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CONNIE MORGAN

IN THE

LUMBER CAMPS

BY

JAMES B. HENDRYX

AUTHOR OF "CONNIE MORGAN IN ALASKA," "CONNIE MORGAN WITH THE MOUNTED"

ILLUSTRATED

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CHAPTER I

CONNIE MORGAN GOES "OUTSIDE"

WITH an exclamation of impatience, Waseche Bill pushed a formidable looking volume from him and sat, pen in hand, scowling down at the sheet of writing paper upon the table before him. "I done give fo' dollahs fo' that dictionary down to Faihbanks an' it ain't wo'th fo' bits!"

"What's the matter with it?" grinned Connie Morgan, glancing across the table into the face of [2] his partner.

"The main matteh with it is that it ain't no good. It's plumb full of a lot of wo'ds that no one wouldn't know what yo' was talkin' about if yo' said 'em, an' the common ones a man has got some use fo' is left out."

"What word do you want? I learned to spell quite a lot of words in school."

"Gillum."

"What?"

"Gillum—I want to write a letteh to Mike Gillum. They ain't no betteh man nowheahs than Mike. He's known all along the Tanana an' in the loggin' woods outside, an' heah's this book that sets up to show folks how to spell, an' it cain't even spell Mike Gillum."

Connie laughed. "Gillum is a proper name," he explained, "and dictionaries don't print proper names."

"They might a heap betteh leave out some of the impropeh an' redic'lous ones they've got into 'em, then, an' put in some of the propeh ones. I ain't pleased with that book, nohow. It ain't no good. It claims fo' to show how to spell wo'ds, an' when yo' come to use it yo' got to know how to [3] spell the wo'd yo' huntin' fo' oah yo' cain't find it. The only wo'ds yo' c'n find when yo' want 'em is the ones yo' c'n spell anyhow, so what's the use of findin' 'em?"

"But, there's the definitions. It tells you what the words mean."

Waseche Bill snorted contemptuously. "What they mean!" he exclaimed. "Well, if yo' didn't know what they mean, yo' wouldn't be wantin' to use them, nohow, an' yo' wouldn't care a doggone how they was spelt, noah if they was spelt at all oah not. Fact is, I didn't give the matteh no thought when I bought it. If it had be'n a big deal I wouldn't have be'n took in, that way. In the hotel at Faihbanks, it was, when I was comin' in. The fellow I bought it off of seemed right pleased with the book. Why, he talked enough about it to of sold a claim. I got right tired listenin' to him, so I bought it. But, shucks, I might of know'd if the book had be'n any good he wouldn't have be'n so anxious to get red of it."

"Where is this Mike Gillum?" Connie asked, as he folded a paper and returned it to a little pile of similar papers that lay before him on the table.

"I don't jest recollec' now, but I got the place copied down in my notebook. It's some town [4] back in Minnesota."

"Minnesota!"

"Yes. Fact is we be'n so blamed busy all summeh right heah in Ten Bow, I'd plumb forgot about ouh otheh interests, till the nippy weatheh done reminded me of 'em."

"I didn't know we had any other interests," smiled the boy.

"It's this way," began Waseche Bill, as he applied a match to his pipe and settled back in his chair. "When I was down to the hospital last fall they brought in a fellow fo' an operation an' put him in the room next to mine. The first day he stuck his nose out the do', I seen it was Mike Gillum—we'd prospected togetheh oveh on the Tanana, yeahs back, an' yo' bet yo' boots I was glad to see someone that had been up heah in the big country an' could talk sensible about it without askin' a lot of fool questions about what do the dawgs drink in winteh if everythin's froze up? An' ain't we afraid we'll freeze to death? An' how high is the mountains? An' did you know my mother's cousin that went up to Alaska after gold in '98? While he was gettin' well, we had some [5] great old powwows, an' he told me how he done got sick of prospectin' an' went back to loggin'. He's a fo'man, now, fo' some big lumbeh syndicate in one of theih camps up in no'the'n Minnesota."

"One day we was settin' a smokin' ouh pipes an' he says to me, 'Waseche,' he says, 'you've got the dust to do it with, why don't you take a li'l flyeh in timbeh?' I allowed minin' was mo' in my line, an' he says, 'That's all right, but this heah timbeh business is a big proposition, too. Jest because a man's got one good thing a-goin', ain't no sign he'd ort to pass up anotheh. It's this way,' he says: 'Up to'ds the haid of Dogfish Riveh, they's a four-thousand-acre tract of timbeh

that's surrounded on three sides by the Syndicate holdin's. Fo' yeahs the Syndicate's be'n tryin' to get holt of this tract, but the man that owns it would die befo' he'd let 'em put an axe to a stick of it. They done him dirt some way a long time ago an' he's neveh fo'got it. He ain't got the capital to log it, an' he won't sell to the Syndicate. But he needs the money, an' if some private pahty come along that would take it off his hands an' agree to neveh sell it to the Syndicate, he could drive a mighty good ba'gain. I know logs,' Mike says, 'an' I'm tellin' yo' there ain't a betteh strip of timbeh in the State.' [6]

"'Why ain't no one grabbed it befo'?' I asks.

"'Because this heah McClusky that owns it is a mighty suspicious ol' man, an' he's tu'ned down about a hund'ed offehs because he know'd they was backed by the Syndicate.'

"'Maybe he'd tu'n down mine, if I'd make him one,' I says.

"Mike laughed. 'No,' he says, 'spite of the fact that I'm one of the Syndicate's fo'men, ol' man McClusky takes my wo'd fo' anything I tell him. Him an' my ol' dad come oveh f'om Ireland togetheh. I'd go a long ways around to do ol' Mac a good tu'n, an' he knows it. Fact is, it's me that put him wise that most of the offehs he's had come from the Syndicate—my contract with 'em callin' fo' handlin' loggin' crews, an' not helpin' 'em skin folks out of their timbeh. If I'd slip the we'd to Mac to sell to you, he'd sell.'"

Waseche refilled his pipe, and Connie waited eagerly for his big partner to proceed. "Well," continued the man, "he showed me how it was an awful good proposition, so I agreed to take it oveh. I wanted Mike should come in on it, but he wouldn't—Mike's squah as a die, an' he said his contract has got three mo' yeahs to run, an' it binds him not to engage in no private business oah entehprise whateveh while it's in fo'ce. [7]

"Befo'e Mike left the hospital he sent fo' McClusky, an' we closed the deal. That was last fall, an' I told Mike that as long as the timbeh was theah, I might's well staht gettin' it out. He wa'ned me to keep my eye on the Syndicate when I stahted to layin' 'em down, but befo'e he'd got a chance to give me much advice on the matteh, theah come a telegram fo' him to get to wo'k an' line up his crew an' get into the woods. Befo'e he left, though, he said he'd send me down a man that might do fo' a fo'man. Said he couldn't vouch for him no mo'n that he was a tiptop logman, an' capable of handlin' a crew in the woods. So he come, Jake Hurley, his name is, an' he's a big red Irishman. I didn't jest like his looks, an' some of his talk, but I didn't know wheah to get anyone else so I took a chance on him an' hired him to put a crew into the woods an' get out a small lot of timbeh." Waseche Bill crossed the room and, unlocking a chest, tossed a packet of papers onto the table. "It's all in theah," he said grimly. "They got out quite a mess of logs, an' in the spring when they was drivin' 'em down the Dogfish Riveh, to get 'em into the Mississippi, they fouled a Syndicate drive. When things got straightened out, we was fo'teen thousan' dollahs to the bad." [8]

The little clock ticked for a long time while Connie carefully examined the sheaf of papers. After a while he looked up. "Why, if it hadn't been for losing our logs we would have cleaned up a good profit!" he exclaimed.

HURLEY

Waseche Bill nodded. "Yes—if. But the fact is, we didn't clean up no profit, an' we got the tract on ouh hands with no one to sell it to, cause I passed ouh wo'd I wouldn't sell it—o' co'se McClusky couldn't hold us to that acco'din' to law, but I reckon, he won't have to. I got us into this heah mess unbeknownst to you, so I'll jest shouldeh the loss, private, an'——" [9]

"You'll *what!*" interrupted Connie, wrathfully. And then grinned good-humouredly as he detected the twinkle in Waseche Bill's eye.

"I said, I c'n get a raise out of yo' any time I'm a mind to try, cain't I?"

"You sure can," laughed the boy. "But just so you don't forget it, we settled this partnership business for good and all, a couple of years ago."

Waseche nodded as he glanced affectionately into the face of the boy. "Yes, son, I reckon that's done settled," he answered, gravely. "But the question is, now we ah into this thing, how we goin' to get out?"

"Fight out, of course!" exclaimed the boy, his eyes flashing. "The first thing for us to find out is, whether the fouling of that drive was accidental or was done purposely. And why we didn't get what was coming to us when the logs were sorted."

"I reckon that's done settled, as fah as *knowin'* it's conse'ned. Provin' it will be anotheh matteh." He produced a letter from his pocket. "This come up in the mail," he said. "It's from Mike Gillum. Mike, he writes a middlin' sho't letteh, but he says a heap. It was wrote from Riverville, Minnesota, on July the tenth." [10]

"Friend Waseche:

"Just found out Hurley is on pay roll of the Syndicate. Look alive.

"Mike."

"Double crossed us," observed the boy, philosophically.

"Yes, an' the wo'st of it is, he wouldn't sign up without a two-yeah contract. Said some yeahs a boss has bad luck an' he'd ort to be give a chance to make good."

"I'm glad of it," said Connie. "I think he'll get his chance, all right."

Waseche looked at his small partner quizzically. "What do yo' mean?" he asked.

"Let's go to bed. It's late," observed the boy, evasively. "Maybe in the morning we'll have it doped out."

At breakfast the following morning Connie looked at Waseche Bill, and Waseche looked at [11] Connie. "I guess it's up to me," smiled the boy.

"Yo' mean——?"

"I mean that the only way to handle this case is to handle it from the bottom up. First we've got to get this Jake Hurley with the goods, and when we've got him out of the way, jump in and show the Syndicate that they've run up against an outfit it don't pay to monkey with. That timber is ours, and we're going to have it!"

"That sums the case right pert as fa' as talkin' goes, but how we goin' to do it? If we go down theah an' kick Hurley out, we've got to pay him fo' a whole winteh's wo'k he ain't done an' I'd hate to do that. We don't neitheh one of us know enough about loggin' to run the camp, an' if we was to hunt up anotheh fo'man, chances is he'd be as bad as Hurley, mebbe wo'se."

"There's no use in both of us going. You're needed here, and besides there wouldn't be much you could do if you were there. Hurley don't know me, and I can go down and get enough on him by spring to put him away where he can think things over for a while. I've just finished a year's [12] experience in handling exactly such characters as he is."

Waseche Bill grinned. "I met up with Dan McKeeveh comin' in," he said. "From what I was able to getheh, heahin' him talk, I reckon they cain't be many bad men left oveh on the Yukon side."

"Dan was prejudiced," laughed Connie. "I did just what any one else would have done—what good men any place you put 'em have *got* to do, or they wouldn't be good men. After I'd found out what had to be done, I figured out the most sensible way of doing it, and then did it the best I knew how. I haven't lived with men like you, and Dan, and MacDougall, and the rest of the boys, for nothing——"

"Jest yo' stick to that way of doin', son, an', I reckon, yo'll find it's about all the Bible yo'll need. But, about this heah trip to the outside. I sho' do hate to have yo' go down theh, so fah away from anywhehs. S'posin' somethin' should happen to yo'. Why, I don't reckon I eveh would get oveh blamin' myself fo' lettin' yo' go."

"Any one would think I was a girl," smiled the boy. "But I guess if I can take care of myself up [13] here, I can handle anything I'll run up against outside."

"What do yo' aim to do when yo' get theah?"

"The first thing to do will be to hunt up Mike Gillum and have a talk with him. After that—well, after that, I'll know what to do."

Waseche Bill regarded the boy thoughtfully as he passed his fingers slowly back and forth along his stub-bearded jaw. "I reckon yo' will, son," he said, "from what I know of yo', an' what Dan done tol' me, comin' in, I jest reckon yo' will."

