentlemen would water the stock," said Kent.

Mr. Ackerman reddened a little. "A liberal valuation isn't water," he replied. "Those who would buy into the concern wouldn't be apt to give you too much. Of course, they would desire to be perfectly fair."

"Oh, of course," said Kent. "Well, Mr. Ackerman, I don't think we need discuss the matter further, for I've decided to keep on paddling my own little canoe."

"Think it over, think it over," Ackerman urged.

"I have thought it over," said Joe. "You see, Mr. Ackerman, I may not know much about this business, but I don't know any more about any other. So I might as well stick to it."

"The plan I have outlined"—Ackerman began.

"I don't like," Kent put in, smiling. "My position is this: I want to handle this business myself and make a success at it. I expect to make mistakes, but not the same mistake twice. I'm awfully obliged for your interest, but to be told what to do by a board of directors would spoil all my fun."

"Fun!" echoed Mr. Ackerman, horrified. "My dear sir, business—is—not—fun!"

"It is for me—about the bulliest fun I ever had in my life," said young Kent. "I never played a game I liked as well."

Mr. Ackerman shook his head sadly. The young man was hopeless. "I suppose," he said casually, as he rose to go, "that in the event of a syndicate offering you a fair price for the whole concern, lock, stock, and barrel, you wouldn't sell?"

"No, I don't think so," Joe replied.

"Ah, well, youth is ever sanguine," said Mr. Ackerman. "Your energy and confidence do you credit, Mr. Kent, though I'm rather sorry you won't entertain the company idea. We could make this a very big business on that basis. Perhaps, later, you may come around to it. Anyway, I wish you luck. If I can assist you in any way at any time just let me know. Good morning. *Good morning!* Remember, in *any* way, at *any* time."

Joe, from his favourite position at the window, saw Mr. Ackerman emerge from the building and begin his dignified progress down the street.

"I didn't like his stock proposition," he thought, "but I guess he isn't a bad old sport at bottom. Seems to mean well. I'm sorry I was rude to him."

Just then Mr. Ackerman, looking up, caught his eye. Joe waved a careless, friendly hand. Mr. Ackerman so far forgot his dignity as to return the friendly salute, and smiled upward benignantly.

"The damned young pup!" said Mr. Ackerman behind his smile.

III

William Crooks, the old lumberman who had been the friend of the elder Kent, was big and broad and burly, and before the years had silvered his mane it was as red as any danger flag that ever wagged athwart steel rails. He held strong opinions, he used strong language, he was swift to anger, he feared no man on earth, and he knew the logging business from stump to market.

He inhabited a huge, square, brick structure that would have given an architect chronic nightmare. Twenty odd years before he had called to him one Dorsey, by trade a builder. "Dorsey," said Crooks, "I want you to build me a house."

Dorsey, who was a practical man, removed his pipe, scratched his head and asked: "What of?"

"Red brick," said Crooks. He held out a sheet of foolscap. "Here's the number of rooms and the sizes of them."

Dorsey scanned the paper. "What do you want her to cost?"

"What she's worth, and a fair profit to you," said Crooks. "Get at her and finish her by frost. I'll want to move in by then."

"All right," said Dorsey. "She'll be ready for you."

By frost "she" was finished, and Crooks moved in. There he had lived ever since; and there he intended to live as long as he could. Kindly time had partially concealed the weird creation of Dorsey's brain by trees and creepers; here and there an added veranda or bow window was offered in mitigation of the original crime; but its stark, ungraceful outline remained a continual offence to the eye. That was outside. Inside it was different. The rooms were big and airy and well lighted. There was an abundance of open fireplaces, as became the residence of a man whose life had been spent in devastating forests, and the furniture and furnishings were practical and comfortable, for Bill Crooks hated "frills."

In that house his children were born, and there three of them and his wife died. There Jean, his youngest girl, grew to womanhood, a straight, lithe, slender, dark-haired young tyrant, with his own fearlessness and directness of speech. She was known to her intimates as "Jack," and she and Joe Kent had been friends all their young lives.

Since coming home Kent had seen little of her. He was very busy mastering details of the business, and either went back to his office in the evenings or spent them quietly at the club. But on the day of his interview with Mr. Ackerman it occurred to him that he should call upon Jack Crooks.

When he opened the gate that evening he saw that the wide veranda was well occupied. Four young men were making exceedingly light conversation to two young women. William Crooks was nowhere visible. Miss Crooks came down the walk to meet him, and held out two slim hands in welcome.

"I'm so glad to see you, Joe. I've been looking for you for days."

"You see, I've been busy," said Kent. "And then, naturally, I haven't been going out much."

She nodded sympathetic comprehension. "I understand, of course. Come up and be presented. I have a very charming visitor."

"Any one I know?"

"Edith Garwood. She's my guest for a few weeks. Have you met her?"

Joe had never met Miss Garwood. He decided as he shook hands with her that this was his distinct loss. Edith Garwood was tall and fair and blue eyed, with the dainty bloom and colouring of a flower. Her smile was simply distracting. Her voice was low and musical, and her laughter carried a little trill that stuck in the memory like the first bird notes of spring. She seemed to be one of those rare girls who are made to be loved by everybody, madly adored by several, and finally captured by some undeservingly lucky man.



*Miss Crooks came down the walk to meet him ...
"I'm so glad to see you, Joe. I've been looking for you for days"*

At that moment she was holding a little court. Mallane, a young lawyer; Drew, of Drew & Son; Leadly, whose chief occupation was the dissemination of his father's money, which he had almost accomplished; and young Jolly, who honoured a bank with his presence by day, clustered around her closely. Each was quite positive that her glances and laughter held a meaning for him which the others did not share. The charmed circle, momentarily broken by the entrance of Kent, closed again. They talked at Miss Garwood, they postured at her, and when, now and then, they remembered the existence of their young hostess and included her in the conversation, it was evidently as a matter of duty only. Just then Edith Garwood was the only star in all the heavens.

Joe drew chairs for himself and Miss Jack just outside the group.

"Well?" she asked.

"Quite, thank you."

"I didn't mean that. Is it love at first sight with you, too?"

"No chance for me," laughed Joe. "Competition is too keen. Besides, Jack, I've been in love with you for years."

"Nonsense!" she said, so sharply that he looked at her in surprise. "I waive my prior claim," she added, with a laugh. "Confess, Joe! Isn't she the prettiest girl you ever saw?"

"She seems to be a good deal of a peach," Joe admitted. "Is she related to Hugh Garwood, the president of the O. & N. Railway?"

"Daughter," said Jack briefly. "His only child."

Joe grinned. "Which probably accounts for the obvious devotion of Mallane and Leadly."

"Don't be so cynical; it isn't nice. She can't help it, can she?"

"Of course not. I was speaking of the men."

"Well, she's very pretty and charming. If I were a young man I'd fall in love with her. It wouldn't surprise me a bit to see you smitten."

Joe reddened a trifle, conscious that while he had been talking to Jack his eyes had been on Miss Garwood. Once or twice her glance had met his and she had given him a friendly smile. It seemed to hint at an understanding between them—as if she would have been very glad to have him change places with one of the others. And yet it was absolutely frank and open.

Kent, being an average young man, did not analyze the quality of it. He merely felt that he liked Edith Garwood, and she probably did not dislike him. At the same time he began to feel a slight aversion to the four men who monopolized her; but he explained this to himself quite honestly on the ground that it was boorish of them to neglect Jack Crooks for a guest, no matter how

charming the latter might be. His reply to Jack's prediction was interrupted by William Crooks.

"Well, young people," said the old lumberman, emerging upon the veranda, "why don't you come into the house and have some music?"

"It's cooler out here, dad," said Jack. "Sit down and make yourself at home and have a smoke. Here's Joe."

Crooks laid a huge hand on Kent's shoulder. "I want to talk over some business with you, Joe. You won't mind if I take him away for half an hour, Jack?"

"Not a bit, dad. Don't keep him all night, though."

"I won't," he promised, smiling at her fondly. "Come on, Joe. We'll go to the library."

William Crooks's library held few books. Such as there were mainly dealt with the breeding, training, and diseases of horses and dogs. Stuffed birds and fish, guns and rods adorned the walls. A huge table in the centre of the room bore a mass of papers in which pipes, cartridge cases, trout flies, and samples of various woods mingled in gorgeous confusion. Crooks laid an open box of cigars on top of the disarray.

"Well, Joe," he asked, "how you makin' it?"

"I don't quite know yet," Kent replied. "I'm just beginning to learn the ropes around the office. So far I like it."

"You'll like it better," said Crooks. "You come to me if you get stuck; but work things out for yourself if you can. Now, about those notes I've indorsed!"

"Yes," said Kent. "I don't see how I'm to take them up just yet."

"Nobody wants you to," said Crooks. "Your father helped me out often enough. I was doing the same for him, and what I'd do for him I'll do for you. Don't worry about the notes or renewals. Only—I may as well talk straight to you, Joe—I don't want to increase my liabilities without I have to. Understand, if it's a case of need I'll back you up to any amount in reason, but if you can worry along without more accommodation I wish you would."

"It's very good of you," said Joe. "I'll try to get along. Anyway, I never thought of asking you for more endorsements."

"Well, you think of it if you need them," said Crooks gruffly. "Come to me as if I were your father, boy. I'll go with you as far as I would with him, and that's to the rim-ice of Hades."

For acknowledgment Joe took his hand and shook it, an action which embarrassed the old lumber baron exceedingly.

"All right, all right," he growled. "Don't be a blamed young fool. I'm not going away anywhere."

Joe laughed. "I'm glad of that. I'll ask your advice pretty often, Mr. Crooks. By the way, what would you think of turning my business into a joint stock company? I don't fancy the idea myself."

"Who's been talking to you?" demanded Crooks.

"Well, Mr. Ackerman dropped in this morning."

"What did he want?"

"I don't suppose he wanted anything in particular. He just happened in, being in town. This came up in the course of conversation."

"Son," said Crooks, "Ackerman doesn't go anywhere or see anybody without he wants something. You tie into that. What did he talk about?"

Joe told him. Crooks listened intently, chewing his cigar.

"He suggested the same thing to your father, and your father refused to consider it," he said. "Now he comes to you. Huh!" He smoked in silence for several moments. "I wonder what his game is?" he concluded thoughtfully.

"Why, I suppose if he organized the company he'd get a block of stock for his services," said Joe, and he thought the comment particularly shrewd. "That's all I see in it, Mr. Crooks."

"You don't know a thing about it," growled the lumberman bluntly. "If you fell in with his proposition he'd kick you out when he got ready."

"No," said Joe. "He suggested that I retain a majority of the shares."

Crooks eyed him pityingly. "In about six months he'd issue more and cut your throat."

"How could he do that unless I consented?"

"You would consent—the way they'd put it up to you. However, you won't deal with him if you have any sense. Now, look here. You're not twenty-five, just starting business. You think all there is to it is to cut your logs, bring down your drives, cut them up into lumber, and the demand will take care of the rest. That's how it used to be. It isn't so now. Timber is getting scarcer and prices are going up. There is a scramble for what timber limits are left, and the men with the pull get them. Same way with contracts. You'll find it out. The big concerns are eating up the little ones in our line, just as in others. That's why you'd better keep clear of any proposals of Ackerman's."

"I will," Joe promised. At the same time he thought Crooks unduly pessimistic.

"Now about timber," the old lumberman went on. "I'm starting men to cruise all north of Rat Lake to the divide. You'd better send a couple of cruisers into Wind River and let them work east over that stuff, so you will be in shape to bid for it. That was what your father intended to do."

"We have two men there now," Joe told him.

"Do you know how this bidding works?" asked Crooks.

"The government calls for tenders and accepts the highest," Joe replied.

"Theoretically," said Crooks. "Practically, if you're not a friend of their rotten outfit you might tender the mint and not get a look in. They used to have sales by public auction, and those were square enough; though sometimes the boys pooled on 'em. Now what happens is this: The government may open any timber for sale on any man's application, and they are supposed to advertise for tenders. If the applicant isn't a friend they won't open it. If he is, they advertise in a couple of issues of some backwoods paper that no one sees, nobody else tenders, and he gets it for a song. Of course some one high up gets a rake-off. Only you can't prove it."

"How do you buy, then?" Joe asked. "You're not friendly to the present government, and I'm not."

Crooks hesitated for a moment.

"You'll have to know sooner or later," he said. "I tender in the name of another man, and I pay him from ten to twenty per cent. of the amount I tender for the bare use of his name—if I get what I want. Oh, I know it's rotten, but I have to stand for it or shut down. Your father did the same thing; you'll have to do it, too. I'm not defending it. I'll tell you more. This infernal political graft is everywhere. You can't supply a foot of lumber to a contractor on any public work unless you stand in."

Joe whistled astonishment, not unmixed with disbelief.

"Sounds pretty stiff, hey?" said Crooks. "Well, here's something else for you to digest. There's a concern called the Central Lumber Company, capitalized for a hundred thousand, composed of a young lawyer, a bookkeeper, a real estate man, and an insurance agent—individuals, mind you, who couldn't raise ten thousand dollars between them—who have bought in timber lands and acquired going lumber businesses worth several millions. What do you think of that?"

Joe did not know what to think of it, and said so. The suspicion that Crooks was stringing him crossed his mind, but the old lumberman was evidently in deadly earnest.

"And now I'll tell you one thing more," said Crooks, instinctively lowering his voice. "I had an offer for my business some time ago, and I turned it down. It came through a firm of lawyers for clients unnamed. Since then I've had a run of bad luck. My sales have fallen off, I have trouble in my mills, and the railway can't supply me with cars. There isn't a thing I can fasten on, either."

"Oh, you must be mistaken," said Joe. It seemed to him that bad luck, which often runs in grooves, had given rise to groundless suspicions in Crooks's mind.

"I'm not mistaken," the latter replied. "I'm playing with a cold deck, and though I can't see a blame thing wrong with the deal I notice I draw rags every time. That's enough for me. I'm going to find out why, because if I don't I may as well quit playing." He banged his big fist viciously on the table. "I'll know the reason why!" he thundered. "I will, by the Glory Eternal! If any gang of blasted high-bankers think they can run me out of my own business without a fight they miss their guess."

His white hair bristled and his cold blue eyes blazed. Thirty years before he had been a holy terror with fists and feet. Few men then had cared to arouse Bill Crooks. Now the old fighting spirit surged up and took possession of him, and he was proceeding to stronger language when Miss Jack tapped imperatively at the door and opened it.

"May I come in? Dad, this isn't playing fair. You've kept Joe all evening. Edith and I have been waiting alone for half an hour. Come in, Edith, and tell him what you think of him."

"Well, you girls had four young fellows without Joe. How many do you want?"

She raised inquiring eyebrows at his tone. "Anything the matter, daddy? I didn't mean to intrude."

"You never do that, Jack," he smiled at her fondly. "Business bothers—nothing to worry about. It'll be all right 'when the drive comes down!'"

"That always means I mustn't ask questions. I won't; but for being rude to me you shall sing the song. Edith wants to hear it."

"Oh, do please, Mr. Crooks," said Miss Garwood sweetly.

"I've no more voice than a crow, and Jack knows it," said Crooks, but followed his daughter meekly to the piano in the next room.

"'When the Drive Comes Down,' as sung by Mr. William Crooks, Selected Record," Jack announced in a metallic voice. She struck a chord, and Crooks, his face beaming and his ill humour forgotten, with the preliminary whine of the genuine shanty vocalist struck into an ancient ballad of the river, which was his especial favourite:

"Come all ye gallant shanty boys, an' listen while I sing,
We've worked six months in cruel frosts, but soon we'll take our fling.
The ice is black an' rotten, an' the rollways is piled high,
So boost upon yer peavey sticks while I do tell ye why-y-y.

For it's break the roll ways out, me boys, an' let the big stick slide,
An' file yer corks, an' grease yer boots, an' start upon the drive,
A hundred miles of water is the nearest way to town,
So tie into the tail of her, an' keep her hustlin' down-n-n."

He roared it in a heavy bass, beating time with a thunderous fist. Jack's clear alto and Joe's strong baritone struck into the first refrain:

"When the drive comes dow-un, when the jam comes down,
Oh, it's then we're paid our money, an' it's then we own the town.
All the gutters runs with whiskey when the shanty boys so frisky
Sets their boot corks in the sidewalks when the drive is down-n-n."

"Splendid!" cried Miss Garwood. "More, Mr. Crooks!" He nodded at her indulgently, and let his big voice go:

"There's some poor lads will never lift a peavey-hook again,
Nor hear the trees crack wid the frost, nor feel a warm spring rain.
'Twas fallin' timber, rowlin' logs that handed them their time;
It was their luck to get it so—it may be yours or mine.

"But break the rollways out, me lads, an' let the big sticks slide,
For one man killed within the woods ten's drowned on the drive.
So make yer sowls before ye take the nearest way to town
While the lads that be's in Heaven watch the drive go down-n-n.

"When the drive starts dow-un, when the drive starts down,
Oh, it's every lad in Heaven he wud swop his golden crown
For a peavey stick again, an' a soakin' April rain,
An' to birl a log beneath him as he drives the river down-n-n."

"Oh, I don't like that verse," protested Miss Garwood. "It's sad, fatalistic, reckless—anything and everything it shouldn't be. I thought shanty songs were more cheerful."

"Some of 'em are cheerful enough," said Crooks, winking at Joe, who had the grace to blush.

"But most describe the lingering deaths of true lovers," said Jack. "A shantyman requires sentiment or murder, and preferably both, in his music. Dad, sing us 'The Fate of Lovely May.'"

"I will not," Crooks refused. "It has five hundred verses, more or less. I'm going to bed. You can lose sleep if you want to."

"Don't take that hint, Joe," laughed Jack. "You're not company."

"Hint nothing," said Crooks. "Jack knows it wasn't."

"I'm a business man now," said Joe. "I feel it my duty to set an example to frivolous young people."

"Come around often, the way you used to," said Jack.

Miss Garwood, obviously, could not second the invitation in words: but much can be expressed by a pair of blue eyes. Joe felt that, unless he was an absolute dub at interpreting such things, his visits would not be unwelcome to her.

IV

Wright stalked into Joe's office one morning and slapped an open letter down on his desk. Evidently he was red hot.

"What do you think of that?" he demanded. The communication was brief and business-like:

BARKER & SMITH

Contractors—Builders
Oshkook, June 10th.

The Kent Lumber Co., Falls City.

Dear Sirs: Referring to our correspondence as to a quantity of lumber f.o.b. Falls City, we would say that we will not require same from you, having been quoted a more favourable rate. Regretting that in this instance we must place our order elsewhere, we are,

— Yours truly, Barker & Smith.

Joe whistled dismally. Barker & Smith were large contractors and retail dealers. The quantity of lumber referred to was large, and the contract had been all but closed; in fact, he was not sure that it had not been closed. After consultation with Wright he had quoted the firm a rock bottom cash price because he needed the money more than the lumber. Now he was thrown down hard.

"Well, some one underbid us," he said, trying to hide his disappointment. "That's all there is to it."

"Nobody could underbid us and get out even," said Wright. "We figured our margin down to a hair-line. I'll bet a hundred to one they can't get it cheaper without stealing."

"They say they can, and I suppose it goes," said Joe wearily. "Hang it, I thought it was as good as closed!"

"Same here; and I'm not sure it isn't," said Wright. "They practically agreed to take the stuff from us."

"Show the correspondence to Locke then, and see what he says," Joe suggested.

But Locke, after he had waded through the papers, tossed them back to Wright. "No good," he said. "What's here doesn't amount to a contract, though it comes mighty close to it."

"It comes so close to it that we had cars run up the spur and started to load," said Wright. "The understanding was—"

"It had no business to be," Locke interrupted. "You've shown me all the papers in the matter, haven't you? Very well, I tell you they don't amount to an agreement. They're simply a series of proposals, rejections, and requests for other proposals, though you came very nearly agreeing. While you're dickering some one cuts in with a better rate and they call it off. You can't hold them."

"But nobody could underbid us; we quoted 'em rock bottom," Wright persisted. That was the main point in his mind.

"Oh, pshaw, Wright, have some sense!" snapped Locke. "That may be an excuse, or it may not. It's quite immaterial. Can't you see that?"

"That's all right from a lawyer's standpoint, but not from ours," said Wright. "Barker & Smith use a lot of lumber, and they're not in business to lose money. I say nobody could underbid us. They lie when they say they got a better rate. What do they want to lie for? It's money out of their pockets."

"I'm a lawyer, not a mind reader," Locke reminded him. "Your quotations were f.o.b. Falls City. It's just possible the freight rate may have something to do with it."

Wright returned to the office, pulled out his tariff books and compared the rate from Falls City to Oshkook with rates from other competitive points to the latter place.

"We've got 'em skinned there, too," he soliloquized. "They can't lay down any lumber cheaper than ours. It beats me."

For an hour he pulled at a blackened brier and pondered the question. Then he went to Kent.

"This thing worries me," he said. "I can't see through it. I think I'll take a run over to Oshkook and have a talk with Barker & Smith."

"I wouldn't," said Joe, his pride up in arms. "We don't want to go begging for their business. We quoted 'em a good rate. If they don't want our stuff at that let 'em go to the devil." He was sore and stiff-necked, as is the wont of youth when things go wrong.

But the older man persisted:

"I don't care so much that we lost the contract; I want to find out, if I can, why we lost it. I know we weren't underbid, and I want to know why they lied about it. It isn't a case of soliciting business; it's a case of finding out why we don't get what's coming to us, and that's a mighty vital question to any concern. We've sold Barker & Smith before, and never had any friction. We can't afford to ride the high horse just now. There's something behind this, and it's up to us to find out what."

Kent recognized the force of the argument. "I was wrong. Go ahead and find out all you can."

Wright took train for Oshkook and dropped into Barker & Smith's office. Barker was out, and he saw Smith.

"I called about the lumber we quoted you a price on," said Wright.

"Oh, that?" said Smith, who was plainly uneasy. "Yes. Let's see! We didn't come to terms, did we?"

"No, we didn't," said Wright. "We quoted you a price that left us practically no margin. I don't see how any one could give a lower quotation. In fact, I wouldn't have believed it possible if your letter hadn't said so. I tell you whoever underbid us will lose money by it, or else you'll get poor stuff."

"We won't accept poor stuff," said Smith. "As to whether the other people lose money or not, that's their affair. I presume they know their own business."

"Would you mind telling me who they are?" Wright asked.

The question appeared to embarrass Smith.

"Why, upon my word, Wright, I don't exactly know," he replied. "We got a number of quotations, of course. Barker has been looking after it. Better see him."

"You'd have the information in the office, wouldn't you?" Wright pressed.

"I suppose so, I suppose so; but—here, you see Barker. He knows all about it. I don't. Sorry to leave you, but I've got an appointment." And he left Wright to wait for the senior partner.

When Barker came in, fully two hours later, his surprise at seeing Wright was so much overdone that the latter knew Smith had been talking to him.

"Well, now, look here," said Barker when Wright had opened the matter, "I don't want to talk about this. We got a dozen quotations and picked out the one that suited us. That's all there is to it. I'm not going to tell you where we buy or what we buy for. That's our business."

"You said we were underbid, and that's my business," said Wright. "I tell you we weren't."

"That," said Barker with first-class indignation, "amounts to a reflection on our veracity."

"I wouldn't put it that way," retorted Wright. "Your letter was a darned poor lie, if you want my opinion of it. Now, hold your horses for a minute while I talk. No one quoted you a better rate than we did; I know that. And I know that transportation charges cut no figure, either. I'm not kicking, understand, but I do want to know why we didn't land the contract. We've done business with you before and hope to do business with you again. Where do we fall down? Why are you throwing it into us? What do we have to figure on besides cost, next time you ask us for a quotation?"

"Better wait till I ask you," said Barker.

"No, because this is a serious thing for us. I want to make it plain that we recognize your right to buy anywhere, and for any price you choose to pay. That's all right. You needn't have given any reason at all. But the reason you did give was not the true one, and we both know it. Now, man to man, Mr. Barker, tell me what we're up against. Why didn't we get the contract?"

"Well," said Barker hesitatingly, "there is something in what you say. I don't mind telling you this much: There are a holy lot of wires in our business, and we have to stand in with the people who pull them, see? Sometimes we have to buy where we're told, no matter what the price is. We get square in other ways. That's about what happened in this case, otherwise you would have got the

order.”

Wright felt quite elated when he took his departure, for he had justified his contention that they had not been underbidden. Wright’s business was to cut logs into lumber and sell the lumber. William Kent had looked after the logging end of the concern. The limits, the camps, and the drives were his field. What logs he did not sell he handed over to Wright and thought no more about, knowing that they would be worked up into everything from rough boards to matched flooring. Wright, then, having ascertained the reason of the throw down, accepted it philosophically as arising from circumstances beyond his control. But young Kent, when he received his manager’s report, was not so philosophic.

“Pretty rotten state of affairs if people have to buy where they are told,” he fumed. “Nice free country we inhabit! I never took much stock in such yarns, but I’m beginning to see that there may be something in them.”

He took his troubles to Crooks, who listened, growled profane comment, but offered no advice. When Kent had gone he went to Locke’s office. Locke heard him with attention.

“What does the boy think about it?” he asked.

“So far,” Crooks replied, “he’s more indignant because Barker & Smith have to buy somewhere else than because he can’t sell to them. Same thing in one way, of course. But he’s looking at it from what he thinks is their standpoint. Says it’s an outrage that they have to buy where they’re told.”

“Now I wonder,” said Locke thoughtfully, “if we may go a step further? I wonder if they are told where not to buy?”

“By George!” exclaimed Crooks.

“It proves nothing,” said Locke. “It may not be especially directed at Kent.”

“I’ll bet it is,” said Crooks. “I’m losing good customers myself without reason. I can stand it, but Joe can’t. He needs good luck to pull him through as it is.”

“What in thunder do you suspect anyway?” asked Locke. “A combine?”

“Not a bit of it,” replied Crooks. “I’ve not been asked to join any ring to boost prices; but I have been asked to sell out. So has Kent. We won’t do it, and immediately our businesses suffer.”

“That is, you think somebody is forcing your hand?”

“That’s what I think. If Barker had told the truth he’d have said he’d been ordered not to buy from Kent.”

“Well, if any one is hammering you he’ll have to show his hand sooner or later,” said Locke. “Take your medicine till you can get hold of one definite illegal act susceptible of proof beyond all question. Then we’ll simply raise the roof.”

V

In less than a week from their first meeting, Edith Garwood and Joe Kent were giving a very fair imitation of a flirtation. Joe, as has been said before, was merely an average young man. He was not genuinely or at all in love at first; but he was strongly attracted, and he played the pleasant game without much thought of consequences. And Edith Garwood, being so constituted that admiration was as the breath of life to her, entered into it with zest.

Not that she confined herself to Joe. Mallane, Leadly, and half a dozen others basked in the sunshine of her smiles, and she held the balance fairly level, enjoying her power. Thus jealousies sprang up which threatened to disrupt the *entente cordiale* normally existing in the younger set of Falls City. These were by no means confined to the young men, for certain young ladies found themselves suddenly deserted by cavaliers to whose loyalty they would have sworn, and were much displeased thereby.

These things bore somewhat hardly on Jack Crooks. She was a frank, unspoiled, straight-forward girl, and loyalty to her friends was one of her distinguishing features. But she was very human, and the general male adoration of her guest made her just a little tired. No young hostess likes to be completely outshone by a visitor, even a very lovely one, and to find herself practically overlooked by the young men of her own town was a new and unpleasant experience.

"I thought Joe, anyway, had more sense," she reflected. "She doesn't care for him any more than for the others, and he ought to see it. Oh, well, let him burn his fingers. I don't care."

But she did care, because he was a very old friend, and she rather resented the pumping process to which Miss Garwood subjected her one evening. That young lady, after eliciting certain information as to the habits, characters, and worldly prospects of several young gentlemen, at last came around to Kent, a sequence which was suspicious in itself.

"Now your Mr. Kent, dear—tell me about him!"

"He's not *my* Mr. Kent," said Jack, a shade of red stealing into her cheeks. "Joe's a nice boy, quite the nicest I know. We played together when we were kids—that is, he condescended to amuse me when he was nine and I was five, and that's quite a concession for a boy, isn't it? Lately he's been away at college, and so we haven't seen much of each other."

"His father died recently. He is the only son, isn't he?"

"Yes. And his mother died when he was a little fellow, so he is quite alone. He is carrying on the business himself."

"It's a big business, isn't it? Somebody said the late Mr. Kent was quite wealthy."

Jack's brows drew together a little. She disliked these questions, perfectly natural though they were.

"I believe he was; that is, of course, he owned mills and timber limits and so on. I suppose Joe is well off, but he has never confided in me."

"But he may some day?" The unmistakable meaning in the words brought the red to Jack's cheeks again. She turned the question carelessly.

"Oh, perhaps, when he is in a confidential mood. He always was a clam, though."

"Jack, dear," said Miss Garwood, "look at me. Is there anything between you and Mr. Kent?"

"Not a blessed thing," said Jack honestly. "Why?"

"I wanted to make sure I wasn't trespassing," replied Miss Garwood lightly.

"Well, you're not," said Jack. "Now let me ask a question: Have you fallen in love with him?"

"No, not exactly," said Miss Garwood. "But—well, dearie, I half suspect that he has fallen in love with me."

In spite of herself Jack winced. It was what she had told herself, but to hear it from Edith Garwood's careless lips was different. And yet why should she care? Joe was no more to her than any other old friend. Naturally he would fall in love some day and marry. Perhaps Edith, in spite of her denial, did care for him. In that case— She gave herself a mental shake and met the curious look in her guest's blue eyes squarely.

"I don't see how he could help it," she said truthfully. "He isn't the only one, either. Shall you marry him, Edith?"

Edith Garwood laughed, well pleased, for she liked to be told of her conquests. "It's rather early to say," she replied. "You see, dear, he hasn't asked me yet. And if he did, there are all sorts of things to be considered."

"Such as what?" asked Jack. "If you love one another that's the main thing, isn't it?"

"You dear, unsophisticated child!" laughed Miss Garwood. "That's only one thing. We should have to live after we were married, you see."

"Well, I suppose Joe has enough money for that," Jack commented. "And then you have plenty of money yourself, or your father has."

"Yes," Miss Garwood agreed; "but papa has his own ideas of what would be a suitable match for me. I'm not sure he would approve of Joe—I mean Mr. Kent. Confidentially, Jack, how much do you suppose he is worth?"

"I never supposed," said Jack shortly. "His income may be one thousand or ten thousand a year; I don't know. You aren't marrying him for his money."

"I haven't decided to marry him at all, you goose," said Miss Garwood lightly. "It will be time enough to make up my mind when he asks me."

Nevertheless she lay awake for half an hour that night, thinking. Her flirtation with Joe had reached a point for thought. She wondered how Hugh Garwood would regard him as a prospective son-in-law. Finding the answer rather doubtful, she sighed, turned her facile mind to something else, and almost immediately slept.

For hours after her guest slumbered, Jack Crooks stared from her bed at the treetops outside the window, and watched the patch of moonlight on the floor slowly shift and finally disappear. And this sleeplessness was the more unaccountable because she told herself again that she didn't care whether Joe married Edith or not. She was quite honest about it.

"But I didn't like her questions about his money," she reflected. "She has or will have enough for both. I know if I were in love—which thank goodness I'm not—the amount of money a young man had would be the last thing I'd think of. I don't believe dad would think of it either, just so we had enough to live on, and good prospects. Of course not. She can't think much of Joe if she lets that stand in the way. If he isn't exactly rich he can't be poor. Mr. Kent was as well off as dad, I should think. Oh, dear! I've simply *got* to go to sleep." And finally she did, just as the faintest light grew in the east.

Meanwhile, Joe Kent was doing a little soul searching himself, without coming to any definite conclusion. He liked Edith Garwood, and he suffered acute jealousy when she accepted the marked attentions of others; but to save his life he couldn't make up his mind whether he would care to look at her across his breakfast coffee as long as they both should live. The question of money occurred to him, but not as an important factor. He knew that old Hugh Garwood, the president of the O. & N. Railway, had it to burn, to throw at the birds, to stuff cats with, and half a dozen other ways of disposition. But he himself had enough to keep a wife in the modest comfort which had always been his. He was clean, healthy, well educated, and owned a business which, though encumbered, was perfectly solvent. Therefore he considered himself, without egotism, eligible for the hand of any girl, no matter how wealthy her father might be.

But apart from the question of whether he loved Edith Garwood or not was the somewhat embarrassing one of whether she loved him. It was all right to flirt, to play the two-handed game for fun. But suppose it was for marbles; suppose one took it seriously—

"Hang it," said young Kent to himself, "I don't know whether I've got the real thing or not; and I don't know whether she has been stringing me along or not. But if she hasn't been it's pretty nearly up to me to come across with a formal proposal. I wish I knew where I was at. I wonder if I could get a line from Jack?"

From which the experienced will readily deduce that young Mr. Kent was somewhat rattled and a little afraid of the future, but not altogether unwilling to pay for his fun like a man.

His endeavour to sound Miss Crooks was by no means a success. With unwonted density she did not or would not see the drift of his questions, framed with what he considered great subtlety; and when he became more direct she went to the point with embarrassing candour:

"Do you want to marry her, or don't you?" she asked.

"Why, Jack, I'll be hanged if I know," he admitted.

"Well, when you make up your mind, ask her," said Jack. "Meanwhile don't try to pump me. I don't know anything about her sentiments, and if I did I wouldn't tell you."

So Joe had to go it blind. The flirtation, however, progressed. One night the moon, rising gorgeous and serene above a notch in the hills, discovered Edith Garwood and Joe Kent seated prosaically upon a huge log by the river side, both very tongue-tied, and both apparently

absorbed in the engrossing pastime of tossing pebbles into the black water and seeing the rings spread. In fact it had come to a showdown. It was distinctly Joe's play, but he held up his hand. It was provoking, from Miss Garwood's standpoint.

"I think," she said, "that we should go home."

"Oh, not yet; it's early," said Joe.

Pause. Miss Garwood sighed inaudibly but impatiently, and her fingers played nervously with a ring. Joe stared blankly at the water. The ring, escaping from the lady's hand, fell tinkling on the beach pebbles.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I've dropped my ring!"

She knelt at once and began to search for it in the semi-darkness. So did Joe. Quite by accident her slim white hand came in contact with his broad brown one. And the natural thing happened.

"Mr. Kent!"

"Yes—Edith!"

"Please!"

But she swayed toward him slightly. Accepting the situation, Joe Kent's unoccupied hand and arm encircled her waist with considerable facility. He even applied gentle pressure. She yielded a little, but protested:

"Mr. Kent—Joe!"

"Yes, dear!"