When Connie Morgan made up his mind to do a thing he went ahead and did it. Inside of a week the boy had packed his belongings, bid good-bye to Ten Bow, and started upon the journey that was to take him far from his beloved Alaska, and plunge him into a series of adventures that were to pit his wits against the machinations of a scheming corporation.

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[14]

CHAPTER II

HURLEY

WITH a long-drawn whistle the great trans-continental train ground to a stop at a tiny town that consisted simply of a red painted depot, a huge water tank, and a dozen or more low frame houses, all set in a little clearing that was hardly more than a notch in one of the parallel walls of pine that flanked the railroad. The coloured porter glanced contemptuously out of the window and grumbled at the delay. The conductor, a dapper little man of blue cloth and brass buttons, bustled importantly down the aisle and disappeared through the front door. Connie raised his window and thrust his head out. Other heads protruded from the long line of coaches, and up in front men were swinging from the platforms to follow the trainmen who were hurrying along the sides of the cars. Connie arose and made his way forward. Two days and nights in the cramped [15] quarters of the car had irked the boy, used as he was to the broad, open places, and it was with a distinct feeling of relief that he stepped to the ground and breathed deeply of the pine-scented air.

Upon a siding stood several flat cars onto which a dozen or more roughly dressed men were busily loading gear and equipment under the eye of a massive-framed giant of a man in a shirt of brilliant red flannel, who sat dangling his legs from the brake wheel of the end car. A stubble of red beard covered the man's undershot jaw. The visor of a greasy plush cap, pushed well back upon his head, disclosed a shock of red hair that nearly met the shaggy eyebrows beneath which a pair of beady eyes kept tab on the movements of his crew. To the stalled train, and the people who passed close beside him, the man gave no heed.

Up ahead, some eight or ten rods in front of the monster engine that snorted haughty impatience to be gone, Connie saw the cause of the delay. A heavy, underslung logging wagon was stalled directly upon the tracks, where it remained fixed despite the efforts of the four big horses that were doing their utmost to move it in response to a loud string of abusive epithets [16] and the stinging blows of a heavy whip which the driver wielded with the strength of a husky arm. A little knot of men collected about the wagon, and the driver, abandoning his vain attempt to start the load, addressed the crowd in much the same language he had used toward the horses. The train conductor detached himself from the group and hurried toward the flat cars.

"Hey, you," he piped, "are you the boss of this crew?"

The huge man upon the brake wheel paid him no heed, but bawled a profane reprimand for the misplacing of a coil of wire line.

"Hey, you, I say!" The little conductor was fairly dancing impatience. "You, Red Shirt! Are you the boss?"

The wire line having been shifted to suit him, the other condescended to glare down into the speaker's face. "I be—what's loose with you?"

"Get that wagon off the track! You've held us up ten minutes already! It's an outrage!"

"Aw, go chase yersilf! Whad'ye s'pose I care av yer tin minutes late, er tin hours? I've got trouble av me own."

"You get that wagon moved!" shrilled the conductor. "You're obstructing the United States [17] mail, and I guess you know what that means!"

Reference to the mail evidently had its effect upon the boss, for he very deliberately clambered to the ground and made his way leisurely toward the stalled wagon. "Give 'em the gad, ye wooden head! What ye standin' there wid yer mout' open fer?"

Once more the driver plied his heavy lash and the big horses strained to the pull. But it was of no avail.

"They can't pull it, it ain't any good to lick 'em," remonstrated the engineer. "A couple of you boys climb up and throw some of that stuff off. We can't wait here all day."

The fireman and the brakeman started toward the load, but were confronted by the glowering boss. "Ye'll lay off a couple av trips while they fan ye back to life, av ye try ut!" he roared. The men turned back, and the boss addressed the engineer. "You try ut yersilf, av ye're lookin' fer a nice little lay-off in the hospital. Av ye lay here all day an' all night, too, ye've got no wan but yer company to thank. Who was ut put them rotten planks in that crossin'?"

The engineer possessed a certain diplomacy that the conductor did not. [18]

"Sure, it's the company's fault. Any one can see that. They've got no business putting such rotten stuff into their crossings. I didn't want to butt in on you, boss, but if you'll just tell us what to do we'll help you get her out of there."

The boss regarded him with suspicion, but the engineer was smiling in a friendly fashion, and the boss relented a little. "Mostly, ut's the company's fault, but partly ut's the fault av that blockhead av a teamster av mine. He ain't fit to drive a one-horse phaeton fer an owld woman's home." While the boss talked he eyed the stalled wagon critically. "Come over here, a couple av you sleepwalkers!" he called, and when the men arrived from the flat cars, he ripped out his orders almost in a breath. "Git a plank befront that hind wheel to ride ut over the rail! You frog-eater, there, that calls yersilf a teamster—cramp them horses hard to the right! Freeze onto the spokes now, ye sons av rest, an' ROLL 'ER!" Once more the big horses threw their weight into the traces, and the men on the wheels lifted and strained but the wagon held fast. For a single

instant the boss looked on, then with a growl he leaped toward the wagon. [19]

"Throw the leather into 'em, Frenchy! Make thim leaders pull up!" Catching the man on the offending hind wheel by the shoulder he sent him spinning to the side of the track, and stooping, locked his thick fingers about a spoke, set his great shoulder against the tire and with legs spread wide, heaved upward. The load trembled, hesitated an instant, and moved slowly, the big boss fairly lifting the wheel up the short incline. A moment later it rolled away toward the flat cars, followed by the boss and his crew.

"Beef and bluff," grinned Connie to himself as the crowd of passengers returned to the coaches.

Connie found Mike Gillum busily stowing potatoes in an underground root cellar. "He's almost as big as the man with the red shirt," thought the boy as he watched Mike read the note Waseche Bill had given him before he left Ten Bow.

The man paused in the middle to stare incredulously at the boy. "D'ye mane," he asked, in his rich Irish brogue, "thot ut's yersilf's the pardner av Waseche Bill—a kid loike you, the pardner av *him*?"

Connie laughed; and unconsciously his shoulders stiffened. "Yes," he answered proudly, [20] "we've been partners for two years."

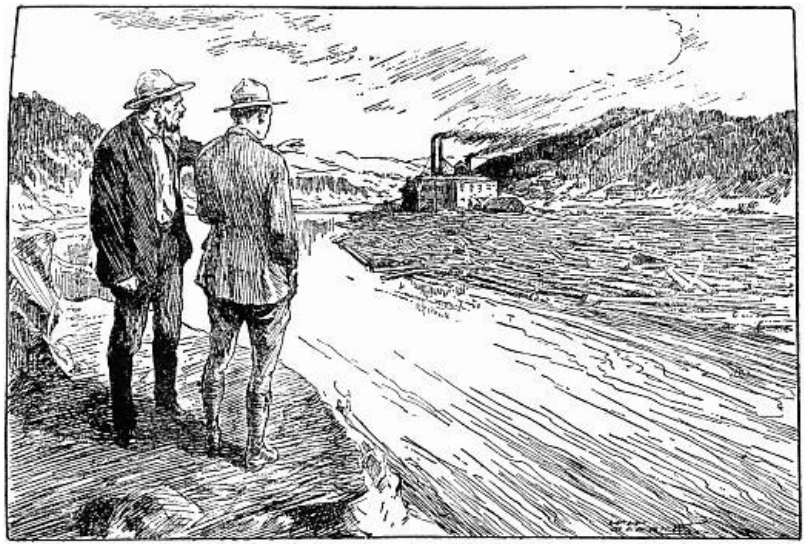
Still the man appeared incredulous. "D'ye mane ye're the wan thot he wuz tellin' thrailed him beyant the Ogilvies into the Lillimuit? An' put in the time whilst he wuz in the hospital servin' wid the Mounted? Moind ye, lad, Oi've be'n in the Narth mesilf, an' Oi know summat av it's ways."

"Yes, but maybe Waseche bragged me up more than——"

Mike Gillum interrupted him by thrusting forth a grimy hand. "Br-ragged ye up, is ut! An-ny one thot c'n do the things ye've done, me b'y, don't nade no braggin' up. Ut's proud Oi am to know ye—Waseche towld me ye wuz ondly a kid, but Oi had in me moind a shtrappin' young blade av mebbe ut's twinty-foor or -five, not a wee shtrip av a lad loike ye. Come on in the house till Oi wash up a bit, thim praties has got me back fair bruk a'ready."

The big Irishman would not hear of the boy's putting up at a hotel, and after supper the two sat upon the foreman's little veranda that overlooked the river and talked until far into the night.

"So ye've got to kape yer oye on um, lad," the Irishman concluded, after a long discourse upon [21] the ins and outs, and whys and wherefores of the logging situation on Dogfish. "Ut's mesilf'll give you all the help Oi can, faylin' raysponsible fer sindin' him to Waseche. There's divilmint in the air fer this winter. The Syndicate's goin' to put a camp on Dogfish below ye, same as last winter. Oi've wor-rked fer um long enough to know ut's only to buck you folks they're doin' ut, fer their plans wuz not to do an-ny cuttin' on the Dogfish tract fer several years to come. Whin Oi heard they wuz goin' to put a camp there Oi applied fer the job av bossin' ut, but they towld me Oi wuz nayded over on Willow River." Mike Gillum knocked the dottle from his pipe and grinned broadly. "'Twuz a complimint they paid me," he said. "They know me loike Oi know thim—av there's crooked wor-ruk to be done in a camp, they take care that Oi ain't the boss av ut. But Willow River is only tin miles back—due narth av the McClusky tract."



MIKE GILLUM TOOK CONNIE TO THE RIVER WHERE MILES OF BOOMS HELD MILLIONS OF FEET OF LOGS

The next morning Mike Gillum took Connie to the river where miles of booms held millions of feet of logs which awaited their turn at the sawmills whose black smoke belched from stacks at [22] some distance downstream where the river plunged over the apron of the dam in a mad whirl of white water.

"How can they tell which mill the logs are to go to?" asked the boy, as he gazed out over the acres of boomed timber.

"Each log carries uts mark, they're sorted in the river. We'll walk on down where ye c'n see um jerked drippin' to the saws."

"Does Hurley live here?" asked Connie, as the two followed the river bank toward the dam.

"Naw, he lives at Pine Hook, down the road a ways. Ut's about time he wuz showin' up, though. He lays in his supplies an' fills in his crew here. He towld me last spring he wuz goin' to run two camps this winter." They were close above the dam and had to raise their voices to make themselves heard above the roar of the water that dashed over the apron.

"Look!" cried Connie, suddenly, pointing toward a slender green canoe that floated in the current at a distance of a hundred yards or so from shore, and the same distance above the falls. "There's a woman in it and she's in trouble!" The big Irishman looked, shading his eyes with his [23] hands. [24]

"She's losin' ground!" he exclaimed. "She's caught in the suck av the falls!" The light craft was pointed upstream and the woman was paddling frantically, but despite her utmost efforts the canoe was being drawn slowly toward the brink of the white water apron.

With a roar the big Irishman sprang to the water's edge and raced up the bank toward a tiny wharf to which were tied several skiffs with their oars in the locks. Connie measured the distance with his eye. "He'll never make it!" he decided, and jerking off coat and shoes, rushed to the water. "Keep paddling, ma'am!" he called at the top of his lungs, and plunged in. With swift, sure strokes the boy struck out for the canoe. The woman saw him coming and redoubled her efforts.

"Come back, ye idiot!" bellowed a voice from the bank, but Connie did not even turn his head. He had entered the water well upstream from the little craft, and the current bore him down upon it as he increased his distance from shore. A moment later he reached up and grasped the gunwale. "Keep paddling!" he urged, as he drew himself slowly over the bow, at the same time [25] keeping the canoe in perfect balance. "Where's your other paddle?" he shouted.

"There's—only—this," panted the woman.

"Give it here!" cried the boy sharply, "and lie flat in the bottom! We've got to go over the dam!"

"No, no, no!" shrieked the woman, "we'll be killed! Several——"

With a growl of impatience, Connie wrenched the paddle from her hands. "Lie down, or I'll knock you down!" he thundered, and with a moan of terror the woman sank to the bottom of the canoe. Kneeling low, the boy headed the frail craft for a narrow strip of water that presented an unbroken, oily surface as it plunged over the apron. On either hand the slope showed only the churning white water. Connie gave one glance toward the bank where a little knot of men had collected, and the next moment the canoe shot, head on, straight over the brink of the falls. For an instant it seemed to hang suspended with half its length hanging over, clear of the water. Then it shot downward to bury its bow in the smother of boiling churning, white water at the foot of the apron. For a moment it seemed to Connie as though the canoe were bound to be swamped. [26] It rolled loggily causing the water it had shipped to slosh over the clothing and face of the limp form of the woman in the bottom. The boy was afraid she would attempt to struggle free of it, but she lay perfectly still. She had fainted. The canoe hesitated for a moment, wobbling uncertainly, as the overroll at the foot of the falls held it close against the apron, then it swung heavily into the grip of an eddy and Connie at length succeeded in forcing it toward the bank, wallowing so low in the water that the gunwales were nearly awash.

Eager hands grasped the bow as it scraped upon the shore, and while the men lifted the still form from the bottom, Connie slipped past them and made his way to the place he had left his coat and shoes.

Mike Gillum met him at the top of the bank.

"Arrah! Me laddie, ut's a gr-rand thrick ye pulled! No wan but a *tillicum* av the Narth country c'ud of done ut! Oi see fer mesilf how ut come ye're the pardner av Waseche Bill. Av Oi had me doubts about yer bitin' off more thin ye c'ud chaw wid Hurley, Oi've got over 'em, now, an'—" He [27] stopped abruptly and glanced toward the river. "Shpakin' av Hurley—there he comes, now!" he whispered, and Connie glanced up to see a huge man advancing toward them at the head of a little group that approached from the point where he had landed the canoe. The boy stared in amazement—it was the red-shirted giant of the stalled wagon.

"So that's Hurley," said he, quietly. "Well, here's where I strike him for a job."

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[28]

CHAPTER III

INTO THE WOODS

THE upshot of Connie Morgan's interview with Hurley, the big red-shirted camp boss, was that the boss hired him with the injunction to show up bright and early the following morning, as the train that was to haul the outfit to the Dogfish Spur would leave at daylight.

"'Tiz a foine job ye've got—wor-rkin' f'r forty dollars a month in yer own timber," grinned big Mike Gillum, as he packed the tobacco into the bowl of his black pipe, when the two found themselves once more seated upon the Syndicate foreman's little veranda at the conclusion of the evening meal.

Connie laughed. "Yes, but it will amount to a good deal more than forty dollars a month if I can save the timber. We lost fourteen thousand dollars last year because those logs got mixed. I [29] don't see yet how he worked it. You say the logs are all branded."

"Who knows what brands he put on 'em? Or, wuz they branded at all? They wuz sorted in th' big river but the drive was fouled in the Dogfish. S'pose the heft of your logs wuz branded wid the Syndicate brand—or no brand at all? The wans that wuz marked for the Syndicate w'd go to Syndicate mills, an' the wans that wuzn't branded w'd go into the pool, to be awarded pro raty to all outfits that had logs in the drive."

"I'll bet the right brand will go onto them this year!" exclaimed the boy.

Mike Gillum nodded. "That's what ye're there for. But, don't star-rt nawthin' 'til way along towards spring. Jake Hurley's a boss that can get out the logs—an' that's what you want. Av ye wuz to tip off yer hand too soon, the best ye c'd do w'd be to bust up the outfit wid nawthin' to show f'r the season's expenses. Keep yer eyes open an' yer mout' shut. Not only ye must watch Hurley, but keep an eye on the scaler, an' check up the time book, an' the supplies—av course ye c'n only do the two last av he puts ye to clerking, an' Oi'm thinkin' that's what he'll do. Ut's either clerk or cookee f'r you, an most an-ny wan w'd do f'r a cookee." [30]

The foreman paused, and Connie saw a twinkle in his eye as he continued: "Ye see, sometimes a boss overestimates the number av min he's got workin'. Whin he makes out the pay roll he writes in a lot av names av min that's mebbe worked f'r him years back, an' is dead, or mebbe it's just a lot av names av min that ain't lived yet, but might be born sometime; thin whin pay day comes the boss signs the vouchers an' sticks the money in his pockets. Moind ye, I ain't sayin' Hurley done that but he'd have a foine chanct to, wid his owner way up in Alaska. An' now we'll be goin' to bed f'r ye have to git up early. Oi'll be on Willow River; av they's an-nything Oi c'n do, ye c'n let me know."

Connie thanked his friend, and before he turned in, wrote a letter to his partner in Ten Bow:

"DEAR WASECHE:

"I'm O.K. How are you? Got the job. Don't write. Mike Gillum is O. K. See you in the spring.

"Yours truly,
"C. MORGAN."

Before daylight Connie was at the siding where the two flat cars loaded at Pine Hook, and two [31] box cars that contained the supplies and the horses were awaiting the arrival of the freight train that was to haul them seventy miles to Dogfish Spur. Most of the crew was there before him. Irishmen, Norwegians, Swedes, Frenchmen, and two or three Indians, about thirty-five in all, swarmed upon the cars or sat in groups upon the ground. Hurley was here, there, and everywhere, checking up his crew, and giving the final round of inspection to his supplies.

A long whistle sounded, and the headlight of a locomotive appeared far down the track. Daylight was breaking as the heavy train stopped to pick up the four cars. Connie climbed with the others to the top of a box car and deposited his turkey beside him upon the running board. The turkey consisted of a grain sack tied at either end with a rope that passed over the shoulder, and contained the outfit of clothing that Mike Gillum had advised him to buy. The tops of the cars were littered with similar sacks, their owners using them as seats or pillows.

As the train rumbled into motion and the buildings of the town dropped into the distance, the [32] conductor made his way over the tops of the cars followed closely by Hurley. Together they counted the men and the conductor checked the count with a memorandum. Then he went back to the caboose, and Hurley seated himself beside Connie.

"Ever work in the woods?" he asked.

"No."

"Be'n to school much?"

"Yes, some."

"'Nough to figger up time books, an' keep track of supplies, an' set down the log figgers when they're give to you?"

"I think so."

"Ye look like a smart 'nough kid—an' ye've got nerve, all right. I tried to holler ye back when I seen ye swimmin' out to that canoe yeste'day—I didn't think you could make it—that woman was

a fool. She'd ort to drownded. But, what I was gettin' at, is this: I'm a goin' to put you to clerkin'. Clerkin' in a log camp is a good job—most bosses was clerks onct. A clerk's s'posed to make hisself handy around camp an' keep the books—I'll show you about them later. We're goin' in early this year, 'cause I'm goin' to run two camps an' we got to lay out the new one an' git it built. [33] We won't start gittin' out no timber for a month yet. I'll git things a goin' an' then slip down an' pick up my crew."

"Why, haven't you got your crew?" Connie glanced at the men who lay sprawled in little groups along the tops of the cars.

"Part of it. I'm fetchin' out thirty-five this time. That's 'nough to build the new camp an' patch up the old one, but when we begin gittin' out the logs, this here'll just about make a crew for the new camp. I figger to work about fifty in the old one."

"Do you boss both camps?"

Hurly grinned. "Don't I look able?"

"You sure do," agreed the boy, with a glance at the man's huge bulk.

"They'll only be three or four miles apart, an' I'll put a boss in each one, an' I'll be the walkin' boss." The cars jerked and swayed, as the train roared through the jack pine country.

"I suppose this was all big woods once," ventured the boy.

"Naw—not much of it wasn't—not this jack pine and scrub spruce country. You can gener'lly [34] always tell what was big timber, an' what wasn't. Pine cuttin's don't seed back to pine. These jack pines ain't young pine—they're a different tree altogether. Years back, the lumbermen wouldn't look at nawthin' but white pine, an' only the very best of that—but things is different now. Yaller pine and spruce looks good to 'em, an' they're even cuttin' jack pine. They work it up into mine timbers, an' posts, an' ties, an' paper pulp. What with them an' the pig iron loggers workin' the ridges, this here country'll grow up to hazel brush, and berries, an' weeds, 'fore your hair turns grey."

"What are pig iron loggers?" asked the boy.

"The hardwood men. They git out the maple an' oak an' birch along the high ground an' ridges —they ain't loggers, they jest think they are."

"You said pine cuttings don't seed back to pine?"

"Naw, it seems funny, but they don't. Old cuttin's grow up to popple and scrub oak, like them with the red leaves, yonder; or else to hazel brush and berries. There used to be a few patches of pine through this jack pine country, but it was soon cut off. This here trac' we're workin' is about [35] as good as there is left. With a good crew we'd ort to make a big cut this winter."

The wheels pounded noisily at the rail ends as the boss's eyes rested upon the men who sat talking and laughing among themselves. "An' speakin' of crews, this here one's goin' to need some cullin'." He fixed his eyes on the boy with a look almost of ferocity. "An' here's another thing that a clerk does, that I forgot to mention: He hears an' sees a whole lot more'n he talks. You'll bunk in the shack with me an' the scaler—an' what's talked about in there's *our* business—d'ye git me?"

Connie returned the glance fearlessly. "I guess you'll know I can keep a thing or two under my cap when we get better acquainted," he answered The reply seemed to satisfy Hurley, who continued,

"As I was sayin', they's some of them birds ain't goin' to winter through in no camp of mine. See them three over there on the end of that next car, a talkin' to theirselfs. I got an idee they're I. W. W.'s—mistrusted they was when I hired 'em."

"What are I. W. W.'s?" Connie asked.

"They're a gang of sneakin' cutthroats that call theirselfs the Industrial Workers of the World, [36] though why they claim they're workers is more'n what any one knows. They won't work, an' they won't let no one else work. The only time they take a job is when they think there's a chanct to sneak around an' put the kibosh on whatever work is goin' on. They tell the men they're downtrod by capital an' they'd ort to raise up an' kill off the bosses an' grab everything fer theirselfs. Alongside of them birds, rattlesnakes an' skunks is good companions."

"Aren't there any laws that will reach them?"

"Naw," growled Hurley in disgust. "When they git arrested an' convicted, the rest of 'em raises such a howl that capital owns the courts, an' the judges is told to hang all the workin' men they kin, an' a lot of rot like that, till the governors git cold feet an' pardon them. If the government used 'em right, it'd outlaw the whole kaboodle of 'em. Some governors has got the nerve to tell 'em where to head in at—Washington, an' California, an' Minnesota, too, is comin' to it. They're gittin' in their dirty work in the woods—but believe me, they won't git away with nothin' in my camps! I'm just a-layin' an' a-honin' to tear loose on 'em. Them three birds over [37] there is goin' to need help when I git through with 'em."

"Why don't you fire 'em now?"

"Not me. I *want* 'em to start somethin'! I want to git a crack at 'em. There's three things don't go in my camps—gamblin', booze, an' I. W. W.'s. I've logged from the State of Maine to Oregon an' halfways back. I've saw good camps an' bad ones a-plenty, an' I never seen no trouble in the woods that couldn't be charged up ag'in' one of them three."

The train stopped at a little station and Hurley rose with a yawn. "Guess I'll go have a look at the horses," he said, and clambered down the ladder at the end of the car.

The boss did not return when the train moved on and the boy sat upon the top of the jolting, swaying box car and watched the ever changing woods slip southward. Used as he was to the

wide open places, Connie gazed spellbound at the dazzling brilliance of the autumn foliage. Poplar and birch woods, flaunting a sea of bright yellow leaves above white trunks, were interspersed with dark thickets of scarlet oak and blazing sumac, which in turn gave place to the dark green sweep of a tamarack swamp, or a long stretch of scrubby jack pine. At frequent [38] intervals squared clearings appeared in the endless succession of forest growth, where little groups of cattle browsed in the golden stubble of a field. A prim, white painted farmhouse, with its big red barn and its setting of conical grain stacks would flash past, and again the train would plunge between the walls of vivid foliage, or roar across a trestle, or whiz along the shore of a beautiful land-locked lake whose clear, cold waters sparkled dazzlingly in the sunlight as the light breeze rippled its surface.