"You shouldn't—I shouldn't. I never gave you any reason to think that I thought that you thought—I mean you couldn't think I did, could you?" Which confusion of speech went to show that the usually composed Miss Garwood was slightly rattled. She had created the situation and she felt it slipping beyond her control. Joe, who had accepted it recklessly, drew a long breath and made the plunge.

"I hope you do. I—I love you, Edith." He wondered if the words rang true. To him they sounded hollow and forced. But Miss Garwood's waist yielded a little more. The fingers of her disengaged hand clasped the lapel of his coat and played with it, and her sweet blue eyes looked up pleadingly, trustfully, into his brown ones.

"Joe," she murmured, "I don't know what to say. I'm not sure, but I half suspect that I—I—oh!"

The exclamation was smothered, for again the natural thing had happened.

Five minutes afterward Miss Garwood smoothed her hair and said irrelevantly:

"But we haven't found my ring!"

"Good old ring," said Joe, producing it from his pocket.

"Joe!" she cried in unaffected astonishment. "Did you have it there all the time?"

"I found it pretty early in the game," he acknowledged without shame. "I'll buy you another tomorrow."

The dim light hid the sudden gravity of her features. "Do you mean an engagement ring, Joe?"

"Of course."

"Are we really engaged?"

"Simple process, isn't it? I guess we are."

Miss Garwood dug a daintily shod foot into the sand. This was getting serious.

"But we ought to have papa's consent first."

"Well, I'll take a run over to your town and tell him about it," said Joe carelessly. "Matter of form, I suppose. I'll look after that in a day or two."

Miss Garwood laughed uneasily. "It's plain that you don't know him. I think you would better leave that to me—about our engagement, I mean. And meantime we won't say anything about it to anybody."

"I don't like that," said Joe frankly. Having made the plunge he was ready to stay in the water. "Why shouldn't we announce it? Do you mean your father wouldn't consent?"

"I doubt if he would, at first," she replied, apparently with equal frankness. "You see he expects me—please don't be offended—but he expects me to make what is called a good marriage."

"Do you mean he expects you to marry for money?"

"No, not altogether. But money and social position are desirable." Thus early she sought to provide an avenue of retreat.

Joe stared at her, his pride hurt. It had never occurred to him that his own social position was not as good as any one's. He was received everywhere he wished to go; of fashionable society and the grades and jealousies of it he knew little and cared less. He had no social ambitions whatever, and his own modest place was perfectly assured.

"I don't quite get it," said he. "I have enough to live on. And I suppose I could butt into society, if that's what you mean."

She explained gently, shouldering the responsibility upon her father. In any event they could not marry at once. Then let their engagement remain a secret between them. She sighed with relief when she carried her point, for it gave her time to pause and reflect. Joe had swept her away a little, for she really liked him. Now she saw things clearly once more. Relative values emerged. Even a temporary engagement to a comparatively poor, obscure young man would never do; that is, it must not be made public. But she was given to following the line of the least resistance. It never occurred to her to doubt that he was genuinely in love, and she hated a scene. Later it would be an easy thing to break with him. Meanwhile she would have what fun she could out of it, for Joe was really very nice.

VI

As a matter of fact Kent was rather relieved when Miss Garwood's visit ended. Whether he had made a mistake or not he was ready to abide by it; but he found himself in a false position, and he greatly disliked to witness the open attentions of numerous young men, to which he could not very well object. However, he had a number of other things, just as important and considerably more pressing, to think about.

For instance, there was the question of car shortage. The Peninsular Railway, which was the only line serving Falls City, seemed to have no rolling stock available. Promises were forthcoming in plenty—but no cars. Complaints of delayed shipments from indignant purchasers poured down on Kent in a daily deluge. He and Wright besieged the manager, the traffic superintendent, and the dispatchers, demanding flats and boxes—anything on wheels—and by dint of unremitting persistence were able to obtain about half as many cars as they needed.

It was this difficulty which made Joe, after consultation with Wright, refuse a proposition of Clancy Brothers, with whom they already had a large delivery contract, calling for almost double the quantity of lumber which they had a right to purchase under the existing agreement, and at the same rate and same terms of delivery.

"No use making contracts if we can't get cars," said Joe regretfully when he had read the Clancys' letter.

"That's so," said Wright. "We'll explain it to them. I suppose if they want more lumber, and if we can ever get anything to ship it in, we can sell it to them." And he wrote them to that effect and subsequently regretted it, for cars began to come easier.

And then there was the situation at the bank. The notes were coming due, and though there was no objection to renewing those which Crooks had endorsed, the bank intimated that the others should be reduced.

"But why?" asked Joe. "You have collateral. The security is as good now as when they were given."

"The personal liability is different," replied Hagel, manager of the Commercial Bank. He was a stout, pompous, side-whiskered man of middle age, inclined to a solemnity of speech which partially cloaked an innate stupidity, and he held his position mainly because he did as he was told, without question. "Your father's ability to pay was one thing; yours—you'll pardon me—is quite another."

"In other words, you don't think I can run the business?" said Joe.

Hagel raised a protesting hand. "It is not what *I* think, Mr. Kent. My directors, in their wisdom, foresee a—er—a financial storm. We must shorten sail, Mr. Kent—hem!—yes—shorten sail. I regret the necessity, but—"

"All right," Joe interrupted. "If you insist, of course I'll have to take up the notes when they mature. To do that I'll have to borrow money, and I don't feel inclined to leave my account where I can't get ordinary accommodation. I'll go over to the Farmers' National and see what McDowell will do for me."

McDowell was manager of the latter institution, and the very antipodes of Hagel, who hated him. He was young, popular, brusque, and a thorough-paced sport after banking hours.

"I trust you won't do that," said Hagel, for the Kent account was a very valuable one. "You have other accommodation from us, and we have had your account for a long time."

"That's got nothing to do with it," said Joe, who was developing a most disconcerting habit of going straight to the point. "You people are trying to keep the cream and make me hustle to sell skim milk. If you force me to hunt accommodation elsewhere not another dollar of my money goes through your hands. You'll do what seems best to you, of course; but I want to know now where I am at."

Hagel had lost some very good accounts which the Farmers' National had subsequently acquired, and his directors had made unpleasant remarks. Although he was merely carrying out their instructions in this instance, he knew director nature well enough to realize that he would be blamed if the account were withdrawn.

"Better wait a few days, Mr. Kent," he said. "I'll put your views before my board, and I think it very likely the matter can be arranged—very likely indeed."

"All right," said Joe; "but that's how it lies. I don't think I'm getting a square deal, and if I have to

lift the notes I'll take the account with them."

On top of this there came another trouble, and a serious one. Joe, one morning, had just rung for his stenographer when Wright burst in upon him in considerable agitation, brushing past that long-suffering young lady in the doorway.

"What do you think of this?" he cried, waving a sheet of paper. "That infernal railway—" He swore venomously, and Joe's stenographer, with a glance at her employer, discreetly withdrew, for she was a young woman of experience.

"What's the row?" Joe asked. "And you might shade your language a little. Not that I mind, but I don't want Miss Brown to quit her job."

"A readjustment of freight rates!" cried Wright. "A readjustment! And look what they've done to lumber!"

Joe grabbed the paper, glanced at it, and supplemented his manager's remarks with great heartiness. In a general and long-promised overhauling of freight rates that on lumber was boosted sky-high. But he did not at once grasp the full significance of it. He saw that the result would be to increase the price of lumber proportionately and restrict building to some extent in certain localities; but in the end the consumer would pay, as usual.

"Rotten!" he commented. "The old rate was high enough. Looks like a case for the Transportation Commission. They ought to scale this down."

"They'll get around to it in a couple of years," snorted Wright with bitter contempt. "Meanwhile where do we get off at? I tell you it just cuts the heart out of our business."

"I don't see—" Joe began.

"You don't?" Wright fairly shouted. "No, and I don't see it all myself—yet. But look what it does to our contract with the Clancys!"

Now the contract with Clancy Brothers, mentioned before, was peculiar. They logged and manufactured lumber, but not nearly all for which they had sale. They operated a system of selling yards in twenty towns. By the terms of an agreement made by his father, which had more than a year to run, Kent was bound to supply them with lumber as required to a stated maximum amount at a stated price according to quality; and they, on their part, were bound to order lumber to a stated minimum quantity.

But instead of the price being f.o.b. Falls City, as was usual, the Clancys had insisted on a delivery price at their central yard, thus striking an average and getting rid of trouble. Therefore the price of the lumber per thousand feet was based on a calculation in which the then existing freight rate was an important factor. Thus an unforeseen and substantial increase in the rate meant a corresponding loss to Kent, if the Clancys chose to hold him to the agreement. Joe looked at his manager in slowly, dawning comprehension.

"Why—why—hang it, Wright," he said slowly, "it means a dead loss to us on every foot of boards we sell them!"

"Just that," Wright agreed grimly. "And they'll boost their price with the rest of the retail men and make a double profit."

"Surely they won't hold us up when we're losing money and they're making two kinds?" said Joe, from his utter inexperience.

"Won't they?" snapped Wright. "They'll hold us up for every foot the contract calls for." He stopped suddenly. "And only a couple of weeks ago they wanted us to enter into a new contract for double the quantity at the same rates. Now I see it!"

"They had advance information of the change!" gasped Joe.

"Sure. After all, that car shortage was a good thing; otherwise we'd have closed with them. Now our only chance to get out even is to find a hole in the contract."

Joe's hope that the Clancys would not hold him to a losing agreement went glimmering, but he didn't quite like Wright's suggestion. "We made this contract with our eyes open," he said. "At least my father did. Would it be square to back out now, even if we could?"

"Square?" exclaimed Wright. "Look at the dirty game they tried on us! Anything's square with people like them. I'd rob their safe if I could. Didn't they try to get a new contract that would kill us? Did you ever see them?"

"No," Joe admitted. "I heard they were good business men, that's all."

"Business men!" Wright struggled for appropriate words, and finding none threw out his hands in a protesting gesture. "They're all that and then some. I wish I had half their business ability. They're a pair of cold-blooded, dirty-tongued, sewer-rat devils, with the knack of making money

hand over fist. And you see how they do it! But they pay up to the day and the cent, and they never squeal when they're hit, I'll say that for them."

"Then we won't squeal either," said Joe proudly. "Maybe, after all, they'll let us down easy."

"Not them," said Wright, ungrammatically but positively.

Not two hours afterward a wire was received from Clancy Brothers ordering a large consignment of dressed lumber which they wanted rushed.

"What did I tell you?" said Wright sadly. "And the nerve of them to want it rushed. Rushed! I'll see them in blazes first. They'll take their turn, and that's last."

This strategic delay was provocative of results. Some days afterward Joe's telephone rang.

"Is that Misther Kent?" demanded a heavy voice at the other end of the wire. "It is? Well, this is Finn Clancy, talkin'—Finn Clancy of Clancy Brothers. I want to know how about that lumber we ordered. Is ut shipped yit?"

"Not yet," Joe replied. "We don't—"

"An' why the divil isn't ut?" interrupted Clancy. "Haven't ye got ut cut?"

"Yes," Joe admitted, "but—"

"No 'buts' about it," Clancy cut him short again. "Don't tell me ye can't get cars. I know better. That gag don't work no more. I'll have yeez people to understand that when we order lumber we want lumber an' not excuses. Th' contract calls for—"

"I know quite well what it calls for," Joe interrupted in his turn. "If you think you've got a kick, come up to the office and make it." And he slammed the receiver back on the hook viciously.

Half an hour afterward Wright ushered in the brothers Clancy. Finn Clancy fulfilled the promise of his telephone voice. He stood over six feet; he was broad, deep-chested, and red-bearded, with a pair of bright blue eyes hard as polished steel. John Clancy was small, dark, and wizened, and his mouth was a straight slit, tucked in at the corners.

"This is Mr. Kent," said Wright.

The brothers stared at Joe for a moment.

"So ut was you I was talkin' to?" growled Finn Clancy belligerently.

"It was," said Joe shortly, but, realizing the advisability of holding his temper, he added: "Sit down, gentlemen."

They sat down. Finn heavily; John cautiously.

"Now about the lumber," Joe began. "We've been delayed one way and another, but we'll ship it in a day or two."

"You betther," Finn rumbled. "We got contracts to fill, an' we got a contract wid you. You want to remember that."

"I do remember it," said Joe. "Also I remember that you tried to get us to sign a new one for double the amount, not so very long ago. I suppose it was a coincidence that the freight rate was boosted a few days afterward."

They simply grinned at him. John Clancy chuckled dryly, as if it were the best joke in the world.

"If we'd 'a' got that we'd 'a' made money," he said.

"No doubt," Joe commented. "You're making enough as it is. We lose money on every order of yours that we fill."

"That's your business," said Finn, and John's mouth tucked in a little more. He shot an understanding glance at his brother, but said nothing.

"Quite true," said Joe. "And your profits will be doubled by the increased price of lumber. In view of that it occurred to us that you might be willing to amend the contract so as to let us out even."

"That occurred to ye, did it?" said the big man. There was a sneer in his voice. "It didn't occur to us, did it, Jawn?"

"It did not, Finn," said John positively.

"Well, I mention it to you now," said Joe. "We don't want to lose money, but we'd be satisfied with an even break. Your profits will be big enough to allow us that. But it's up to you. If you choose to hold us up I suppose you can do it."

"There's no holdin' up about it," said Finn. "You contract to deliver lumber at one price; we contract to buy it at that price. If it goes down we lose; if it goes up you lose. Anyways ye had yer eyes open when ye signed. That's how I look at it. Am I right, Jawn?"

"Ye are," declared his brother. "If so be lumber had went down, wud we have came whinin to ye to let us off our contract? We wud not. When we lose we pay, an' say nawthin' about it. That's business."

"All right," said Joe; "it may be. But if I stood to make as much money as you do I'd see that the other fellow didn't lose anything, that's all."

"It's aisy to talk," sneered Finn; "an' all the time ye do be holdin' up our order, thinkin' to bluff us into amendin' the contract. Is that straight business, young felly?"

Joe flushed, for there was just a little truth in the words.

"That's not so," he replied. "Your order will go through, but I won't rush it for you. And if you'll allow me to give you a pointer, Clancy, it's to the effect that you're not in a position to make insinuations."

"I don't insinuate, I talk straight," retorted Clancy. "I'm onto ye, young felly. Ye'll keep that contract to the letter, or I'll know why!" and he emphasized his ultimatum with an oath.

"Mr. Clancy," said Joe icily, though his temper was at boiling point, "we'll dispense with profanity. I do all the necessary swearing here myself, understand. I won't have strong language or loud talk in my office."

"Won't ye?" shouted Clancy. "Why, ye damned little——"

Joe Kent's chair crashed back against the wall. Its occupant put his hand on the desk and vaulted it, alighting poised on his toes in front of the big man so suddenly that the latter paused in sheer amazement.

"Go ahead and say what you were going to," said Joe with a queer little shake in his voice; "and then, you dirty mucker, I'll give you a lesson in manners!"

Finn Clancy would have tackled a Dago armed with a knife or a construction hand holding a shovel without an instant's hesitation, for he was quite devoid of physical fear and a scrapper to his fingers' tips. But to have a quiet, brown-eyed young man suddenly leap a desk in an orderly business office and challenge him was so surprising that he paused.

He took careful note of the steady, watchful eyes, the sweep of the lean jaw, the two brown fists swinging to just the slightest oscillation of the tensed forearms, and the poise of the body on the gripping feet; and he knew that if his tongue uttered the words on the tip of it those fists would smash into him with all the driving power of a very fine pair of shoulders behind them.

Knowing it, his lips opened to speak the words; and Joe Kent, who had mastered the difficult art of starting a punch from wherever his hand happened to be, tautened his arm and shoulder muscles to steel.

John Clancy intervened.

"There's enough of this," he said. "Dry up, Finn. For why wud ye start rough-house wid the lad? An' you, Kent, 'tis wan punch ye'd have, an' then he'd kill ye." He pushed roughly between them and took his brother by the shoulder. "Come on out o' here, Finn, now. Lave him be, I tell ye!"

"I won't," said Finn. "I'll tell him what I think iv him. An' if he makes a pass at me, Jawn, I'll break him acrost me knee!"

"An' be pulled f'r it, wid yer name in the papers, an' a fine, an' a lawyer to pay, an' all," said his brother bitterly. "Have some sense. I'll not stand f'r it, an' I warn ye!"

"Let him go, and stand out of the way!" cried Joe. "There'll be no law about it, Clancy, I promise you that, whichever way it goes." His blood was dancing in his veins and he laughed nastily in the surge of his anger. He fairly hungered to whirl two-handed into this big, beefy Irishman, and give or take a first-class licking.

John Clancy put his open hand on his brother's breast and pushed him back. "Ye're a pair of fools," he announced dispassionately. "Can't ye talk over a business matter widout scrappin'? Be ashamed! It's little good ye've done yerself, Kent, this day. Finn, come on out of here!"

"All right," growled Finn as he took a step toward the door, propelled by his brother's insistent hand. "Lave me be, Jawn. I'll get him another time. Mind ye, now," he cried to Kent, "we mane to have every foot of timber the contract calls for, an' no shenanigan about ut! An' ye may bless yer stars for Jawn, here, me bucko. Only for him I'd have lamed ye!"

Joe did not reply to the threat. "When you came in I was willing to stay with the contract, even at a loss," he said. "Now, I tell you straight that if there's a way out of it you won't get another foot

of boards from me.”

John Clancy grinned at him. “Hunt for holes in it, an’ welcome,” he said dryly. “If our lawyers is bum we want to know it, so we can change ’em. Nicholas K. Ryan drew that agreement. I’m thinkin’ ye couldn’t break it wid dynymite.”

When they had gone Joe dug his copy of the agreement out of the safe and went to see Locke.

“I want to know,” he said, “if this agreement will hold water.”

Locke barely glanced at the document.

“Ryan drew this, and your father signed it against my advice,” he said. “Hold water? It would hold gas. What’s the matter? Aren’t they living up to it?”

“Living up to it? I should say they are!” exclaimed Joe. “That’s just the trouble. I want to know if there’s a way out of this for me?” He explained the position, and the lawyer listened, frowning.

“They’re a sweet pair,” he commented. “And so you want to dodge out of an agreement with them because you stand to lose money on it?”

Joe reddened. Baldly put it amounted to just that, though in the heat of his anger he had lost sight of his former scruples.

“They’ve rubbed you the wrong way,” said Locke, “and no doubt they’re too crooked to lie straight in a ditch, but that doesn’t affect this contract. You can’t break it.”

“If I haven’t a chance I won’t fight,” said Joe. “I guess you’re right about the ethics of the case, too. They made me so mad I forgot that side of it. Of course they knew the railway was going to jump the rate on us. Have you any idea why it was jumped.”

“I suppose they knew you’d have to stand for it,” said Locke, grimly. “That’s enough reason for any railroad.”

VII

Coincident with the rise in the freight rate the car shortage became a thing of the past. Orders from Clancy Brothers poured in and were filled as slowly as possible. Around them flourished a mass of acrid correspondence—complaints and threats from the consignees, tart rejoinders from Kent. In other quarters sales were slow and small, for the time was one of money stringency. Credit, once long and easy, contracted, and the men who held the purse-strings drew them tight.

Hagel, of the Commercial Bank, communicated his directors' decision as to the maturing notes, with his usual verbose solemnity. Done into plain English it amounted to this: The directors insisted on having the notes reduced by half, and they didn't care a hoot for the Kent current account.

Kent thereupon drew a check for his balance and took it to the Farmers' National, where he had already made tentative arrangements. New notes were signed, the Commercial paid off, and the securities held by them transferred to the Farmers'. That incident was closed.

Joe found McDowell a vast improvement upon Hagel. Where the latter had backed and filled and referred to his directors, McDowell, to whom responsibility was as the breath of life, decided instantly. He was less bound by routine and tradition, more willing to take a chance, and in closer touch with the exigencies of modern business. But for all that he never lost sight of his bank's interests, and his impartial and cool advice was of inestimable benefit to Joe. Also he made it very plain that while his institution would meet any reasonable proposition more than half way, it would protect itself first, last, and all the time. But their policy was a more liberal one than the Commercial's.

Thus Joe was able to pay the interest on the mortgages held by the Northern Loan Company. This was overdue, and the mortgagees had threatened legal proceedings. And he was able, also, to accompany his tender for the choice Wind River limits by a marked check, a necessary formality which had cost him some sleepless nights.

Naturally neither Crooks nor Kent sat down quietly under the new freight rate. They protested warmly, and, protests failing, deputed Locke to handle the matter for them. Locke went straight to headquarters, as was his custom. Henry J. Beemer, the general manager of the Peninsular Railway, tilted back his chair and knocked the ashes from his cigar.

"As a matter of fact, Locke," he said, "there never was a freight rate that pleased everybody."

"Certainly not this one," Locke replied. "It pleases no one."

"Oh, I don't know," said Beemer. "It's not such a bad rate. We have the usual number of complaints, but nothing more. Before promulgating it we made inquiries——"

"From my clients?" Locke interrupted sceptically.

"No, I'm afraid we overlooked them. But we have letters from several large lumber shippers and dealers. Like to read them?"

Locke nodded. He perused the letters produced, with a sardonic smile.

"Very pretty," he commented, handing them back. "You couldn't have worded them better yourself. They wouldn't deceive a child."

"Do you insinuate that they are not genuine?" asked Beemer sharply, frowning.

"They're not forgeries, but that lets them out," said Locke. "They're inspired, every one of them. The signatories would admit it under oath, too. Are you paying them rebates?"

"Illegal," said Beemer, recovering his usual suavity.

"Yes—but are you?" Locke retorted.

"I'm not in the witness box," said Beemer.

"You will be, one of these days," Locke predicted. "Then we'll thresh out the letters and the rebate question, if I have the cross-examining of you."

Beemer smiled rather uneasily. "We don't seem to be getting ahead. What do you want us to do?"

"Restore the old rate. My clients—or one of them—made contracts on the faith of it."

"Shouldn't have done it," said Beemer. "Good heavens! You, as a lawyer, can't hold us responsible for that."

"No, but you see how the new rate hits them."

"We were losing money on the old one," said Beemer. "This has just gone into effect. We must see how it works. I won't promise anything, but later we may be able to reduce it."

"That isn't satisfactory," Locke told him bluntly. "I shall advise my clients to file a complaint with the Transportation Commission."

Beemer laughed. The commission was notoriously slow and over-loaded with work. Taken in its order of priority the complaint would not, in all probability, be disposed of inside a year.

"Go ahead!" he said indifferently.

"All right," said Locke. "Give me a list of your directors."

"What do you want that for?"

"I want to find out, if I can, how many or which of them will benefit by this increased rate on lumber."

"Confound it, Locke," snapped Beemer, "that's another insinuation. It amounts to a charge of manipulation of rates."

"Which is, of course, absurd," said Locke ironically. "Will you give me the names, or must I get them another way?"

That night he and Crooks went carefully over the list of directors. They found several names whose owners were more or less connected with lumber interests, though just how they benefited by the new rate was not apparent, unless they received rebates in some form, as doubtless they did.

"As to Carney it's plain enough," said Crooks. "His business is over on the O. & N. The rise won't touch him and will cut us out of his markets."

"That's so," responded Locke. "Now, take Ackerman. I know he's mixed up in about everything, but I never heard that he had lumber interests."

"He tried to get young Kent to turn his business into a stock company, and failing that to sell it," said Crooks.

"The devil he did? Then we may assume his interest. But what is it?"

Neither could answer the question. Mr. Ackerman's varied activities were not blazoned forth to the world. He was more prominent in finance than in commerce, and so far as they knew he was not identified with any lumber business.

"But he must be," said Locke thoughtfully. "I'll see what I can find out. It's strange. I wonder——" He broke off abruptly and pulled out a drawer of his desk, burrowing among the papers. "Yes, here we are. Huh!" He laid two papers side by side and ran his eye down them. "By the Lord Harry, Crooks, Ackerman is a director of the Peninsular Railway, of the Commercial Bank, and of the Northern Loan Company!"

"Is, hey?" Crooks did not see the connection. "He's in a lot of things besides."

"Don't you get it?" Locke rapped out. "That bank was Joe Kent's till they tried to squeeze him and he changed. The loan company hold his mortgages and threatened foreclosure for an instalment of interest not much overdue. The railway makes a rate that loses money for him. And Ackerman, director in all three concerns, tries to get hold of his business. What do you think of that?"

Crooks's thought compressed itself into one forcible word.

"So there's a coon in the tree somewhere," Locke pursued. "Now, here's another thing: Clancy Brothers knew of the intended change before the new rate was promulgated. The contract which they tried to obtain would have been absolutely ruinous to Kent. The one they have is bad enough. Therefore we seem to be warranted in assuming some connection between Ackerman and the Clancys."

The assumption seemed warranted but did not put them much further forward. Out of their speculations two salient points emerged: Some person or persons were hammering the lumber interests along the Peninsular Railway, and Kent's in particular; and Mr. Stanley Ackerman represented the people who wielded the hammer.

Joe, when told of their deductions, was not nearly as surprised and indignant as he would have been a couple of months before. He was learning in a hard school, and hardening in the process. And his brief and pointed reference to Ackerman, the Clancys, *et hoc genus omne*, would have done credit to old Bill Crooks in his most vitriolic mood.

"Showing the effect of a modern college education upon the vocabulary," Locke commented

dryly.

Joe grinned mirthlessly. "They're all that and then some," he said. "I'll show them yet."

Therefore it was unfortunate for Mr. Stanley Ackerman that he should have chosen this juncture for a second call upon the son of his highly respected deceased acquaintance, William Kent.

Joe had just finished reading a letter from that eminent lawyer, Nicholas K. Ryan, setting forth the law in the matter of breach of contract, when Mr. Ackerman's accurately engraved card was handed to him. Followed Mr. Ackerman, perfectly dressed, bland, and smiling. His manner had lost nothing in warmth; indeed it was, if possible, more fatherly than ever. He beamed upon Joe, greatly to that young man's disgust.

"Well, Mr. Ackerman," he said shortly, "what can I do for you?"

"Why, my dear boy, that is exactly what I was about to ask *you*," replied Mr. Ackerman. "I promised myself that the first time I was in Falls City I would drop in and ask if I could be of *any* assistance in *any* way."

"Awfully kind of you," said Joe in a tone which should have given his visitor warning.

"Not a bit of it, my boy. The signs point to hard times, and the advice of one who has—hem!—a certain amount of business experience may not come amiss. What can I do for you? Out with it! How is the business?"

"The business," said Joe grimly, "is doing about as well as can be expected—under the circumstances."

Involuntarily his eyes sought the letter lying open on his desk. So did Mr. Ackerman's, and as he recognized the huge, sprawling signature of that eminent attorney, Nicholas K. Ryan, a satisfied comprehension came into them.

"Ah," he said, "you feel the prevailing depression already. I am sorry to say—hem!—it is only beginning. These things move in cycles. Buoyant trade, optimism, expansion; over-expansion, falling trade, pessimism. We are on the down grade now, and have not nearly reached the lowest point. It may be one year or two or three before there is a revival. Those whose businesses are sound will weather the storm; but those who are unprepared will perhaps founder."

"Well, I'll weather it all right, if that's what you mean," said Joe.

"I hope so—I sincerely hope so," said Mr. Ackerman in a tone which implied grave doubt. "By the way, since I was here I mentioned in a certain quarter—no matter where—the possibility of your being willing to stock your business or sell it, and I think a very good arrangement might be made—good from your standpoint, I mean. Let me tell you just what might be done."

"I won't trouble you," said Joe. "I told you once I wasn't open to anything of the kind."

"But this would be most advantageous," Ackerman persisted. "It would allow you to retain practical control of the business and give you more money than you are making at present."

"Drop it!" rasped Joe. "You and your friends will get hold of the pieces of my business when you smash it and me, and not before."

Mr. Ackerman was amazed, shocked, and pained. At least his face assumed an expression combining all three emotions.

"My *dear* boy—"

"What's the use?" Joe interrupted hotly. "I know more about you than I did. You and your fellow directors of the railway raised the rate on lumber and tipped off the Clancys in advance. You nearly got me on that. You and your fellow directors of the bank tried to close me out when my security was ample. You and your fellow directors of the loan company wouldn't give me an ordinary extension of time for an interest payment. And if I went into any such arrangement as you seem prepared to suggest you'd cut my throat and throw me overboard when it suited you. And so, Mr. Ackerman, I think we may as well close this interview now."

"I assure you——" Mr. Ackerman began earnestly.

"Don't!" Joe interrupted curtly. "I wouldn't believe you."

Mr. Stanley Ackerman rose and held out his hand, a smile, tolerant and forgiving, illuminating a countenance which, to tell the truth, was somewhat red.

"I'd rather not, thanks," said Joe, looking at the hand. His tone was so thoroughly contemptuous that Mr. Ackerman's beautiful smile vanished.

"All right, then, young man," he snapped. "This is the last offer you'll get from me. And in future you need expect no consideration from any institution with which I am identified. Go ahead and

run your own little business, and see what happens.”

Joe brightened instantly.

“That’s better talk—and I believe you are telling the truth for once,” he said cheerfully. “That’s precisely what I’m going to do.”

Mr. Ackerman’s lips opened in a further remark; but thinking better of it he shut them again and left the office, wearing his dignity about him as a mantle. He brushed past Wright in the hall, and the latter whistled his astonishment, for the highly respectable and usually unperturbed twin brother of Capital was swearing through his teeth in a way that would have increased the reputation of any drunken pirate who ever infested the Florida Keys.

VIII

The year drew into September, time of goldenrod, browning grasses, crisp, clear mornings and hazy, dreamy days. The shanty lads began to straggle back to town from little backwoods farms where they had spent the summer loafing or increasing the size of the clearings, from mills, from out-of-the-way holes and corners. They haunted the lumber companies' offices looking for jobs. There things began to hum with the bustle of preparation and owners held long consultations with walking bosses and laid plans for the winter's campaign.

Kent's tender for the choice Wind River limits was accepted, somewhat to his surprise and to Crooks's profane amazement. The latter, through the good offices of a middleman working for his rake-off, secured the limits on Rat Lake. Remained the question of how the logs should be cut, and when.

Joe, after taking counsel with Crooks, Wright, and Locke, decided on his course. That winter he would make a supreme effort to cut every stick he could, and sell them in the drive, retaining only enough logs to run his mill on half time or a little better. This seemed the only thing to do. Locke had been unable to push his complaint anent the freight rate to a hearing before the commission.

Kent's liabilities were piling up and maturing; the general financial stringency was increasing, as predicted by Ackerman; his timber sales, taking into consideration the unprofitable contract with the Clancys, showed a very narrow margin; and the consensus of advice he received was to market his raw product while he could, reduce his liabilities as much as possible, and then sit tight and hope for better luck and better times.

For once fortune seemed to play into his hand, for while he was considering the question of opening negotiations for the disposal of the surplus logs the following spring he received a letter from Wismer & Holden, who were very large millmen and did little logging, either jobbing out such limits as they bought or buying their logs from loggers who had no mills. The letter stated that they wished to obtain from twenty million feet upward, in the log, deliverable at their booms not later than July 1st of the following year. They offered a good price, and were prepared to pay cash on delivery. And they wished to know if Kent could supply them with the above quantity of logs, or, if not, what part of it.

This was too good a proposition to be neglected, and Joe immediately took train and called on Wismer & Holden. In half an hour the preliminaries were settled.

"You understand," said Wismer, "that we must have these logs by July 1st. A later date won't do."

"I can get them down by then, of course," said Joe.

"Then we might as well close the deal now," said Wismer, and called his stenographer. He dictated an agreement from a form which he took from his desk. In this agreement was a clause providing a penalty for non-delivery by the date named. Joe was not versed in legal terminology, but it read pretty stiff and he took objection to it.

"That's our ordinary form of delivery contract," said Wismer. "We have to protect ourselves somehow. We give you ample margin for delivery, you see, but we've got to have some guarantee that you'll make good, because we make other contracts in the expectation of getting the logs by a certain date. If we didn't get them we'd be up against it."

That seemed reasonable enough, and Joe signed the instrument. But when a few days afterward he showed it to Locke, the lawyer pounced on that clause like a hawk, switched over to the last page, looked at Joe's signature duly witnessed, and groaned.

"Boy, what on earth did you sign that for? Did they chloroform you?"

"What's the matter with it?" asked Joe.

"Matter with it?" snorted Locke. "Why, it's a man-trap, nothing short of it. Can't you read, or didn't you read? If you didn't know what you were signing there's a glimmer of hope."

"I read the thing," Joe admitted.

"And yet you signed it! Why, you young come on, if you fail to deliver by July 1st they may refuse to accept any logs whatever; and, moreover, you become their debtor and bind yourself to pay an amount which they say is ascertained damages for non-performance. Do you get that with any degree of clarity?"

"Oh, that's all right, I guess," said Joe, and repeated Wismer's explanation. "I'm sure to have the logs down early in June, so it doesn't matter."

"Any clause in a contract matters," said Locke. "You're gambling on a date. The amount they specify as damages is an arbitrary one, and may be twice as great as the loss to them. This is another of Nick Ryan's deadfalls—I recognize the turn of the phrases—and he's got the little joker tucked inside, as usual. After this don't you sign a blame thing without showing it to me."

Locke's words would have caused Joe some uneasiness but for the fact that he was sure of making delivery. Having arranged a market for his logs, or, rather, one having arranged itself for him, the next thing was to provide the logs themselves. He and Wright held council with McKenna, Tobin, Deever, and MacNutt, the former being Kent's walking boss and the last three his foremen.

The winter's work was divided in this way: Deever and Tobin were to finish cutting the limits on the Missabini; MacNutt was to take the Wind River limit, just acquired; Dennis McKenna, the walking boss, had a general oversight of the camps, but would divide his time between Tobin's and Deever's, after locating the camp at Wind River, which limit he had cruised before the purchase.

Immediately on reaching this decision, the foremen got together the nucleus of crews.

"Why don't you go up to the Wind with McKenna and take a look at things?" said Crooks.

Joe welcomed the suggestion with enthusiasm. He had been sticking pretty closely to the office, and the prospect of a couple of weeks in the open air was attractive.

Three days later saw him trudging beside McKenna and MacNutt, while behind them a wagon laden with tents, blankets, food, and tools bumped and jolted.

They left roads behind, and plunged into unmarked, uncharted country where the wheels sank half-way to the hubs in damp, green moss, crashed through fern to the horses' bellies, or skidded perilously on rocky hillsides. Ahead, McKenna piloted his crew, a light axe in his hand, gashing the trees with blazes at frequent intervals. He blazed them both back and front, until the road was plainly marked so that going and coming the way might be seen. To Joe the instinct of the old woodsman was marvellous. He made no mistakes, never hesitated, never cast back. But always he followed the lines of the least natural resistance, and somehow these lines, which he apparently carried in his head, became a fairly straight route to an objective point.