Every few miles, to the accompaniment of shrieking brake shoes, the train would slow to a stop, and rumble onto a siding at some little flat town, to allow a faster train to hurl past in a rush of smoke, and dust, and deafening roar, and whistle screams. Then the wheezy engine would nose out onto the main track, back into another siding, pick up a box car or two, spot an empty at the grain spout of a sagging red-brown elevator, and couple onto the train again with a jolt that threatened to bounce the cars from the rails, and caused the imprisoned horses to stamp and snort nervously. The conductor would wave his arm and, after a series of preliminary jerks that [39] threatened to tear out the drawbars, the train would rumble on its way.

At one of these stations a longer halt than usual was made while train crew and lumberjacks crowded the counter of a slovenly little restaurant upon whose fly swarming counter doughnuts, sandwiches, and pies of several kinds reposed beneath inverted semispherical screens that served as prisons for innumerable flies.

"The ones that wiggles on yer tongue is flies, an' the ones that don't is apt to be blueberries," explained a big lumberjack to Connie as he bit hugely into a wedge of purplish pie. Connie selected doughnuts and a bespeckled sandwich which he managed to wash down with a few mouthfuls of mud-coloured coffee, upon the surface of which floated soggy grounds and flakes of soured milk.

"Flies is healthy," opined the greasy proprietor, noting the look of disgust with which the boy eyed the filthy layout.

"I should think they would be. You don't believe in starving them," answered the boy, and a roar of laughter went up from the loggers who proceeded to "kid" the proprietor unmercifully as [40] he relapsed into surly mutterings about the dire future in store for "fresh brats."

During the afternoon the poplar and birch woods and the flaming patches of scarlet oak and sumac, gave place to the dark green of pines. The farms became fewer and farther between, and the distance increased between the little towns, where, instead of grain elevators, appeared dilapidated sawmills, whose saws had long lain idle. Mere ghosts of towns, these, whose day had passed with the passing of the timber that had been the sole excuse for their existence. But, towns whose few remaining inhabitants doggedly clung to their homes and assured each other with pathetic persistence, as they grubbed in the sandy soil of their stump-studded gardens, that with the coming of the farmers the town would step into its own as the centre of a wonderfully prosperous agricultural community. Thus did the residents of each dead little town believe implicitly in the future of their own town, and prophesy with jealous vehemence the absolute decadence of all neighbouring towns.

Toward the middle of the afternoon a boy, whom Connie had noticed talking and laughing [41] with the three lumberjacks Hurley suspected of being I. W. W.'s, walked along the tops of the swaying cars and seated himself beside him. Producing paper and tobacco he turned his back to the wind and rolled a cigarette, which he lighted, and blew a cloud of smoke into Connie's face. He was not a prepossessing boy, with his out-bulging forehead and stooping shoulders. Apparently he was about two years Connie's senior.

"Want the makin's?" he snarled, by way of introduction.

"No thanks. I don't smoke."

The other favoured him with a sidewise glance. "Oh, you don't, hey? My name's Steve Motley, an' I'm a bear-cat—*me!* I'm cookee of this here camp—be'n in the woods goin' on two years. Ever work in the woods?"

Connie shook his head. "No," he answered, "I never worked in the woods."

"Whatcha done, then? You don't look like no city kid."

"Why, I've never done much of anything to speak of—just knocked around a little."

"Well, you'll knock around some more 'fore you git through this winter. We're rough guys, us [42] lumberjacks is, an' we don't like greeners. I 'spect though, you'll be runnin' home to yer ma 'fore snow flies. It gits forty below, an' the snow gits three foot deep in the woods." Connie seemed unimpressed by this announcement, and Steve continued: "They say you're goin' to do the clerkin' fer the outfit. Hurley, he wanted me to do the clerkin', but I wouldn't do no clerkin' fer no man. Keep all them different kind of books an' git cussed up one side an' down t'other fer chargin' 'em up with somethin' they claim they never got out'n the wanagan. Not on yer life—all I got to do is help the cook. We're gettin' clost to Dogfish Spur now, an' the camp's twenty-seven mile off'n the railroad. Guess you won't feel lost nor nothin' when you git so far back in the big sticks, hey?"

Connie smiled. "That's an awfully long ways," he admitted.

"You bet it is! An' the woods is full of wolves an' bears, an' bobcats! If I was figgerin' on quittin' I'd quit 'fore I got into the timber."

The train was slowing down, and Steve arose. "Y'ain't told me yer name, greener! Y'better [43]

learn to be civil amongst us guys."

Connie met the bullying look of the other with a smile. "My name is Connie Morgan," he said, quietly, "and, I forgot to mention it, but I did hold down one job for a year."

"In the woods?"

"Well, not exactly. Over across the line it was."

"Acrost the line—in Canady? What was *you* doin' in Canady?"

"Taming 'bear-cats' for the Government," answered the boy, dryly, and rose to his feet just as Hurley approached, making his way over the tops of the cars.

"You wait till I git holt of you!" hissed Steve, scowling. "You think y're awful smart when y're around in under Hurley's nose. But I'll show you how us guys handles the boss's pets when he ain't around." The boy hurried away as Hurley approached.

"Be'n gittin' in his brag on ye?" grinned the boss, as his eyes followed the retreating back. "He's no good—all mouth. But he's bigger'n what you be. If he tries to start anything just lam him over the head with anything that's handy. He'll leave you be, onct he's found out you mean business." [44]

"Oh, I guess we won't have any trouble," answered Connie, as he followed Hurley to the ground.

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[45]

CHAPTER IV

CONNIE TAMES A BEAR-CAT

AS the cars came to rest upon the spur, plank runways were placed in position and the horses led to the ground and tied to trees. All hands pitched into the work of unloading. Wagons appeared and were set up as if by magic as, under the boss's direction, supplies and equipment were hustled from the cars.

"You come along with us," said Hurley, indicating a tote wagon into which men were loading supplies. "I'm takin' half a dozen of the boys out tonight to kind of git the camp in shape. It'll take four or five days to haul this stuff an' you can help along till the teams start comin', an' then you've got to check the stuff in. Here's your lists—supplies on that one, and equipment on this. Don't O. K. nothin' till it's in the storehouse or the cook's camp or wherever it goes to."

Connie took the papers and, throwing his turkey onto the load, climbed up and took his place [46] beside the men. The teamster cracked his whip and the four rangy horses started away at a brisk trot.

For five miles or so, as it followed the higher ground of a hardwood ridge, the road was fairly good, then it plunged directly into the pines and after that there was no trotting. Mile after mile the horses plodded on, the wheels sinking half-way to the hubs in the soft dry sand, or, in the lower places, dropping to the axles into chuck holes and plowing through sticky mud that fell from the spokes and felloes in great chunks. Creeks were forded, and swamps crossed on long stretches of corduroy that threatened momentarily to loosen every bolt in the wagon. As the team swung from the hardwood ridge, the men leaped to the ground and followed on foot. They were a cheerful lot, always ready to lend a hand in helping the horses up the hill, or in lifting a wheel from the clutch of some particularly bad chuck hole. Connie came in for a share of good-natured banter, that took the form, for the most part, of speculation upon how long he would last "hoofing it on shank's mares," and advice as to how to stick on the wagon when he should get tired out. [47] The boy answered all the chafing with a smiling good humour that won the regard of the rough lumberjacks as his tramping mile after mile through the sand and mud without any apparent fatigue won their secret admiration.

"He's a game un," whispered Saginaw Ed, as he tramped beside Swede Larson, whose pale blue eyes rested upon the back of the sturdy little figure that plodded ahead of them.

"Yah, ay tank hay ban' valk befoor. Hay ain' drag hees foot lak he gon' for git tire out queek. Ay bat ju a tollar he mak de camp wit'out ride."

"You're on," grinned Saginaw, "an', at that, you got an even break. I can't see he's wobblin' none yet, an' it's only nine or ten miles to go. I wished we had that wapple-jawed, cigarette-smokin' cookee along—I'd like to see this un show him up."

"Hay show ham up a'rat—ju yoost vait."

Twilight deepened and the forest road became dim with black shadows.

"The moon'll be up directly," observed Hurley, who was walking beside Connie. "But it don't [48] give none too much light, nohow, here in the woods. I've got to go on ahead and pilot."

"I'll go with you," said the boy, and Hurley eyed him closely.

"Say, kid, don't let these here jay-hawkers talk ye inter walkin' yerself to death. They don't like nawthin' better'n to make a greener live hard. Let 'em yelp theirself hoarse an' when you git tuckered jest you climb up beside Frenchy there an' take it easy. You got to git broke in kind of slow to start off with an' take good care of yer feet."

"Oh, I'm not tired. I like to walk," answered the boy, and grinned to himself. "Wonder what he'd think if he knew about some of the trails I've hit. I guess it would make his little old twenty-mile hike shrink some."

As they advanced into the timber the road became worse, and Connie, who had never handled horses, wondered at the dexterity with which Frenchy guided the four-horse tote-team among stumps and chuck holes, and steep pitches. Every little way it was necessary for Hurley to call a halt, while the men chopped a log, or a thick mat of tops from the road. It was nearly midnight when the team swung into a wide clearing so overgrown that hardly more than the roofs of the [49] low log buildings showed above the tops of the brambles and tall horseweed stalks.

"All right, boys!" called the boss. "We won't bother to unload only what we need for supper. Don't start no fire in the big range tonight. Here, you, Saginaw, you play cook. You can boil a batch of tea and fry some ham on the office stove—an' don't send no more sparks up the stovepipe than what you need to. If fire got started in these weeds we'd have two camps to build instead of one; Swede, you help Frenchy with the horses, an' yous other fellows fill them lanterns an' git what you need unloaded an' cover the wagon with a tarp."

"What can I do?" asked Connie. Hurley eyed him with a laugh. "Gosh sakes! Ain't you petered out yet? Well, go ahead and help Saginaw with the supper—the can stuff and dishes is on the hind end of the load."

The following days were busy ones for Connie. Men and teams laboured over the road, hauling supplies and equipment from the railway, while other men attacked the weed-choked clearing with brush-scythes and mattocks, and made necessary repairs about the camp. It was [50] the boy's duty to check all incoming material whether of supplies or equipment, and between the

arrival of teams he found time to make himself useful in the chinking of camp buildings and in numerous other ways.

"I'll show you about the books, now," said Hurley one evening as they sat in the office, or boss's camp, as the small building that stood off by itself was called. This room was provided with two rude pine desks with split log stools. A large air-tight stove occupied the centre of the floor, and two double-tier bunks were built against the wall. The wanagan chests were also ranged along the log wall into which pins had been inserted for the hanging of snow-shoes, rifles, and clothing.

The boss took from his desk several books. "This one," he began, "is the wanagan book. If a wanagan book is kep' right ye never have no trouble—if it ain't ye never have nawthin' else. Some outfits gouge the men on the wanagan—I don't. I don't even add haulin' cost to the price—they can git tobacker an' whatever they need jest as cheap here as what they could in town. But they've be'n cheated so much with wanagans that they expect to be. The best way to keep 'em [51] from growlin' is to name over the thing an' the price to 'em after they've bought it, even if it's only a dime's worth of tobacker. Then jest name off the total that's ag'in' 'em—ye can do that by settin' it down to one side with a pencil each time. That don't never give them a chanct to kick, an' they soon find it out. I don't run no 'dollar you got, dollar you didn't get, an' dollar you ort to got' outfit. They earn what's comin' to 'em. Some augers they might as well gouge 'em 'cause they go an' blow it all in anyhow, soon as they get to town—but what's that any of my business? It's theirn.

"This here book is the time book. Git yer pen, now, an' I'll call ye off the names an' the wages an' you can set 'em down." When the task was completed the boss continued: "Ye know about the supply book, an' here's the log book—but ye won't need that fer a while yit. I've got to cruise around tomorrow an' find a location fer the new camp. I want to git it laid out as quick as I can so the men can git to cuttin' the road through. Then they can git to work on the buildin's while I go back an' fill me out a crew.

"Wish't you'd slip over to the men's camp an' tell Saginaw I want to see him. I'll make him [52] straw boss while I am gone—the men like him, an' at the same time they know he won't stand for no monkey business."

"What's a straw boss?" asked the boy.

"He's the boss that's boss when the boss ain't around," explained Hurley, as Connie put on his cap and proceeded to the men's camp, a long log building from whose windows yellow lamplight shone. The moment he opened the door he was thankful indeed, that Hurley had invited him to share the boss's camp. Although the night was not cold, a fire roared in the huge box stove that occupied the centre of the long room. A fine drizzle had set in early in the afternoon, and the drying racks about the stove were ladened with the rain-dampened garments of the men. Steam from these, mingled with the smoke from thirty-odd pipes and the reek of drying rubbers and socks, rendered the air of the bunk house thick with an odorous fog that nearly stifled Connie as he stepped into the superheated interior.

Seated upon an upper bunk with his feet dangling over the edge, one of the men was playing [53] vociferously upon a cheap harmonica, while others sat about upon rude benches or the edges of bunks listening or talking. The boy made his way over the uneven floor, stained with dark splotches of tobacco juice, toward the farther end of the room, where Saginaw Ed was helping Frenchy mend a piece of harness.

As he passed a bunk midway of the room, Steve rose to his feet and confronted him. "Ha! Here's the greener kid—the boss's pet that's too good to bunk in the men's camp! Whatchu doin' in here? Did Hurley send you after some strap oil?" As the two boys stood facing each other in the middle of the big room the men saw that the cookee was the taller and the heavier of the two. The harmonica stopped and the men glanced in grinning expectation at the two figures. Steve's sneering laugh sounded startingly loud in the sudden silence. "He made his brag he used to tame bear-cats over in Canady!" he said. "Well, I'm a bear-cat—come on an' tame me! I'm wild!" Reaching swiftly the boy jerked the cap from Connie's head and hurled it across the room where it lodged in an upper bunk. Some of the men laughed, but there were others who did not laugh —those who noted the slight paling of the smaller boy's face and the stiffening of his muscles. [54] With hardly a glance at Steve, Connie stepped around him and walked to where Saginaw Ed sat, an interested spectator of the scene.

"The boss wants to see you in the office," he said, and turning on his heel, retraced his steps. Steve stood in the middle of the floor where he had left him, the sneering smile still upon his lips.

"I believe he's goin' to cry," he taunted, and again some men laughed.

"What is it you say you are? I don't believe they all heard you." Again Connie was facing him, and his voice was steady and very low.

"I'm a bear-cat!"

Connie stretched out his arm: "Give me my cap, please, I'm in a hurry." The boy seized the hand roughly, which was just what Connie expected, and the next instant his other hand closed about Steve's wrist and quick as a flash he whirled and bent sharply forward. There was a shrill yelp of pain as the older boy shot over Connie's lowered shoulder and struck with a thud upon the uneven floor. The next instant Connie was astride the prostrate form and with a hand at his elbow and another at his wrist, slowly forced the boy's arm upward between his shoulder blades. [55]

"O-o-o, O-w-w!" howled Steve. "Take him off! He's killin' me!" Roars of laughter filled the [56] room as the lumberjacks looked on with shouts of encouragement and approval. The cookee continued to howl and beg.

"Once more, now," said Connie, easing up a bit on the arm. "Tell them what you are."

"Le' me up! Yer broke my arm!"

"Oh, no I didn't." Connie increased the pressure. "Come on, tell them what you told them a minute ago. Some of them look as if they don't believe it."

"COME ON, TELL THEM WHAT YOU TOLD THEM A MINUTE AGO"

"O-w-w, I'm a-a bear-cat—O-w-w!" whimpered the boy, with such a shame-faced expression that the men roared with delight.

Connie rose to his feet. "Climb up there and get my cap, and bring it down and hand it to me," he ordered tersely. "And the next time you feel wild, just let me know."

For only an instant the boy looked into the blue-grey eyes that regarded him steadily and then sullenly, without a word, he stepped onto the lower bunk, groped for a moment in the upper one and handed Connie his cap. A moment later the boy, accompanied by Saginaw Ed, stepped out into the night, but Saginaw saw what Connie did not—the look of crafty malevolence that flashed into Steve's eyes as they followed the departing pair. [57]

"By jiminetty, kid, y're all right!" approved the man, as they walked toward the office. "That was as handy a piece of work as I ever seen, an' they ain't a man in camp'll fergit it. You're there! But keep yer eye on that cookee—he's a bad egg. Them kind can't take a lickin' like a man. He'll lay fer to git even, if it takes him all winter—not so much fer what you done to him as where you done it—with the men all lookin' on. They never will quit raggin' him with his bear-cat stuff—an' he knows it."

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[58]

CHAPTER V

HURLEY LAYS OUT THE NEW CAMP

WANT to go 'long?" asked Hurley, the morning after the "bear-cat" incident, as he and Connie were returning to the office from breakfast at the cook's camp. "I've got to locate the new camp an' then we'll blaze her out an' blaze the road so Saginaw can keep the men goin'." The boy eagerly assented, and a few moments later they started, Hurley carrying an axe, and Connie with a light hand-axe thrust into his belt. Turning north, they followed the river. It was slow travelling, for it was necessary to explore every ravine in search of a spot where a road crossing could be effected without building a bridge. The spot located, Hurley would blaze a tree and they would strike out for the next ravine.

"It ain't like we had to build a log road," explained the boss, as he blazed a point that, to [59] Connie, looked like an impossible crossing. "Each camp will have its own rollways an' all we need is a tote road between 'em. Frenchy Lamar can put a team anywhere a cat will go. He's the best hand with horses on the job, if he is a jumper."

"What's a jumper?" asked Connie.

"You'll find that out fast enough. Jumpin' a man generally means a fight in the woods—an' I don't blame 'em none, neither. If I was a jumper an' a man jumped me, he'd have me to lick afterwards—an' if any one jumps a jumper into hittin' me, he'll have me to lick, too."

When they had proceeded for four or five miles Hurley turned again toward the river and for two hours or more studied the ground minutely for a desirable location for the new camp. Up and down the bank, and back into the woods he paced, noting in his mind every detail of the lay of the land. "Here'd be the best place for the camp if it wasn't fer that there sand bar that might raise thunder when we come to bust out the rollways," he explained, as they sat down to eat their lunch at midday. "There ain't no good rollway ground for a half a mile below the bar—an' they [60] ain't no use makin' the men walk any furthur'n what they have to 'specially at night when they've put in a hard day's work. We'll drop back an' lay her out below—it ain't quite as level, but it'll save time an' a lot of man-power."

As Connie ate his lunch he puzzled mightily over Hurley. He had journeyed from far off Alaska for the purpose of bringing to justice a man who had swindled him and his partner out of thousands of dollars worth of timber. His experience with the Mounted had taught him that, with the possible exception of Notorious Bishop whose consummate nerve had commanded the respect even of the officers whose business it was to hunt him down, law-breakers were men who possessed few if any admirable qualities. Yet here was a man who, Connie was forced to admit, possessed many such qualities. His first concern seemed to be for the comfort of his men, and his orders regarding the keeping of the wanagan book showed that it was his intention to deal with them fairly. His attitude toward the despicable I. W. W.'s was the attitude that the boy knew would have been taken by any of the big men of the North whose rugged standards he had unconsciously adopted as his own. He, himself, had been treated by the boss with a bluff [61] friendliness—and he knew that, despite Hurley's blustering gruffness, the men, with few exceptions, liked him. The boy frankly admitted that had he not known Hurley to be a crook he too would have liked him.

Luncheon over, the boss arose and lighted his pipe: "Well, 'spose we just drop back an' lay out the camp, then on the way home we'll line up the road an' take some of the kinks out of it an' Saginaw can jump the men into it tomorrow mornin'." They had proceeded but a short distance when the man pointed to a track in the softer ground of a low swale: "Deer passed here this mornin'," he observed. "The season opens next week, an' I expect I won't be back with the crew in time for the fun. If you'd like to try yer hand at it, yer welcome to my rifle. I'll dig you out some shells tonight if you remind me to."

"I believe I will have a try at 'em," said Connie, as he examined the tracks; "there were two deer—a doe, and a half-grown fawn, and there was a *loup-cervier* following them—that's why they were hitting for the river."

Hurley stared at the boy in open-mouthed astonishment: "Looky here, kid, I thought you said [62] you never worked in the woods before!"

Connie smiled: "I never have, but I've hunted some, up across the line."

"I guess you've hunted *some*, all right," observed the boss, drily; "I wondered how it come you wasn't petered out that night we come into the woods. Wherever you've hunted ain't none of my business. When a man's goin' good, I b'lieve in tellin' him so—same's I b'lieve in tellin' him good an' plain when he ain't. You've made a good start. Saginaw told me about what you done to that mouthy cookee. That was all right, fer as it went. If I'd be'n you I'd a punched his face fer him when I had him down 'til he hollered' 'nough'—but if you wanted to let him off that hain't none of my business—jest you keep yer eye on him, that's all—he's dirty. Guess I didn't make no mistake puttin' you in fer clerk—you've learnt to keep yer eyes open—that's the main thing, an' mebbe it'll stand you good 'fore this winter's over. There's more'n I. W. W.'s is the matter with this camp—" The boss stopped abruptly and, eyeing the boy sharply, repeated his warning of a few days [63] before: "Keep yer mouth shet. There's me, an' Saginaw, an' Lon Camden—he'll be the scaler, an' whoever bosses Number Two Camp—Slue Foot Magee, if I can git holt of him. He was my straw-boss last year. If you've got anythin' to say, say it to us. Don't never tell nothin' to nobody else

about nothin' that's any 'count—see?"

"You can depend on me for that," answered the boy, and Hurley picked up his axe.

"Come on, le's git that camp laid out. We won't git nothin' done if we stand 'round gassin' all day." The two followed down the river to the point indicated by Hurley where the banks sloped steeply to the water's edge, well below the long shallow bar that divided the current of the river into two channels. As they tramped through the timber Connie puzzled over the words of the boss. Well he knew that there was something wrong in camp beside the I. W. W.'s. But why should Hurley speak of it to him? And why should he be pleased at the boy's habit of observation? "Maybe he thinks I'll throw in with him on the deal," he thought: "Well, he's got an awful jolt coming to him if he does—but, things couldn't have broken better for me, at that." [64]

At the top of the steep bank Hurley blazed some trees, and with a heavy black pencil, printed the letter R in the centre of the flat, white scars. "That'll show 'em where to clear fer the rollways," he explained, then, striking straight back from the river for about twenty rods, he blazed a large tree. Turning at right angles, he proceeded about twenty five rods parallel with the river bank and made a similar blaze. "That gives 'em the corners fer the clearin', an' now fer spottin' the buildin's." Back and forth over the ground went the man, pausing now and then to blaze a tree and mark it with the initial of the building whose site it marked. "We don't have to corner these," he explained, "Saginaw knows how big to build 'em—the trees marks their centre." The sun hung low when the task was completed. "You strike out for the head of the nearest ravine," said Hurley, "an' when you come to the tree we blazed comin' up, you holler. Then I'll blaze the tote road to you, an' you can slip on to the next one. Straighten her out as much as you can by holdin' away from the short ravines." Connie was surprised at the rapidity with which [65] Hurley followed, pausing every few yards to scar a tree with a single blow of his axe.

The work was completed in the dark and as they emerged onto the clearing Hurley again regarded the boy with approval: "You done fine, kid. They's plenty of older hands than you be, that would of had trouble locatin' them blazes in the night, but you lined right out to 'em like you was follerin' a string. Come on, we'll go wash up an' see what the cook's got fer us."

After supper Saginaw Ed received his final instructions, and early next morning Hurley struck out on foot fer Dogfish Spur. "So long, kid," he called from the office door. "I left the shells on top of my desk an' yonder hangs the rifle. I was goin' to give you a few pointers, but from what I seen yeste'day, I don't guess you need none about huntin'. I might be back in a week an' it might be two 'cordin' to how long it takes me to pick up a crew. I've got some men waitin' on me, but I'll have to rustle up the balance wherever I can git 'em. I told Saginaw he better move his turkey over here while I'm gone. You'll find Saginaw a rough-bark piece of timber—but he's sound clean [66] plumb through to the heart, an' if you don't know it now, before this winter's over yer goin' to find out that them's the kind to tie to—when you kin find 'em."