There were obstacles easier to surmount than to avoid—logs to be cut and thrown aside, pole bridges to be built, bits of corduroy to be laid in shaky places; merely temporary things, these, for the flying column. Later others would make a road of it, but at present anything that would carry team and wagon served. So the crew slashed out a way with double-bitted or two-faced axes—"Methodist axes," as they were called in an unwarranted reflection upon that excellent denomination—throwing light, frail bridges together with wonderful celerity, twisting fallen timber out of the way with peavey-hook and cant-dog, and doing the work effortlessly and easily, for they were one and all experts with the tools of their trade, and such work was child's play to them.

In due course they arrived at the site chosen by McKenna when he had cruised the limit. It was a natural opening, ringed about with towering, feathery-headed pines. At one end it sloped down to alder and willow through which a little stream slid gently between brown roots and mossy banks. This meant water supply. Ruffed grouse roared up from under Joe's feet as he parted the bushes, and when he rose to his knees, having drunk his fill lying flat on the ground, he saw a big, brown swamp hare, already graying about the ears, watching him not twenty feet away. Also, in a bare and muddy place, he saw the pointed tracks of deer, and dog-like prints which were those of a stray wolf. However, he had not come to hunt.

Tents came out of the wagon and were rammed up and made fast in short order. The cook dug a shallow trench and built his fireplace, drove forked stakes, laid a stout, green pole between them, slung his pot-hooks on it and below them his pots, and so was ready to minister to the needs of the inner man. With tape-line and pegs McKenna laid out the ground plans of bunk-house, eating-camp, caboose, foreman's quarters, and stables. At a safe distance he located the dynamite storehouse.

Already the crashing fall of trees announced that the crew was getting out timbers for the buildings, and Joe watched the work of axes and saws with a species of fascination. No sooner did a tree strike the ground than men were on it, measuring, trimming, cutting it to length. When a square timber was required, one man cut notches three feet apart down the sides of a prostrate trunk and split off the slabs. Another, a lean, wasp-waisted tiemaker, stripped to underclothes and moccasins, mounted one end with a huge, razor-edged broad-axe which was the pride of his heart. Every stroke fell to a hair. He hewed a straight line by judgment of eye alone, and the result was a stick of square or half-square timber, absolutely straight, and almost as smooth as if planed.

As fast as the logs were ready the teamster grappled them with hook and chain, and the big horses yanked them out into position. Another wagon and more men arrived. Buildings grew as if by magic. The wall-logs were mortised and skidded up into place; the whole was roofed in; the chinks were stuffed with moss and plastered with wet clay; bunks in tiers were built around the

walls; tables and benches knocked together in no time; and the Wind River camp was finished and ready for occupation.

While these preparations were going forward, Joe, McKenna, and MacNutt prowled the woods at such times as the last two had to spare from construction work. The walking boss and the foreman sized up the situation with the sure rapidity of experts. They knew just how many feet of timber a given area held, how long it should take so many men to cut it, and in how many loads, given good sleigh-roads, it should be hauled out to the banking grounds at the river.

"It'll depend a lot on the season, of course," said McKenna. "If she's a fair winter—a powder of snow and good frost for a bottom and then snow and hard weather with odd flurries to make good slippin'—we can get out all we cut. But if she freezes hard and dry, and the snow's late and scanty or hits us all in a bunch when it comes, it will put us back. Or if mild weather gets here early and the roads break it will be bad."

As the walking boss spoke he and Joe were standing at the top of a height looking down a vista of brown tree-trunks which sloped gently away to a dense cedar swamp. Suddenly Joe's eye caught a moving figure and he pointed it out to McKenna.

"It can't be one of our men," said the latter; "we'd better see who it is."

As the stranger came into plain view, heading straight for them, McKenna gave a grunt of recognition and displeasure.

"That's Shan McCane!"

"Never heard of him," said Joe carelessly.

"You don't miss much," the walking boss commented. "'Rough Shan,' they call him. The name fits."

Mr. McCane was no beauty. He was big, and looked fleshy, but was not. A deceptive slouchiness of carriage covered the quickness of a cat when necessary. His cheeks and chin bristled with a beard of the texture and colour of a worn-out blacking brush; his nose had a cant to the northeast, and his left eye was marred by a sinister cast. Add to these a chronic, ferocious scowl and subtract two front teeth, and you have the portrait of Rough Shan McCane, as Joe saw him. For attire he wore a greasy flannel shirt, open in front so that his great, mossy chest was bare to the winds, short trousers held in place by a frayed leather strap, and a pair of fourteen-inch larrigans. He and McKenna greeted each other without enthusiasm.

"Cruisin'?" asked the walking boss.

"Nope," replied McCane. "I got a camp over here a ways. I'm cuttin' Clancys' limit."

"Clancys'!" said Joe in surprise, for Clancy Brothers had purchased the next limit in the name of a third party a couple of years before and their interest did not appear. "Do they own timber here?"

"Their limit butts on your east line," McCane told him.

"How do you get your logs out?" asked McKenna.

"We'll haul down to Lebret Creek and drive that to the Wind."

McKenna nodded. The Kent logs would be driven down Wind River. Lebret Creek lay east of it. It was a small stream, but fast and good driving.

"Well, I must be gettin' back," said McCane. "Your timber runs better than ours. So long!"

He nodded and slouched off. McKenna looked after him and shook his head.

"I'd rather have any one else jobbin' Clancys' limit," he observed. "McCane keeps a bad camp an' feeds his crew on whiskey. He has a wild bunch of Callahans, Red McDougals, and Charbonneaus workin' for him always. No other man could hold 'em down."

"How does he get his work done with whiskey in camp?" Joe asked.

"He can make a man work, drunk or sober—or else he half kills him. The worst is that with a booze-camp handy our boys will get it once in awhile. Still, MacNutt can hold 'em down. McCane laid him out a couple of years ago with a peavey, and he hates him. He won't stand any nonsense. A good man is Mac!"

MacNutt, the foreman of the Wind River crew, was a lean, sinewy logger who had spent twenty years in the camps. He owned a poisonous tongue and a deadly temper when aroused; but he had also a cool head, and put his employer's interests before all else. He heard the news in silence.

"Of course we can't stand for booze in the camp," said Joe. "If any man gets drunk on whiskey from McCane's camp or elsewhere, fire him at once." He thought he was putting the seal of authority on a very severe measure.

MacNutt smiled sourly. "I won't fire a good man the first time—I'll just knock the daylights out of him," he said. "As for McCane, I look for trouble with him." Suddenly he swore with venom. "I'll split his head with an axe if he crowds me again!"

"Oh, come—" Joe began.

"Sounds like talk, I know," MacNutt interrupted. "But he nigh brained me with a peavey once, when I had only my bare hands. It's coming to him, Mr. Kent. I'll take nothing from him nor his crew."

Joe, on his way back to town the following day, thought of MacNutt's hard eyes and set mouth, and felt assured that he would meet any trouble half-way. His own disposition being rather combative on occasion, he endorsed his foreman's attitude irrespective of the diplomacy of it.

IX

When he returned from Wind River, Kent determined, after clearing off what work had accumulated in his absence, to pay a visit to Edith Garwood. He sent no advance notice of his coming, and her surprise at seeing him was considerably more apparent than any joy she might have felt; for she was carrying on an interesting affair with a young gentleman who really did not know the extent of resources which had been in his family in the form of real estate for something over a century. It was most annoying that Joe Kent should turn up just then.

"I'm just going out," she said. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"No particular reason," said Joe, feeling the coolness of his reception. "Does it matter?"

"Of course it matters. I have made engagements which I can't very well break, even for you. If you had told me——"

"Don't worry," said Joe. "I'll take what's left. You're going out, and I shan't keep you. May I call to-night?"

That evening happened to be blank. She gave him the desired permission, and feeling that she had perhaps shown her irritation too plainly, asked him to accompany her.

"It's an afternoon affair," she explained, "and of course you won't care to come in; but you may see me that far if you like, and the car will set you down anywhere."

As they entered the waiting car a gentleman on the other side of the street raised his hat. Miss Garwood bowed, and Joe acknowledged the salute mechanically. It was only when the car shot by the pedestrian that he recognized him as Mr. Stanley Ackerman.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Do you know that fellow?"

"Really, Joe," she replied, "I wish you wouldn't speak of my father's friends in that way." Her annoyance was genuine, but his words were not the cause of it. She disliked Ackerman and distrusted him. Also he knew the young man with the real estate pedigree.

"I can't congratulate your father on that particular friend," Kent observed bluntly, and became thoughtful.

Mr. Ackerman looked after the car and became thoughtful also. Shortly afterward he entered Hugh Garwood's office.

The president of the O. & N. would have been spare and shapely if he had taken ordinary exercise; but being far too busy a man to spend any time on the trifling matter of physical well-being his figure had run to seed. Only his head was lean and alertly poised, by virtue of the keen, ever-working brain within. The face was narrow, hard, and determined; and the mouth, set awry beneath the close-clipped gray moustache, was ruthless and grim. It was, in fact, a fairly good indication of his character and methods. He was never known to forego an advantage of any kind, and he was accustomed to bludgeon opponents into submission without being particular where he cut his clubs.

"Well, Ackerman," he said, "what's the news?"

Mr. Ackerman had no news. It was a fine day, though cool. Beautiful weather. Made a man want to be outdoors.

Garwood grunted. He was not interested in the weather, save as it affected business. Snow blockades and wash-outs and natural phenomena producing them received his attention. Apart from such things he scarcely knew whether a day was fine or not.

"All very well for people who have time to burn," he commented. "I haven't."

"Young people enjoy it," said Mr. Ackerman, getting his opening. "I saw your daughter go by in a car as I came downtown. Lovely girl that. I thought she looked remarkably well and happy."

"She ought to be happy," said her father grimly. "She spends enough money."

"You can afford it. It won't be long till some one else is paying her bills. Plenty of young men would think it a privilege."

Garwood, from his knowledge of Mr. Ackerman's indirect methods of approach, suddenly regarded him with attention.

"What are you driving at, anyway, Ackerman?" he asked. "You don't want to marry her, do you?"

Mr. Ackerman disclaimed any such desire with haste and evident sincerity. "There was a very good-looking young fellow with her this afternoon," he observed.

"Trust her for that," growled Garwood. "Who was it? Young Statten?"

"No," said Mr. Ackerman slowly, enjoying the sensation in advance, "his name is Kent, Joseph Kent of Falls City."

"What?" cried Garwood, and straightened in his chair as if he had received a shock, as indeed he had.

"Yes," said Mr. Ackerman. "You remember she was in Falls City for some weeks this summer. I heard somewhere—you know how these things get about—that she and Kent were—well, in fact, I heard that they were together a great deal."

Garwood rapped out a man's size oath. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Knowing Miss Edith's penchant for innocent summer flirtations I attached no importance to it," smiled Mr. Ackerman.

Garwood sat frowning. "You may be right. That girl would flirt with a man's shadow. However, I'll put a stop to this at once. Now see here, Ackerman, you've bungled the Kent matter so far."

"I have not," denied Mr. Ackerman indignantly. "He simply would not sell. That's not my fault."

Garwood dismissed the protest with an impatient gesture. "The fact remains that I haven't got what I'm after. Crooks's business and Kent's are all that prevent us from controlling the lumber market on the O. & N. and the Peninsular. Crooks is pretty strong, but this winter must break Kent, and after that we'll get Crooks. We absolutely must have the water powers which Kent owns. He has a fortune in them, if he only knew it and had money enough to develop them, and we also need his mills. We must have these things, and there must be no mistake about it."

"If he doesn't deliver the logs he has contracted to deliver——" Ackerman began, but Garwood cut him short.

"It must be made impossible for him to deliver them. If he makes good it gives him a new lease of life and delays our plans; but if he doesn't cut the logs he can't deliver them, whether his drive is hung up or not."

"It was against my advice that his tender for the Wind River limits went through."

"I know. But he could ill afford to put up the cash for them. His credit is becoming badly strained. A small cut or non-delivery will be fatal to him."

"But how can we prevent his cutting?"

"Really, Ackerman, you are dense to-day," said Garwood. "Clancy Brothers have timber near Wind River. We can't touch the other camps, so far as I can see at present, but if you represent matters properly to the Clancys I think they will look after that one."

When Garwood went home that evening he called his daughter into his private room and went straight to the point.

"Now, Edith," said he, "I want to know what there is between you and young Kent."

She flushed angrily, immediately fixing the responsibility for the leak on Ackerman. "Who told you there was anything between us?"

"Never mind. Is it a fact?"

"Is what a fact?"

"Don't beat about the bush with me. How far has this flirtation of yours gone?"

"Not very far," she answered calmly. "Mr. Kent has merely asked me to marry him."

"What!" cried Garwood, "you don't mean to tell me you're engaged?"

"I suppose we are—in a way."

"This must stop," said Garwood. "I thought you had more sense. You can't marry him. He is a nobody; he is on the verge of bankruptcy; he is merely after my money."

She cast a sidewise glance at a long mirror and laughed at the lovely reflection. "You are not complimentary, papa. Don't you think a young man might fall in love with me for myself?"

"I am not talking of love, but of marriage," said Garwood cynically. "I won't have it, I tell you. You must drop Kent now."

"Why?"

"Because I say so," said her father, his mouth setting firmly. "I won't mince matters with you, Edith. Inside a year Kent will be looking for a clerk's job. You're not cut out for a poor man's wife."

"You mean that if I married him you would give me nothing?"

"You grasp my meaning exactly. Not a cent during my life nor after my death."

Edith Garwood sighed as plaintively as she could; but it was in fact a sigh of relief. It was put up to her so squarely that she had no choice, as she looked at it. She was already tired of Kent, anxious for an excuse to break with him, and she had secretly dreaded the affair coming to her father's knowledge. Now the worst was over. And she saw an opportunity of avoiding a scene with Joe, which she had dreaded also.

"Of course I haven't been brought up to marry a poor man," she said. "We would both be miserable, if it came to that. So it would be a mistake, wouldn't it?"

"Undoubtedly," responded Garwood, who, having carried his point much more easily than he expected, found a certain amusement in her mental processes, as one is entertained by the antics of a kitten.

"Then I suppose I shall have to give him up," she continued, with another beautifully plaintive sigh. "He is to call to-night. Will you tell him? Or shall I write him a note?"

"No doubt you know the correct procedure," said Garwood. "Write your note and give it to me. Make it firm and definite."

She nodded agreement. "And now, papa, don't you think I am a very dutiful, self-sacrificing daughter?"

Garwood reached for his check-book with a smile of grim comprehension. "How much does it cost me this time?" he asked.

When Joe called that evening he was shown into Hugh Garwood's study. The railway man, seated at his desk, eyed him keenly. Kent found the scrutiny unfriendly, and stiffened.

"I called to see Miss Garwood," said he. "My name is Kent."

"Sit down, Mr. Kent," said Garwood. "My daughter has given me this note for you. Will you please read it."

Joe read. It was brief and to the point, and wound up with perfunctory regrets. There was no possibility of misunderstanding it. He folded the missive.

"I presume you know the contents of this letter, Mr. Garwood?"

"I am aware of them, yes."

"Miss Garwood says that you object to her engagement to me. Will you kindly tell me why?"

"With pleasure. You are not in a position to marry, and you entrapped my daughter into a clandestine engagement, which was not a manly thing to do. In fact, to put it very plainly, you are trying to marry money."

"To put it just as plainly," said Joe, flushing, "I don't care about your money at all. I am in a position to marry. The secret engagement I own up to and take the blame for. I shouldn't have consented to it."

"Consented?" said Garwood sharply. "Then it was my daughter who suggested that?"

"Not at all," said Joe, lying manfully as he felt bound to do after the slip. "It was my fault entirely."

Garwood smiled cynically. "You needn't shoulder all the blame. I know her better than you do." He was rather surprised at the equanimity with which Kent accepted his dismissal. He had looked for a stormy interview with a disappointed, unreasonable youth who would protest and indulge in heroics. He felt quite kindly toward this young man, whose business, nevertheless, he intended to smash. Inwardly he made a note to offer him some sort of a job when that was accomplished. "I take back what I said a moment ago. But you must understand that there can be nothing between you and my daughter."

"I think I understand that very well," said Joe. "Glad to have made your acquaintance, Mr. Garwood. By the way, please tell Mr. Ackerman I recognized him to-day. Good night."

Edith Garwood, peeping from behind a drawn blind, expected to see an utterly crushed being slink from the house. What she saw was an erect young man who paused on the steps to light a

cigar, cocked it up at a jaunty angle, and went down the street head up and shoulders back.

In fact, Joe Kent was shaking hands with himself. He had known for some time that his feeling for Edith Garwood fell far short of love; but as he looked at it, he could not tell her so. So that his dismissal, instead of plunging him into the depths of gloom, boosted his spirits sky-high.

“Thank the Lord!” he exclaimed fervently as he swung down the street. “Joe, my son, let this be a lesson to you. Cut out the girl proposition and stick to business.” He became thoughtful. “So old Ackerman’s a friend of Garwood’s. And Garwood tells me I’m not in a position to marry. I wonder how he knows so much about it? I wonder——” He did not complete the sentence, but Garwood’s words stuck in his recollection.

X

When Mr. Ackerman, following the hint received from Garwood, called at the office of Clancy Brothers, his reception was nothing short of frosty.

John Clancy was alone, and he regarded his visitor from beneath a lowering brow.

"Now, here's what I want to know about," said he. "How does it come that Kent gets them limits at Wind River? We tendered for them ourselves."

"Likely his tender was higher," said Mr. Ackerman with assumed carelessness.

"An' what's that got to do wid it?" demanded Clancy, who appeared to find this explanation inadequate. "Don't we give up strong to th' campaign fund? Neither young Kent nor his father ever gave a cent to it, and their politics is the other way. It's a raw deal we got, an' ye can say that we'll remember it. If them limits had gone to one of our own people we'd have said nawthin', for we could have fixed it wid him or he'd a had to fix it wid us. But th' way it is we're sore, an' we make no bones about sayin' so. Where's his pull, that's what we want to know? An' if it's come to this, that a young felly whose politics is agin ye an' who don't give up to th' fund can buy limits ahead of us, why, then, we're through an' be damned to ye! An' there's others who thinks the same way."

This unusually long and evidently heartfelt speech of Clancy's indicated a dissatisfaction which Mr. Ackerman, who held confidential relations with certain members of a thoroughly rotten and graft-ridden administration, could not afford to ignore.

"Oh, that's nonsense, Clancy," said Ackerman. "There was a reason why Kent got the limits and we'll see that you get something else."

"We want what we go after, an' we don't have to take what's handed to us," retorted Clancy unappeased. "See now, Ackerman, we know a thing or two. Here's Kent been makin' up to ould Garwood's girl. Garwood works his pull, an' th' limits goes to Kent. I have it from the inside that Garwood got them for him. Now, I'm not settin' our pull agin Garwood's—not by no manes—but we will not be used by you to double-cross him. We want no trouble wid Garwood."

"What do you mean?" Ackerman queried.

"I mane this: You tip us off to make a new contract wid Kent bekase the railway will raise the rates on boards. Ye don't do that for love of us, nor yet for a rake-off, for ye asked for none. So ye do it to hit Kent. Then he tenders for timber limits, an' Garwood, bekase the young man is keepin' company wid his daughter, sees he gets them. You an' Garwood do be thick together, an' it's strange you're knockin' his son-in-law-to-be. Me an' Finn will have no more to do wid it."

Mr. Ackerman chuckled at Clancy's very natural mistake. "If you think Garwood is a friend of Kent's you're wrong."

"Show me," said Clancy.

"There's nothing now between Garwood's daughter and Kent," responded Ackerman. "If Garwood had cared to use his influence for him the Peninsular would not have raised the rate on lumber. That's obvious enough, I should think."

"I'm talkin' about them limits," said Clancy obstinately.

"Well, admitting that Garwood is responsible for that, he had his reasons other than the one you mentioned. Kent has sunk a lot of money in that timber. He may not get it out again."

"Ye mane that the limits was onloaded onto him to tie up his cash resources?" said Clancy, comprehending.

"I didn't say so," said Mr. Ackerman, smiling sweetly, "but his business is involved already, and if anything unforeseen should occur he might smash."

"An' somebody might buy him in," Clancy commented with an appreciative grin. "I wish ye luck, but what do we get in place of our tender that was turned down?"

"Let me know what you want and I'll do my best for you," Ackerman promised. "Now, I understand you have some timber near Kent's Wind River limits?"

"Buttin' onto 'em at one line," Clancy replied. "That's why we tendered—to round out our holdin'."

"Are you cutting it this winter?"

"We are."

"Yourselves?"

"We jobbed it out."

"That's too bad," said Mr. Ackerman in disappointment. "I suppose the jobber is a good man?"

"A good man!" echoed John Clancy. "Is Rough Shan McCane a good man? If there's a worse one anywheres I never seen him."

"Then why did you give him the stuff to cut?"

"Bekase he'll put in the logs. He can drive a crew, drunk or sober."

"I thought liquor wasn't allowed in the camps?"

"No more it is—in most."

"I suppose," said Mr. Ackerman casually, "that if whiskey got into Kent's camp his work would suffer?"

John Clancy eyed him keenly. "Two an' two makes four," he said oracularly. "What are ye drivin' at? Put it in plain words."

Mr. Ackerman put it as plainly as his bias in favour of indirect speech would permit. Clancy considered with pursed mouth.

"These things works both ways," he said. "A loggin' war, wanst started bechune two camps, means hell an' docthers' bills to pay, to say nawthin' of lost time. What would we get out of it?"

Mr. Ackerman told him, prudently sinking his voice to little more than a whisper, and Clancy's eyes glistened.

"Them's good contracts," he commented. "I'll speak to Finn. He has it in for Kent."

This partial assurance seemed to satisfy Mr. Ackerman. "Is Kent still delivering lumber under your contract?" he asked.

"He is—as slow as he can. Ryan says we can't have the law on him for breach of contract yet. I had him write a letter makin' a bluff, an' Kent's lawyer wrote back callin' it. So there ye are."

"Well, I suppose it can't be helped," said Mr. Ackerman regretfully. But on the whole he was very well satisfied with the position of affairs, and left Clancy's office wearing the peculiarly bland, guileless smile which was his whenever he had succeeded in arranging a particularly unpleasant programme for some one else. The smile, however, lost something of its quality when, just outside the street door, he ran into Locke.

The lawyer glanced from him to Clancy Brothers' window lettering and back again, and smiled. His expression somehow reminded Mr. Ackerman of a dog that has found an exceedingly choice bone.

"Hallo, Ackerman!" said he. "What are you framing up now?"

"I don't think I understand you," said Mr. Ackerman with dignity.

"Well, here's something I wanted to ask you," Locke went on. "Is it a fact that the O. & N.—otherwise Garwood—has secured control of the Peninsular?"

The question was so entirely unexpected that Mr. Ackerman was almost caught off his guard, but he said:

"Control of the Peninsular? You must be joking."

"It is not a fact, then?" asked Locke.

"He may have bought some shares. But control—oh, no! that would be most unlikely. Our shares are all too strongly held."

"Not an impossibility, however?" Locke persisted.

"Humanly speaking, anything is possible," smiled Mr. Ackerman, getting his second wind. "Rumours are most unreliable things."

"Yes," Locke assented. "When did you and Garwood go into the lumber business?"

Once more Mr. Ackerman was taken flat aback. Figuratively speaking, he even gathered sternway. He simply stared at Locke for a moment.

"The—lumber—business?" he exclaimed, recovering power of speech. "My dear sir, I am not in the lumber business, save for a few shares which I own here and there."

"No?" Locke smiled unpleasant, open disbelief. "How about Garwood?"

"Why don't you ask him?" said Mr. Ackerman with unnecessary tartness.

"I will, one of these days," said Locke. "By the way, I'm going to subpoena both of you in my application to the commission."

"That will come on next year, I believe," said Mr. Ackerman with something very like a sneer.

"Probably next month," Locke retorted. "Good morning."

Locke's words were by no means random shots. Once convinced that Ackerman represented some person or persons inimical to Kent and Crooks, he sought for a clue. One by one he went over Ackerman's business associates, including Garwood, and discarded them one by one. Then came the rumour of Garwood's acquisition of the Peninsular, an acquisition almost coincident with the rise in rates. Therefore, Locke argued, Garwood somehow benefited by it. But how? The railway man was not known to be interested in lumber. Still, as Locke saw it, he must be.

"Here," said Locke to himself, "is this Central Lumber Company officered by dummies, capitalized for a mere trifle, and yet acquiring business after business. Why the secrecy? Who is behind it? Obviously some man or men who don't wish their identity known until they have accomplished a certain purpose. What is the purpose? So far it seems to be the buying out of existing lumber concerns. Ackerman approached Kent. For whom? Probably for this Central Lumber Company. Therefore Ackerman is one of those behind it. Ackerman's influence has been unfriendly to Kent in every way. Garwood no sooner acquired control of Peninsular stock than the rate on lumber was boosted. Ackerman is associated with him. Therefore it is not a wild hypothesis to say that Garwood is financing the Central Lumber Company."

Thus Locke argued to himself, and he found fresh confirmation in the methods adopted toward Kent, which were typically those of Hugh Garwood. Then, too, Mr. Ackerman's evident discomposure when directly charged with association with him in a lumber business was suspicious.

He arrived at these conclusions quite independently and mentioned them to no one. His surprise, therefore, was great when Joe Kent, dropping in one morning, asked what he knew about Hugh Garwood.

"Did it ever strike you," Joe asked, "that he may be the man behind?"

"It did," Locke answered, "but tell me how it happened to strike you."

"Well—it just occurred to me," replied Joe, embarrassed.

"Give up, give up," said the lawyer impatiently. "Don't hold out on your doctor, your banker, or your lawyer."

Thereupon Joe, under pledge of secrecy, outlined the conjunction of events. It was a slight thing, but another corroboratory circumstance. Suppressing Joe's part, Locke mentioned his suspicions to Crooks.

"I'll bet a thousand you're right," said the old lumberman thoughtfully. "Garwood, hey? He's the last man I'd have suspected. And usually the last man you suspect is the first man you ought to. It's just like him to cut a man's throat and then pick his pocket. Why, damn him"—Bill Crooks' voice rose in indignation—"his girl visited my girl for a month last summer. You know that, Joe; you used to trot around with her."

Joe reddened. Crooks went on:

"Well, what can we do about it? This is up to you, Locke. Start your game and I'll back it. So will Joe."

"I haven't got enough evidence to start anything," said Locke. "I hope to prove Garwood's connection with the Peninsular when our application to the Transportation Commission comes up for hearing. Outside of that our best chance lies in investigating this Central Lumber Company. I'll see what I can find out about them and you'd better get busy along the same line and pump every lumberman and dealer you know."

Kent's good spirits and increased cheerfulness were so noticeable that Jack Crooks, knowing of his recent flying trip, drew her own conclusions. Casually one evening she approached the subject.

"Of course you saw Edith?"

"Oh, yes, I saw her," Joe replied.

"She must have been very glad to see you?"

Joe smiled enigmatically. "Well, Jack, she didn't exactly fall on my neck. I don't think I brightened up life for her to any extent."

"Modest young man. Are you aware that you have worn a sunny smile ever since you returned? You can't bluff me, Joe. Why don't you own up?"

"Own up to what?" Joe's smile became a broad grin.

Jack thought he looked idiotically pleased. To her eyes his face expressed the good-natured fatuity of the recently engaged man who rather likes to be joked about it—a being whom she despised. She was disappointed in Joe.

"If you expect me to jolly you into admitting your engagement to her you're making a mistake," she said coldly. "I can wait till you see fit to announce it."

"Are you sure you can?" he teased.

"Very nicely. And I beg your pardon for what must have seemed an impertinent curiosity." She regarded him with an icy dignity.

"Fine speech, that," Joe commented genially. "It's from some third act, isn't it? And then I say: 'Ah, Beatrice, why that cold and haughty tone? My life holds no secrets from you: my heart——'"

"Joe Kent, I'll throw something at you!" she cried indignantly. Then she laughed. "Joe, I'll come down to the ploughed ground. You and Edith were very much taken with each other, and when you come back, wearing an idiotic grin, I'm entitled to suppose. I confess to curiosity. Come, now; give up, like a good boy!"

"There's nothing to give up," said Joe frankly. "Not a thing."

"I know better," said Jack. "Edith was in a very confidential mood one night and she told me something. Afterward she regretted it and swore me to secrecy. Does that make any difference?"

"Not much," said Joe. "But now I can tell you that I've been thrown down hard. What you spoke of is very much off." He outlined what had occurred. She listened, indignant but puzzled.

"But—but you seem so cheerful about it. I don't understand. Weren't you fond of her? And if you weren't, why did you tell her you were? And if you were, why——"

"Stop!" cried Joe. "Don't get me in so deep." He became serious. "Jack, most people make mistakes at times. Edith and I made one together. I think we both saw it as soon as it was made, but it took all this time to straighten out. I'm sure she's relieved, and, though it doesn't seem a nice thing to say, I'm just tickled to death."

"Well," said Jack judicially, "I don't approve of flirting, and I never flirt myself. I think she was flirting straight through, and I don't know whether to blame you or not. But, anyway, I'm awfully glad it's all off."

"It's great," said Joe. "Now I can get down to work."

There was, indeed, much to be done. Wright looked after the manufacturing and sales end of the business and looked after it well; McKenna was an excellent walking boss; MacNutt, Deever, and Tobin were good, practical foremen. But the concern lacked a strong, competent executive head who knew the logging business intimately, who could decide at once and finally the questions that must ever arise, and who could command the loyalty and unquestioning obedience of his men in the camps.

For there is a vast difference in the mind of a lumber jack between working for wages merely and working for an employer. For the one he will do a day's work; for the other he will do a day's work and a half, with the pay as an entirely secondary consideration. Just as great commanders have fired their troops with enthusiasm to the point of performing practical impossibilities through pride in them and in themselves and that magic, mystic thing called *esprit du corps*, so there have been employers who, in time of need, command the unswerving, uncomplaining loyalty of the shantyman. For such men he will work without grumbling in all kinds of weather; he will take all manner of chances on land or water; he will fight for them at the drop of a hat; and, finally, he will throw his loyalty into each lick of axe and pull of saw, so that at the end of the season it may be measured in saw logs.

Nor does this depend wholly or even materially upon the treatment accorded him by the "Old Man"—save that he must have a square deal. He may be driven like a mule, cursed in language for which he would kill any one else, fed poorly and housed worse; but if the essential thing is possessed by the boss the lumber jack will not grumble overmuch nor ask for his time.

And this essential is mysterious and hard to define. Much as the shantyman admires physical prowess, it is not a prime requisite. But courage is, and so is firmness in dealing with any situation. The boss must never recede from a position once taken. He may listen to advice, but he

must decide for himself and by himself. He must never argue, he must never give reasons. He must hold himself aloof and above his men, and yet not overdo it. He must be approachable but dignified, friendly but not familiar. He must be boss, first, last, and all the time, and from his decisions, right or wrong, there must be no appeal and of them no slackness of enforcement.

William Kent had filled this bill. With his passing a place became vacant. Some of the old hands hired again into the Kent camps; more did not come back, but went to others of renown. New blood drifted in, and a generation arose which literally knew not Joseph—to whom the name of Kent meant nothing. The old hands would have fought at one word uttered against the “Old Man’s” son, whom most of them had never seen, but they would have done so on general principles merely, and not because they cherished any particular feeling toward him. Neither walking boss nor foreman could take the place which William Kent had filled.

Thus the work of the camps was no better and no worse than the average. The foremen’s capability ensured fair effort. But the something necessary to weld the crews into a supremely efficient machine was lacking.

The winter opened hard and dry, without snowfall. Day after day the wind wailed through the bare arms of the deciduous trees and moaned in the feathery tops of the pines. The ground was frozen to an iron hardness, and the little lakes, creeks, and rivers were bound in black ice, smooth and unbroken.

At the Wind River camp the logging roads—veins leading to main arteries which in turn led to the river and the banking grounds—were useless. By dint of effort and good luck logs could be got to the various skidways located at convenient places beside the roads, and piled there, but they could not be transported farther. The big sleighs with their nine-foot bunks, built to accommodate ten thousand feet and upward of logs at a load, lay idle. MacNutt prayed for snow, or, rather, cursed the lack of it.

When it came, with continued cold weather, it was hard, dry, and powdery. It had no bottom. It gritted like sand beneath the sleigh-shoes, and they went through it to the ground, even without a load. To obviate this and to get going in some way MacNutt put the sprinklers to work. These were huge tank affairs on runners, drawn by from four to six horses. At the top of the tank was a stout, wooden triangle with a block. A wire rope ran through the block. At one end of the rope was a barrel; at the other end was a horse. The horse walked away; the barrel, filled at a water-hole cut in the ice, ran up an inclined, rungless ladder to the top of the tank, where it dumped its contents automatically. The water found its exit from the tank through auger holes bored in the rear, controlled by a closely fitting trap door. Thus the roads were flooded, they froze, and the hauling began.

So far MacNutt had seen nothing of Rough Shan McCane. Occasionally on a Sunday, when work was suspended, one of the latter’s men would drift over, but the gang kept very much to themselves. There was no indication of undue sociability. Still MacNutt, on the principle that storms always brew in fine weather, kept a very open pair of eyes and ears. Some of the men, he knew, could not resist liquor; given access to it they would become drunk as certainly as effect ever follows cause. Over these weak vessels, then, he kept watch.

It was shortly after the road went into operation that he found the first sign of trouble. A swamper, named Flett, was trimming the top of a fallen tree. MacNutt observed the listless rise and fall of the man’s axe in high displeasure. It fell almost of its own weight; there was no power to the blow, and instead of being recovered and swung up again with vim for another stroke the blade lay for an appreciable instant in the gash.

“You, Flett,” rasped MacNutt, “I’ll have no sojerin’ on this job! Understand?”

The man turned, startled, exhibiting a pair of reddened, bloodshot eyes.

“Who’s sojerin’?” he growled.

“Wake up an’ work, ye damned lazy dog!” roared MacNutt. “Take a man’s pay, eat a man’s grub, an’ then loaf on the job, would ye, ye slab-mouthed, slouchin’ son of sin?” For the first time he noticed the man’s eyes, and swore a great oath. “Ye’ve been drinkin’!”

“I ain’t,” Flett denied sullenly.

“Ye lie!” barked MacNutt. “Where did ye get it?”

“Go to blazes!” said Flett.

MacNutt caught him by the throat, crooked a knee, and threw him back down across the log with a shock that almost broke his spine.

“Talk, ye dog, or I’ll kill ye!” he gritted; and Flett, staring up helpless and half stunned into the savage face of the foreman, gave up.

“Regan and me got a bottle apiece from a man in McCane’s camp.”

MacNutt jerked him to his feet and turned him loose. "Get yer time to-night and hike in the morning!" he ordered. "You're fired! Not because ye got drunk, but for bein' no use, drunk or sober."

He sought Regan. Regan was doing a man's work, and doing it well.

"I've fired Flett," said MacNutt without preliminary. "I'll have no booze in this camp, Regan."

Regan, who was made of different stuff than his fellow-transgressor, spat on the dry snow and regarded the foreman with a level stare.

"Do I get my time?" he asked.

"Not unless you want it," MacNutt replied. "I can do with ye or without ye. Suit yourself. But I'll have no more of it."

"A drink now an' then hurts no man," said Regan.

"It raises Cain with a camp, and you know it," MacNutt retorted.

"That's true enough," admitted Regan, who was not unreasonable, "but the boys over to McCane's camp shoved it at us. They've plenty there."

MacNutt said no more. He could not forbid his men from strolling on Sunday, when there was nothing else to do, over the few miles which separated the two camps. But he could and did issue a warning that any man bringing liquor into the camp would get his time forthwith.

He saw no man drunk, but the little signs were unmistakable. The percentage of quarrels and fights became higher; the bunk-house at night, usually noisy, was now uproarious; some of the men obeyed with less alacrity and grumbled with a great deal more; and through the entire crew there spread a spirit of devil-may-care slackness very hard indeed upon a foreman.

One Sunday MacNutt shouldered an axe and took the well-marked trail which led through the forest to McCane's camp. Arrived at the compass line dividing the limits, he sat down and lit his pipe. For an hour he waited, smoking thoughtfully, watching the fluffy, impudent whiskey-jacks. At the end of that time three men appeared down the trail from McCane's. One carried a sack over his shoulder, and the sack bulged suggestively in the shape of a two-gallon jug. MacNutt tapped out his pipe and stepped into the trail.

"Where are you men headin' for?" he asked.

"None o' your business," replied the man with the sack.

"What's in that sack?" MacNutt demanded.

"Cold tea," answered the man, and the others laughed. MacNutt shut his lips grimly.

"Go back and take your booze with you," he ordered; "and don't let me catch you this side of that line again."

"Must think you own the woods," said he of the jug, slipping the bag from his shoulder in readiness for trouble. "You go to hell!"

The axe resting on MacNutt's shoulder leaped forward and down in a sweeping stroke. There was a crash of crockery and a sudden strong odour of alcohol; following these a tremendous burst of profanity. The three men rushed at MacNutt.

The foreman was not foolish enough to meet three hardened "bully-boys" with his fists. His axe flashed up and just missed the head of the leader in its descent. There was such evident deadly sincerity in the blow that the men paused. MacNutt gave them no time. He charged them instantly, axe aloft, and, prudence getting the better of anger, they ran for their lives. MacNutt followed for a short distance, shouted a final warning, and returned to camp. He did not think that he had put a stop to the contraband traffic, but he had fired the first gun and made his attitude clear.

The following day, as he was overseeing the work, Rough Shan McCane came striding through the snow.

"What's this I hear about your chasing three of my men with an axe?" he demanded.

"Well, what about it?" asked MacNutt indifferently, and the men near at hand listened with all their ears.

"This much," said Rough Shan truculently. "My men have a right in the woods, an' not you nor anny one else will stop them going where they like."

"Well, I did stop them," retorted MacNutt. "I smashed a jug of booze they were bringing to my camp, and I'd have split their heads if they hadn't run."

This was news to the Kent men. MacNutt rose several notches in their estimation. Regan, who had expected to share the contents of the jug and had been disappointed by its non-arrival, whispered to Devlin:

"Ain't ould Mac th' bully-boy? I'd 'a' give a week's pay to 'a' seen it."

"A jug of booze among fifty men!" sneered Rough Shan. "What's that? Can't ye let the boys have a drink if they want it? An' if it was a bar'l ain't ye man enough to be boss of yer own camp?"

"When I want your help to run it I'll send for you," rasped MacNutt. "There's been booze comin' over from your camp, an' I'm goin' to stop it; an' the way I stop it is my business."

"If you lay out a man of mine I'll take you to pieces," threatened Rough Shan. "I done it once, an' I'll do it again."

MacNutt's eyes blazed. He caught Regan's axe and tossed it on the snow before McCane. Himself he seized Devlin's.

"If you want a fight pick up that axe and go to it!" he cried.

McCane was rough and tough, but he had come to run a bluff rather than to look for serious trouble, and a fight with axes was too cold-blooded a proposition, even for him.

"I'll go ye with fists an' feet in a minute," he offered.

"No," MacNutt refused. "Take an axe. I want to kill ye!"

McCane was bluffed, to the huge delight of the Kent men.

"I'm no damn fool, if you are," he said. "Leave my men alone, an' I'll leave you alone. But if you don't, I'll come over and take you apart."

"Bring your own axe," said MacNutt. "Now you get out o' here."

This conversation, retailed at the camp by Devlin, Regan, and others, with such additions, mainly blasphemous, as the imagination of the individual narrator could suggest, sent MacNutt's stock booming. The lumber jack loves a fighter, and a man who could run three of McCane's crew out of the woods and bluff Rough Shan himself was one after their own hearts. Regan, himself a rough-and-tumble artist of considerable ability, voiced the sentiments of the better men.

"I like me drink as well as anny man; but ould Mac is boss, an' what he says goes wid me, after this. I'll save me thirst till the drive is down, an' then—" An uplifting of the eyes and a licking of the lips expressed more than mere words.

But many of the men did not see it in that way. If they could get liquor they would drink it. Visitors from McCane's camp came empty-handed, and Kent's men seldom went there. And yet there was liquor in the camp!

MacNutt could not account for it. He pondered the problem over many pipes. "They get it somewhere," he said to himself. "For a week not a man has gone to McCane's and not a man of his has been here. There's only one answer. They've got a *cache*."

Having reached this conclusion by the Holmes process of elimination, he began a new line of investigation; and he was struck by the popularity of the tote road as a promenade. There was no reason why the men should not walk on it, and it bore directly away from McCane's camp, but in the light of his deduction the fact had to be explained.

MacNutt walked out the tote road. Over a mile from camp he saw a blazed tree. With this as a base he began a systematic search, and finally found beneath the butt of a windfall a small keg containing rye whiskey of peculiarly malignant quality. In the keg was a spigot, so that each visitor might fill a bottle for himself.

MacNutt did not demolish the keg. Instead he made a flying trip to camp. When he returned he carried one bottle of horse liniment, half a pound of cayenne pepper, a tin of mustard, two boxes of "Little Giant" pills, a cake of soap, and a huge plug of black chewing tobacco. All these he introduced to the keg's interior and replaced the spigot. This took time. Afterward he took fifteen minutes' violent exercise in shaking the keg.

Thus it was that Hicks, up-ending Chartrand's bottle with a grin of pure anticipation, suddenly choked and gagged, for he had taken two mighty swallows before the taste reached his toughened palate. Now two swallows may not make a summer, but they may make a very sick lumber jack. The winter forest echoed to the sounds of upheaval. Between paroxysms Hicks cursed Chartrand. The latter regarded him in amazement.

"W'at's de mattaire wit' you, hey?" he queried. "Mo' Gee! I t'ink you eat too moche grub dat you ain't chaw. S'pose you tak one leettle drink, encore, for help hold heem down."

"I'll kill you, you blasted pea-soup!" howled Hicks. "I'll kick your backbone up through your hat;

I'll—” Here circumstances over which he had no control interrupted him.

“I t'ink you go crazee, me,” said Chartrand. “You eat lak one dam beeg *cochon*—de pork, de bean, de bread an' molass'—*tous les choses*. All right. I tak heem one leetle drink, *moi-meme*. *A votre sante, mon ami!*”

He grinned pleasantly at Hicks and tilted the bottle to his own mouth, rolling a beatific eye as the liquid gurgled down. Suddenly he choked as Hicks had done.

“*Sacré nom du bon Dieu!*” he shrieked, spitting like a cat. “What is it that it is? Ah, holy Sainte Agathe, I am poison' lak one wolf! Ah, *bon Saint Jean Baptiste, venez mes secours*, for I have been one sinful man! *Sacré dam*, I burn lak hell inside!”

Hicks, sitting weakly on a log, his hands clasped across his outraged epigastrium, watched Chartrand's gyrations with huge satisfaction, and roared vindictive sarcasm at the final catastrophe.

“Eat too much grub that I don't chew, do I?” he mocked. “Make a pig of meself wid pork an' beans, hey? Take some yerself, me laddybuck. That's right—tie yerself in knots. How would ye like another little drink to help hold her down?”

In the end they sat together on the log, cursing in two languages, and regarding the fragments of the broken bottle balefully. Chartrand rose and picked up a heavy club.

“Bagosh, I bus' up dat keg for sure!” he announced. But Hicks, whose wisdom was of the serpentine variety, demurred.

“Let the boys find it out for themselves,” he counselled. “If we give ourselves away we get the dirty laugh.”

Therefore there descended upon the camp a sudden sickness amounting to an epidemic; for the effects of MacNutt's concoction, though violent and immediate, were also far-reaching and enduring. The foreman noted the victims of his strategy, issued them chlorodyne from the van, and kept his mouth shut. He had won the first round, but he knew very well it was only a preliminary. Rough Shan was still to be reckoned with.

XI

The east line of Kent's limit butted on the west line of Clancys', and in due course MacNutt began to cut along the line. The snow he had been longing for fell in plenty and the road already bottomed and made became good. A constant stream of logs flowed down it on the big-bunked sleighs, draining the skidways, which were continually replenished by more logs travoyed out of the woods. At the banking grounds the big piles grew. The work was going merrily.

About the time MacNutt began to cut to his line McCane did the same. The crews fraternized to some extent, but the bosses had nothing to say to each other, each keeping to his own side. Hence Kent's foreman was surprised when one morning, after a fresh fall of snow, Rough Shan accompanied by two other men came to him. He noted, also, with an eye experienced in reading signs of trouble, that most of McCane's crew were working, or making a pretence of working, just across the line.

"These men is sawyers, MacNutt," said Rough Shan. "Yesterday, late on, they dropped a tree an' cut her into two lengths. This morning the logs is gone."

"What have I got to do with that?" asked MacNutt.

"That's what I've come to find out," retorted McCane. "Our teamsters never touched them. Logs don't get away by themselves."

MacNutt frowned at him. "If you think we took your logs there's our skidways, and the road is open to the river. Take a look for yourself."

McCane and his men went to the nearest skidway and examined the logs. They passed on to another, and MacNutt thought it advisable to follow. At the second skidway one of the sawyers slapped a stick of timber.

"This is her," he announced. "I know her by this here knot. Yes, an' here's the other length."

Jackson, Ward, and Haggarty, cant-hook men and old employees of the Kents, had been regarding McCane and his followers with scowling disfavour, and Haggarty, from his post on top of the pile where he had been "decking" the logs as they were sent up to him, asked:

"What's wrong wid them sticks?"

"We cut them yesterday on our limit," the man told him.

"Ye lie!" cried Haggarty fiercely, dropping his cant-hook and leaping to the ground. Jackson and Ward sprang forward as one man.

"You keep out o' this," said Rough Shan. "This is log stealin', and a matter for your boss, if he's man enough to talk to me face."

"Man enough? Come over here an' say we stole yer logs, ye dirty——" Haggarty's language became lurid. He was an iron-fisted old-timer and hated McCane.

MacNutt, when he saw Haggarty drop his cant-hook and jump, ran across to the skids. So did other men at hand. A ring of fierce, bearded faces and level, inquiring eyes gathered about the intruders.

"Here is the logs, MacNutt," said Rough Shan. "Now, I want to know how they come here."

MacNutt examined the logs. They had not yet been branded by the marking-iron with the big K which proclaimed Kent ownership. They were in no material particular different from the rest. It was possible that his teamsters had made a mistake. His sawyers could not identify the logs positively; they thought they had cut them, but were not sure. On the other hand, the two teamsters, Laviolette and old Ben Watkins, were very sure they had never drawn those particular sticks to the pile.

"One o' yeez must 'a done it," asserted McCane.

"Not on your say-so," retorted Watkins, whose fighting blood had not cooled with age. "Don't you get gay with the old man, Shan McCane. I'll——"

"Shut up, Ben!" MacNutt ordered. He turned to McCane. "I'll give you the logs because your men are sure and mine ain't. Break them out o' that, Haggarty; and you, Laviolette, hitch on and pull them across the line to wherever they say they laid. All the same I want to tell ye it wasn't my teamsters snaked them here."

"An' do ye think mine did?—a likely t'ing" said Rough Shan. "Mind this, now, MacNutt, you be

more careful about whose logs ye take.”

MacNutt lit his pipe deliberately before replying.

“The next one ye pull onto our skidways we’ll keep,” said he.

McCane glowered at him. “Ye’ve got a gall. Steal our logs, an’ tell me I done it meself! I want to tell ye, MacNutt, I won’t take that from you nor anny man.”

“Go back and boss your gang,” said MacNutt coldly, refusing the evident challenge.

He had made up his mind to give no provocation; but he had also determined to push the fight to a finish when it came, as he saw it inevitably must. The occurrence of the morning’ confirmed his suspicion that McCane was following out a deliberate plan. He perceived, too, that the matter of the logs was a tactical mistake of the latter’s. For, if Rough Shan had confined his activities to supplying the men with whiskey and fomenting discontent, MacNutt would have been forced to discharge half of them, and good hands were scarce. Thus the camp would have been practically crippled. But an accusation of log stealing would weld the men solidly together for the honour of their employer.

Haggarty, the iron-fisted cant-hook man, who had drawn Kent pay for years, took up the matter in the bunk-house that night.

“Nobody knows better nor Rough Shan hisself who put them logs on our skidway,” he declared with a tremendous oath. “An’ for why did he do it? To pick a row, no less. He thought ould Mac would keep the sticks an’ tell him to go to the divil. Mac was too foxy for him that time.”

“If he wants a row he can have it,” said Regan; “him or anny of his gang. It’s the dirty bunch they are. An’ I want to say right here,” he continued, glaring at the row of men on the “deacon seat,” “that the man that fills himself up on rotgut whiskey from McCane’s camp after this is a low-lived son of a dog, an’ I will beat the head off of him once when he’s drunk an’ again when he’s sober.”

A growl of approval ran along the bench.

“That’s right.”

“That’s the talk, Larry!”

“To hell wid McCane an’ his whiskey, both!”

“Mo’ Gee! we pass ourself on hees camp an’ clean heem out.”

The temperance wave was so strong that the minority maintained a discreet silence. Indeed, even those who relished the contraband whiskey most would have relished no less an encounter with McCane’s crew, for whom they had little use, individually or collectively. Save for the first few bottles to whet their appetites, the whiskey had not been supplied free. They had paid high for it, and the mystery of the fatal keg had never been cleared up. The sufferers were inclined to blame one or more of McCane’s men, and, not being able to fasten the responsibility for the outrage on any individual, saddled it on the entire crew.

At this juncture Joe Kent arrived in camp, following out a laudable determination to become acquainted with the woods end of his business. He came at night, and took up his quarters with MacNutt.

Although he had visited camps before with his father, it was still fresh and new to Joe—the roomy box stove, the log walls hung with mackinaw garments, moccasins, and snowshoes, the water pail on the shelf beside the door, the bunks with their heavy gray blankets and bearskins—all the raffle that accumulates in a foreman’s winter quarters. And because his imagination was young and active and unspoiled he saw in these things the elements of romance where an older hand would have seen utility only. He felt that they typified a life which he had come to learn, that they were part of a game which he had studied theoretically from a distance, but was now come to play himself.

MacNutt was silent from habit. A foreman cannot mingle socially with his men to any extent and preserve his authority. Hence his life is lonely and loneliness begets silence. He answered questions with clear brevity, but did not make conversation. He was not at all embarrassed by the presence of his employer; nor would he have been if the latter had been old and experienced instead of young and green. He knew very well that Kent had come to learn the practical side of the woods business. That was all right and he approved of it. He would tell him whatever he wanted to know; but as a basis he must know enough to ask intelligent questions. Outside of that he must learn by experience. That was how MacNutt had learned himself, and if Joe had asked him the best way to obtain practical knowledge he would have been advised to go into the woods with another man’s crew and use an axe.

“And now about McCane’s gang,” said Joe when he had learned what he could absorb as to the progress of the work. “Are they giving you any trouble.”

“Not more than I can handle,” said MacNutt, and for the first time told of the doctored whiskey.

Joe roared at the recital, and MacNutt smiled grimly. He was not a humourist, and his narrative was not at all embellished. He went on to relate the incident of the logs and his deductions.

Kent thought of Finn Clancy and frowned. He told the foreman of the contract with the Clancy firm and of the narrowly averted row with Finn.

"Then they are behind McCane," said MacNutt conclusively. "That means he will make it bad for us yet—unless we stop him."

"I don't understand," said Joe.

"It's this way," MacNutt explained. "McCane has his instructions, but you can't prove them. Suppose he claims a log and doesn't get it and a fight starts between the crews—why, he's jobbing the limit himself and the Clancys ain't responsible."

"A bit of a scrap won't matter," said Joe cheerfully.

"It will matter if the woods ain't big enough to hold but one crew—ours or theirs," returned MacNutt. "I've seen it happen before."

"Tell me about it," said Joe. He listened eagerly to the concise narrative that followed, which was the little-known history of a logging war in which the casualties were large.

"The dead men were reported killed by falling timber," the foreman concluded. "Five of them there was—five lives, and all for one pine tree that turned out punk when it was cut." He tapped his pipe out against the stove. "You'll be tired. I get up before light, but I'll try not to wake you, Mr. Kent."

"I'll get up when you do," said Joe. "I'm going out on the job with the crew."

"All right; I'll wake you," said the foreman without comment, but likewise without conviction.

In the morning—or as it seemed to Joe about midnight—he awoke with a light in his eyes and the foreman's hand on his shoulder. The light came from the lamp. Outside it was pitch dark, and the wind was shouting through the forest and whining around the cabin. Now and then a volley of snow pattered against the window.

By way of contrast never had a bed seemed so absolutely comfortable. For a moment he was tempted to exercise his right to sleep. The ghost of a smile on MacNutt's face decided for him. He tumbled out, soused his head in water, pulled on his heavy clothes, high German socks, and moccasins, and in five minutes stood, a very solid, good-looking young lumber jack with a very healthy appetite for breakfast.

The darkness was lifting when the crew left camp for the woods. Joe and the foreman tramped behind. There was little speech. However excellent early rising may be theoretically it does not sweeten the temper, especially in mid-winter. There was a notable absence of laughter, of jest, even of ordinarily civil conversation. Almost every man bent his energies to the consumption of tobacco. They had not shaken off the lethargy of the night, and their mental processes were not yet astir. They plodded mechanically, backs humped, eyes upon the ground, dully resentful of the weather, the work, of existence itself.

Arrived at the scene of operations, the lethargy vanished. Men sighed as they lifted axes for the first blow—such a sigh as one gives when stooping to resume a burden. With the fall of the blow, and the shock of it running up the helve through arms and shoulders, they were completely awake. What remained of the dull, aimless resentment was directed at the timber that ringed them around—the timber that represented at once a livelihood and an unending toil.

Joe followed MacNutt, keenly observant. He knew little about the work—how it should be done, how much each man and team should do, where odd moments might be saved, and the way in which a desired object might be accomplished with the least expenditure of effort. But he was by no means absolutely ignorant, for, like the average young American, he had spent considerable time in the woods, which involves a more or less intimate acquaintance with the axe, and he had also the average American's aptitude for tools and constructive work of any kind. Then, too, he had absorbed unconsciously much theory from his father and from the conversation of his father's friends, added to which was the study and thought of the past few months. Thus he possessed a groundwork. Remained analysis of the actual individual operations as they were performed before his eyes, and synthesis into a whole.

With the foreman he went over most of the job, from the first slashings to the river rollways, and thus gained a comprehensive idea of what had been done, what remained to do, and what time there was to do it in. He drank scalding tea and ate pork, bread, and doughnuts with the men at noon, and smoked a pipe, sheltered from the biting north wind by a thick clump of firs. In the afternoon, to keep himself warm, he took an axe and trimmed tree tops with the swampers, showing a fair degree of efficiency with the implement. Also he took a turn at the end of the long, flexible cross-cut saw, an exercise which made a new set of muscles ache; but he learned the rudiments of it—to pull with a long, smooth, level swing, not to push, but to let the other man pull on the return motion, to tap in a wedge when the settling trunk began to bind the thin, rending

ribbon of steel, and to use kerosene on the blade when it gummed and pulled heavily and stickily. When the work ceased with the falling darkness he tramped back to camp with the men, ate a huge supper, spent an hour in the bunk-house with them, and sang them a couple of songs which were received with wild applause, and then rolled into his bunk, dog-tired, and was asleep as his head settled in the pillow.

Behind him, in the sleeping-camp, he left a favourable impression.

"He's good stuff, that lad," said Haggarty. "He minds me of some one—a good man, too."

"Would it be Alec Macnamara, now?" asked Regan. Macnamara, a famous "white-water birler," had met his fate in the breaking of a log-jam some years before.

"That's who it is, God rest his soul," said Haggarty. "He's younger, but he's the dead spit of Alec in the eyes an' mouth. It's my belief he laughs when he fights, like him, an' he'd die game as Alec died."

Whether Haggarty's belief was right or wrong did not appear. Nothing arose to put the young boss's courage to a test. All went merry as a marriage bell, and the quantity of logs pouring down to the banking grounds attested the quality of the work done. Then came trouble out of a comparatively clear sky.

One day Joe was bossing the job, MacNutt being in camp. His bossing, truth to tell, lay more in the moral effect of his presence than in issuing orders or giving instruction. Having the good sense to recognize his present limitations, he let the men alone. The air was soft with a promise of snow, and he lit his pipe and sauntered up the logging road.

Before a skidway stood four men in hot argument. Two of these were Haggarty and Jackson. One was unknown to Kent. The fourth he recognized as Rough Shan McCane.

"Here's Mr. Kent now," said Haggarty, catching sight of him.

Rough Shan favored Joe with a contemptuous stare. "Where's MacNutt?" he demanded. "I told him this log stealin' had got to stop."

"MacNutt is in camp," said Joe. "You can talk to me if you like. What's the matter?"

Rough Shan cursed the absent foreman. "Log stealin's the matter," he announced. "A load of our logs has gone slick an' clean."

"Gone where?" asked Joe coldly.

"MacNutt knows where!" asserted Rough Shan with an oath. "This is the second time. I'm goin' to find them, an' when I do——"

"What'll ye do?" demanded Haggarty truculently. "It is the likes of you can come over here an' say——"

"Dry up, Haggarty!" Joe commanded shortly. "Now, look here, Mr. McCane, we haven't got your logs."

"But ye have," Rough Shan proclaimed loudly. "I know the dirty tricks of ye. That's stealin'—stealin', d'ye mind, young felly? I want them logs an' I want 'em quick, drawed over an' decked on our skidways an' no words about it. As it is, I'm a good mind to run ye out o' the woods."

Joe's temper began to boil. Here was an elemental condition confronting him. Rough Shan was big and hard and tough, but he was not much awed. To him the big lumber jack was not more formidable than any one of a score of husky young giants who had done their several and collective bests to break his neck on the football field, and he was not inclined to take any further gratuitous abuse.

"What makes you think we took your logs?" he asked.

"Who else could 'a' done it?" demanded Rough Shan with elemental logic.

"You might have done it yourself," Joe told him. "Now, you listen to me for a minute and keep a civil tongue in your head. You're trying to make trouble for us, and I know it, and I know who is behind you. If you want a row you can have it, now or any old time. You won't run anybody out of the woods. As for the logs, you know what MacNutt told you. Still, if you can prove ownership of any, satisfactorily to me, you may haul them back with the team you hauled them in with. But, mind you, this is the last time. The trick is stale, and you mustn't play it again."

"I'll find them an' then I'll talk to you," said Rough Shan with contempt. "Come on, Mike." He made for the nearest skidway.

"You two men go along and tell the boys to let him look till he's tired," said Joe to Haggarty and Jackson. "Don't scrap with him, remember."

"Well, we'll try not," said Haggarty. "That's Mike Callahan wid him—a devil!"

"You do what I tell you!" Joe snapped, and Haggarty and Jackson uttered a suddenly respectful "Yes, sir."

In half an hour Jackson came for Joe. He found Rough Shan at the banking grounds. Before him lay a little pile of thin, round circles of wood; also sawdust. McCane picked one circle up and handed it to him.

It was a slice cut from the end of a saw log. One side was blank. On the other the letters "CB" proclaiming the ownership of Clancy Brothers were deeply indented.

"Well, what about it?" asked Joe.

"What about it!" Rough Shan repeated. "Here's the ends sawed from our marked logs. Then ye mark them fresh for yerself. A nice trick! That's jail for some wan."

"Pretty smooth," said Joe. "Saves you the trouble of hauling the logs in here, doesn't it? One man could carry these ends in a sack."

Rough Shan glared at him. "I want them logs, an' I want them now," he cried with an oath.

"All right; take them," Joe retorted. "Of course you'll have to match these ends on the logs they belong to. Possibly you overlooked that little detail. Haggarty, you see that he makes a good fit."

Haggarty grinned. "Then I'm thinkin' I'll be goin' over onto Clancys' limit wid him," he commented.

Rough Shan took a fierce step forward. Joe stood his ground and the other paused.

"Our logs is here," he exclaimed. "These ends proves it. I'll not match them, nor try to. I give ye an hour to deliver a full load of logs, average twelve-inch tops, at our skidways."

"Not a log, unless you prove ownership of it, and then you do your own delivering," said Joe. "Pshaw! McCane, what's the use? You can't bluff me. Let your employers go to law if they want to."

"Law!" cried Rough Shan. "We run our own law in these woods, young felly. I give ye fair warnin'!"

"You make me tired," Joe retorted. "Why don't you *do* something?"

Joe was quick on his feet, but he was quite unprepared for the sudden blow which Rough Shan delivered. It caught him on the jaw and staggered him. Instantly Haggarty hurled himself at McCane, while Jackson tackled Callahan. The men at the rollways ran to the scrap. Callahan floored Jackson and went for Joe, who met him with straight, stiff punches which surprised the redoubtable Mike. As reinforcements came up, McCane and his henchman backed against a pile of timber.

"Come on, ye measly log stealers!" roared the foreman, thoroughly in his element. The odds against him had no effect save to stimulate his language. He poured forth a torrent of the vilest abuse that ever defiled a pinery. Beside him Callahan, heavy-set and gorilla-armed, supplemented his remarks. There was no doubt of the thorough gameness of the pair.

In went Haggarty, Reese, Ward, and Chartrand. Others followed. The rush simply overwhelmed the two. They went down, using fists, knees, and feet impartially. A dozen men strove to get at them.



Haggarty and Rough Shan, locked in a deadly grip, fought like bulldogs

Joe's sense of fair play was outraged. He caught the nearest man by the collar and slung him back twenty feet.

"Quit it!" he shouted. "Haggarty! Chartrand! White! Let them alone, do you hear me?" In his anger he rose to heights of unsuspected eloquence and his words cut like whips. The men disentangled before his voice and hands. At the bottom Haggarty and Rough Shan, locked in a deadly grip, fought like bulldogs, each trying for room to apply the knee to the other's stomach.

"Pull 'em apart!" Joe ordered sharply, and unwilling hands did so. They cursed each other with deep hatred. Their vocabularies were much on a par and highly unedifying.

"That'll do, Haggarty!" Joe rasped. "McCane, you shut your dirty mouth and get out of here."

"You—" McCane began venomously.

"Don't say it," Joe warned him. "Clear out!"

"A dozen of ye to two!" cried McCane. "If I had ye alone, Kent, I'd put ye acrost me knee!"

"Come to my camp any night this week and I'll take you with the gloves," said Joe. "If you want a scrap for all hands bring your crew with you. Now, boys, get back on the job. We've wasted enough time. These men are going."

He turned away, and the men scattered unwillingly to their several employments. Rough Shan and Callahan, left alone, hesitated, shouted a few perfunctory curses, and finally tramped off. But every one who knew them knew also that this was only the beginning.

XII

Locke, by means known to himself alone, managed to have his application to the Transportation Commission set down for an early hearing. This made Joe's presence necessary, and he came out of the woods lean and hard and full of vigour. Neither McCane nor his crew had taken up the challenge, and their intentions remained matter of speculation. Just before the hearing, however, the railway suddenly restored the old freight rate on lumber, thus taking the wind out of Locke's sails.

"This puts us in the position of flogging a dead horse," he grumbled. "Now the commission will tell us we ought to be satisfied, and refuse to let me show the genesis of the cancelled rate. Confound it! I depended on this to find out more about Garwood."

This prediction turned out to be correct. The commission refused to allow its time to be wasted. The old rate was restored, and that was not complained of. Therefore, said they, there was no question for them to consider, their powers not being retroactive. Locke was unable to convince them to the contrary.

Outgeneralled in his plan of attack he sought another, finding it in a grievance possessed by one Dingle, a small contractor in a town on the O. & N. There the price of lumber had been boosted sky-high, and this destroyed Dingle's profits on contracts he had undertaken. Investigation showed that the Central Lumber Company had bought out two competing dealers and immediately raised the price. Locke brought action for Dingle, claiming damages and charging an unlawful combination. He named the Central Lumber Company, its directors, Ackerman, Garwood, and the O. & N. Railway, defendants. It was, in fact, a legal fishing expedition and little more. The object of it was to obtain information looking to an action by Crooks and Kent against the same defendants, with the Peninsular Railway added.

Locke's first intimation that he had drawn blood came in the shape of a visit from Henry J. Beemer, manager of the Peninsular. Beemer offered him the position of general counsel for that railway. The offer was apparently *bona fide*, and no visible strings dangled from it. Beemer, in fact, was not aware of the Dingle action and was merely carrying out instructions, and he was much surprised when Locke refused the offer.

"But why?" he asked. "It's a good thing."

"I know it is," said Locke with a sigh, as he thought of his own rough-and-tumble practice. "Still I can't take it. I don't suppose you are aware of the fact, Beemer, but this is an attempt to buy me up."

"Nonsense!" said Beemer indignantly. "If we had wanted to buy you we should have done it before. There is no litigation against us now in which you are interested. We make you the offer in good faith, because you are the man for the job."

"I have litigation pending against Ackerman and Garwood," the lawyer informed him. "You didn't know that. So, you see, I have to refuse."

Beemer took his departure, rather indignant at Ackerman for keeping him in the dark. But a few days afterward Hugh Garwood himself walked into Locke's office.

"My name is Garwood," he announced.

"I know you by sight," said Locke. "Sit down, Mr. Garwood."

Garwood sat down and looked at the lawyer from narrowed eyes. His face was an inscrutable mask. "You have made me a defendant in litigation of yours," he said bluntly. "Why?"

"Because I believe you are financing the Central Lumber Company."

"Can you prove that?" Garwood asked.

"I think so; at least I can put it up to you to disprove it."

"Suppose I am financing it," said Garwood after a pause. "Suppose this man-of-straw, Dingle, gets a judgment and his paltry damages are paid—what then?"

"Then he should be satisfied," said Locke.

Garwood frowned impatiently. "You are a clever man, Locke. Give me credit for average intelligence, please."

"Certainly—for much more than the average, Mr. Garwood."

"Very good. Now I am going to talk plainly. You are promoting this litigation to form a groundwork for more. If you find what you hope to find, you will bring an action against myself and others."

"Well?"

"Well, I don't want that action brought."

Locke smiled.

"Understand me, I am not afraid of it; but it might disarrange some of my plans. Now, a certain offer has been made to you. You refused it. Wasn't it big enough?"

"No."

"In the not improbable event of the fusion of the Peninsular with the O. & N.," said Garwood slowly, "you might be offered the post of counsel for the amalgamated road."

"I should refuse that also, for the same reason."

Garwood threw himself back in his chair.

"Then what *do* you want?"

"Several things," said Locke. "I want a fair deal for my clients, Crooks and Kent. I want damages for the outrageous freight rate you made for their injury. They must have cars, hereafter, when they want them. The political ukase forbidding purchases from them must be withdrawn, and the markets must be thrown open to them again. The crooked system of double-check tenders for timber limits must be altered. And generally you must stop hammering these men and using your influence against them."

Garwood waved an impatient hand. "We are not discussing these things now. Leave them aside. What do you want for yourself?"

"They are not to be left aside. My clients will pay my fees. I can't accept anything from you as matters stand."

Garwood stared incredulously. "I thought I was dealing with a lawyer," said he.

"You will be absolutely certain of that in a very short time," Locke retorted bitingly.

Garwood saw his own mistake immediately. You may make an amusing pun on a man's name or gently insinuate that the majority of the members of the profession to which he belongs are unblushing rascals, and the man may smile: but in his heart he feels like killing you. And so Garwood, who desired to come to terms with Locke if possible, apologized. The lawyer accepted the apology coldly and waited.

"Your demands for your clients are out of the question," Garwood resumed positively. "We need not discuss them at all. I came here to make an arrangement with you. I have made you an offer which most men would snap at. I ask you again what you want?"

"I have told you," Locke replied. "I am bound to my clients. That is absolute and final. If you will not recognize their claims I will proceed with the Dingle action and follow it by another, as you infer."

"I dislike to upset your carefully arranged plans," said Garwood, "but Dingle will come to you tomorrow, pay your fees, and instruct you to discontinue the action."

"What?" cried Locke, shaken out of his usual calm. If this were true the enemy had again executed a masterly retreat. It annoyed him exceedingly to be blocked twice by the same trick, although he did not see how he could have helped it.

"As I told you, we don't want litigation just now," said Garwood. "Without admitting Dingle's claim at all, we considered a settlement the easiest way."

"No doubt," said Locke dryly. "Well, you won't be able to buy off the next action. I'll take care of that."

"You persist in your refusal to make terms?"

"That is a very cool way of putting it," said Locke. "I tell you now, Garwood, I'm going after you, and when I get you I'll nail your hide to the sunny side of the barn."

Garwood rose and shook a threatening forefinger at the lawyer. "Remember, if you make trouble for me I'll smash your business. Perhaps you don't think I can. You'll see. Inside a year you won't have a case in any court."

"You own a couple of judges, don't you?" said Locke cheerfully. "A nice pair they are, too. You think my clients will get the worst of it from them. Of course they will, but I appeal most of their

decisions now. You can injure me to some extent, but not as much as you think. Go to it, Garwood. When I get through with you you'll be a discredited man."

On the whole he considered that he had broken even with the railway magnate. The settlement of the Dingle action was a confession of weakness. When that individual made an apologetic appearance the next day, Locke turned his anger loose and almost kicked him out of the office. Then he sat down and did some really first-class thinking, marshalling all the facts he had, drawing deductions, sorting and arranging, and finally he decided that he had a *prima facie* case.