Connie gazed after the broad-shouldered form 'til it disappeared from sight around a bend of the tote road, then he turned to his books with a puzzled expression. "Either Mike Gillum was wrong, or Hurley's the biggest bluffer that ever lived," he muttered, "and which ever way it is I'll know by spring."

Saginaw put his whole crew at work on the tote road. Saplings and brush were cleared away and thrown to the side. Trees were felled, the larger ones to be banked on the skidways and later hauled to the rollways to await the spring break-up, and the smaller ones to be collected and hauled to the new camp for building material.

Connie's duties were very light and he spent much time upon the new tote road watching the men with whom he had become a great favourite. Tiring of that, he would take long tramps through the woods and along the banks of the numerous little lakes that besprinkled the country, searching for sign, so that, when the deer season opened he would not have to hunt at random, [67] but could stalk his game at the watering places.

"Whar's yer gun, sonny?" called out a lanky sawyer as the boy started upon one of these excursions.

"Hay ain' need no gun," drawled Swede Larson, with a prodigious wink that distorted one whole side of his face. "Ay tank he gon fer hont some bear-cat." And the laughter that followed told Connie as he proceeded on his way, that his handling of Steve had met the universal approval of the crew.

It was upon his return from this expedition that the boy witnessed an actual demonstration of the effect of sudden suggestion upon a jumper. Frenchy Lamar pulled his team to the side of the roadway and drew his watch from his pocket. At the same time, Pierce, one of the I. W. W. suspects, slipped up behind him and bringing the flat of his hand down upon Frenchy's shoulder, cried: "*throw it*." Frenchy threw it, and the watch dropped with a jangle of glass and useless wheels at the foot of a tree. The next instant Frenchy whirled upon his tormentor with a snarl. The man, who had no stomach for an open fight, turned to run but the Frenchman was too quick [68] for him. The other two I. W. W.'s started to their pal's assistance but were halted abruptly, and none too gently by other members of the crew. "Fight!" "Fight!" The cry was taken up by those nearby and all within hearing rushed gleefully to the spot. The teamster was popular among the men and he fought amid cries of advice and encouragement: "Soak 'im good, Frenchy!" "Don't let 'im holler ''nough' till he's down!"

The combat was short, but very decisive. Many years' experience in the lumber woods had taught Frenchy the art of self-defence by force of fist—not, perhaps, the most exalted form of asserting a right nor of avenging a wrong—but, in the rougher walks of life, the most thoroughly practical, and the most honourable. So, when the teamster returned to his horses a few minutes later, it was to leave Pierce whimpering upon the ground nursing a badly swollen and rapidly

purpling eye, the while he muttered incoherent threats of dire vengeance.

CHAPTER VI

THE I. W. W. SHOWS ITS HAND

CHANGED yer job?" inquired Saginaw Ed, sleepily a few mornings later when Connie slipped quietly from his bunk and lighted the oil lamp.

"Not yet," smiled the boy. "Why?"

"No one but teamsters gits up at this time of night—you got an hour to sleep yet."

"This is the first day of the season, and I'm going out and get a deer."

Saginaw laughed: "Oh, yer goin' out an' git a deer—jest like rollin' off a log! You might's well crawl back in bed an' wait fer a snow. Deer huntin' without snow is like fishin' without bait—you might snag onto one, but the chances is all again' it."

"Bet I'll kill a deer before I get back," laughed the boy.

"Better pack up yer turkey an' fix to stay a long time then," twitted Saginaw. "But, I won't bet [70] —it would be like stealin'—an' besides, I lost one bet on you a'ready."

The teamsters, their lanterns swinging, were straggling toward the stable as the boy crossed the clearing.

"Hey, w'at you gon keel, de bear-cat?" called Frenchy.

"Deer," answered Connie with a grin.

"Ho! She ain' no good for hont de deer! She too mooch no snow. De groun' she too mooch dry. De deer, she hear you comin' wan mile too queek, den she ron way ver' fas', an' you no kin track heem."

"Never mind about that," parried the boy, "I'll be in tonight, and in the morning you can go out and help me pack in the meat."

"A'm help you breeng in de meat, a'ri. Ba Goss! A'm lak A'm git to bite me on chonk dat *venaison*."

Connie proceeded as rapidly as the darkness would permit to the shore of a marshy lake some three or four miles from camp, and secreted himself behind a windfall, thirty yards from the trail [71] made by the deer in going down to drink. Just at daybreak a slight sound attracted his attention, and peering through the screen of tangled branches, the boy saw a large doe picking her way cautiously down the trail. He watched in silence as she advanced, halted, sniffed the air suspiciously, and passed on to the water's edge. Lowering her head, she rubbed an inquisitive nose upon the surface of the thin ice that sealed the shallow bay of the little lake. A red tongue darted out and licked at the ice and she pawed daintily at it with a small front foot. Then, raising the foot, she brought it sharply down, and the knifelike hoof cut through the ice as though it were paper. Pleased with the performance she pawed again and again, throwing the cold water in every direction and seeming to find great delight in crushing the ice into the tiniest fragments. Tiring of this, she paused and sniffed the air, turning her big ears backward and forward to catch the slightest sound that might mean danger. Then, she drank her fill, made her way back up the trail, and disappeared into the timber. A short time later another, smaller doe followed by a spring fawn, went down, and allowing them to pass unharmed, Connie settled himself to wait for [72] worthier game. An hour passed during which the boy ate part of the liberal lunch with which the cook had provided him. Just as he had about given up hope of seeing any further game, a sharp crackling of twigs sounded directly before him, and a beautiful five-prong buck broke into the trail and stood with uplifted head and nostrils a-quiver. Without taking his eyes from the buck, Connie reached for his rifle, but just as he raised it from the ground its barrel came in contact with a dry branch which snapped with a sound that rang in the boy's ears like the report of a cannon. With a peculiar whistling snort of fear, the buck turned and bounded crashing away through the undergrowth. Connie lowered the rifle whose sights had been trained upon the white "flag" that bobbed up and down until it was lost in the thick timber.

"No use taking a chance shot," he muttered, disgustedly. "If I should hit him I would only wound him, and I couldn't track him down without snow. I sure am glad nobody was along to see that, or they never would have quit joshing me about it." Shouldering his rifle he proceeded leisurely toward another lake where he had spotted a water-trail, and throwing himself down [73] behind a fallen log, slept for several hours. When he awoke the sun was well into the west and he finished his lunch and made ready to wait for his deer, taking good care this time that no twig or branch should interfere with the free use of his gun.

At sunset a four-prong buck made his way cautiously down the trail and, waiting 'til the animal came into full view, Connie rested his rifle across the log and fired at a point just behind the shoulder. It was a clean shot, straight through the heart, and it was but the work of a few moments to bleed, and draw him. Although not a large buck, Connie found that it was more than he could do to hang him clear of the wolves, so he resorted to the simple expedient of peeling a few saplings and laying them across the carcass. This method is always safe where game or meat must be left exposed for a night or two, as the prowlers fear a trap. However, familiarity breeds contempt, and if left too long, some animal is almost sure to discover the ruse.

Packing the heart, liver, and tongue, Connie struck out swiftly for camp, but darkness overtook him with a mile still to go.

As he approached the clearing a low sound caused him to stop short. He listened and again he [74]

heard it distinctly—the sound of something heavy moving through the woods. The sounds grew momentarily more distinct—whatever it was was approaching the spot where he stood. A small, thick windfall lay near him, and beside it a large spruce spread its low branches invitingly near the ground. With hardly a sound Connie, pack, gun, and all, scrambled up among those thick branches and seated himself close to the trunk. The sounds drew nearer, and the boy could hear fragments of low-voiced conversation. The night prowlers were men, not animals! Connie's interest increased. There seemed to be several of them, but how many the boy could not make out in the darkness. Presently the leader crashed heavily into the windfall where he floundered for a moment in the darkness.

"This is fer enough. Stick it in under here!" he growled, as the others came up with him. Connie heard sounds as of a heavy object being pushed beneath the interlaced branches of the windfall but try as he would he could not catch a glimpse of it. Suddenly the faces of the men [75] showed vividly as one of their number held a match to the bowl of his pipe. They were the three I. W. W.'s and with them was Steve! "Put out that match you eediot! D'ye want the hull camp a pokin' their nose in our business?"

"'Tain't no one kin see way out here," growled the other, whom Connie recognized as Pierce.

"It's allus fellers like you that knows more'n any one else, that don't know nawthin'," retorted the first speaker, "come on, now, we got to git back. Remember—'leven o'clock on the furst night the wind blows stiff from the west. You, Steve, you tend to swipin' Frenchy's lantern. Pierce here, he'll soak the straw, an' Sam, you stand ready to drive a plug in the lock when I come out. Then when the excitement's runnin' high, I'll holler that Frenchy's lantern's missin' an' they'll think he left it lit in the stable. I tell ye, we'll terrorize every business in these here United States. We'll have 'em all down on their knees to the I. W. W.! Then we'll see who's the bosses an' the rich! We'll hinder the work, an' make it cost 'em money, an' Pierce here'll git even with Frenchy, all in one clatter. We'll be gittin' back, now. An' don't all pile into the men's camp to onct, neither." [76]

Connie sat motionless upon his branch until the sounds of the retreating men were lost in the darkness. What did it all mean? "Swipe Frenchy's lantern." "Plug the lock." "Soak the straw." "Terrorize business." The words of the man repeated themselves over and over in Connie's brain. What was this thing these men were planning to do "at eleven o'clock the first night the wind blows stiff from the west?" He wriggled to the ground and crept toward the thing the men had *cached* in the windfall. It was a five-gallon can of coal-oil! "That's Steve's part of the scheme, whatever it is," he muttered. "He's got a key to the storehouse." Leaving the can undisturbed, he struck out for camp, splashing through the waters of a small creek without noticing it, so busy was his brain trying to fathom the plan of the gang. "I've got all day tomorrow, at least," he said, "and that'll give me time to think. I won't tell even Saginaw 'til I've got it doped out. I bet when they try to start something they'll find out who's going to be terrorized!" A few minutes later he entered the office and was greeted vociferously by Saginaw Ed: [77]

"Hello there, son, by jiminetty, I thought you'd took me serious when I told you you'd better make a long stay of it. What ye got there? Well, dog my cats, if you didn't up an' git you a deer! Slip over to the cook's camp an' wade into some grub. I told him to shove yer supper onto the back of the range, again' you got back. While yer gone I'll jest run a couple rags through yer rifle."

When Connie returned from the cook's camp Saginaw was squinting down the barrel of the gun. "Shines like a streak of silver," he announced; "Hurley's mighty pernickety about his rifle, an' believe me, it ain't everyone he'd borrow it to. Tell me 'bout yer hunt," urged the man, and Connie saw a gleam of laughter in his eye. "Killed yer deer dead centre at seven hundred yards, runnin' like greased lightnin', an' the underbrush so thick you couldn't hardly see yer sights, I 'pose."

The boy laughed: "I got him dead centre, all right, but it was a standing shot at about twenty yards, and I had a rest. He's only a four-prong—I let a five-prong get away because I was clumsy."

Saginaw Ed eyed the boy quizzically: "Say, kid," he drawled. "Do you know where folks goes [78] that tells the truth about huntin'?"

"No," grinned Connie.

"Well, I don't neither," replied Saginaw, solemnly. "I guess there ain't no place be'n pervided, but if they has, I bet it's gosh-awful lonesome there."

Despite the volubility of his companion, Connie was unusually silent during the short interval that elapsed before they turned in. Over and over in his mind ran the words of the four men out there in the dark, as he tried to figure out their scheme from the fragmentary bits of conversation that had reached his ears.

"Don't mope 'cause you let one buck git away, kid. Gosh sakes, the last buck I kilt, I got so plumb rattled when I come onto him, I missed him eight foot!"

"How did you kill him then?" asked Connie, and the instant the words were spoken he realized he had swallowed the bait—hook and all.