Thereupon he brought action against everybody concerned, directly or remotely, in the assault on the business of Kent and Crooks.

Meanwhile Joe Kent was impatient to get back to the woods, but certain business held him. A year before he would have been quite content to pass his evenings at the club, with cards, billiards and the like. Now these seemed strangely futile and inadequate, as did the current conversation of the young men about town. It all struck him as not worth while. He longed for the little log shack with the dully glowing stove within, the winter storm without, and the taciturn MacNutt. As he lay back with a cigar in a luxurious chair he could see the bunk-house filled with the smoke of unspeakable tobacco, the unkempt, weather-hardened men on the "deacon seat," and the festoons of garments drying above the stove. The smart slang and mild swearing disgusted him. He preferred the ribald, man's-size oaths of the shanty men, the crackling blasphemies which embellished their speech. In fact, though he did not know it, he was passing through a process of change; shedding the lightness of extreme youth, hardening a little, coming to the stature of a man.

Because the club bored him he took to spending his evenings with Jack Crooks. There was a cosy little room with an open fire, a piano, big, worn, friendly easy-chairs, and an atmosphere of home. This was Jack's particular den, to which none but her best friends penetrated. Sometimes Crooks would drop in, smoke a cigar, and spin yarns of logging in the early days; but more often they were alone. Jack played well and sang better; but she made no pretence of entertaining Joe. He was welcome; he might sit and smoke and say nothing if he chose. She sang or played or read or created mysterious things with linen, needle, and silk, as if he were one of the household. On the other hand, if he preferred to talk she was usually equally willing.

One night she sat at the piano and picked minor chords. Joe, sunk in the chair he particularly affected, scowled at the fire and thought of logs. Lately he had thought of little else. He wanted to get back and see the work actually going on. Jack half turned and looked at him.

"He needs cheering up," she said. "He's thinking of her still."

"What's that?" said Joe with a start.

"'Tis better to have loved and lost," she quoted mockingly. "Brace up, Joe." She often teased him about his temporary infatuation with Edith Garwood, knowing that it did not hurt. She swung about to the piano and her fingers crashed into the keys:

"Whin I was jilted by Peggy Flynn,
The heart iv me broke, an' I tuk to gin;
An' I soaked me sowl both night an' day
While worrukin' on the railwa-a-a-y.

"Arrah-me, arrah-me, arrah-me, ay,
Arrah-me, arrah-me, arrah-me, ay,
Oh, sorra th' cint I saved of me pay
While worrukin' on the railwa-a-a-y.

"But in eighteen hundred an' seventy-three
I went an' married Bidy McGee,
An' th' foine ould woman she was to me
While worrukin' on the railwa-a-a-y.

"We'll omit the next thirteen stanzas, Joe. See what your fate might have been:

æIn eighteen hundred an' eighty-siven,
Poor Bidy died an' she went to Hiven;
An' I was left wid kids eliven
Worrukin' on the railwa-a-a-y."

"Great Scott, Jack, where did you pick up that old come-all-ye?" Joe interrupted. "You sing it like an Irish section hand."

"I learned it from one. He was a good friend of mine. Do you want the rest of the verses? There are about seventy, I think."

"If Bidly is in Heaven, we'll let it go at that," laughed Joe. "Why don't you sing something touching and sentimental, appropriate to my bereaved condition? By the way, Jack, where is Drew keeping himself? I haven't seen him lately. I was just beginning to feel *de trop* when he called."

This was carrying the war into Jack's territory. Young Drew had paid her very pronounced attentions and had recently discontinued them, for a reason which only she and himself knew. The colour flamed into her cheeks.

"Don't talk nonsense! There was no reason why you should feel that way."

"Hello! You're blushing!" Joe commented.

"I'm not; it's the fire."

"Is it?" said Joe sceptically. For the first time in his life he regarded her carefully. He had been used to taking Jack for granted, and had paid no more attention to her looks than the average brother pays to those of a younger sister. Now it struck him that she was pretty. Her hair was abundant, brown and glossy; her eyes and skin were clean and clear and healthy, and her small, shapely head was carried with regal uprightness; she was slim and straight and strong and capable. In fact she suddenly dawned upon his accustomed vision in an entirely new way.

"Jack," said he, and his surprise showed in his voice, "upon my word I believe you are rather good looking!"

She rose and swept him a mock curtsey.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Nice eyes, plenty of hair, and a good figure," Joe drawled. "I don't blame Drew at all."

"Now, Joe, quit it. I don't care to be jollied about that."

"What's sauce for the gander is ditto for the goose. I wasn't aware that there was anything serious——"

"There isn't," Jack snapped, "and there never will be. Will you stop when I ask you to?"

Joe dropped the subject, but eyed her curiously.

"I take it back," said he after an interval of silence. "Jack, you're absolutely pretty. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"I always was pretty," Jack declared. "The trouble was with your powers of observation."

"Likely," said Joe, and fell silent again. Jack picked up a book and began to read. He watched her idly, pleased by the picture she presented. She fidgeted beneath his gaze.

"I wish you wouldn't stare at me as if I were a recently discovered species," she exclaimed at last.

"Now I wonder," said he, "why I never noticed it before."

Jack dimpled charmingly. "I want to tell you, young man, that you are singularly dense. Even dad knows what I look like."

"So do I—now," said Joe. "I suppose I've been thinking of you as a little girl. Great Scott!" He shook his head, puzzled by his blindness. Jack's eyes twinkled and her dimples became pronounced. She was enjoying his discovery greatly. Presently she said:

"When do you go up to Wind River?"

"As soon as I can—in a day or two, anyway." A slight frown drew lines between his eyes. "I ought to be up there now. Not that I can tell MacNutt anything about his job, of course. But there's that outfit of McCane's! No telling what they will be up to next. And then I ought to go round to the other camps and see how there're making it. We want a main drive of twenty-five or thirty million this year. Got to have it. Yes, I ought to be on the spot."

He was talking to himself rather than to her, and the boyishness had vanished from his voice and manner. He was the man of affairs, the executive head, thinking, planning, immersed in his business.

Jack was quick to recognize the change.

"You need the logs, don't you, Joe?"

"I'll smash without 'em, sure. Twenty million feet delivered at Wismer & Holden's booms by July 1st. Not a day later. Then I can lift the notes, square my overdraft, and meet the mortgage payments. If I don't—well, my credit is strained pretty badly now."

"You'll pull through, Joe. I know you will." Her hand fell on his shoulder. He looked up abstractedly and saw her standing beside him. Mechanically his hand reached up and closed on hers. At the contact he felt a little thrill, and something stirred within him. It was the first time he had touched her hand since childhood, save in greeting or farewell. And her touch was the first of understanding human sympathy he had had since called upon to hoe his own row. He vibrated to it responsively.

"You're a good little sport, Jack," he said gratefully and pressed her hand.

There was a discreet knock at the door.

"Telegram for you, Joe," said Jack, taking the yellow envelope from the maid.

"May I?" said Joe, and tore it open. His face became a thunder-cloud. He bit back the words that rose to his lips.

"What is it?" asked Jack anxiously. "Not bad news?"

"Couldn't be much worse." He held out the slip of yellow paper. She read:

Camp burnt out. McCane's crew. Wire instructions.
—MacNutt.

Joe tore a leaf from a note-book and scribbled:

Hold men together and build new camp. Rushing supplies.
Coming at once.

"I've got to have that camp going again in a week," said he grimly. "That means hustle. I shan't see you again before I go up."

"You're going yourself," she said with approval. "Good boy, Joe. Oh, how I wish I were a man!"

"If you were I'd have you for a partner," he declared. "But I'm glad you're not. I like you best this way. Good-bye, little girl, and thanks for many pleasant evenings. I'll tell you all about the war when I come back."

In spite of Joe's misfortune Jack went upstairs that night with a light step, humming the refrain of the last stanza of her father's favourite song:

When the drive comes drow-down, when the jam comes down.
What makes yeez lads so wishful-eyed as we draw near to town?
Other eyes is soft an' bright like the stars of a June night—
Wives an' sweethearts—prayin' waitin'—as we drive the river down.
(Oh, ye divils!)
God bless the eyes that shine for us when we boil into town.

"Other eyes is soft an' bright;" she crooned to her white-clad reflection as she braided the great coils of glossy brown hair. "To think Joe has just found out that *my* eyes are bright. Charlie Drew knew it long ago. How stupid some boys are!"

Meanwhile Wright and Locke were swearing angrily as they read the telegram, while Joe told them of his determination to rebuild at once.

"That's the talk," said Wright.

"I'll sue Clancy Brothers at once," said Locke. "I believe they can be made liable. Anyway, it will have a good moral effect. And when you get the names of the men who did the burning I'll have them arrested."

"I don't think I'll bother about law," said Joe.

Locke stared at him in surprise.

"Because the way I feel now," young Kent continued, "I think as soon as I can spare the time I'll take a bunch of bully-boys and run them out of the woods."

XIII

At Maguire's station Joe disembarked from the crawling, snow-smothered train, consisting of engine, baggage car, and day coach. The platform was covered with boxes, sacks, and bundles; and men were piling them on bobsleighs. These were shanty boys from the Wind River camp.

Haggarty, one eye blackened and almost closed, growled a hearty welcome to the young boss. The latter, looking around, observed other marks of combat. He asked the cause.

"It was like this, Mr. Kent," Haggarty replied. "The camp was burnt at noon. Half a dozen men wid flour sacks over their heads ran in on the cook, the cookee bein' out on the job. They took him out an' fired the camp. Then they tied him, covered him wid blankets so he wouldn't freeze, an' lit out. The cookee come back an' found him, an' brought us word. MacNutt an' what men he could hold hit for camp to see what could be done, but the rest of us was too mad, an' we boiled across to do up McCane's crew. It was a good fight, but they was too many for us." He swore with deep feeling. "Just wait. The woods ain't big enough to hold us both after this."

"Are all the men at camp now?"

"All but what's down wid the teams. There was tents an' stoves went up yesterday. Before that she was a cold rig for sleepin' and eatin'. Now it's better."

On the long sleigh drive Joe got details, but the main facts were as stated by Haggarty. None of the incendiaries had been recognized, but nobody doubted that they were of Rough Shan's crew.

Joe found a dozen tents pitched around the clearing, well banked with snow and floored with boughs. New buildings were going up as fast as the logs could be hauled out of the woods and laid in place. The work of logging was temporarily suspended. MacNutt, grim and in a poisonous temper, drove the willing crew from streak of dawn till fall of dark.

"You'll blame me, like enough," said he. "I blame myself. I've seen the like before, and I knew McCane, curse him! If you say so I'm ready to quit, but I'll get even with him for this."

"I don't blame you a bit," Joe told him. "It can't be helped. We must get the camp and the cutting going on again, and then we'll square up with McCane when we have time."

As the buildings neared completion new men began to arrive—strapping, aggressive-eyed fellows who viewed each other and the Wind River men very much after the manner of strange mastiffs. These were draughts from Tobin's and Deever's camps—the "hardest" men from each, picked by the foremen by Joe's instructions and sent on to him. In return, Joe instructed some of his original crew to report to Deever and Tobin. Thus he found himself with a crew of "bully-boys" who feared nothing on earth and were simply spoiling for a fight.

In the completed bunk-house a huge, bearded, riverman leaped high, cracked his heels together and whooped.

"Is it Rough Shan McCane?" he yelled as he hit the floor. "Is it him wid his raft of Callahans an' Red McDougals an' scrapin's of hell wud burn a Kent camp?" His blasphemy was original and unreproducible. "By the Mortal! The moon's high, an' the travellin's good. Come on, bullies, we'll burn them out of their bunks this night!"

The yell that arose reached the ears of Joe and MacNutt. The foreman looked at his employer.

"What's up?" the latter asked.

"If you want McCane's camp burnt and his gang run out of the woods all you have to do is to sit here and smoke your pipe," MacNutt replied.

Joe seized his cap and opened the door just as the crew began to pour out of the bunk-house hastily pulling on garments as they came. He dashed across the open space and met the leaders.

"What's the excitement, boys?" he asked.

"We're going to burn out Rough Shan for you," answered the big riverman.

"Oh, you are!" said Joe. "Well, Cooley, I don't remember asking you to do anything of the kind."

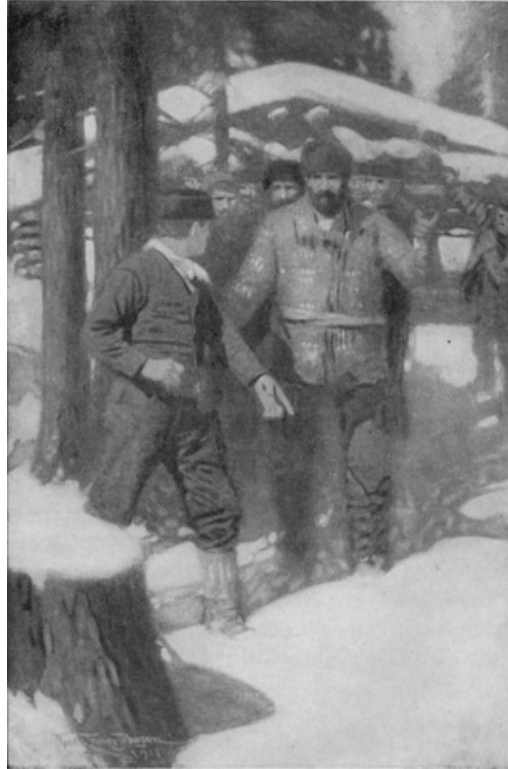
"Sure, you don't need to ask it, Mr. Kent," returned big Cooley with what he intended for an amiable, protective smile. "The boys will see to it for you." A yell of fierce affirmation arose behind him. "You go to bed an' know nawthin' about it."

"Are you giving me orders, Cooley?" Joe demanded in biting tones. "Let me tell you this," he cried. "Not a man goes out to-night. When I want McCane's camp burnt I'll tell you. Yes, and I'll

set fire to it myself. That's the kind of fellow I am. I won't hide behind you boys. Now get back, every man of you!"

They hesitated and murmured. Those behind pushed forward. The young man was showing unsuspected qualities. Joe stepped up close.

"Do you men think I'll let you run this camp?" he demanded. "You're here to cut logs when I tell you and not to fight till I tell you. Get it through you now and get it clear that I'm Boss. *Boss*, do you understand? *BOSS!* What I say goes, day or night." He drew a furrow in the snow with his moccasin. "The man who crosses that line gets his time. If you all cross you all get it. If half of you cross you all get it, and I'll shut down this camp. That's what Clancy and McCane are trying to make me do. If you want to help them and smash me—cross the line!"



"There's the line. Cross it to-night or try to scrap with McCane's crew before I tell you to, and I'll shut down"

His voice rang clear as a trumpet in the frozen stillness. By accident, almost, he had chosen the right course. Pleadings alone would have been in vain; orders alone would have been useless; the placing of this responsibility upon the men turned the scale.

"Aw, now, Mr. Kent," said big Cooley coaxingly, "what harm to put the run on them high-bankers and burn their dirty camp?"

Joe eyed him coldly. "I won't argue," he said. "There's the line. Cross it to-night or try to scrap with McCane's crew before I tell you to, and I'll shut down. I mean it, boys. Goodnight."

He turned and walked to the foreman's quarters without looking back. Behind him the men stood huddled foolishly. Then, one by one, they straggled back to the bunk-house. From that moment Joe Kent stood with his crew on his own feet. He was *boss*.

The following night, when he came in with the crew from the woods, he was served with an injunction restraining him, his servants, agents, or workmen, from entering upon the limits of Clancy Brothers, or injuring or interfering with their property or employees.

"Wouldn't that jar a brick wall?" he commented to MacNutt. "They burn our camp and get an injunction against us. I half wish I had let the boys go over last night. Now, I suppose it would be contempt of court to cross their line."

"Don't let that worry you," said the foreman grimly. "Orders of court is a poor rig in the woods. All you've got to do is to give me and the boys our time and hire us again when we've cleaned 'em out."

But this beautifully simple evasion of the law did not appeal to Joe. He wanted logs, and had no time to waste in satisfying his grudges. The weather, which had been ideal for logging, changed and choking snows fell. The road had to be ploughed out time after time. The hauling was heavy and slow. Then came a great thaw. The horses balled and stumbled and caulked themselves. The huge sleighs made pitch-holes in the road. Altogether it was discouraging. Finally the wind

switched into the north and the weather hardened. The mercury dropped to zero at night and rose to twenty at noon. The road became icy and the runners slid easily in the ruts. Once more the teamsters took full loads and the choked skidways found relief.

The men, denied the innocent recreation of burning out the other camp, worked with vim. The word went around that Kent needed the logs—needed them, in fact, badly. That was enough. Haggarty, Regan, big Cooley, and half a dozen others set the pace, and the rest of the crew kept up to it. They were at work by the first light, and only darkness forced a halt. The nooning was cut short voluntarily, the men contenting themselves with a few whiffs of tobacco and resuming work without a word from MacNutt.

Joe felt the change. There was a subtle difference in the ring of the axes and the vibration of the saws. They sang a faster song and held a truer note. As he went over the work from man to man with a joke or a pleasant word—criticisms, instructions, and suggestions he still wisely left to MacNutt—he was met by cheerful grins. These rough, virile men of the woods and the river recognized a kinship with the young boss; they felt in him their own fearlessness and willingness to take a chance, and a strength of purpose and of character unmarred by their vices.

Since the rebuilding of the camp they had seen little of McCane's crew. Curses and threats had been exchanged between individuals across the deadline, but on the whole Peace brooded dove-like and triumphant, as it is accustomed to brood above armed states, and the manner of its sudden, startled flight was thus:

Joe and MacNutt, going through a slashing at the farthest corner of the limit which they had reached in the cutting, inadvertently trespassed upon Clancy's; thereby becoming technically guilty of contempt of court. As they ploughed through the deep snow two men came into view from behind the fallen tops. One of these was Rough Shan; the other, to Joe's astonishment, proved to be Finn Clancy.

The two advanced. Joe and MacNutt stopped. Clancy opened the ball with an explosion of profanity.

"Are ye lookin' for more logs to steal?" he observed in conclusion. "Keep to yer own limit, ye young thief, or I'll break yer neck!"

"You've reached *your* limit!" said Joe through his teeth, and put his whole weight behind his left fist.

Clancy went back in the snow as if he had been hit by an axe. MacNutt, like a dog unleashed, went for McCane. The latter, nothing loath, met him half-way. Clancy staggered up out of the snow spitting blood and broken dentistry, and charged Joe like a bull moose, roaring inarticulate invective. Joe smashed him right and left, took a counter in the face that made his brain swim, was caught in the big man's arms and fought himself free by straight, hard body punches. Two of McCane's men ran into the slashing. At sight of the fight they raised a yell and charged.

This yell reached the ears of Kent's teamster, little Narcisse Laviolette, bending to clutch the butt of a log with a swamp-hook. He straightened himself at the sound.

"Bagosh, some feller mak' de beeg row!" he muttered. "I see heem dat boss an' MacNutt pass heemself dat way. Mo' Gee! mebbe dey ron into plaintee troubl'." He cupped his hands to his mouth. "Ya-hoo-ee! Ya-hoo-ee!" he shouted in a far-carrying cry. Leaving his team to their own devices he turned and ran, shouting at every step.

The buoyant cry went echoing through the forest. It spelt trouble. Man after man left saw in the cut and axe in the limb and ran toward it.

Laviolette bounded into the slashing. In the middle were half a dozen men, fighting fiercely. On the other side, the woods poured forth a yelling crew. Laviolette did not hesitate. He hurled himself through the snow in great leaps, and plunged into the thick of the fray. His heavy "snag-proof" gum boot crashed into one man's face with all the power of his leg-muscles behind it. He sprang on the back of another and bore him to the ground, gripping one ear and tearing it half away from the head, for little Laviolette was a dirty fighter. Then he was kicked in the throat and stamped into the snow.

Clancy was getting the worst of it from Joe, and MacNutt was holding his own with Rough Shan. The first newcomers turned the scale. Laviolette almost evened it again. Then all were swamped by the rush of McCane's crew. Kent and MacNutt went down fighting gamely, and were kicked and hammered until the world swam before their outraged senses.

At this stage of the combat Kent's crew caught sight of the enemy. The roar that went up from them was heard even at the rollways. They charged home. A wave of fighting shantymen surged over Joe, and he raised himself and staggered up as he had often done from the bottom of a scrimmage. Big Cooley raged in the van of the fight, spouting blasphemies and swinging his enormous fists right and left. Beside him Haggarty and Regan found vent for their hatred of the other camp. The fight spread out into a number of single combats, and it was then that Kent's picked fighters proved their quality. Man after man of McCane's gang had enough, quit, and ran. The rout became general.

"Burn them out!" was the cry.

Joe turned to MacNutt, who stood beside him gasping for breath and swaying. "Shall I stop them?" he said.

"Stop nothing!" said the foreman. "If I get there in time I'll touch her off myself!"

He ran twenty yards and fell in the snow. For the first time in his life he had fainted. Joe caught Laviolette darting past and held him.

"Get a sleigh and haul him into camp," he ordered. Laviolette, mad with excitement, tried to break away. Joe gripped the teamster by the throat and shook him violently, despite a grinding pain in his side which made the forest swim. "Do you hear me, damn you?" he thundered. "A sleigh, I say, or——" His fingers tightened.

"Sure, sure," croaked the teamster. "*Oui, m'sieu!* Mo' Gee, I choke!"

Joe released him and bent over MacNutt. Suddenly the world grew black and he pitched down head foremost beside his foreman. Thus neither of them saw the finish of McCane's camp.

The gang roared through the woods and stormed the camp like demons. McCane's cook, game enough, grabbed an axe. Instantly an iron pot, thrown with full force, sailed through the air and broke his right arm. The cookee emerged from the bunk-house with a gun in his hand and found himself face to face with Cooley. He levelled the weapon. The big riverman grinned at him.

"Put it down an' ye won't be hurted," he said. "Shoot, an' the boys will burn ye alive."

There was no mistaking the temper of the gang, and the cookee wisely did as he was told. The men raided the van and broached a barrel of kerosene oil. They threw the contents by the pailful inside the buildings.

"Here she goes to hell!" shouted big Cooley as he struck a match.

The light blue flames ran up the oil-soaked wood and took hold. It began to crackle and then to roar. Outside, Kent's crew danced with glee. Some one found a keg of whiskey. Regan smashed in one end and upset the contents on the snow.

"No booze," said he. "This is no work to get drunk at."

From a neighbouring knoll most of McCane's crew looked on with curses loud and deep, but they had no collective stomach for further warfare just then. When nothing but charred end-logs and glowing coals remained, Kent's men tramped off through the deep snows shouting gibes and taunts at their enemies. Their vengeance had been ample and satisfying.

XIV

MacNutt was able to boss the job on the following day; but Kent was less fortunate. Pains in side and head attacked him, what of the pounding he had received. After waiting a couple of days for them to disappear, with a healthy man's confidence in his own recuperative powers, he was driven back to Maguire's, where he took train for Falls City. There his injured side was strapped and he was ordered complete rest and quiet.

Early in the winter, because he was alone in the world, he had leased his house and moved to an apartment building. This now seemed to him about as cheerful as a prison. He longed for human companionship of some sort, and he would have disobeyed his doctor's orders and gone out in search of it, but for the fact that his face, covered with bruises, would have attracted attention. But in the afternoon of his first day's confinement came William Crooks and Miss Jack.

That young lady took charge of the situation with calm capacity.

"Now, Joe," she said, "you're coming up to the house until you're well. Doctor's orders. So tell me what things you want and I'll pack them for you."

"I couldn't think of troubling you," he protested. "I'm not sick, you know. Just a cracked rib and a jolt on the head. I feel all right, really."

"You do as you're told," she replied. She began to pull out the drawers of his chiffonier. "What a mess your things are in! Nothing where it ought to be. Where *do* you keep your pajamas? Dad, look in that closet for his suit case."

"This is kidnapping," said Joe.

"Call it what you like," chuckled Crooks. "Do as Jack tells you and quit kicking. *I* have to." He brought out a suit case and a deep club bag. "Fire in what you think he needs, Jack."

Joe watched uneasily her selection of articles supposedly indispensable to his comfort, and gave in.

"Hold on, Jack, or else get a trunk. Let me show you, if I have to go."

"That's better," said Crooks. He paused and regarded Joe critically. "Well, you did get a pounding. Did the whole crew jump on your face?"

"It felt that way at the time," said Joe, "but you ought to see Finn Clancy's." He told the story of the fight briefly, making little mention of his own part in it. "So you see I was out of the fun at the wind-up," he concluded.

"Too bad," said Crooks with a sympathy born of personal experience. "There will be trouble over that, though. They'll call it contempt of court, and malicious destruction, and the Lord and Locke only know what else."

This prophecy proved to be correct. As soon as he could be located writs, summonses, and orders to appear and show cause showered on Joe. These passed on to Locke, who secured delay by physicians' certificates, affidavits, motions—all the methods by which the experienced attorney can clog the slowly moving wheels of the law.

Meanwhile Joe nursed his knitting ribs and rested completely. Jack established an invisible wall about him through which no business affairs penetrated.

"Dad and Mr. Wright can look after things for a week or two," she explained. "Mr. Locke says you needn't worry about law matters. Everything at the camps is going well. So, young man, you just make yourself comfortable and be lazy. That's your job for the present."

When a few days had accustomed him to inaction it proved to be a very pleasant job. He developed an unsuspected capacity for sleep. This meant the restorage of his nerve cells. The pains in his head lessened and ceased, and the bruised flesh gradually assumed a normal hue.

His favourite place was Jack's den. There was a bow window with a south exposure, and in the recess stood a huge easy-chair. Joe lay in it and absorbed sunshine, for the days were warming and lengthening, and stared up into the blue sky dotted with little white-wool clouds, or watched Jack, who had made the den her workroom. He found the latter pursuit the more entertaining.

Jack affected white, with a superb disregard of laundry bills. It set off her lithe, straight figure, the small uplifted head with the abundant coils of dark hair, and the pretty piquant face with the firm yet tender mouth. From top to toe she was spotless and neat and trim and dainty. Her conversation was a tonic in itself. She was direct of speech, frank, and often slangy when slang best expressed her meaning. There were many odd "characters" dependent upon the open-

handed bounty of William Crooks, and from them she had heard strange philosophies born of twisted lives, odd expressions which occasionally crept into her speech, and scraps of forgotten song. She had listened by the hour to old Micky Keeliher who tended the garden; to the widowed Mrs. Quilty who came once a week to do the washing; to crippled Angus McDougal, once a mighty riverman, whose strength had departed, and to a dozen others. Not one of them but would have died for William Crooks's daughter. To her they sang the songs of their youth in cracked, quavering voices; for her they unlocked the storehouses of their experience and gave of it freely. She absorbed their songs, their sayings, their tales; and as nearly as her youth would permit she understood their viewpoint of life.

Joe, buried in his chosen chair, listened to the queer tunes she lilted—tunes which had stirred the hearts of by-gone generations in other lands—and by turns stared at the bright out-of-doors and slept. And Jack, on her part, felt a strange happiness, as if the room held all that was best and most to be desired. She did not analyze the feeling; she was content that it was hers. Bending over her sewing one bright afternoon during the last days of Joe's convalescence she crooned:

"Is it far away ye're goin', Danny, dear?
Is it lavin' me ye arre, widout a tear?
Sure the ship's white sails is swellin',
But it's this to ye I'm tellin'—
Ye shall love an' seek me out widin the year,

"By the spell that's laid upon ye ye shall come agin to me,
The dear, bould, handsome head of ye shall drop upon me knee.
While ye sleep or while ye wake,
It's the heart of ye shall ache
Wid love o' that poor weepin' gyurl ye left beside the sea!"

"That's a cheerful song," said Joe ironically from his chair. "Did he come back?"

"Of course," laughed Jack. "Unfortunately, he died as his head touched her knee, and naturally she was inconsolable. Like to hear her lament?" She drew her face into lines of sorrow and threw back her head in a preliminary wail, as a dog howls.

E-e-yah-h-h! Oh, why did he die?
Oh-h-h-h, why did—

"Stop!" cried Joe. "Look here, Jack, remember I'm an interesting invalid. I want something cheerful."

"Well, that *is* comparatively cheerful. Now, if I sang you a real Hielan' lament—"

"Don't you dare," Joe interrupted. "I am still far from strong."

Jack laughed. "You smoked yesterday. Doctor Eberts says that a man who can enjoy a smoke is well enough to work."

"Good for the doc!" cried Joe. "Me for the office and then back to the woods. Hooray!"

"Not for a day or two," said Jack. "Things are going all right. You keep quiet."

Joe sank back in his chair. "I suppose so, but—well, I want to look after them myself." Far off against the blue sky a wedge of black specks bored through space, swinging off beyond the limits of the town. "Look, Jack! The first geese going north. That means the end of winter and open water. We'll start our drives in a few weeks."

"Yes, Joe." She perched on the arm of the big chair and stared after the birds, her face clouded with discontent. "That's life, and you can live it. Oh, heavens! Why wasn't I a boy? I'd love it so. I want to go up to the camps and see the rollways broken out and the banking grounds emptied. I want to wear spiked boots and ride a stick in white water and use a peavey. I want to come back to the wanegan at night, and eat and dry off by a big fire and sleep out of doors. I want—don't you dare to laugh at me, Joe Kent—I want to come into town with the bully-boys, with a hat pulled down over my eyes and a cigar in my mouth sticking up at an angle, and sing 'Jimmy Judge,' and 'From Far Temiskamang.' I want"—she faced him defiantly—"I want to ride up town in a hack—*with my feet out of the window!* Yes, I do. And now tell me you are shocked."

"I might be if I saw you do it," said Joe. "I've felt the same way myself—like breaking loose from everything. If you were a man you wouldn't, though. Only the shanty boys tear off these stunts. *We can't.*"

"All very well for you to talk—you could if you wanted to," said Jack disconsolately. "I'm a girl. I can't even go up to the camps unless dad takes me." She voiced her grievance again. "I wish I had been a boy."

She turned to the window and stared out. Joe rose and stood beside her, looking down at the burnished brown of her hair and the soft profile of her cheek. Once more the nameless thrill he had felt before when he had touched her hand possessed him. Hesitatingly, awkwardly, impelled by something which was not of his own volition, he put his arm around her. Instantly, as if a curtain had been rolled up—as if a screen had been withdrawn—he saw his own mind clearly.

Why, he loved her!

It came to him with a shock of utter amazement. Little Jack Crooks, his playmate, his friend, his confidant, the girl he had looked at so long with unseeing eyes—she, she was the only woman in the wide world for him. She had always been the only one. Edith Garwood? Pshaw! How could he have been so blind? Not all her radiant beauty and deceptive sweetness could compare with straight, loyal, little Jack, his chum and his love.

She seemed unconscious of his arm until he spoke her name. Then she turned her head slowly and her dark eyes looked directly into his. What she saw there brought the red to her cheeks in a wave. Up and up the telltale crimson tide leaped to her brow, to the roots of her glossy brown hair, but her gaze did not waver.

“Should you, Joe?” she asked simply.

Stumblingly, humbly he told her, and she listened, nestling in his arms as one who has found her own place. And so, when bluff old William Crooks came home, he found them sitting in the twilight, planning wonderful things. Joe put the situation simply.

“Jack has consented to marry me, sir.”

William Crooks stared at him and then at his daughter.

“Fact, dad,” she confirmed.

“Well, I’ll be—” began Crooks out of his unbounded astonishment.

She put her hand over his lips. “I hope not, dad.”

“Well, you take a man unawares,” growled Crooks. “How long has this been going on?”

“About two hours, I think,” said Joe happily.

“Oh,” said Crooks; “I was afraid you had been holding out on me. You’re sure about this, I suppose?”

They were very sure.

“Well,” said Crooks judicially, “I don’t know any young fellow I’d rather give Jack to, Joe. Shake hands, you robber. But, mind you, you’ve got to put your business on its feet before you marry her.”

“I’ll do it,” Joe promised.

“Of course he will,” Jack asserted with perfect faith.

Bill Crooks regarded them wistfully. In their youth and hope he saw his own. He thought of a far day when he and a girl had faced the world together, determined to wring from it success. The success had come, but the woman of his heart no longer shared it with him. Suddenly he felt old and lonely. He roused himself with a sigh and a shake of his big shoulders. No one, not even his daughter, suspected old Bill Crooks of sentiment. His thoughts were his own.

XV

Joe Kent tore himself away from his new happiness, visited Tobin's and Deever's camps, spent a few days at each, and wound up at Wind River. The banking grounds were full—great piles of timber stretching along the water's edge waiting the going of the ice. The winter roads were failing fast and the last logs were coming out the woods in half loads. Most of the hauling was done by night, for then the roads hardened with frost. By day the air was mild and the depth of snow sank sensibly. Then came the first rain of the season, destroying the roads utterly.

All the men, save the driving crew, were paid off. Since a lumber camp is a self-contained community including a store or "van" at which the hands purchase most of their simple necessities, paying off involves an adjustment of accounts. A lumber jack seldom keeps a record of his purchases, and is thus dependent upon the honesty of his employer's bookkeeping. The custom is to run rapidly over the account of each man in his presence. If he remembers the purchases and is satisfied, as he is in the majority of cases, well and good. If he does not remember or is not satisfied after reasonable explanation he is tendered a check and told to see a lawyer. But there have been logging firms who have robbed their men shamelessly.

"Jack," one employer is alleged to have said, "you remember that pair of socks you got in December?"

Jack, after an effort, remembered.

"That's one pair," said the employer, and went on rapidly. "And you remember the pair you didn't get in January—that's two pairs." And Jack agreed. Keener men have been flimflammed by much the same formula.

But, on the whole, the men get a square deal, few employers being small enough to charge excessive prices for supplies, much less to make fictitious entries against them. There was no dissatisfaction among Kent's men. Differences of opinion never reached the point of absolute assertion.

"Well, Billy," MacNutt would say, "there's the entry in our books made at the time. If you say flat you didn't get the goods we'll let it go, because we know you're a straight man, and think you're right. But if you just say you don't remember, why, then, our books show we do."

This unusual but effective system had been installed by William Kent and worked like a charm. Seldom did a man, having it put up to him in that way, flatly contradict the books. And then it prevented all friction.

After the surplus men had been paid off, the weather hardened. A bitter wind held in the north by day; the nights were still, clear, and cold. Ice actually made and thickened in the river.

It was unheard-of. Each morning the rivermen rose, cocked wise eyes at the sky, and cursed the weather. Each night they sat around the stove, for the cold was penetrating.

"It's the qualified adjective moon," said Cooley. "The weather will break when she changes."

"She'll break when she gets ready," said Jackson. "This will make a late drive."

"But high water when it does come," said another.

Joe Kent took to looking into the sleeping camp for an hour or so each night. He had brought a banjo with him, and he exhausted his song repertory. The men enjoyed it thoroughly. It was, perhaps, bad for discipline, but it developed a feeling of comradeship. His authority was not in danger, for they had seen him hold his own against the redoubtable Mike Callahan, who was a dangerous fighter; and he had also bested big Finn Clancy, who had whipped many a good man in his day.

Suddenly the weather changed. One morning a southerly wind and a cloudy sky greeted them; by noon there was a warm rain slashing against the earth; at night mists and fog hung everywhere.

"She breaks up this time," said Cooley, who was engaged in saturating his driving boots with oil and hot tallow, not with intent to keep his feet dry, but to preserve the leather.

"An' time it is," said Regan, busy with a file at the inch spikes which studded the soles of his footgear. "She's a fortnight later nor she should be."

This was so, but it had caused Joe little uneasiness, for his margin seemed ample. His plan was to drive the Wind River cut down the Wind to the Mattawagan. Tobin and Deever would drive down the Missabini to the latter stream. The drives would unite at McColl's Sney, where the main drive would be formed. Thence it would proceed down that great water artery past Falls City to

Wismer & Holden's booms. It was all very simple—on paper.

But it took a week for the ice to move in the Wind. The driving crew chafed and cursed, for they regarded Kent's interests as their own, and they longed to feel a rocking log beneath their feet once more. When the ice finally moved they attacked the rollways with fury, and the huge piles of great sticks cascaded thunderously into the water like huge amphibians. At that point the river was deep and had little current. Therefore the logs strung out slowly and in an orderly manner with a dignity befitting their weight and age.

When the drive began to string with the slow current, MacNutt sent part of the crew downstream to keep the logs moving and prevent jams. The remainder divided and strung along either bank, releasing such sticks as grounded in the shallows or caught in the "sweepers" from the banks.

Last of all came the "wanegan," also known as the "sweep." This was a long, heavy, flat bottomed scow, of primitive but enormously strong construction. It was the base of supplies for the driving crew. It held tents, provisions, clothing, and tools, and it was manned by the cook, cookees, and blacksmith. For propulsion it possessed long sweeps; but since it had merely to keep pace with the logs and the logs moved no faster than the current, these were used only for guidance. In slow water the life of its crew by day was one of dreamy, idyllic ease; but in fast water this condition was reversed. The scow was big, heavy, and unwieldy. It refused to be guided, checked or restrained; it bumped malevolently against boulders, grounded on sandbars, scraped its crew against overhanging limbs, and dragged them, cursing, into the water when they tried to line it down a fast, obstructed current.

For the first few days they always endeavoured to control their craft; after that they let it go and trusted to luck, clinging perfunctorily to the sweeps and damning the grinning rivermen who shouted sarcastic comment and advice from the banks and solitary logs.

At night the crew sought the wanegan and ate voraciously. They were always wet to the waist and often to the ears. They changed and dried their soaked clothing on pole racks by roaring fires, smoked, and slept in little tents pitched ready for them. Before the first light they had breakfasted, and they stepped into ice water in the gray dawn. But with it they were happy and contented, for the drive was the crowning glory of the year.

The drive made average progress. There were small jams, easily broken, minor delays which always occur, but both MacNutt and Joe were pleased.

"The late opening won't matter," said the former as they spread their blankets in the little wedge tent. "The head will hit the first dam to-morrow, sometime. We ought to sluice her through inside two days. Then there's the second dam. If we have luck we'll tie into the main drive pretty near on time. The others'll be about as late as we are."

"I hope so," said Joe. "We don't want to hang up anywhere. I suppose McCane's drive will be out of our way?"

"Sure to — unless he jams somewhere," said MacNutt. "Lebret Creek is faster than the Wind and opens earlier. It's good drivin'. He ought to be through the second dam by now."

Lebret Creek joined the Wind above the second dam. They were then some twenty-five miles from the confluence, and four miles above the first dam.

The day broke clear and splendid. Joe and MacNutt set off down stream for the dam half an hour behind a dozen of the crew. They cut through the woods across a three-mile bend of the stream and came suddenly upon it again.

"By the G. jumping Jasper!" cried MacNutt.

The river seemed to have shrunk. Logs lay along the banks, were caught in shallows, rocked in the feeble current. As far as the eye could reach stretched the shaggy backs of the brown herd, motionless or nearly so. The ancient bed of the stream appeared as it had been before the dams were built—a flat, rocky bottom over which a foot or so of water brawled noisily and ineffectively, utterly useless from the standpoint of a logger. The drive was plugged for want of water.

A man appeared through the trees. He was running. "Dam's gone out!" he shouted as he came within hailing distance.

Joe and the foreman looked at each other. There was no need to put the single thought into words.

"Come on," said Joe briefly, and broke into a trot.

They found the men gathered by the remnants of the dam. The wings of the structures sagged forlornly, and through the wrecked centre the stream poured over a rocky bed. The débris had been swept downstream by the rush of released water, and the ruin was beautifully complete. The cause of its going out must remain speculation merely.

"What's the best thing to do?" Joe asked MacNutt.

"Ward," said MacNutt, "you hike. Bring every man here, a-jumping. Load up a peakie with tools, blocks and tackle and dynamite and run her down river somehow. Load up another with tents, blankets, and grub, and tell the cook to bring her down. Camp is here till we move the logs. Get a move on you, now!"

"There's only one thing to do," he continued to Kent. "The dam has got to be put in again. There's no fall to speak of, and four foot of water will float the best part of the logs. The rest we'll have to sack out. It means a week, but we can't help it."

Regan, who after examining the wreck narrowly had taken to the bank, appeared above them. He carried a piece of timber, twisted and riven. This he dumped down before the boss.

"Found her back in the brush," said he. "They used powder. I knowed that dam never went out by herself."

"The infernal scoundrels!" said Joe.

Regan looked at him hopefully. "I seen an Injun yesterday. He says McCane's drive is jammed near the mouth of Lebret. Say the word, boss, an' we'll mosey over an' half murder every mother's son of them!"

"Thank you, Regan, but I can't say it," said Joe. "I have to get these logs out. If I don't get them I bust. Tell the boys that."

The men began to arrive. MacNutt divided them into gangs and set them to work staying and shoring the remnants of the dam. Slight progress was made that day. The wanegan was looted and the peakies—a peakie is a flat-bottomed, double-ended river boat—made trip after trip, drawn by men wading in the shallows, until sufficient supplies were transferred to the camp by the dam.

Light saw the crew at work. There was nothing fancy about the structure which MacNutt planned. It was built entirely of logs. Holes were blown in the bed of the river at intervals of a few feet, and in these were set buttress-logs slanted sharply upstream to back the timbers when the weight of the water should come against them. These things took time—days of the hardest kind of toil—but the impromptu dam was finally completed, even to the construction of a short slide to run the logs to the free water below.

The river rose and backed up. The newly laid timbers groaned and complained. Now and then a startling crack made Joe's heart leap.

"Will she hold, Mac?" he asked anxiously.

"She's got to hold," said the foreman grimly. "I don't mean she's a permanent job; she ain't. If she'll last till we get through we'll blow her to glory."

"Why?" asked Joe.

"Because if we don't she may go out herself or some skunk may blow her for us when we're downstream. Half of us might be drowned and the logs winged out into the bush."

But the jury-rig held. The water mounted higher and higher. Booms were strung, forming a funnel of which the sluiceway was the outlet. These also served to keep the weight of floating timber off the dam structure.

Satisfied with the strength of his work, MacNutt hurried up stream. Many of the logs were afloat, moving sullenly; others were beginning to rock in the rising water. The men were working hard and steadily, with concentrated energy. Their peavies clanked regularly, and the logs twirled out of their resting places and trundled into the stream. Still the river rose, and MacNutt judged that it was high enough. Fearful for the strength of his dam he made an outlet by the simple expedient of knocking a few timbers loose. The water held at the new level.

Down by the dam the herd of logs thickened and packed tight. The boom strained with their pressure. It was manned by men with long pike poles. They pushed here, restrained there, feeding the slide constantly and evenly, so that a nearly solid stream of timber shot through it into the good water below. When darkness fell, huge fires were lighted on the banks and the sluicing continued. Half the crew turned in immediately after supper; the other half kept the logs going. At two o'clock in the morning they shifted. By noon the last logs shot through. Then came the wanegan.

MacNutt picked half a dozen men. "Throw her down little by little, boys," he ordered. "Don't be in a hurry, and don't use powder till there's no danger of a wave hitting us. We want a head of water, but not too much of it. The river's rising now."

Joe looked back from the stern of the peakie in which he rode to catch up with the drive. The men had clambered out on the timbers and were busy with axes and saws destroying what had been so laboriously constructed. It had served his turn, but he felt regret. He would have liked it to stand, so that some day he might show Jack the rude, effective structure, and tell her the story of

its building. He had had but small part in it, though his hands were blistered and ragged from handling rocks and rough timbers. He did not pose even to himself as a conqueror of difficulties; he gave the credit to MacNutt and his crew.

XVI

MacNutt suddenly struck his head a violent blow with his clenched fist and swore. He and Joe sat before the fire smoking a final pipe before turning in, and the gurgle of the water under the banks was music to their ears, for it meant that the logs were travelling free by night.

"What's the matter?" Joe asked, sleepily.

"I ought to be kicked!" cried the foreman in tones of bitter self-condemnation. "I'm a saphead. I got no more sense than a hen. McCane blew that dam on us. What's to hinder his blowing the other when he's finished sluicing his drive? He may be through now."

"By heavens, Mac!" Joe ejaculated, appalled by the prospect. With the late season's start and the delays which had already occurred such an occurrence would be a calamity. "By heavens Mac, we can't let him get away with it again! We can't afford to take a chance. We've got to be *sure* he doesn't."

MacNutt scowled at the fire, biting his pipe stem. "I can't think of but one way out," said he. "We've got to put a guard on that dam, and if it comes to a case they must have the nerve to make good."

"You mean—?"

"Just what I say. If any one starts monkeying with it they must stop him—with lead if they have to. Of course you'll be held responsible for such an order."

Joe's mouth hardened. "Mac," said he, "this is make or break with me. I've got to get these logs out. Pick one man and I'll go with him myself."

"Don't do that," MacNutt dissuaded. "The boys will look after it all right. You better keep out."

"No, I'll go," said Joe with determination. "You need every hand on the drive. I won't ask any man to do what I won't do myself. Pick your man and fetch him in here. We ought to start now."

MacNutt arose and left the tent. In five minutes he returned with a little, brown-faced riverman, Dave Cottrell by name. Joe was surprised. He had expected the foreman to choose Cooley, Haggarty, or one of the noted "bully-boys." Cottrell was an excellent riverman, active as a squirrel and ready to take any chances, but extremely quiet and self-effacing. He was never in a row, had no chums, and, apparently, no enemies. He minded his own business and avoided notice. Such speech as he essayed was brief and to the point.

"Now Dave," said the foreman, "we think McCane may blow this dam on us. Mr. Kent is going down to see that it ain't done, and he wants a man with him. How about you? Of course this ain't what you were hired for."

"That's all right," said Cottrell.

"You understand," said Joe, "that we're going to protect the dam at all costs. Can you shoot?"

"Some," said Cottrell, and MacNutt chuckled to himself.

"Then get ready," Joe ordered. "We'll start in half an hour."

"C'rect," said Cottrell, and departed to roll his blanket.

Blankets and food for two days were made into packs. The outfit owned two rifles, one belonging to Joe, the other to the foreman, who gave it to Cottrell. The little riverman tested the action, filled the magazine, and shouldered his pack.

"Now if you're ready we'll be goin'," said he.

Straightway he took the lead and the command. Joe found himself relegated to a subordinate position, compelled to follow one who seemed to possess the eyesight and easy movement of a nocturnal animal. The riverman had discarded his spiked boots and taken to moccasins. His gait was the bent-kneed amble of the confirmed woods-loafer. It was not pretty, and it looked slouchy and slow; but it carried him along at a tremendous rate. Now and then he paused and waited for the young boss, but made no comment. They left the river and took to the bush, following a course presumably known to Cottrell. They crossed swamps and wormed through alder swales, coming out again on pine and hardwood ridges. Joe was hopelessly lost and bewildered. He had no idea of the direction in which they were going.

"You're sure you're heading right?" he asked.

"Why, of course," said Cottrell, surprised at the question.

About two o'clock in the morning he halted by a little creek.

"We better take a spell," he said. "You ain't used to this, but the travellin' will be better from now on."

Joe was glad to sit down. His legs ached, and he was torn by limbs and briers; but besides the purely physical fatigue was that which comes of travelling an unknown route without the faintest idea of how much of it you are covering. He stretched himself out with his back to a log. Cottrell built a fire and hung a little pail over it. When the water boiled he made tea, and they ate. Afterward they smoked. Warmed and weary, Joe began to nod.

"We better be gettin' on," said Cottrell.

Once more they plunged into the forest, but it was more open and, as the riverman had foretold, the going was easier. Gradually the stars paled in the east, and a faint gray light succeeded. Then came the rosy streaks of dawn. Cottrell halted and held up his hand. Faint in the distance sounded the measured music of an axe.

"We're in time," said Cottrell.

They came out on the river and on McCane's rear. Cottrell led the way back into the bush and when they emerged again it was at the dam. The dam pond was brown with logs, and they were being sluiced through in a great hurry. A crew of unkempt, tousled rivermen manned the booms and kept the sticks hustling. Rough Shan McCane stood on the boom by the water-gate directing operations, and his profane urgings came to them above the sound of the water. As they stood on the bank, rifles under their arms, one of the men caught sight of them and pointed. Immediately they became the nucleus of all eyes. McCane came ashore accompanied by half a dozen of his crew. He walked up to the new comers.

"What do yez want?" he demanded.

"When will you be sluiced through?" Joe asked.

"What business is that of yours?" growled the rough one.

"You know what business it is of mine," Joe answered. "My drive's coming down. And I'll tell you something more, McCane, we're going to camp right here till it does. I warn you now—don't try to wreck this dam!"

"Wreck the dam, is it?" said McCane innocently. "For why should we wreck the dam?"

"I suppose you don't know that the one above went out and hung my drive for a week," said Joe with sarcasm.

"Is that so?" said McCane with mock sympathy. "Well, well, ye do be in hard luck. What's the guns for? Deer is out o' season. Yon's a pretty-lookin' rifle, now. I'll bet it cost ye somethin'. Let me have a look at it."

He stretched out his hand casually, and suddenly leaped. His hand fastened on the rifle barrel. Instantly Cottrell's weapon sprang to a level.

"Drop that, McCane!" snapped the little riverman. "You men keep back there, or I'll onhook her into you."

Rough Shan looked into the ominous tube and slowly released his grip. "Don't ye get gay wid that gun!" he warned. "I could have ye jailed for pointin' it at me."

The little man's bright eyes twinkled behind the sights. "If she went off as she's pointin' now you wouldn't know what happened," he announced gravely.

Joe backed up alongside him. "We're not looking for trouble," said he, "but the man who tries any funny business with that dam will get hurt. Go ahead with your sluicing, or my drive will be down on top of you."

"Will it?" said McCane. "Then, let me tell ye this, young felly, it'll stop till I get through. I'll sluice when I please." Behind him his men growled angrily. He shook his fist and roared, forth a flood of blasphemy.

To Joe's utter amazement it was answered by Cottrell. The little man's language was fairly blood-curdling. His words snapped and crackled with venom. Such a "cursing out" had never been heard along the Wind. Finally his voice cracked.

"Burn our camp, would ye?" he croaked hoarsely in conclusion. "Hang our drive, would ye? Blow a dam on us, an' think for to do it again! The man that takes a stick of powder near it will never draw his pay. See them birds!"

Fifty yards away two woodpeckers clung to the bark of a tree, hopping and tapping in search of the worms that were their food. Dave Cottrell's rifle swung to his shoulder. Two reports followed, spaced inappreciably by the jangle of the magazine action. Two mangled masses of bloody feathers fell from the tree. The little man regarded the unkempt crew with evil eyes.

"Lemme see one o' ye make a bad move!" he challenged, and there was death in his voice.

Not a man made a move, bad or otherwise. Cottrell chose a spot overlooking the packed logs and the sliding water of the sluiceway. There he sat down, rifle on knees, and smoked. He had apparently talked himself out, for he answered Joe's remarks with customary brevity.

In half an hour McCane quit sluicing. He and his crew came ashore and lit their pipes, lounging in the sun. The men from the rear came in and the whole camp rested. This continued all day. It was evident that McCane had a purpose in view. With the fall of night Joe and Cottrell moved down on the dam. The stars gave an intermittent light. The banks were deep in shadow, but objects could be made out on the river.

"You better lie down and get some sleep," Dave advised his boss. "Then you can spell me later. They won't touch the dam till their logs is through, likely, but they may try to do us up."

Joe rolled up in his blanket and presently slept. The fires of the camp died down. Save for the deep roar of rushing water the night was still.

About twelve o'clock three stones, thrown simultaneously, whizzed out of the darkness. Two missed Cottrell's head by a few inches; the third, thrown short, struck Joe's shoulder a glancing blow as he lay in his blanket.

As he woke with a startled cry Cottrell's rifle spat a rod of flame into the dark. The man fired three shots and paused. A stick cracked in the bushes. Instantly he fired twice more at the sound, and listened. The camp was astir. Men poured out cursing in three languages. Through the babel Cottrell tried to make out the sound of footsteps. Failing, he fired once more, on general principles.

"Stop it, Cottrell!" cried Joe. "We don't want to kill any one."

"If one o' them rocks had hit my head it would have killed *me*," snarled Cottrell. "I'll put the fear o' God in their rotten hearts!" He shoved in fresh cartridges savagely.

"I think you've put it there now," Joe commented as the row subsided. "But don't shoot at their camp, or they'll start shooting back. They must have a gun in their outfit."

Boom! The roar of a shotgun shattered the silence, and the shot pellets pattered against the logs and stones. Boom! the second barrel spoke.

"Damn scatter-gun!" said Cottrell with contempt, and fired one shot. The crowd stampeded for cover as the bullet whined a foot above their heads. "It's all right—I held high," he explained. "It'd be just my darn luck to get one o' them little shots in the eye. Now they won't do no more shootin'."

This prediction proved correct. The night passed without further incident. With daylight McCane's cook appeared and made up his fire. Later the crew crawled out of their dingy tents. A few washed at the river; but most made no attempt at a toilet. They sat on the ground and wolfed down their food. With the last mouthful they reached for tobacco.

"Red McDougals, Callahans, and Charbonneaus—a dirty bunch," said Cottrell. The little man had sluiced himself with icy water from top to toe in the gray of the dawn, and was now frying slices of pork strung on green twigs above a small fire. "Some day the small pox will do a good job for 'em. Look at them scratch their backs against the rocks. Ugh!" His disgust was too deep for words. McCane emerged from his tent and Cottrell cursed him with venom.

"What have you got against the man?" asked Joe reaching for a slice of bread.

"He beat up a chum of mine once," Cottrell replied, "a little feller about my size that had no chance agin him. I'll get him yet for that. I wish t' God he'd made a move yesterday, an' I'd 'a' blowed his head off!"

"Now, look here, Dave," said Joe, "we're here to protect the dam, and that's all. I won't have any feud mixed up with it."

"I ain't mixin' it," said Cottrell. "I'm just prayin' he'll have the nerve to walk out to the sluice gate with a stick of powder in his hand or even a bulge in his shirt."

But McCane and his crew lay around camp. Nobody went out on the booms or touched a log. The Kent drive would soon be running into their rear, and this meant confusion as well as delay. Joe finally left Cottrell on the dam and walked down to the camp.

"See here, McCane," said he, "you've got to get your logs out of my way. You can't hang me up like this."

McCane leered up at him insolently from where he lay stretched on the ground, resting comfortably against a log.

"Can't I? Not a log goes through till I'm good an' ready."

"But you've got no right——" Joe began hotly, and paused as he saw the living sneer in the other's eyes. He realized that argument was worse than useless and went back to his position. There he awaited the coming of MacNutt and his own crew, wondering what had delayed them.

MacNutt had been delayed for a few hours by a small jam, but finally he ran into the logs of McCane's rear. He reached the dam at the head of a dozen indignant "bully-boys," and he and Joe tackled McCane.

"You've got to move your logs," Joe told him again.

"Not till I get ready," McCane answered as before.

"You think you'll hang our drive, do you?" said MacNutt. "Well, you won't. You get your crew out on them booms at once and go to sluicing."

McCane merely grinned.

"Get at it!" cried the foreman furiously, and took a step forward.

Rough Shan did not yield an inch.

"If you want a fight you can have it quick," said he. "Me men have quit me. I can't pay their wages; I'm hung up meself."

"That's a poor lie," said MacNutt.

"Ask them," returned McCane. "If ye will step out here I'll beat the face off of ye!"

MacNutt ignored the challenge and questioned the men. They backed up Rough Shan's statement surlily. Convinced that they were lying but unable to prove it, Joe and MacNutt held council. They had to get their logs through, and the only way to do it was to sluice McCane's first, and charge him with the time.

"A lot of good that will do," said Joe. "He'll let us sluice them and then hang us up somewhere again."

"Not if I can help it," said MacNutt. "I think I can work a game on him. Act as if you were good and sore."

They returned to Rough Shan.

"Your men say they won't work," said Joe. "We'll do your sluicing for you, but you'll pay us for it."

"Like hell I will," said Rough Shan. "I'll sluice me own logs when I get a fresh crew."

"You want to hang us up, do you?" cried Joe, finding no difficulty in simulating anger. "You can't do it. My men will pitch the whole bunch of you into the pond if I give them the word. I'll put your logs through. MacNutt, start the sluicing."

"I warn ye to let my logs alone," said Rough Shan. "I'll hold ye responsible for every stick that goes through the chute."

"All right," said Joe, and turned away.

The sluicing began at once. MacNutt issued private instructions to Cooley and Cottrell. They started upstream, where they were shortly joined by ten more. There they picked up a peakie, and laboriously portaged the heavy boat through the woods well out of sight of the dam, setting it in the water below. With another trip they brought augers, boom-chains and shackles, and a manilla rope. Embarking they ran downstream two miles.

At that point the river ran past the mouth of a backwater, an old channel, now an almost currentless little lake, reedy, with shores of floating bog and bottomed with ooze of unknown depth. The water ran into it sluggishly, and drained out half a mile below over muddy shallows. Logs once ensnared in this backwater could be taken out only at the cost of much time and labour.

The dozen, working at speed, constructed a boom of logs shackled end to end. This they strung slantwise across the stream. One end was moored to the lower side of the backwater's inlet; the other to the opposite bank upstream. Thus logs coming down were deflected to the backwater. Six men with pike poles manned the boom, walking to and fro on the precarious footing, shoving the logs, as they came down, toward the slough. The others saw them safe inside. Dave Cottrell sat in midstream in the peakie, a rifle across his knees, watching either bank.

The work proceeded merrily, for the rivermen enjoyed the trick. Late in the afternoon half a

dozen of McCane's crew hove in sight. When they saw the boom and comprehended its meaning they ran forward to cut its moorings.

"You get back there!" yelled Cottrell, raising his rifle. As they paid no attention to him he fired. The bullet cut dirt at the toes of the foremost. "I'll drop one of ye next time," Cottrell warned them, his eyes glued to the sights.

They halted and cursed him.

"When I count twenty I'm goin' to start shootin' the hats off of ye," said Cottrell. "If I was on shore I could do it easy, an' hurt no one. Out here the water jiggles the boat, an' I may go high or low. One—two—three—"

He began to count. At "ten" they gave back; at "fifteen" they were in full retreat.

McCane, when the news was brought to him, ran out on the booms, his face working with rage. Profanity spewed from his mouth in a steady stream.

"You'll bring every log out o' that backwater or I'll know why," he thundered. "A dirty trick!"

"Dealin' with you we're dirty every time from now out, and you can tie to that," MacNutt told him. "Every log in your drive is goin' into that backwater if she'll hold them. You'll get them out yourself, or train beavers to do it for you. You stinkin', lowdown Mick, you've been givin' us dirt all winter. Here's where we get square. Now get off o' these booms, or I'll bash in your head with a peavey. If I say 'sic 'em' to the boys you know what'll happen. You won't have camp nor crew nor nothin' in ten minutes, an' you'll spend the summer in a hospital, like enough. I'm *sick* of you! Get out!"

McCane's courage was beyond question, but the odds were against him. Twenty hardened fighters, every one of whom thirsted for a chance to trample on his face with caulked boots, crowded up behind MacNutt. His crew, rough and tough as they were, were outnumbered, and Kent's men were picked "bully-boys" with a score to even.

"All right," said he. "You hear *me*, MacNutt—I'll get even with you an' Kent. It's comin' to both of ye. The woods ain't big enough for me an' you now."

"Bah!" said MacNutt, and spat.

McCane went ashore. MacNutt shut down the sluicing with darkness. In the morning it began again. That day saw McCane's entire drive packed in the backwater. He was helpless to prevent it.

Kent's logs slid down merrily into the free current, and Rough Shan and his wild crew cursed the rear out of sight as it swept around a bend below. Then they went at the tedious task of extricating their own drive from the backwater. Rough Shan the next day put Callahan in charge and departed, as he said, to see about supplies, for his grub was running low.

XVII

In due course the Wind River logs reached McColl's Sney, where Tobin and Deever had already brought their respective drives, and were waiting impatiently with McKenna for the others. A strong crew had gone upriver to lend a hand, and as soon as MacNutt's logs got within a few miles the booms were opened and the entire drive thrown into the current.

McColl's boasted a post-office, and there Joe found a stack of mail awaiting him, among it half a dozen letters from Jack; and it is a sad commentary on his attention to business that he opened these first.

Jack did not run to sentiment in correspondence. Her letters were frank, newsy notes, and she was keenly interested in the drive and all that pertained to it. She wrote much as a partner in the business might write, giving here and there a bit of advice from Bill Crooks's ripe experience; but beneath the frank words and often slangy phrases ran a tender undercurrent which Joe was quick to detect.

"What a little brick she is," he said to himself as he folded her last letter and placed it carefully in an inside pocket. "When we get into touch with the railway, I'll bring her up to see the drive. She'd like that, bless her little heart."

This was the real thing at last. He knew that thenceforth no pleasure would be perfect which she did not share, no sorrow too great to be borne with her help. He looked at the logs, acres and acres of them herded in the booms and drifting by in the current, at the steel-shod rivermen who ran here and there pushing and guiding, at his camp set back beneath the budding trees; and he realized that the mainspring of his life and his endeavour had changed. It was no longer the business—his father's business—personal pride, nor the desire to succeed that held him to effort; but it was Jack—straight, slim little Jack, with the crown of dark hair and the frank, fearless eyes. From such realizations spring success.

The next letter he opened was from Locke, and the news it contained was not only unexpected but very good indeed.

You will be surprised to hear the action against Garwood *et al.* has been discontinued, Crooks agreeing with me that we should accept the terms of settlement offered, which, however, did not proceed from Garwood directly. As a matter of fact, the action was getting out of the realm of law into that of politics. The newspapers were beginning to sit up and take notice, and it looked as if our innocent little lawsuit might blossom into a general investigation which, in turn, might involve a number of prominent people. At this stage I received an intimation that if we dropped the action we could have what we wanted, and after consultation with Crooks we decided to do so.

Having the whip hand we were by no means modest in our demands. You will hear no more of the proceedings in contempt against you for your disregard of the Court's order re-trespass upon Clancys' limits, and destruction of their property. So, too, Clancys' action against you for the said destruction will be withdrawn. In future you will both receive a fair share of orders from the contractors who have been boycotting you; you will get a fair deal in buying timber berths; the railway will give you all the cars you want; and there will be no discrimination against you in haulage rates. This means that your businesses will be henceforth on a fair competitive basis in the above respects, which is all you can expect. It also means that the riot act has been read to Garwood by some people who are in a position to read it. Just how he was persuaded to crawl down I don't know, though I rather think a threat of legislation affecting his railways was the means used. You see he might very easily be forced to spend anywhere from half a million up on useless frills and equipment merely as a beginning. Anyway, you may depend upon these terms of settlement being carried out.

But all the same you are by no means out of the woods, and a great deal depends upon your ability to deliver your logs to Wismer & Holden by July 1st. I am satisfied in my own mind that their offer and the "little joker" in the contract were both inspired by Garwood; also that they will not give you an hour's grace. McDowell, of the Farmers' National, tells me that his bank cannot carry you after that date—indeed, only the practical certainty of your filling the contract induced them to finance you to the extent which they did. If you don't make good they will shut down on you, and proceed to realize on what securities they hold. Then, a payment will be due on your mortgage to

the Northern Loan Company. You need not expect any leniency from them. So, if I were you, I'd hustle the logs down day and night.

Joe was delighted with the first part of the letter. With fair competition in the future he saw plain sailing ahead. But the latter part gave him some uneasiness.

It was then well along in May, and the drive was at least three weeks later than it should have been, due to the backward season and to the unforeseen delays. That night Joe held council with his foremen. The probabilities were carefully canvassed, and at the end of the discussion old Dennis McKenna voiced the general opinion.

"We can make her with a week or two to spare—if we don't strike a snag somewheres," said he. "That's allowin' for usual hard luck, too. The river's risin' now. The snows up north are meltin' and she'll boom soon. That'll help us a lot."

Day after day the brown logs of Kent's big drive slipped down the current. He had experienced foremen and a strong driving crew. A log no sooner touched the shore than it was thrust back into deep water. The drive was strung for miles, and all along the banks prowled husky rivermen, peavey or pike pole in hand, keeping the sticks hustling.

MacNutt and the Wind River crew, reinforced by most of Deever's, had the rear, which usually means hard work, for none of the logs must be left behind. McKenna travelled daily up and down the banks overseeing the whole, and Joe tramped with him. Tobin, ahead, kept a sharp lookout for obstructions and possible jams. But so far not a jam worth mentioning had formed.

"She's too good to last," said McKenna one night. "Tobin will hit the Silver Chain to-morrow, and then look out. I figured on higher water than this."

The Silver Chain was a succession of rapids greatly disliked by river drivers. It extended for a couple of miles, white, torn patches of water with some clear current between. The banks were steep, sheer rock fringed with dwarf pines, frowning ceaselessly at the foam and turmoil below. Jams had a habit of forming there, and nearly always some sort of trouble occurred. The crew had calculated upon this and they got it, for early the next day Tobin sent them word of a jam which he had not been able to break, and demanded more men.

"And she's a bad one, sure enough," said McKenna, when he and Joe arrived.

The jam had occurred in a rapid familiarly known as "Hell's Bumps," about midway in the Chain. Just how it had formed nobody knew. The logs were running free when suddenly half a dozen plugged and held for an instant only, but it was sufficient for others to pile on top of them. Every moment brought down fresh sticks, and the fast water flung them at the growing mass to make a part of it. Some shoved, up-ended, and forced others aloft. The face of the jam rose high, abrupt, and dangerous. The tail grew swiftly upstream. By the time McKenna arrived it had become a genuine, old-time "teaser." The foremen went over it carefully, with glum faces, for this meant more delay; no one could tell how long it would take to break it. They pondered the current and the depth of water as they knew it by experience, and were not encouraged.

"Sooner or later we'll have to use powder on her," said McKenna; "we might as well use it sooner."

He set the crew to work picking out logs so that the dynamite might be exploded in the bowels of the monster. The men worked with a will but gingerly, for the task was dangerous. The dynamite was placed deep in the jam. When it exploded the mass heaved, shook, buckled, and moved a few yards downstream, where it plugged again. Nothing had been gained.

"It'd take a carload of powder to root her out," said Tobin in disgust. "We'll just have to dig into her with the peavies, Dinny, and trust to luck."

So they dug with the peavies for three days, and nothing happened. Occasionally there would be a quiver and a long, shuddering groan as if a monster were awaking from sleep; and once a series of startling, premonitory cracks and a sharp movement set the jam crew zig-zagging for shore. But this proved a false alarm, for the tremendous pack of timber merely settled down and squatted immutably upon its brown haunches, the bristling top of it seeming to grin defiance at the puny efforts of man.

"If it takes a trainload of powder we've got to break it," said Joe desperately, and telegraphed Wright from the nearest station to send on a supply of high-explosive.

As the keystone supports an arch so key-logs hold a jam. If they can be found and dislodged, the jam collapses and disentangles. Finding them is difficult, laborious, and very dangerous. If there are dams above, a head of water is sometimes let loose suddenly and the jam swept away. But there were no dams, so that Kent had his choice between manual labour, which is slow and costly, and dynamite, which is sudden but uncertain. By way of compromise he used both, and still the logs did not move.

He began to feel a strange personal enmity toward them. They were his, bought by his money,

cut by his crew, inanimate, senseless things. And yet in the mass they seemed to possess a personality, a living spirit of pure, balky cussedness; they lay in bulk, a brown shaggy monster that obstinately refused to heed the voice of its master.

XVIII

Joe stood on the jam, watching the crew dry-picking out the logs and throwing them into the water, burrowing down for a place to use more powder, when his name was shouted. He looked up, and his heart gave a decided thump. Above him stood William Crooks and Jack.

Joe leaped the logs and ran up the bank. "How did you get here?" he cried. "Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

"We thought we'd surprise you," said Jack sedately. "I persuaded dad. I wanted to see how *our* drive was coming down."

"It isn't coming down just now," Joe observed. "We can't stir it. Here, come over to my tent and make yourselves at home. Oh, Jimmy," he called to the cook, "rustle a good meal, will you? Spread yourself on something fancy, now."

The cook grinned amiably, and became suddenly shamefaced as Jack smiled at him. "I ain't got much fixin's," he apologized. "If th' lady, there'd tell me what she'd like——"

"Why, you're Jimmy Bowes!" cried Jack. "I remember you, twelve years ago on dad's camp on the Little Canoe. You used to give me lumps from the brown sugar barrel. Jimmy, I'll always love you for that."

Jimmy Bowes blushed to the top of his bald head as he shook hands. "You've growed," said he. "Sure, I remember, but I didn't think you'd know the old bull-cook. You're—you're real purty!" Suddenly embarrassed by his own candour and Joe's laughter he retreated to his own domain where, cursing his cookee, he plunged into preparations for a magnificent meal.

McKenna and MacNutt came ashore and met Crooks.

"Well, boys," said the old lumberman, "she's a teaser, hey!"

"You bet," replied McKenna. "She's solid as a cellar—froze to the bottom all the way. Still, the water's risin' now, an' she may pull most any time." He did not believe a word of his statement, but he spoke so that Joe should not be discouraged. Crooks, who did not believe a word of it either, nodded.