With vast solemnity, Saginaw stared straight before him: "Well, you see, it was the last shell in my rifle an' I didn't have none in my pocket, so I throw'd the gun down an' snuck up an' bit him [79] on the lip. If ever you run onto a deer an' ain't got no gun, jest you sneak up in front of him an' bite him on the lip, an' he's yourn. I don't know no other place you kin bite a deer an' kill him. They're like old Acolyte, or whatever his name was, in the Bible, which they couldn't kill him 'til they shot him in the heel—jest one heel, mind you, that his ma held him up by when she dipped him into the kettle of bullet-proof. If he'd of be'n me, you bet I'd of beat it for the Doc an' had that leg cut off below the knee, an' a wooden one made, an' he'd of be'n goin' yet! I know a feller's got

two wooden ones, with shoes on 'em jest like other folks, and when you see him walk the worst you'd think: he's got a couple of corns."

"Much obliged, Saginaw," said Connie, with the utmost gravity, as he arose and made ready for bed, "I'll sure remember that. Anyhow you don't need to worry about any solitary confinement in the place where the deer hunters go." And long after he was supposed to be asleep, the boy grinned to himself at the sounds of suppressed chuckling that came from Saginaw's bunk.

Next morning Connie helped Frenchy pack in the deer, and when the teamster had returned [80] to his work, the boy took a stroll about camp. "Let's see," he mused, "they're going to soak the straw inside the stable with oil and set fire to it on the inside, and they'll do it with Frenchy's lantern so everyone will think he forgot it and it got tipped over by accident. Then, before the fire is discovered they'll lock the stable and jam the lock so the men can't get in to fight it." The boy's teeth gritted savagely. "And there are sixteen horses in that stable!" he cried. "The dirty hounds! A west wind would sweep the flames against the oat house, then the men's camp, and the cook's camp and storehouse. They sure do figure on a clean sweep of this camp. But, what I can't see is how that is going to put any one in terror of the I. W. W., if they think Frenchy caused the fire accidentally. Dan McKeever says all crooks are fools—and he's right." He went to the office and sat for a long time at his pine desk. From his turkey he extracted the Service revolver that he had been allowed to keep in memory of his year with the Mounted. "I can take this," he muttered, as he affectionately twirled the smoothly running cylinder with his thumb, "and Saginaw can take [81] the rifle, and we can nail 'em as they come out of the woods with the coal-oil can. The trouble is, we wouldn't have anything on them except maybe the theft of a little coal-oil. I know what they intend to do, but I can't prove it—there's four of them and only one of me and no evidence to back me up. On the other hand, if we let them start the fire, it might be too late to put it out." His eyes rested on the can that contained the supply of oil for the office. It was an exact duplicate of the one beneath the windfall. He jumped to his feet and crossing to the window carefully scanned the clearing. No one was in sight, and the boy passed out the door and slipped silently into the thick woods. When he returned the crew was crowding into the men's camp to wash up for supper. The wind had risen, and as Connie's gaze centred upon the lashing pine tops, he smiled grimly,—it was blowing stiffly from the west.

After supper Saginaw Ed listened with bulging eyes to what the boy had to say. When he was through the man eyed him critically:

"Listen to me, kid. Nonsense is nonsense, an' business is business. I don't want no truck with [82] a man that ain't got some nonsense about him somewheres—an' I don't want no truck with one that mixes up nonsense an' serious business. Yer only a kid, an' mebbe you ain't grabbed that yet. But I want to tell you right here an' now, fer yer own good: If this here yarn is some gag you've rigged up to git even with me fer last night, it's a mighty bad one. A joke is a joke only so long as it don't harm no one——"

"Every word I've told you is the truth," broke in the boy, hotly.

"There, now, don't git excited, kid. I allowed it was, but they ain't no harm ever comes of makin' sure. It's eight o'clock now, s'pose we jest loaf over to the men's camp an' lay this here case before 'em."

"No! No!" cried the boy: "Why, they—they might kill them!"

"Well, I 'spect they would do somethin' of the kind. Kin you blame 'em when you stop to think of them horses locked in a blazin' stable, an' the deliberate waitin' 'til the wind was right to carry the fire to the men's camp? The men works hard, an' by eleven o'clock they're poundin' their ear [83] mighty solid. S'pose they didn't wake up till too late—what then?"

Connie shuddered. In his heart he felt, with Saginaw Ed, that any summary punishment the men chose to deal out to the plotters would be richly deserved. "I know," he replied: "But, mob punishment is never *right*, when a case can be reached by the law. It may look right, and lots of times it does hand out a sort of rough justice. But, here we are not out of reach of the law, and it will go lots farther in showing up the I. W. W. if we let the law take its course."

Saginaw Ed seemed impressed: "That's right, kid, in the main. But there ain't no law that will fit this here special case. S'pose we go over an' arrest them hounds—what have we got on 'em! They swiped five gallons of coal-oil! That would git 'em mebbe thirty days in the county jail. The law can't reach a man fer what he's *goin'* to do—an' I ain't a goin' over to the men's camp an' advise the boys to lay abed an' git roasted so's mebbe we kin git them I. W. W.'s hung. The play wouldn't be pop'lar."

Connie grinned: "Well, not exactly," he agreed. "But, why not just sit here and let them go [84] ahead with their scheme. I've got a good revolver, and you can take the rifle, and we can wait for 'em in the tote wagon that's just opposite the stable door. Then when they've soaked the straw, and tipped over Frenchy's lantern, and locked the door behind 'em, and plugged the lock, we can cover 'em and gather 'em in."

"Yeh, an' meanwhile the fire'll be workin' on that oil-soaked straw inside, an' where'll the horses be? With this here wind a blowin' they ain't men enough in the woods to put out a fire, an' the hull camp would go."

Connie laughed, and leaning forward, spoke rapidly for several moments. When he had finished, Saginaw eyed him with undisguised approval: "Well, by jiminetty! Say, kid, you've got a head on you! That's jest the ticket! The courts of this State has jest begun to wake up to the fact that the I. W. W. is a real danger. A few cases, with the evidence as clean again' 'em as this, an' the stinkin' varmints 'll be huntin' their holes—you bet!"

At nine-thirty Saginaw and Connie put out the office light, and with some clothing arranged

[85]

dummies in their bunks, so that if any of the conspirators should seek to spy upon them through the window they would find nothing to arouse their suspicion. Then, fully armed, they crept out and concealed themselves in the tote wagon. An hour passed, and through the slits cut in the tarpaulin that covered them, they saw four shadowy forms steal silently toward them from the direction of the men's camp. Avoiding even the feeble light of the stars, they paused in the shadow of the oat house, at a point not thirty feet from the tote wagon. A whispered conversation ensued and two of the men hastily crossed the open and disappeared into the timber.

"Stand still, can't ye!" hissed one of those who remained, and his companion ceased to pace nervously up and down in the shadow.

"I'm scairt," faltered the other, whom the watchers identified as Steve. "I wisht I wasn't in on this."

"Quit yer shiverin'! Yer makin' that lantern rattle. What they do to us, if they ketch us, hain't a patchin' to what we'll do to you if you back out." The man called Sam spat out his words in an angry whisper, and the two relapsed into silence.

[86] At the end of a half-hour the two men who had entered the timber appeared before the door of the stable, bearing the oil can between them. The others quickly joined them, there was a fumbling at the lock, the door swung open, and three of the men entered. The fourth stood ready with the heavy padlock in his hand. A few moments of silence followed, and then the sound of the empty can thrown to the floor. A feeble flicker of flame dimly lighted the interior, and the three men who had entered rushed out into the night. The heavy door closed, the padlock snapped shut and a wooden plug was driven into the key hole.

"*Hands up!*" The words roared from the lips of Saginaw Ed, as he and Connie leaped to the ground and confronted the four at a distance of ten yards. For one terrified instant the men stared at the guns in their captors hands, and then four pairs of hands flew skyward.

"Face the wall, an' keep a reachin'," commanded Saginaw, "an' if any one of you goes to start somethin' they'll be wolf-bait in camp in about one second."

[87] A horse snorted nervously inside the stable and there was a stamping of iron shod feet.

"Jest slip in an' fetch out Frenchy's lantern, kid, an' we'll git these birds locked up in the oat house, 'fore the men gits onto the racket."

With a light crow-bar which the boy had brought for the purpose, he pryed the hasp and staple from the door, leaving the plugged lock for evidence. Entering the stable whose interior was feebly illumined by the sickly flare of the overturned lantern, he returned in time to hear the petty bickering of the prisoners.

"It's your fault," whined Pierce, addressing the leader of the gang. "You figgered out this play —an' it hain't worked!"

"It hain't neither my fault!" flashed the man. "Some one of you's blabbed, an' we're in a pretty fix, now."

"'Twasn't me!" came in a chorus from the others.

"But at that," sneered Sam, "if you'd a lit that oil, we'd a burnt up the camp anyhow."

"I did light it!" screamed the leader, his face livid with rage. "I tipped over the lantern an' shoved it right under the straw."

[88] "That's right," grinned Connie, from the doorway, as he flashed the lantern upon the faces of the men. "And if you hadn't taken the trouble to soak the straw with water it would have burned, too."

"Water! Whad' ye mean—water?"

"I mean just this," answered the boy, eyeing the men with a glance of supreme contempt, "I sat out there beside that windfall last night when you hid your can of oil. I listened to all you had to say, and today I slipped over there and poured out the oil and filled the can with water. You I. W. W.'s are a fine outfit," he sneered: "If you had some brains, and nerve, and consciences, you might almost pass for *men!*"

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[89]

CHAPTER VII

THE PRISONERS

"IWISH'T Hurley was here," said Saginaw Ed, as he and Connie returned to the boss's camp after locking the prisoners in the oat house. "The men's goin' to want to know what them four is locked up fer. If we don't tell 'em there'll be trouble. They don't like them birds none but, at that, they won't stand fer 'em bein' grabbed an' locked up without nothin' ag'in' 'em. An' on the other hand, if we do tell 'em there's goin' to be trouble. Like as not they'd overrule me an' you an' hunt up a handy tree an' take 'em out an' jiggle 'em on the down end of a tight one."

"Couldn't we slip 'em down to the nearest jail and tell the men about it afterwards, or send for a constable or sheriff to come up here and get them?"

Saginaw shook his head: "No. If me an' you was to take 'em down the camp would blow up in [90] no time. When the men woke up an' found the boss, an' the clerk, an' three hands, an' the cookee missin', an' the lock pried offen the stable door, work would stop right there. There ain't nothin' like a myst'ry of some kind to bust up a crew of men. We couldn't wake no one else up to take 'em without we woke up the whole men's camp, an' they'd want to know what was the rookus. If we sent fer a constable it'd be two or three days 'fore he'd git here an' then it would be too late. This here thing's comin' to a head when them teamsters goes fer the oats in the mornin', an' I've got to be there when they do."

"I hate to see Steve mixed up in this. He's only a kid. I wonder if there isn't some way——"

Saginaw Ed interrupted him roughly: "No. There ain't no way whatever. He's a bad aig or he wouldn't do what he done. You're only a kid, too, but I take notice you ain't throw'd in with no such outfit as them is."

"I can't help thinking maybe he's getting a wrong start——"

"He's got a wrong start, all right. But he got it quite a while ago—this here kind of business [91] ain't no startin' job. They're all of a piece, kid. It's best we jest let the tail go with the hide."

"What will Hurley do about it? If he agrees with us, won't the men overrule him?"

"I don't know what he'll do—I only wish't he was here to do it. But, as fer as overrulin' him goes—" Saginaw paused and eyed Connie solemnly, "jest you make it a p'int to be in the same township sometime when a crew of men ondertakes to overrule Hurley. Believe me, they'd have the same kind of luck if they ondertook to overrule Mont Veesooverus when she'd started in to erup'."

The door swung open and Hurley himself stood blinking in the lamplight. "This here's a purty time fer workin' men to be up!" he grinned. "Don't yous lads know it's half past twelve an' you'd orter be'n asleep four hours?"

"I don't hear *you* snorin' none," grinned Saginaw. "An' you kin bet me an' the kid sure is glad to see you."