"That's the way with big jams. I remember, thirty years ago on Frenchman's Creek—" He drew McKenna and MacNutt out of earshot, relating his story. Suddenly he stopped. "Look here, Dinny, if this jam don't break mighty soon young Kent goes out of business."

"Well, I wish t' God I knew how to break her," said McKenna. "The boys can't work harder than they're doing. We've put in shots 't'd rip a mountain loose, and she just lays back her ears and sits tighter."

Meanwhile Jack and Joe walked upstream along the bank. Here and there on the flanks of the wooden monster crews of men picked away with peavies. The clean smell of the millions of feet of freshly cut, wet timber struck the nostrils. The water tore and snarled at the wedged logs, and little streams shot through the mass, hissing and gurgling; the voice of the checked river was deep and angry.

"To-morrow we're going to fill it up with powder and see what that does," said Joe. "With the rising water it may start things. If it does not—" He shrugged his shoulders. If the jam did not "pull" soon he was broken, and he knew it.

Jack slid her arm in his. "Dad says the big jams go when you least expect it. This will. You have time yet, Joey-boy."

He patted her hand. "It's good of you, Jack. Anyway, I've done my best, and if I'm downed this time I can make a fresh start. I know something about the business now."

Jack looked at him and nodded. He was quite unlike the neatly tailored Joe Kent of a year before. He wore a battered felt hat, a gray shirt, trousers cut off below the knees, and heavy woollen stockings. On his feet were the "cork boots" of the riverman. Already he had mastered the rudiments of "birling," and could run across floating logs, if not gracefully at least with slight chance of a ducking. He was bronzed and hard, and his hands were rough and calloused. But the difference went deeper than outward appearance. He was stronger, graver, more self-reliant, and the girl recognized and approved of the change.

The day faded into dusk. Big fires were lighted at the camp. Crooks and his daughter remained for supper; afterward they were to drive back to the little town, coming back the next morning to see the big shots let off.

Crooks lit a cigar and joined the foremen, to discuss the jam and the probability of breaking it, and yarn of his own experiences with mighty rivermen whose names were now but traditions. The men lay about the fires, smoking and talking. They were tired, and the popular vocalists, shy because there was a girl in the camp, hung back and muttered profane refusals when asked to sing. Jack was disappointed. "I haven't heard a shanty song sung by a crew in ages. I wish they would wake up. Am I the wet-blanket?"

"I'll go over and tell them to sing anything you like," Joe offered promptly.

"No, that wouldn't do. Some of them are going to their blankets already. To-morrow night—when the jam is broken—we'll have a celebration. I'll sing to them myself."

"If it *is* broken!"

"Now, Joe," she reproved him severely, "you brace up. We're going to break that jam to-morrow; and we're going to deliver our logs on time, and don't you dare to even *think* we're not. I tell you we are! Don't get discouraged, for we're going to win out."

"You're a good booster, Jack" he said, smothering a sigh. "Of course we are. And once we get through here we'll have plain sailing."

He pressed her hand gratefully. It was something to receive encouragement, even if it was plainly labelled, and he would not be so ungracious as to tell her so. Crooks loomed out of the darkness and called for his team. Half an hour afterward Joe was the only man awake in camp, and he drifted into slumber with the memory of the soft touch of Jack's lips as they lay for a moment on his.

In the morning the jam was sown with dynamite, planted deep beneath the logs at points approved by McKenna. Crooks and Jack arrived. The men came ashore and waited anxiously.

Almost simultaneously, columns of water, strips of bark and twisted, riven wood shot high in the air, and the detonations thundered back from the rocks. A rumbling growl issued from the inwards of the wooden monster. It heaved and rose. Logs toppled down the face of it, and then the whole front cascaded in wild confusion. Just when it seemed that the whole thing must go motion ceased. The shaggy, bristling brute settled back into immobility. The shots had failed.

Bosses and men swore fervently. These continued failures were blots on their records as rivermen. Their employer needed those logs badly, and it was up to them not to disappoint him. The jam was big and ugly, but it must be broken. Doggedly they climbed out on the logs again and set to work.

When the jam failed to "pull," Kent looked at Jack, reading the bitter disappointment in her face. Somehow it helped him to conceal his own.

"Better luck next time, girlie," he said. "Anyway, we made a lot of noise."

She smiled back at him, but her lips quivered, "Of course it will pull next time; it can't help it."

"Of course not," he agreed, being quite convinced to the contrary.

They fell silent, gloomily watching the crew at work. Below them a man clamped his peavey into a log at the base of the pile and swung back on it so that the tough stock bent like a whip. Failing to move it he called a comrade. They pried and boosted, their clinging shirts bulging with the swell of their back-muscles. Suddenly the log came away. Immediately a groan rose from the timbers. The men sprang to alertness. Crackings and complainings ran through the mass.

The girl caught Joe's arm.

"It's going out, Joe! It's going out! Oh, see it pull!"

There was no doubt of it. The jam "pulled" with the bellow of a maddened beast. Logs shot outward, upward, downward—every way, rolling over and over, smashing, up-ending, grinding. Through them the white, torn water boiled madly. The core of the jam seemed to leap bodily downstream and then split into fragments.

Over the turmoil the rivermen fled for shore, each man balancing himself with his peavey, held low across his body. Their flight was swift, but unhurried and calculated. In face of the deadliest peril of the riverman—the breaking jam—they were cool and wary, timing to a nicety leap from tossing log to tossing log.

Suddenly, opposite the watchers, a man lost his footing and pitched forward. Another, twenty feet away, cleared the space with two leaps, caught the first by the collar and dragged him upright, but the man sagged down, evidently badly hurt. The other dropped his peavey, heaved him up in his arms and, thus burdened, made for shore. He sprang once, twice, hampered by his load. Then a wave of smashing timber surged down and over them. They were blotted from the world, effaced without even a stain on the torn water.

Jack, deadly white, with shining eyes and parted lips, stared at the spot where they had been.

"Oh, the brave boy—the poor, brave boy!" she cried. "Who was he, Joe?"

"Ward—Ward and McClung, two of my best men—chums," Joe told her bitterly. "I wouldn't have—Jack! Jack, look there!"

Strung along the jam as the men were when it pulled, some of them had no direct route for shore. Among these were McKenna, Dave Cottrell, and Hill and Laflamme of Deever's crew. The last three were noted "white water birlers," experts upon logs under any and all conditions, and McKenna, the old walking boss, in his best days had never found a man who could put him off a stick of pine.

When the jam began to pull they were opposite a stretch of rocky bank that offered no way of escape.

"Boys," said McKenna, "it's a bad chance, but we've got to take it—we've got to ride her down."

As he spoke the log on which he stood pitched sideways beneath him. He left it as a bird leaves a bough, alighting on another, and ran the tossing mass downstream. Cottrell, active as a squirrel, kept close to him. Hill and Laflamme, too, kept together but without premeditation, for each instinctively took the course that looked best to him. They dodged over and across the up-ending, smashing timbers, avoiding death at each spring by the thickness of a hair. It was this sight which had caused Joe Kent's exclamation.

Hill was the first to go. Just once he miscalculated by the fraction of an inch. He disappeared without a sound. Laflamme, just behind him, sprang across the spot where his companion had been, his eyes widening, his teeth bared and set, his gaudy voyageur's sash streaming from his waist, a bright flag fluttering in the face of destruction. Suddenly an up-ending log brushed his thigh. It was little, but it threw him from his stride. His shriek soared high above the roar of wood and water as the great logs nipped out his life.

Neither McKenna nor Cottrell looked back, though they heard the cry. Their own case was too perilous. A log thrust up suddenly beneath Cottrell's feet and threw him into the air as if he had been shot from a springboard. He alighted on his feet again by the purest of luck, and seeing an opening of water and a free log, leaped on it, whence he made his way to shore. McKenna, dead-beat, gained the outlying logs and fell as he reached solid earth.

Behind them the jam swept by in tossing, foaming grandeur, the backed-up water scouring all before it. McKenna staggered to his feet and waved a gaunt arm.

"Into her, boys, and keep her hustling!" he shouted.

But MacNutt and Deever were already on their way upstream. Tobin and his crew attacked the outlying logs and flung them into the current. Soon the channel was brown with the shooting sticks, flashing by in the racing water.

Jack, pale and shaken, sat and watched them go by. The bright sun, the dancing water, the bird songs from the woods, and the fierce activity of the rivermen were all at variance with the vision of sudden death which she had beheld. Joe, grave and silent, came up accompanied by her father.

"I guess we'd better be going, daughter," said Crooks gently.

She shook her head. "No, dad, I'd like to stay, please. Just leave me here. Joe has the work to see to, and you'd like to be there, too." The men looked at each other, and her father nodded silently. They went upstream to where the rear was working ferociously.

Jack, left alone, stared at the river, reconstructing the scene, which she was never to entirely forget. It was the first time she had seen men, rejoicing in the pride of their strength, wiped from life as dust is wiped up by a damp cloth. From her childhood she had spent days and even weeks in her father's camps, meeting the big, rough shantymen who one and all adored her; getting glimpses of their life, but only touching the outer shell of it; seeing them against a background of cheerful labour, ringing axes, song and jest, as real and yet as unreal as a stage setting—a background which in her eyes surrounded them with the elements of romance. Of their vices she knew nothing save by hearsay; of the tragedy of their lives she knew even less. Now, before her young eyes, Fate had swooped and struck instantly and without warning. Small wonder that she was shocked.

And she was shocked, also, by the apparent callousness of the dead men's comrades. They worked carelessly, as it seemed, about the very spot where the others had died. But here common sense came to her aid. The logs—Joe's logs, their logs—must be got out. No matter what toll the river claimed the drive must go down and to market.

It was the way of the world. In this as in other things, human life was the cheapest of commodities; its loss the least important hindrance, of less practical moment than the breakage of an ingenious man-made machine. She sighed as the realization came to her. It seemed heartless, yet she could not escape it. Sitting on the log, staring at the river, her lips moved in almost unconscious prayer for the men who had died like men, doing the work they were paid to do.

XIX

With the breaking of the big jam the luck of the drive seemed to change. The river was rising, the water was good, the logs travelled freely day and night without halt. Indeed, the delays seemed about to prove blessings in disguise, for other firms' drives, more fortunate, would be out of the way. Also when they reached the lower almost currentless stretches of the river, down which the logs would have to be towed in booms by steamers, there would be no delay. But these calculations were upset one day when they got news of a drive just ahead of them.

Straightway Tobin and Joe went down to see about it. Sure enough there was a drive, and as he looked at the end of a stranded log the foremen swore indignantly, for on it was stamped the "CB" of Clancy Brothers.

"It's their drive from Basket Lake," said Tobin. "They should have had it down three weeks gone." As they passed downstream he called Joe's attention to the rear crew. "Look at that. See 'em sojerin' on the job. They're loafin', every mother's son of them, and they've a stronger crew than they need, too."

They found Clancys' river-boss, Tom Archer by name, smoking a pipe and watching the indolent efforts of half a dozen men who were not even pretending to hustle.

"I thought you would have been down long ago," said Tobin. "Our drive is right behind, and we'll be bumping your rear to-morrow if you don't get some ginger into your crew."

"They're a lazy bunch," said Archer without the flicker of an eyelid. "I just have to do the best I can with them. I've cursed them till my throat went back on me."

Tobin regarded him narrowly. "Let me handle them for twenty-four hours and I'll show you a difference."

"Thanks, but I can run my job myself," said Archer dryly.

"The point is," Joe explained, "that my drive is coming down a-humping, and we need all our time because we have a delivery contract to fill. Can you keep ahead of us, do you think?"

"Couldn't say," returned Archer.

"I don't want to run down on top of you," said Joe. "How would it be if I turned a dozen men into your rear to lend a hand?"

Archer regarded him in silence for a ten-second interval. "When I need your help, bub, I'll ask for it."

"I didn't mean it that way," Joe explained. "I don't suppose you want to delay me. It's about four days to Moore's Rapids. Will you oblige me by booming there till I get through? Of course I'll pay for the time of your crew."

"No," Archer replied. "I have my rights on the river and I don't have to get out of your way. You can tail along behind me."

"The hell we can!" flared Tobin, whose temper was always set on a hair-trigger. "Do you think we ain't onto you, Archer. What's Clancys payin' you for doin' their dirty work?"

Archer put his pipe in his pocket with deliberation. "Any more talk like that, Tobin, and you and me will settle it right here," he announced.

Tobin, nowise loath, would have accepted the challenge instantly, but Joe restrained him and pointed to a man who appeared on the bank.

"It's quite plain what this gentleman is up to, Tobin. There's Rough Shan McCane. I guess any more talk is waste time."

McCane sprang down like a cat and advanced truculently. "Tom," said he to Archer, "I'm going to give this young feller a father of a lickin' an' put the boots to him afterward. You look after the other one."

Joe did not assume any attitude popularly supposed to be one of defence, but the bunched shoulder muscles crept and crawled beneath his shirt, and Archer, eyeing him carefully, interposed a decided negative.

"No, you won't. I don't want any trouble with Mr. Kent or his crew. If they crowd us it'll be different."

"It'll be a lot different," said Tobin. "You're McCane, are you? I've heard of your doin's this winter. You've got it comin' to you, me buck, tie into that."

Then and there hostilities would have started but for Joe and Archer, who kept cool. Tobin and McCane growled at each other like leashed fighting-dogs.

"Come along, Tobin," Joe ordered. "We're wasting time. You won't reconsider my offer, Archer?"

"No," replied Archer flatly, "I won't. I have the right-of-way, and I'll keep it."

The way he intended to keep it immediately became apparent. His drive travelled with maddening slowness. His rear crew made great pretence of working, but the feint was transparent and the tempers of Kent's men wore under the strain. One or two fights took place, more or less indecisive. Clearly a climax was at hand.

Joe took counsel with his foremen, and they threshed the matter out one night sitting around the fire. It was plain that as long as Clancys' drive kept ahead they could make no speed. Much time had already been lost. They could not pass it on the river, and Archer would not yield his right-of-way at Moore's Rapids. It looked like an impasse. It was quiet Deever who suggested the only way out. Deever usually had little to say. The reverse of Tobin, he was slow to anger, but knew no limit when aroused, as unruly lumber jacks found to their cost. He was rather small of frame, but built of wires and steel springs.

"If we run our drive right on top of them and mix the logs we'll make better time than we're making now," said he. "Then we sack out our own, and they can bring theirs along or not, as they like. There's sortin' booms at Moore's, and we've a strong crew, just spoilin' for a scrap. If we take charge an' cull out all Clancys' logs, why, then we get ahead. It just means a little fight."

The foremen looked at each other and nodded. Then they looked at Joe. "It sounds good," said he. "Of course, we haven't any right to do it."

"Not a right," said MacNutt cheerfully, "but we've got a blame good crew."

Joe laughed. "Go to it, then," said he. "Slam the whole drive down on top of them as soon as you can."

The speed of a drive depends upon the work of the crew, for although logs can travel no faster than the current the more that are kept in the current the faster the whole will travel. Kent's men sailed into the work like demons. No log had a chance to rest. Soon the two drives tangled and became one, although naturally Clancys' leading logs were far in advance of Kent's. The latter's crew left the other logs religiously alone, but Clancys' men soon began to shove Kent's logs toward the shallows.

"Leave them logs alone!" roared Big Cooley savagely, detecting a man in the act. The man swore back at him defiantly and shoved another log shoreward. Cooley jumped from the log on which he stood, alighting on the one ridden by the offender, and knocked him into the water.

In two minutes the crews were more tangled than the logs. More of Kent's men piled downstream and joined the melee. Finally Clancys' rear crew, badly whipped, left the field to their opponents.

When Archer heard of the fight he came back at once. "I won't stand this," said he. "You've got no right to run into my drive."

"Keep it out of my way, then," said Joe. "I gave you your chance; I'm going to drive clean through you."

"We'll see about that," said Archer, and took his departure.

Thereafter his crew worked hard but avoided trouble. Nevertheless the drives were hopelessly entangled, and they drew near Moore's Rapids.

The booms at Moore's had been put in and were maintained by the various lumber firms for their own convenience, so that one had as much right to them as another. This was lucky for Kent, for had the booms been owned by a river improvement company, as were those on the lower river, he could not have carried out the high-handed act he contemplated. As it was, the question resolved itself into whether he could seize the booms and hold control of them while he sorted the logs. By so doing he laid himself open to an action for damages, but he could better afford that than further delay.

Twenty-four hours before any logs could reach Moore's, McKenna chose a picked crew and took possession of the booms, forestalling Archer, who intended to do that very thing himself. Therefore when he arrived with a picked crew of his own some hours later he became righteously indignant.

"I have the right-of-way, McKenna," said he, "and my logs are going down that channel first. You can sort out yours and wait your turn."

"I hear what you say," said McKenna from the boom. "You're making a little mistake, Archer."

Ours are going through first."

"What?" cried Archer, suddenly realizing the situation. "Do you know what the law is? The leading drive has precedence in booms, chutes, and slides. You'd better be careful!"

"I know all that," retorted McKenna. "That's the law—and *we're going to break it*. You'd hog the river on us, would you? Well, we'll hog the booms and channel on you!"

Archer spat into the stream and swore. "I have nothing against you, McKenna, but you nor no other man can hang my drive. I'll bring down my crew and clear you off the booms. If I can't do that I'll cut them and let the whole shootin' match go down together."

"That's big talk," said McKenna. "Now you listen here. We're doing this cold because we have to, and you know it. We won't stop at anything. Bring down your crew and try to clean us out if you like. We expect it. But if you try to cut the booms it's different." He pointed to a pier out in the current. On it in a state of splendid isolation, sat Davy Cottrell. "That man out there has a rifle and he can hit birds flying with it. He'll shoot the first man that touches the booms. If you don't believe that, get somebody to try."

Shortly afterward the first logs began to arrive, and with them Archer's entire crew. Immediately they made a determined attempt to seize the booms, but as these were already occupied by Kent's men, against whom they could advance only in single file, their numbers gave them little advantage. The fight raged along the length of the slippery, swaying boom-logs. Men knocked off into the river swam and climbed up again, or cunningly seized others by the ankles and upset them, taking the chance of being kicked in the face by spiked boots. Gradually Archer's men pushed McKenna's backward and might have driven them from the booms altogether had not the rest of Kent's crew arrived, thirsting for battle.

Archer's crew, now hopelessly outnumbered, fought gamely. The fight spread from booms to shore. Tobin went for Archer and met his match. MacNutt tried to get to Rough Shan, but could not. Quiet Deever, white-faced and eyes ablaze, his lips lifting at the corners in a wolfish snarl, was before him.

"Rough Shan' they call you," he gritted through set teeth. "Let's see how rough you are, you dirty cur. Come on an' rough it with a littler man, you lousy, camp-burnin' high-banker!" He planted a terrific right in McCane's face, and was himself knocked sideways the next instant by a heavy swing. They went at it hammer-and-tongs.

Joe Kent found himself paired with a smooth-faced, bronzed, shanty lad who fought with a grin and hit with a grunt. His blows were like the kicks of a mule, but his knowledge of boxing was rudimentary. The young boss smashed him almost at will, but the grin never faded. Always he came back for more, and when he landed, it jarred Joe from top to toe. Finally they clenched and wrestled to and fro among the rough stones of the beach. At this game Joe rather fancied himself, but all he ever remembered of the outcome was that suddenly his feet flew into the air—the rest was a shock, accompanied by marvellous constellations.

He came to with water sluicing his face and a hat fanning air into his lungs. He got to his feet rather dizzily, looked around and laughed.

"You cleaned them out, did you?"

Deever, his face battered and swollen and his knuckles cut to raw meat, grinned happily. Tobin, one eye closed and the other blinking, nodded.

"We're sluicin' now."

"We put the run on them," said McKenna, whose leathery face bore the marks of war. "Lucky for us we had the numbers. They're hard lads, but 'tis not like they'll bother us again. Now, boys, the boss is all right. Out on the booms with yez."

Without delay they swarmed out on the booms. Others went upstream to hustle the logs down. The work of sorting and sluicing went forward merrily, for Kent's logs outnumbered Clancys' in the proportion of four to one, and besides the crew was not very particular as to the ownership of individual logs, which could be culled out later. The main thing was speed. Clancys' logs were sided into an inner boom; Kent's were allowed to go down with the current. It took time, but it was worth it.

Thus Kent's big drive passed Clancys' and ran Moore's Rapids in defiance of the law and usage of the river; but every man, from the young boss down, was very sure that the end justified the means, and was quite ready to take any consequences that might accrue from the high-handed act.

XX

Joe Kent preceded his drive to Falls City by a few days. He found Wright in great feather. Several large orders had been placed, proof that the terms of the settlement mentioned by Locke in his letter were being carried out. But when Joe asked the lawyer for more details the latter shook his head.

"I can't mention names, for that was part of the arrangement," said he. "You be satisfied with what you've got. You're a hundred times better off than if you had merely exposed Garwood."

"I know it," Joe admitted; "but are you sure the arrangement will be carried out?"

"Certain. You've got good orders coming in, haven't you? You won't have anything to complain of hereafter. How about those logs? Can you deliver them on time?"

"I think so," Joe replied.

"Well, you'd better be mighty sure before you take them past your own booms. Wismer will refuse to accept them if he gets half a chance, and see where that would leave you. You couldn't bring them back upstream, and there isn't a concern on the river below Wismer that would buy them, this side of Hughson's Mills. To get there, towing charges and tolls would eat up your profits, and old Hughson would whipsaw you, anyway."

"Crooks says I can do it, and so do my foremen," said Joe. "I've got to sell the logs to meet my liabilities. I'll keep barely enough for my own mill."

"All right—if you're dead-sure," said Locke.

The situation was made very clear to Joe. He was told plainly that the bank had gone with him as far as it would go. In the event of non-delivery his credit would be cut off and his securities sold. The mortgage company would enforce their rights in any event. Also there was no doubt that Wismer & Holden would enforce to the letter the penalty clause in their contract. These things, taken together, meant bankruptcy. And that would mean that his marriage with Jack must be put off indefinitely. On the other hand, if he delivered the logs he could wipe off most of the debt, put his business on a solid basis, and ask her to become mistress of the old Kent homestead without delay. It was worth fighting for, and Joe's lean jaw hardened as he swore to himself that nothing should stop his drive.

Business claimed him by day, but the evenings he was able to spend with Jack. They sat in the dusk of Crooks's wide veranda, watching the stars light and wink in the June sky, while soft-winged moths fluttered ghost-like among the shading vines. Neither was overly given to sentiment, but in those brief evenings their confidences grew; and each, looking into the other's inmost mind, found there only honour and loyalty and little of ambition, but a great desire to live straightly and cleanly and truly, thinking evil of none and doing such good as might be.

Being ordinary young people they did not put these things into words. They rather shied from the sentimental and high-flown, preferring the more accustomed planes of speech and thought. But they understood each other, and so were content. The only shadow, and a constantly recurring one, was the question of the drive.

"If I don't make it I'm busted," said Joe practically, "and so I've got to make it. There's no reason why I shouldn't. Now, it's this way." For the twentieth time he went over the problem.

"Dad says you can make it," Jack agreed. "It's a week to Steven's Ferry. Down to Burritt's Rapids is two days more. Then allow time to tow through Thirty Mile Lake—oh, you can make it with nearly a week to spare."

"Of course I can," said Joe, "and then, Jack, I think we'd better get married."

She flushed to the roots of her brown hair.

"In the fall, Joe?"

"No—right away. What's the use of waiting? My business will be solid then, and I deserve a holiday. Let's take one together."

"Well"—she considered the question gravely, without affected hesitation—"I'd like that. I'll see what dad says about it."

"It's up to you."

"Yes—I know. Still, we'd better not leave him out."

"I don't want to. He's as good a friend as I have. What he says goes, of course; but he won't object if you don't."

"I won't." Suddenly she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. "Oh, Joe, you've got to deliver those logs! You've got to, you've got to!"

"Jack," he said grimly, "I'd deliver 'em now if the whole blamed river dried up. Come down tomorrow and see them go through. We'll cut out enough to run the mill, but the main drive will go straight ahead and I'm going with it. I'll wire you as soon as we strike Burrirt's Rapids. I can tell then how it's going to go."

"Do you think I'll stay here?" she cried. "Dad and I are going down to see the drive come into Wismer & Holden's booms. You'll probably see us at Thirty Mile."

The sun was barely risen when the first logs of the big drive swung down leisurely, their pace accelerating as the faster current above the falls gripped them. This vanguard was run into Kent's booms, and the rivermen cheered as they caught sight of the young boss, and cheered again for William Crooks and his daughter who stood beside him. They ran gaily along the slippery brown logs and danced lightly across their backs, pushing, pulling, prodding, guiding and restraining, and the booms filled magically.

The main drive did not halt at all. The river was crowded with logs, and they were fed through the huge water-gates of the slides as fast and as thick as they would run. It was beautiful, clean, uninterrupted work, and when the last stick had shot through Joe bade Jack good-bye and followed.

Now, at last, the drive was on the homestretch with a few days to spare—a narrow margin, but still a margin. It was then the fifteenth of June, and the river was at its best. Taking into consideration the high water and consequently more rapid current, Joe hoped to reach Burrirt's Rapids by the twenty-third. That would give one week from that point to Wismer & Holden's mills, a distance of thirty-five miles. Below Burrirt's Rapids, however, was Thirty Mile Lake, a shallow, almost currentless expansion of the river, some thirty miles long and varying in width from half a mile to two miles, through which the drive would have to be towed by steamers owned by a river improvement company, who also owned the booms above the rapids. The time occupied by towing would depend on the weather. Therefore, although the probabilities were in Joe's favour there was always a doubt. He must remain on the anxious seat till the actual event.

Because of the good water the drive made Burrirt's on the twenty-second instead of the twenty-third. They made it in a heavy downriver gale with an accompaniment of slashing rain that soaked every one to the skin.

Because a drive turned down the rapids would simply float all over the lake and have to be gathered up again, a task involving much time and trouble, the logs were always put through a narrow, inner channel protected by cribwork and booms, and caught in other booms below. There steamers took them in tow and turned them loose down other rapids at the foot of the lake, which were about three miles above Wismer & Holden's booms. Accordingly, when they made Burrirt's with some daylight to spare the dripping crew ran the drive into the booms and started to feed down the inner channel. When darkness fell they winched a boom across the narrow mouth and quit.

The ground was wet, the tents were wet, and so were the blankets. Although it was June the wind was raw and cutting. The rain slashed and sputtered at the fires. Clothes hung before them steamed, but accumulated moisture faster than they dried. Altogether it was miserable, and the rivermen cursed the weather heartily. They squatted on the sodden ground beneath canvas that let through fine spray with every gust, and big teardrops which had an aggravating habit of landing on the back of the neck, and juggled tin plates piled with pork and beans on their knees, wiping them up with huge wedges of bread.

"A curse of a night," grumbled Haggarty, shifting away from a drop which threatened to become a stream. "Black as a cord of black cats, an' rainin' fit to flood hell! An' not a dry stitch to me back, an' the blanket's soaked, an' all. Fill up me plate again, you, cookee, an' slap a dose of molasses on her. Praise be, me hide is waterproof an' the inside of me's dry."

"An' that's more nor mine will be this day week," said big Cooley, licking his lips in pure anticipation. "A hard winter, an' a long drive. The throat of me aches for the rasp of a drink of the good stuff!"

"For sure, for sure," Chartrand agreed with him. "I'll be dry, me, lak one sap maple in August. When dat drive is finish', by dam' I stay dronk for one mont'. Hooray!"

"An' you see me so," Cooley promised. "I'll find that McCane an' put the boots till him till he can't crawl. A dirty dog! An' Tom Archer is no better—no, nor his bosses."

In another tent Joe and his foremen ate supper and listened to the rain, the wind, the roar of the rapids, and the swirl of the current as it talked against the booms. MacNutt went out and came back dripping.

"Can't see a thing," he reported. "The wind is gettin' worse, an' the water's risen nigh a foot. How is them booms, Dinny? Our whole drive is down by now, an' there's an awful weight on them with this wind an' the high water."

"I went over them when we came down," returned McKenna. "They're all right. The big lower one is three logs, and well anchored."

"They should have another anchor-pier in the middle of it," growled MacNutt. "It has an awful belly. If it went out on us——" He paused and shook his head.

The boom referred to was directly above the rapids, strung at an angle across the river. Upon it came all the pressure of the logs above. It was a massive affair, built of three logs fastened side by side and chained to other threes end to end. The ends of the boom were secured to huge, stone-filled piers. It appeared capable of holding any weight of logs.

"What's the use of talkin' like that, Mac?" said Tobin, half angrily. "You're borrowin' trouble for every one. The boom's all right. I looked at it myself after Dinny did." Nevertheless he went out ten minutes later and was absent sometime. "She sure has a belly on her," he said when he returned. "She'll hold, though. I think the wind's dropped some."

As he uttered the words a shrieking gust almost laid the tent flat. A shout and muffled curses followed.

"I'll bet one of the men's tents has blown down," said Joe. "Hear Cooley swear."

They grinned at each other as Cooley rose to the occasion. The wind grew worse. The side and roof of the tent bellied in and slatted in the squalls. Tobin went out and tautened the guy ropes.

"It'd blow the bark from a tree," he cried when he came in.

McKenna sat pulling his grizzled moustache. The wind, the rapidly rising water, the huge weight of timber, and MacNutt's forebodings were getting on his nerves. Suddenly he began to pull on his spiked river boots.

"What's up, Dinny?" MacNutt asked.

"I'm going to look at that boom," McKenna replied. "You've got me all worked up over it. I *know* it's all right; but all the same——"

"I'll go with you," said Joe, reaching for his boots.

"You're not good enough on the logs yet," said the walking boss bluntly. "It's pitch dark and blowin' great guns. It's an old hand's job, Mr. Kent. You'd only hinder me."

Joe realized the truth of the words.

"Well, I'm going," said MacNutt.

"Same here," said Tobin.

"Sure," said Deever.

Each man took a lantern. Joe went with them. Anyway he would go as far as the first pier. They could hear the logs grumbling and complaining.

"I don't like it," said MacNutt. "It sounds——" He hesitated to put the thought into words, and swung his lantern high, peering at the intensified darkness.

"Oh, shut *up!*" snapped Tobin. "What do you want to croak for? Of course they'll talk with the wind an' current an' all. Funny if they wouldn't."

They ran out across the almost solid carpet of timber that filled the head of the channel, and reached the anchor-pier of the big lower boom. McKenna, in advance, stopped short with a gasp:

"They're moving, boys—they're *moving!*"

Slowly, with the calm certainty of irresistible might, the big drive was on its way. The logs ground at the anchor pier and thrust and bumped at it. The feeble rays of the upheld lanterns threw a short circle of light on the field of timber as it slid smoothly downstream. Joe's heart, for the first time, skipped a beat. The boom had gone out.

McKenna leaped out on the moving logs. MacNutt caught him.

"Come back, Dinny! What do you think you can do?"

McKenna's seamed face was absolutely colourless as he turned to Joe.

"He's right, Mr. Kent. I can't do a damned thing. It's my fault. I should 'a' backed the boom with another."

His voice was vibrant with sorrow and self-accusation. He knew what it meant to his employer. The logs, driven by the wind, would go down the rapids and be flung far and wide over Thirty Mile Lake. To gather them up would be a task of weeks; they could not be delivered on time.

Joe met the blow like a man. "That's all right, Dinny," he said. "It was up to the company, not to you. Their boom was weak somewhere, that's all. Now what can we do about it? They have two steamers below. We'll need 'em right away. Mac, you tell 'em to get fire under their boilers, quick. Promise 'em anything. Say you've got the company's orders—but get 'em. Tobin, rouse out the boys and get 'em down to the boats double-quick. Take every foot of rope and chain you can find or steal. Deever, you open the channel boom and let everything go that will go. Dinny, you come with me."

In five minutes they were banging at the door of the boom company's representative, bringing that worthy citizen from his bed to the window.

"Your boom has gone out and my drive is over the rapids into the lake," Joe told him. "I haven't got time to talk about damages or liabilities now. I want your steamers day and night till I sweep my logs up and every other boat you can hire as well. I want every river man you can lay your hands on, too. I'll pay for these things at once, pending the adjustment of any question of responsibility. Will you do your best for me?"

"Sure I will," said the agent. "Wait till I get my clothes on and I'll come along. It's funny about that boom. I don't see——"

But Joe and McKenna were already out of earshot, hurrying back to the river. The camp was buzzing like a hornet's nest. Men were catching up ropes, chains, peavies, and pike poles and hurrying off into the darkness. Joe, Tobin, and McKenna followed.

As they passed the head of the channel where Deever and half a dozen men were stationed the foreman called to them:

"I've got something to show you, Mr. Kent. It won't take five minutes."

He led the way over the logs and down the cribwork and booming of the channel, and stopped: "One end of the boom swung down here when she went out," he said, and lowered his lantern. "Look at that!"

They bent low and peered at the ends of three joined boom-timbers. The ends were white, square, and new.

"Sawed through, by thunder!" cried McKenna.

XXI

The *Sophie Green*, a beamy, shallow-draft, paddle-wheeled old teakettle, lay broad-side-on to a rickety wharf which was piled with cord wood. From the pile, across her gang-plank and back again, trotted an endless procession of deckhands and rivermen, carrying the big sticks that were her fuel. The fires were roaring beneath her boilers, and the gauge was beginning to move.

A hundred yards away, at another cord wood pile, her sister craft, the *Ada Bell*, was receiving like attentions. Out in the darkness, by the fitful light of lanterns, half a dozen big riverboats crowded with men, were shackling up short lengths of boom into longer ones. Chains rattled and hammers rang on cold-shuts as the crews joined the timbers. Down the shore for a mile and more other rivermen hunted for boats, taking everything that would pull two pairs of oars.

When she had steam enough the *Sophie Green* bellowed and cast off, wallowing around in a short semi-circle. A peakie shot under her stern and a heaving-line uncoiled across her deck. To this was attached a hawser. It came inboard to the bucking clatter of a winch, and was made fast to the towing bitts. Then the crew of the peakie swarmed aboard; the peakie was hoisted up with half a dozen others, and the *Sophie* felt her way downstream in the darkness, a half-mile of boom trailing after her. In twenty minutes the *Ada Bell* followed with more boom-timbers in tow.

The river just below the rapids was obstructed by the floating logs of the broken drive, and the *Sophie* went through them gingerly, fearful for her paddle-wheels. It was still pitch-dark and blowing hard, but the rain had ceased. The lake opened out before them, scummed with foam and torn into choppy, white-topped waves among which the logs were tossing.

Joe and McKenna were in the wheel-house with Capt. Jimmy Congdon, a veteran of the river who had been a warm friend of William Kent's, and was ready to do anything for his son. Captain Jimmy was broad, ruddy, and silver-haired, with a pair of steady blue eyes that never shifted. Periodically he spat to leeward with precision, but until the lake opened up his whole attention was devoted to the wheel.

"Steerin' on a night like this is mostly be-guess and be-god," he vouchsafed. "There's Six Mile Light off to sta'bo'rd. Now, young man, I run this boat to suit you, so tell me what you want."

"I want to boom the logs the easiest and quickest way," Joe informed him. "How would you do it?"

Captain Jimmy spat and reflected. "Blowin' like she is now logs'd jump a boom even if we got 'em into one; but she's breezin' too hard to last. If it was me, come daylight I'd boom off the Fire Island Channel and sweep the floatin' stuff into it."

This advice was identical with McKenna's. Joe decided to adopt it. Daylight found them lying to, below long, swampy Fire Island, which lay well over toward the eastern shore. They strung a boom from the lower end to the mainland, thus closing the channel and forming a great pocket; and then they went at the tough job of "sweeping up" the scattered drive.

The logs were strewn all over the upper end of the lake; but by that strange attraction which floating objects have for one another many of them lay in small rafts. They lay inert, motionless on the almost glassy expanse, for the storm had blown itself out and a sunny day of almost perfect calm succeeded. When these floating patches of timber were reached the peakies were dumped over the side and the rivermen tumbled into them.

The *Sophie Green* steamed in a slow, careful circle, and when she had completed it her half-mile of trailing boom lay in a great loop about many patches of logs. She picked up the other end and went ahead, and the logs naturally sagged back into the farther end of the loop.

The *Ada Bell* went through a similar manœuvre. Then they steamed up to more logs, winged out one end of the boom alongside, and the men in the peakies fed them more logs through the opening. When the booms were full, they took them to Fire Island, emptied the logs out into the big pocket, and came back for more.

As the morning lengthened they obtained reinforcements in the form of a powerful tug belonging to the company and a couple of launches whose owners were not averse to making a few honest dollars. These were of material assistance. The tug took one end of a boom and the *Sophie* the other and steamed straight ahead in parallel courses. The swath of the boom took up every log between the two boats. Then the *Sophie* took up both ends as before, but left a dozen lengths of boom-timbers trailing free. These were winged out by a launch, and the rivermen fed logs down the moving funnel thus formed. The tug, meanwhile, went to the assistance of the *Ada Bell*.

In this manner the lake was being expeditiously cleared of the rafts of floating logs. Joe blessed his stars for the quiet weather, but for which he could have made but little progress, and prayed for its continuance. He had eight days to sweep up the broken drive and bring it through, and

this was not a bit too much.

The logs floating openly in the lake were the easiest part of the job; but there were more, strewn along the shore, washed high and dry and embedded in the sand by the storm or caught in shallows and marshy bays—there was where the pull would come.

In the afternoon a long, lean power-boat racketed up the lake, nosed the logs inside Fire Island, went up one shore and down the other, and finally ran alongside the *Sophie Green*. In it sat Wismer, and he hailed Joe, who looked over the rail.

"This is a nice mess your drive is in, Kent," said he. "I'm afraid you won't be able to get it down in time."

"I'll try, anyway," Joe told him.

"You can't make it," said Wismer. "Now, I don't want to be hard on you, and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make you an offer for the logs as they lie, and if you'll accept it I'll cancel our existing contract."

"Let's hear your offer," said Joe. When he heard it he laughed, for it was entirely piratical. "You must think I'm easy. You couldn't steal logs much cheaper."

"Take it or leave it," said Wismer, a little puzzled. The Joe Kent with whom he had made his contract had certainly been easy; but this bronzed young fellow leaning over the rail was different. "You don't want to forget that penalty clause," he added warningly.

"Not for a minute," said Kent. "I know quite well that Ackerman or Garwood framed up that cinch contract. And I know you're trying to get the logs cheap now, and give them the double-cross. I'm not kicking—merely pointing out that I know what you're up to."

Wismer reddened, and for the first time found a difficulty in meeting the young man's eye. "You're talking utter nonsense," said he. "I don't know what you mean, and I don't much care. If you like to take up the offer I've just made, all right. If not, I'll hold you to the letter of our contract."

"I'm holding myself to it," said Joe. "I want you to have your booms ready for me, for the first tow of logs goes down the lake to-night."

He watched Wismer's launch gather way, and turned to the business in hand. At dusk the *Ada Bell* picked up one tow and the tug another, and started down the lake. The tired crew went ashore just above Fire Island, where the camp was established. Joe and McKenna remained on the *Sophie*. After supper the foreman came aboard to plan the next day's work.

"Boys," said Joe, "who cut that boom?"

"McCane, an' no one else," MacNutt answered, and the others nodded.

"That's what I think," said Joe, "but I'll never be able to prove it. Now, then, about the drive. Is it possible to get it down on time?"

"Shure," said McKenna, "if we have good weather."

"Not unless," said Tobin.

On a fine-weather basis they planned the work. In the morning they went at it again. Before noon the tow-boats returned, the long booms trailing behind them. Their tows had been emptied down the rapids, and a small crew was seeing them safe into Wismer & Holden's booms.

Late in the afternoon a launch—a flying thing of spotless paint, burnished brass, and throbbing engines—split the lake. A wall of water fell away on either side of her shearing stem, and the white kick of her wake streamed out behind like a giant ribbon. She slowed and swung daintily up to the dingy *Sophie Green*. In her sat William Crooks and his daughter.

"Hello, Joe!" roared the veteran lumberman. "Hello, Jimmy!" to Captain Congdon. "Throw down a ladder or something. We want to come aboard."

They came aboard, and the very spick-and-span young man who owned the launch looked doubtfully at the other young man in the flannel shirt, short trousers, and spiked boots, who was on such enviable terms with pretty little Miss Crooks.

"How's she comin'?" Crooks demanded, and Joe told him. "I got twenty boys off my drive on the way to give you a boost," the old lumberman continued. "We'll show these fellows a thing or two about sweepin' up logs. Jimmy, my girl and I are going to camp down on this old tub of yours till the last log's out of the lake. Got room for us?"

"You bet I have, Bill," replied Congdon, "Miss Jack, you take my quarters."

"Couldn't think of it, thank you, Captain Congdon," said Jack promptly. "I wouldn't put you out

for the world.”

“Mutiny, by the Lord!” shouted Captain Jimmy. “Young woman, I’m a bachelor, and used to having my own way. I get awful mean and cranky when I’m opposed. It’d be just like me to refuse to tow a single blame log if you don’t obey orders.”

“Aye, aye, sir!” said Jack. “Any more orders, sir?”

“Only that you’re to ask for what you want if you don’t see it,” said Captain Jimmy, grinning.

The launch shot away down the lake, and the *Sophie* continued to gather logs. Night fell. This time one boat was sufficient to tow all the day’s take. Jack and Joe sat on the foredeck in the dusk, listening to the soft lap of water alongside.

“I can’t tell you what I felt when I heard the drive had broken, Joe,” said she. “It seemed so safe before, and now—but you’ll make it, Joe, I know you will!”

“I’ll make it or bust—and that’s no figure of speech,” he told her grimly. “Those twenty men your father has lent me will just about turn the scale. The boys are working like demons—each man doing the work of two; but it depends on the weather more than on anything else. A couple of windy days would knock us cold. However, there’s no use worrying about that, and all the weather sharps in the crew, and Congdon as well, say it has set for fair. To-morrow night we’ll work by moonlight. I feel a presentiment amounting to a hunch that you’ll be Mrs. Kent before another moon.”

She nestled closer to him. “If I were a very conventional person I’d insist on three months at least to prepare a trousseau and make sure of a lot of wedding presents—but I’m not. I’ve spoken to dad, and he makes your delivery of these logs the only condition. And now, boy, it’s time you were asleep. You’re working as hard as any of the men.”

The floating logs had all been gathered up. Now the crew attacked those hung in bays and jettisoned on shoals and points. It was slow, hard work, but little by little the broken drive was gathered up. The fine weather held. Nightly tows went down the lake, and each morning the empty-booms trailed back for more.

Joe Kent worked with his men. He was strong, active, and enduring. He developed a fair amount of skill with a peavey, and he derived a fierce satisfaction from each log that he twisted from its resting place and rolled into free water. By just that much he was beating Garwood, Ackerman, Clancys—all the gang who, as principals or tools, had determined to loot his business and strip him of his inheritance.

His young, sinewy body responded to the calls made upon it. Wet to the waist he worked all day and at night until the moon set, cheering on his crew with laugh and joke. Afterward he stumbled aboard the *Sophie Green* almost too tired to speak, even to Jack; but the first dim light saw him drop over the side eager for the new day’s work.

That week Joe lost twenty pounds—and he was not fleshy to start with. Those days of heartbreaking work and the nerve-strain back of it cut lines in his face which were never wholly erased. It was for him a desperate hand-to-hand grapple with time. Logs, logs, logs! By day he worked with them, and by night they crowded his dreams. He had to lift them, to climb over them, to count millions of them; sometimes piles of them cascaded on him, burying him from the world; sometimes they were about to fall on Jack. He would wake, a cry of warning on his lips and the sweat running from every pore of his iron-hard body.

His men responded nobly to the call. They held a fierce, jealous pride in their drive, in their ability to bring it down, in making good any promise given by their employer. Chronic grumblers over small things, they accepted cheerfully the eighteen hours a day of work, and even stretched it a little. And every minute of every hour they worked. Each man moved with a spring and a jump. There were no laggards—none for the foremen to curse. They took in Bill Crooks’s chosen twenty and fired them with the same fierce energy. But this was not a hard task, for the word passed around somehow that on their success in getting out the logs depended the marriage of Kent and Miss Jack. Every man straightway felt a personal responsibility, and the way they sailed into the job made Kent’s crew hustle to keep pace.

Bill Crooks threw off thirty years, put on a pair of spiked boots, and tramped up and down the shore bellowing encouragement to the rivermen. Most of it took the form of virulent curses directed at the men who had persistently tried to hang Kent’s drive.

“But they can’t do it, boys!” the old logger would roar. “They may blow dams and saw booms, but we’ll do them yet. Birl into her, bullies! All the blasted high-bankers between this and the booms of hell can’t hang us up.” Then the men would bark fierce assent, and whirl into the logs with fury.

And so, by unremitting work by day and night, the big drive was swept up from open water, shoal, point, and bay. On the twenty-eighth of June, at midnight, the last logs were boomed. Half an hour afterward the *Sophie Green*, the *Ada Bell*, and the big tug started down the lake with heavy tows. The boats were full of rivermen, proud in the consciousness that they had set a

record for the river. Their toil and their weariness of body were forgotten. Only a few days separated them from town, where they would make up for both, according to time-honoured custom. They shouted songs—expurgated editions out of deference to Jack Crooks—and the hoarse cough of the ancient *Sophie Green's* exhaust, delivered at exact intervals, chopped the verses in two.

Jack and Joe had arranged a little treat. The cook rustled a wonderful meal. Boxes of good cigars were passed around. A phonograph played in the bow of each boat. The trip down the lake was as good as a moonlight excursion, and the men of Kent's drives talk of it yet. One by one they lay down on the deck, beside the boilers, anywhere and everywhere, and slept the sleep of exhaustion.

In the morning they let the tows down the rapids. The rivermen debarked, followed down the river, and hustled out the bunches of logs that the few men who had preceded them had not bothered about. It was plain sailing now. That day and the next the channel was brown with logs. Kent's foremen and Wismer & Holden's cullers checked them as they came. Joe and Jack stood out on an anchor pier and watched the booms fill. More logs came down and still more.

Far away on the morning of the thirtieth they heard the bellowing whistles of the *Sophie Green* and *Ada Bell*, and the deep-throated blast of the tug telling them that the last of the big drive was down. At six o'clock that night the booms closed behind the last log.

Joe drew a long breath. "Thank heaven," said he. "Now, girlie, we'll have the best meal they can put up in this little town."

"We will—but we'll have it in camp," she informed him. "I've arranged with Jimmy Bowes. This is my treat to the men."

They occupied the head of an impromptu table of pine boards. Down its length and along similar tables were ranged the rivermen. Huge roasts, fowls, vegetables, and stacks of pies were piled before them, for Jimmy Bowes, having *carte blanche* from Jack, had raided the shops of the town. When the meal was over Haggarty rose, very red and confused amid low growls of encouragement:

"Go to it, Larry!"

"What are ye waitin' for?"

"Shut up an' listen to him, now!"

"Mr. Kent, an' Miss Crooks an' Mister Crooks," began Haggarty, and paused. More growls of encouragement. "I'm no speaker, but the boys wants me to tell ye something, an' it's this: There's them that's had it in for ye these months past, an' has done their da—I mean their dirtiest—to spoil yer cut an' hang yer drive. They haven't done it, an' for why? Bekase ye're good stuff, an' kept a stiff upper lip an' stayed wid the game when others would have give it up, beaten. There ain't a man that ain't proud to work for ye, an' we'll stick by ye, Mr. Kent, till there's snowballin' in—in summer. That's what I was to say. An' besides that, an' not wantin' to be fresh at all, we wish you an' the young lady all sorts of luck an' happiness."

Haggarty sat down and was pounded on the back. Joe rose, almost as confused as Haggarty. "Boys," said he, "you knew I was in a tight place and you stayed with me. I've got you to thank that my logs are here to-night, instead of somewhere upriver. Each man of you has done the work of a dozen, and I want you to know that I'm grateful. I can't pay you in money, but I want to say that I'm the friend of each man here, and any time one of you wants anything from me all he has to do is to ask for it. I hope to have you all with me next year, and I'll saw every log we cut in my own mills. Just one thing more, and that's an important one." He took Jack's hand and she rose blushing and laughing while the men cheered madly. "Miss Crooks will be Mrs. Kent in a few weeks, boys, and we ask you all to the wedding."

The shout that went up startled the little town. They cheered and pounded the table with hammer-like fists. Then in the tumult began a cry which soon grew insistent:

"Cooley, Cooley! Big Bill Cooley!"

"Speech, Bill!"

"Get up on yer hind-legs, ye bully-boy!"

"Tell the boss about it, Bill!"

From the seclusion of the foot of the farthest table came muffled, shamefaced protest and muttered profanity. Suddenly half a dozen pairs of arms heaved the big riverman upon the long table.

"Heavens, Joe! what has he been doing?" gasped Jack.

For big Bill Cooley's face was puffed and cut, and one eye was quite closed. The other glared wickedly at those who had thrust him into prominence. His right hand was bandaged, and the

knuckles of the left resembled a hamburger steak. Plainly Cooley had been in the wars.

"You fellies make me tired," he growled. "Let me down out o' this!"

"Tell the boss an' his young lady first," howled the crew.

"Go ahead, Cooley," Joe encouraged him.

"They ain't nothin' to tell, Mr. Kent," said Cooley. "I only caught Rough Shan McCane in among the lumber piles this afternoon and took a birl out of him."

The crew yelped joyously beneath him.

"He won't walk for a month!"

"Ye done him up good, Billy-buck!"

"The boots in his face, an' all!"

"Hooray for dat beeg Bill Cooley, de boss bully-boy!"

"Dry up, ye divils! How can he hear himself?"

But Cooley made a flying leap from the table, and nothing could induce him to mount it again. Joe got details at second hand of the fearful licking administered to McCane by Cooley, a combat which had been witnessed by only half a dozen. In the end the big riverman had kicked his enemy into unconsciousness with his spiked boots, according to ancient custom. He desisted only when it was apparent that the fallen man's life hung in the balance. As he and his fellows looked at it, this was merely justice, and very light justice at that.

More than half the crew started for town to drink the health of the young boss and his bride-to-be. It was a beautiful excuse. Jack and Joe walked up the river's bank to take a last look at the logs. They had little to say, for the reaction had set in. They stood silently in the moonlight, gazing at the fields of brown timber covering the surface of the river, safe down at last at the cost of a winter's toil, a spring's heartbreaking endeavour, and a toll of human life.

Joe put his arm around the girl's waist and drew her to him. Strong and full-throated, mellowed by distance, came the last refrain of old Bill Crooks's favourite river-song as the crew shouted it on their way to town.

"When the drive comes dow-un, when the jam comes down,
What makes yeez lads so wishful-eyed as we draw near to town?
Other eyes is soft an' bright, like the stars of a June night—
Wives an' sweethearts—prayin', waitin'—as we drive the river down.
(Oh, ye divils!)
God bless the eyes that shine for us when we boil into town."

"God bless *your* eyes, Jack, dear!" said Joe softly, and kissed her. The future lay clear and fair before them, a-flush with the rosy lights of youth and hope.

XXII

By the terms of Joe's contract with Wismer & Holden, these astute millmen had agreed to pay cash for the logs on delivery. Joe held them to this, refusing acceptances at thirty and sixty days. He was thus at once in a position to reduce his liabilities and sustain his credit, which had been seriously strained, with his own bank.

His mill was running at capacity. All day the air was vibrant with the hum of it, the thunder of the log carriages, the deep raucous drone of the big saws, the higher pitched voices of the smaller. All day a stream of shaggy, brown logs, prodded by pike poles, was swept upward in dripping procession on an endless chain, tossed on iron beds, flung against the saws, rolled on carriers as rough boards to other saws—to edgers, trimmers and planers—and disgorged from the farther end of the mill in a dozen grades of product to be carried to the piling yards and drying sheds. Day and night the smoke from burning sawdust in the huge, stack-like consumer poured upward to the sky.

Thus the producing end of his business was satisfactory. Not less so were the sales. In addition to a particularly brisk local demand, Wright's activities had resulted in some excellent contracts not only for immediate, but for future delivery. There would be no lack of a market for every foot the mill could turn out. Also there was no car shortage. The tacit agreement which Locke had been able to obtain as part of the price of withdrawing his action was being held to rigidly. The firm could sell all its mills could cut and deliver all it could sell. Naturally Wright and Joe were pleased and congratulated each other upon the rosy outlook.

"It looks as if we were over the hump," said Joe one afternoon. "Those are good contracts you landed. I want to show you that I appreciate all you have done. Left to myself I'd have been as helpless as a baby in this business."

"Oh, I don't know," said Wright. "You pick up things pretty fast. I've been paid for whatever I've done. But apart from that I've been with this concern a good many years and your father always treated me well. Funny if I wouldn't do all I could for you. You've come pretty near making good so far. You made the big cut that your father planned to make and you brought the logs down. That's all he could have done, and I tell you not even Crooks knows the logging business better than he did. So far as showing your appreciation goes it isn't necessary—or, anyway, that can wait till you are in better shape. I'm not shouting for money the minute I see your head above water."

"I know you're not, but at the end of the year we'll fix things up on a better basis," said Joe.

While Joe was occupied with his business, Jack was busy, too. Mysterious packages were constantly arriving at Bill Crooks's home. As the wedding day drew near the patter of these became a downpour. Jack's friends gave luncheons in her honour, and she was "showered" with articles of alleged usefulness or ornament.

She and Joe, sitting chatting one night in her den, heard the heavy, decided tread of the old lumber baron in the darkened hall. Suddenly there was a stumble, a wrathful bellow, and Bill Crooks's voice raised in insistent demand for the name of the thus-and-so-forth wretch who left boxes in the hall, mingled with a prophecy as to his ultimate fate.

"What kind of 'fire' and 'nation' were you speaking of, dad?" asked Jack as he appeared in the door.

"Never mind," growled Crooks, who was under the impression that his remarks had been sotto voce. "This house is being cluttered up with a bunch of junk. I've peeled a six-inch strip of hide clean off my shin. Who left that box out there?"

"I think you did."

"Hey?"

"I think you did. You took it from the expressman."

"Huh?" snorted Crooks. "If I did I didn't leave it in the middle of the hall. I put it out of the way behind the hatrack. Somebody moved it out. That's only one thing. There's a hundred others. You've got enough truck to start a china shop or a jewellery store or a whitewear sale!"

"I don't get married every summer," his daughter returned placidly. "We have to have things. And then our friends are good to us. I know one darling old grouch who gave me a big cheque. Remember what he told me to do with it?"

"I didn't need to tell you. You can get away with a cheque without instructions. Never knew a woman who couldn't."

"You told me to 'blow it' on myself—not to put a dollar of it into house furnishings."

"Suppose I did! You don't need house furnishings. There's two houses ready furnished for you—this one and Kent's. How many blamed houses do you want to live in, anyway?"

"Oh, Heavens, Joe, give him a cigar!" exclaimed Jack at the end of her patience. "He's going to be an awful crank of a father-in-law."

Crooks took Joe's cigar and dropped into a chair, while Jack departed in search of refreshment; men being, as she declared, invariably hungry when they were not thirsty.

"I've been thinking, Joe," said the old lumberman, "quite a bit about my business lately."

"Why, what's the matter with it?" asked Joe in surprise, for Crooks's business, like his own, had been very good indeed.

"Nothing's the matter with it," Crooks replied. "It's good—it's too good. I've run it for a long time, and now it's beginning to run me."

"I don't quite understand."

"It's this way," Crooks explained: "I'm getting on, and outside of Jack I've nobody. Now you're going to marry her. It had to be somebody, I suppose, and I'm glad it's you. Still, there's the business. It's mine, I made it and I like it—but it's beginning to drive me too much. I can't go away for a month or a week without being afraid things will be tied up in hard knots before I get back. If I had a man as good as Wright it might be different, but I haven't. I have to be on the job myself all the time, and I'm getting too old for that. I want to take it easy a little and get the most out of the years that are left me."

"I see," said Joe as Crooks paused.

"You'll know better how it is yourself thirty years from now," Crooks continued. "I've nobody but Jack. If the boys had lived they'd have been able to run the business and let me sit back and just give them a hand now and then. But they died." He was silent for a long moment. "I'll tell you something, Joe, you were the one thing I envied your father. I saw you growing up, a good, clean, healthy young fellow, with no bad habits to speak of—oh, I don't mean that you were any saint; I suppose you kicked up once in a while, same as any healthy young colt, but there was nothing vicious about you—and it seemed hard luck that out of my three boys one wasn't left me. Well, never mind that. Now all I've got will be Jack's when I get my time. And so I was thinking of making you a little proposition."

"Yes," said Joe wondering what this was leading up to. "What is it, Mr. Crooks?"

"I was wondering," Crooks pursued, "whether you'd care to combine our businesses?"

Joe was thoughtful for a moment. His eyes narrowed a little, and his brows drew down in a slight frown. He looked at Crooks steadily. The old lumberman returned his gaze.

"Is there anything behind this, sir?" Joe asked.

"Behind it—how? You don't think I'm putting up a job to freeze you out, do you?"

"No, not that. But are you making this proposition for Jack's sake? I mean, do you think I'd make a mess of my business if I ran it alone? Because if that's really the reason I'd like to show you."

"If I thought you couldn't run your own business I wouldn't want your help to run mine," Crooks replied. "Mind you, I consider myself able to give you a few pointers. You've a lot to learn, but you're one of the young fellows who will learn. Some can't; others won't. I'd hate to see Jack marry a man I didn't think would make good. I'd tell him so mighty quick. No, I gave you my real reason."

"It's a good proposition for me, Mr. Crooks," said Joe. "I'm for it, if we can arrange details. Were you thinking of forming a company?"

"No, I wasn't," said Crooks. "I don't like companies—too much shenanigan about stock and directors and meetings. A company can't do a blamed thing without seeing a lawyer first. I own one business which will be Jack's and yours some day, and you own another. We just make a little 'greement to run 'em together and divide the profits; and we arrange who's to do what work—and there you are. Any time things don't run to suit us we split the blanket. If we tell Locke what we want he'll put it in shape in half an hour."

"I'll do it," Joe agreed; "but I feel that I'm getting the best of the bargain in your experience."

"My experience is all right," said Crooks, "but I can't hustle like I used to—or else I won't. You will, and I'll be able to tell you how. That makes it an even break. And then you've got Wright. I've wanted him or some one like him for years."

"I feel that I owe Wright a good deal," said Joe. "He has really run the business end of the

concern. I was thinking of giving him a share in it. Seems to me something like that is coming to him."

"I'm glad to hear you say so. We'll take him in with us and give him an interest."

"I want it to come out of my share."

"No. He's going to work for me as much as for you. Wright is a part of your equipment and a big asset. Whatever interest he gets must come out of the whole business and not out of one end of it."

They took their proposition in the rough to Locke, and that experienced adjuster of other men's perplexities proceeded to hammer it into working shape, finally producing an agreement, clear, concise and satisfactory. Thus the lumber firm of Crooks & Kent was born.

A couple of days before the wedding, certain quarters of the town—and also those charged with the duty of enforcing a fair imitation of law and order therein—began to notice a sudden influx of strangers. They were for the most part big and very brown, and they walked with a truculent swagger and regarded the world through humorously insolent eyes. Also they held together clannishly, and for the most part—to the relief of the authorities—maintained themselves in a condition of near sobriety.

"For if ye get too full," big Cooley explained to the bibulously inclined Chartrand, "ye miss the weddin'. An' it's not the likes of you is axed to one every day."

"I'll be mos' awful dry, me!" Chartrand complained. He hailed little Narcisse Laviolette. "*Hola, Narcisse, mon vieux!* Come on, tak' leetle drink wit' me. Come on, you beeg Cooley. We don't get dronk—*pas du tout*. We jus' feex ourself so we lak for sing leetle *chanson*."

He hammered the bar with the heavy-bottomed little glass constructed in the interests of the house to hold one man's size drink and no more, and burst into alleged melody:

"Dat square-face-gin, she'll be ver' fine,
Some feller lak dat champagne wine—
 But de bes' dam' drink w'hat I never saw
 Come out of a bottle of *whiskey blanc*.
(O listen to me now, while I'll tol' you how!)
Dere was Joe Leduc an' me, Larry Frost an' Savigny,
 Chevrier an' Prevost, Jimmy Judge an' Larribee,
Lamontagne an' Lajeunesse—mebbe fifty mans, I guess;
You would know de whole kaboodle if I ain't forget de res'.
We was drive upon dat reever an' we ron heem down *les Chats*,
An' den we hit dat Quyon where we buy dat *whiskey blanc!*"

"Yell her out, *mes amis!* Bus' dat roof!"

"Hooraw! hooraw! *pour le good ol' whiskey blanc!*
She's gran' for mak love on, she's bully for fight,
 She'll keep out dat col', an'——"

"Shut up!" roared Cooley. "Now you listen here—you ain't goin' to show up drunk at the boss's weddin', puttin' the whole crew on the hog. Savvy? You're three parts full now. I'll sober ye, me buck, if it's wid me feet in yer face!"

And the threat of Cooley, combined with the eloquent profanity of a self-constituted temperance committee, caused Chartrand to postpone his celebration. It was Cooley also who constituted himself an authority on social usage.

"Bein' asked to this weddin'," said he, "the c'rect thing is to put up a present."

"Sure!"

"That's right, Cooley."

"You bet!"

"We'll do it right while we're about it," said the big man. "Here's ten dollars in me hat. Sweeten as she goes 'round, boys. Let's buy the boss an' his girl somethin' good—somethin' they won't be ashamed to keep in the front room an' tell their friends it come from the boys of Kent's big drive!"

An hour later the proprietor of Falls City's leading jewelry store was somewhat startled by an invasion of half a dozen weather-beaten, rough-looking customers quite different from his ordinary patrons; and he nearly fainted when the spokesman told him that they were in search of

a wedding present on which they were prepared to expend between three and four hundred dollars.

In the end they chose a cabinet filled with silver, eying respectfully the dainty knives, forks, and spoons, and other articles of whose use they had small conception.

"We want a name plate put on her," said Cooley, "showing a lad in river clothes standin' on a log wid a peavey in his fist; an' above that we want the date; an' underneath it, 'From Kent's River Crew.'"

It is safe to say that never had the church, to whose support old Bill Crooks contributed more often than he attended it, held as motley a gathering as on the morning of the wedding of his daughter and Joe Kent. Big, brown men, painfully shaven, in aggressively new garments which cramped their strong muscles and rendered them awkward and ill at ease, occupied seats beside the members of Falls City's leading families, who eyed the intruders askance. And here and there, also ill at ease, were old men and women, dependents of William Crooks and friends of his daughter, whom they loved.

Joe and his best man entered from the vestry; but there was a slight delay. They stood before the chancel waiting for the bride and her father.

"The boss is nervous," Cooley commented to Haggarty in a low whisper. "Look at him shift on his feet. An' see the ears of him. Red!"

"Small blame to him," Haggarty responded sympathetically. "I'll bet he'd rather be swappin' punches wid a man twice his own weight."

But Jack entered on her father's arm—a dainty, queenly Jack, clad in bride-white, her eyes demurely downcast but the small head with the crown of glossy brown hair carried as proudly as ever.

"An' I used to give her lumps out of the sugar bar'l!" said Jimmy Bowes, the fat old bull-cook, in sentimental reminiscence.

"Purty as a little red wagon," said Haggarty with approval.

"Mo' Gee! I leave home for dat myself!" commented little Narcisse Laviolette, who possessed a wife of double his own fighting weight and offspring of about the same combined avoirdupois. And Cooley, who overheard this tribute from the little teamster, took offence thereat.

"Shut up, ye blasted little pea-soup!" he growled. "She's the boss's wife—or as good as. You remember that, and don't try to be funny!"

"Who's try for be fonnee?" demanded Laviolette with indignation at this unjust interpretation of his well-meant speech. "You give me de swif' pain, you. Sacré dam! Some tam, bagosh, I ponch your beeg Irish mug!"

"Sh!" rumbled Haggarty. "Can't ye quit yer dam' swearin' in a church? Shut up, the both of ye!"

The ceremony, which was rapidly changing Jack Crooks into Mrs. Joe Kent, proceeded, finished. Kisses were showered on her, handshakes and slaps on the back on Joe. In the midst of these the latter caught sight of a group of weather-tanned faces in the centre of the church. Their owners were standing uncertainly, diffident, not caring to mingle with the more fashionably clad throng that clustered about the principals. Joe turned to his bride.

"There's Cooley and Haggarty and a bunch of the boys of my river crew, Jack," he said. "They want to wish us luck, and they're too bashful to mix. Come on down and shake hands."

"Of course," said Jack.

With his bride on his arm Joe went down the aisle to the men of his drive, to have his right hand almost permanently disabled in the grips he received; but the pressure of the big hands that closed bashfully around Jack's slim fingers would not have crushed a butterfly. "Wishin' ye good luck an' happiness, ma'am," was the formula, but little varied.

Into the midst of them came old Bill Crooks. "Come on, boys!" he exclaimed. "There's a wedding spread up at my house, and I want every man of you there to drink good luck to the bride—and to the new firm of Crooks & Kent. No holding back, now. Come along, everybody!"

They came along, though most of them would have preferred to go down a bad piece of water on a single stick of pine, and their coming taxed the space of Crooks's dining-room—to say nothing of the commissariat and canteen—to the limit. They ate and drank solemnly, on their best behaviour and conscious of it, sipping the unaccustomed wines with reserved judgment.

"What'll be a dose of this?" whispered Regan, eying his champagne glass with suspicion. "The waitin' gyurls fill it up whenever I empty it. This makes five I've had and I can't feel it yet. Belike it acts suddint. I wouldn't want to get full here."

"Nor me," Cooley agreed. "They're all drinkin' it, an' none the worse. If they can stand it we can." He gulped down half a glass and thrust his tongue back and forth experimentally. "Champagne, hey? It has a puckery taste till it, but no rasp. It might be hard cider wid more fizz. There's no harm in it. I cud drink enough of it to float a log. Here's some lad speakin'. Listen to what he says."

They heard the health of the bride proposed in customary language; Joe's reply, embarrassed, jerky, brief.

"Speaking isn't Kent's strong point," a guest commented. Cooley glowered at him, resentful of the just criticism.

"He can talk when he has anything to say, and he can curse *fine!*" he affirmed. He led vociferous cheers as Joe sat down, and cheered almost equally hard when Crooks concluded five minutes of pointed remarks in which he announced the formation of the new firm.

But these cheers were as nothing to the leather-lunged roars that bade Jack and Joe farewell as they stepped into the carriage. With the cheers came showers of rice. Joe turned up his coat collar; but Jack laughed back through the fusillade of it, blowing kisses to her father, her girl friends, and the rivermen, impartially. And the memory of them stayed with the rough shantymen for years.

The train which bore Joe and his bride on their wedding journey clanked slowly through the yards following the line of the river. As it looped around a curve they could see, looking backward from the rear platform of the last coach which they had to themselves, the mills of Bill Crooks and of Joe Kent each flying a flag from the topmost point, the silver of the flowing water checkered with the black lines of the long booms and the herds of brown logs inside them. In the mills not a wheel turned that day. But steam was in the boilers, for as they looked it poured white from the roofs of the engine houses and the bellowing howls of two fire sirens bade them a joyous farewell.

Jack slipped her hand in Joe's.

"Are you glad?"

"Glad it's over? You bet I am!"

"No—glad we're married?"

"That's a nice question. And you know the answer."

"Of course I do," she admitted happily. "I suppose a wedding trip is a fine thing. Anyway, it's conventional. But—I'll be glad to come back home."

"Same here," he agreed. "There's lot to be done—a holy lot. I have to get right down to work. I want to take all the weight I can off your father's shoulders. That's up to me. Then, when you come to running two mills under one management, there must be all sorts of economies possible, if a fellow could only find out what they are. I don't want to let Wright do all the finding out for me. Yes, I'll be pretty busy."

"Well, you like the work. That's the main thing."

"That's so," he admitted. "I like it better all the time. I never knew what real fun was till I had to hustle for myself. A year ago I was no better than a big kid. I could feed myself and dress myself if somebody handed me the price, and that just about let me out. And at that I thought I was having a good time. A good time? Huh! Why, I didn't know I was alive. Oh, well ... we'll cut out business on this trip—not talk of it or think of it at all. Shall we?"

"No—o. I like to talk about it. It makes me think I'm helping. If I were a man——"

"I'm mighty glad you're not. Remember the time you wished you were a boy?"

"That was before——"

"Before what?"

"You know very well. Before I knew you thought anything of me."

"You are absolutely the best little girl in the world," he said with conviction. "I always loved you, Jack—ever since we were kids—only I didn't know it."

She gave his arm a quick little understanding hug, with a new womanly pride in the hard, swelling muscles that met the pressure. They stood close together, watching the last silvery reach of the river, burnished, mirror-like, lustrous beneath the sloping afternoon sun. They had been born beside it; as children they had played on it, in it; and they loved it as a part of their lives. It was a treasure stream, bearing to them year after year the loot of the northern forests—the great, brown sticks of pine. Changeless and yet ever changing it never failed to charm. Ages old but ever young it held its children in the spell of its eternal life. And so as it vanished, shut out by a landscape that seemed to rush backward as the train gathered speed, their eyes and

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THE END

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