"Got through sooner'n I expected. Slue Foot had the crew all picked out. He'll bring 'em in from the Spur in the mornin'. Thought I'd jest hike on out an' see how things was gittin' on."

"Oh, we're gittin' on, all right. Tote road's all cleared, Camp Two's clearin's all ready, an' the [92] buildin's most done. An' besides that, four prisoners in the oat house, an' me an' the kid, here, losin' sleep over what to do with 'em."

"Prisoners! What do you mean—prisoners?"

"Them I. W. W.'s an' that cookee that throw'd in with 'em. They tried to burn the outfit—locked the hosses in the stable an' set fire to it, after waitin' 'til the wind was so it would spread over the hull camp."

Hurley reached for a peavy that stood in the corner behind the door. "Ye say they burn't thim harses?" he rasped, in the brogue that always accompanied moments of anger or excitement.

"No they didn't, but they would of an' it hadn't be'n fer the kid, here. He outguessed 'em, an' filled their coal-oil can with water, an' then we let 'em go ahead an' put on the whole show so we'd have 'em with the goods."

The big boss leaned upon his peavy and regarded Connie thoughtfully. "As long as I've got a camp, kid, you've got a job." He bit off a huge chew of tobacco and returned the plug to his [93] pocket, after which he began deliberately to roll up his shirt sleeves. He spat upon the palms of his hands, and as he gripped the peavy the muscles of his huge forearm stood out like steel cables. "Jist toss me th' key to th' oat house," he said in a voice that rumbled deep in his throat.

"Wait!" Connie's hand was upon the boss's arm. "Sit down a minute and let's talk it over——"

"Sure, boss," seconded Saginaw. "Let's have a powwow. If you go out there an' git to workin' on them hounds with that there peavy you're liable to git excited an' tap 'em a little harder'n what you intended to, an' then——"

Hurley interrupted with a growl and the two saw that his little eyes blazed. "Oi ain't got the strength to hit 'em har-rder thin Oi intind to! An-ny one that 'ud thry to bur-rn up harses—let alone min slaypin' in their bunks, they can't no man livin' hit 'em har-rd enough wid an-nything that's made."

"I know," agreed Saginaw. "They ain't nothin' you could do to 'em that they wouldn't still have some a-comin'. But the idee is this: Bein' misclassed as humans, them I. W. W.'s is felonious to

kill. Chances is, the grand jury would turn you loose when they'd heard the facts, but the grand [94]
jury don't set 'til spring, an' meantime, where'd you be? An' where'd this camp be? Your contract calls fer gittin' out logs, an' don't stipulate none whatever about spatterin' up the oat house with I. W. W.'s. I don't like to spoil a man's fun, but when a mere frolic, that way, interferes with the work, as good a man as you be is a-goin' to put it off a spell. You know, an' I know, there's more than gittin' out logs to this winter's work."

Saginaw's words evidently carried weight with Hurley. The muscles of the mighty arms relaxed and the angry gleam faded from his eyes. Also, the brogue was gone from his voice; nevertheless, his tone was ponderously sarcastic as he asked: "An' what is it you'd have me to do, seein' ye're so free with yer advice—pay 'em overtime fer the night work they done tryin' to burn up my camp?"

Saginaw grinned: "The kid's got it doped out about right. He figgers that it'll show 'em up better if we let the courts handle the case an' convict 'em regular. With what we've got on 'em they ain't no chanct but what they'll get convicted, all right."

"You see," broke in Connie, "the I. W. W.'s are a law-defying organization. The only way to [95]
bring them to time is to let the law do it. As soon as *all* the I. W. W.'s see that the law is stronger than they are, and that their lawless acts are sure to be punished, there won't be any more I. W. W.'s. The law can't teach them this unless it has the chance. Of course, if the law had had the chance and had fallen down on the job because the men behind it were cowardly, it would be time enough to think about other ways. But, you told me yourself that Minnesota was beginning to give 'em what's coming to 'em, and she'll never get a better chance to hand 'em a jolt than this is, because we've got 'em with the goods. Now, if we'd go to work and let the men at 'em, or if you'd wade into 'em yourself we wouldn't be smashing at the I. W. W.'s, but only at these three men. When you stop to think of it, you can't teach an outfit to respect the law when you go ahead and break the law in teaching 'em."

Hurley seemed much impressed. "That stands to reason," he agreed. "You're right, kid, an' so's Saginaw. I know Judge McGivern—used to go to school with him way back—he ain't much as [96]
fer as size goes but believe me he ain't afraid to hand these birds a wallop that'll keep 'em peekin' out between black ones fer many a day to come. I'll take 'em down myself, an' then I'll slip around an' have a talk with Mac." Hurley tossed the peavy into its corner and proceeded to unlace his boots.

"I kind of hate to see Steve go along with that bunch. He ain't a regular I. W. W., and——"

The boss looked up in surprise as a heavy boot thudded upon the floor. "What d'ye mean—hate to see?" he asked.

"Why, he might turn out all right, if we kept him on the job and kind of looked after him."

The boss snorted contemptuously. "Huh! He done you dirt onct didn't he?"

"Yes, but——"

"He throw'd in with these here ornery scum that ain't neither men, fish, nor potatoes, didn't he?"

"Yes, but——"

"'Yes' is all right—an' they ain't no 'buts' about it. I had him last winter, an' he wasn't no 'count. I thought they might be some good in him so I hired him ag'in this fall to give him another [97]
chanct, but he's rotten-hearted an' twisty-grained, an' from root to top-branch they ain't the worth of a lath in his hide. He's a natural-borned crook. If it was only hisself I wouldn't mind it, but a crook is dangerous to other folks—not to hisself. It ain't right to leave him loose." The other boot thudded upon the floor and Hurley leaned back in his chair, stretched out his legs and regarded the toes of his woollen socks. "I've often thought," he continued, after a moment of silence, "that men is oncommon like timber. There's the select, straight-grained, sound stuff, an' all the grades down through the culls 'til you come to the dozy, crooked, rotten-hearted stuff that ain't even fit to burn. There's sound stuff that's rough-barked an' ugly; an' there's rotten-hearted stuff that looks good from the outside. There's some timber an' some men that's built to take on a high polish—don't know as I kin git it acrost to you jest like I mean—but bankers and pianos is like that. Then there's the stuff that's equal as sound an' true but it wouldn't never take no polish on account its bein' rough-grained an' tough-fibred—that's the kind that's picked to carry on the world's heavy work—the kind that goes into bridges an' ships, an' the frames of buildin's. It's the [98]
backbone, you might say, of civilization. It ain't purty, but its work ain't purty neither—it jest does what it's picked to do.

"It's cur'us how fer you kin carry it on if yer a mind to. There's some good timber an' some good men that's started bad but ain't got there yet. The bad habits men take on is like surface rot, an' weather checks, an' bug stings—take that stuff an' put it through the mill an' rip it an' plane it down to itself, an' it's as good as the best—sometimes. The danger to that kind is not puttin' it through the mill quick enough, an' the rot strikes through to the heart.

"There's a lot of timber that there ain't much expected of—an' a lot of humans, too. They're the stuff that works up into rough boards, an' cull stuff, an' lath, an' pulp wood, an' cordwood an' the like of that—an' so it goes, folks an' timber runnin' about alike.

"It takes experience an' judgment to sort timber, jest like it takes experience an' judgment to pick men. But no matter how much experience an' judgment he's got, as long as *man's* got the sortin' to do, mistakes will be made. Then, a long time afterwards, somewheres somethin' goes [99]
wrong. They can't no one account fer it, nor explain it—but the Big Inspector—he knows."

Hurley ceased speaking, and Connie, who had followed every word, broke in: "Couldn't we keep Steve here and—put him through the mill?"

The boss shook his head: "No—we didn't catch him young enough. I'm responsible, in a way, fer the men in this camp. This here runt has showed he don't care what he does—s'pose he took a notion to slip somethin' into the grub—what then? Keepin' him in this camp would be like if I seen a rattlesnake in the bunk house an' walked off an' left it there."

Connie realized that any further effort on his part to save Steve from sharing the richly deserved fate of the I. W. W.'s would be useless. The three turned in and it seemed to the boy that he had barely closed his eyes when he was awakened by the sounds of someone moving about the room. Hurley and Saginaw Ed were pulling on their clothes as the boy tumbled out of bed.

"You don't need to git up yet, kid. Me an' Saginaw's goin' to slip out an' see that the teamsters gits their oats without lettin' no I. W. W.'s trickle out the door. Better pound yer ear fer an hour [100] yet, cause you're goin' to be busier'n a pet coon checkin' in Slue Foot's supplies, an' gittin' his men down on the pay roll."

As Connie entered the cook's camp for breakfast he noticed an undercurrent of unrest and suppressed excitement among the men who stood about in small groups and engaged in low-voiced conversation. Hurley and Saginaw Ed were already seated, and, as the men filed silently in, many a sidewise glance was slanted toward the big boss.

When all were in their places Hurley rose from his chair. "We've got three I. W. W.'s an' the cookee locked up in the oat house," he announced bluntly. "An' after breakfast me an' Frenchy is goin' to take 'em down to jail." There was a stir among the men, and Hurley paused, but no one ventured a comment. "They tried to burn the stable last night, but the kid, here, outguessed 'em, an' him an' Saginaw gathered 'em in."

"Last night!" cried a big sawyer, seated half-way down the table. "If they'd a-burnt the stable last night the whole camp would of gone! Let us boys take 'em off yer hands, boss, an' save you a trip to town."

The idea gained instant approval among the men, and from all parts of the room voices were [101] raised in assent.

"Over in Westconsin we——"

Hurley interrupted the speaker with a grin: "Yeh, an' if we was over in Westconsin I'd say go to it! But Minnesota's woke up to these here varmints—an' it's up to us to give her a chanct to show these here other States how to do it. You boys all know Judge McGivern—most of you helped elect him. Give him the chanct to hand the I. W. W.'s a wallop in the name of the State of Minnesota! If the State don't grab these birds, they'll grab the State. Look at North Dakota! It ain't a State no more—it's a Non-partisan League! Do you boys want to see Minnesota an I. W. W. Lodge?"

As Hurley roared out the words his huge fist banged the table with a force that set the heavy porcelain dishes a-clatter.

"No! No!" cried a chorus of voices from all sides. "The boss is right! Let the State handle 'em!" The men swung unanimously to Hurley and the boss sat down amid roars of approval.

And so it was that shortly after breakfast Frenchy cracked his whip with a great flourish and [102] four very dejected-looking prisoners started down the tote road securely roped to the rear of the tote wagon, at the end gate of which sat Hurley, rifle in hand and legs a-dangle as he puffed contentedly at his short black pipe.

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[103]

CHAPTER VIII

THE BOSS OF CAMP TWO

SLUE FOOT MAGEE, who was to boss Camp Two, was a man of ambling gait and a chronic grumble. He arrived with the vanguard of the new crew a half-hour before dinner time, grumbled because grub wasn't ready, growled when he learned that the buildings at Camp Two were not entirely completed, and fumed because Hurley had told him to leave fifteen of his fifty men at Camp One.

"What's the use of pickin' out a crew an' then scatterin' 'em all over the woods?" he demanded querulously of Connie, as they stood in the door of the boss's camp while the men washed up for dinner. "If Hurley wants thirty-five men in Camp Two an' fifty in Camp One why don't he send Camp One's crew up to Two an' leave me have Camp One?"

"I don't know," answered the boy, and refrained from mentioning that he was mighty glad [104] Hurley had not ordered it so.

Slue Foot slanted him a keen glance. "Be you the kid Hurley was tellin' nailed them I. W. W.'s that he was fetchin' out of the woods when we come in this mornin'?"

Connie nodded: "Yes, Saginaw Ed and I caught 'em."

"Purty smart kid, hain't you? What's Hurley payin' you?"

"Forty dollars a month."

"An' no rake-off on the wanagan. There's plenty room in the woods to use brains—same as anywheres else." Slue Foot turned at the sound of the dinner gong. "Let's go eat while there's some left. When we come back I'll give you the names."

During the meal Connie furtively studied the new boss. He was fully as large as Hurley, and slovenly in movement and appearance. His restless eyes darted swift glances here, there, and everywhere, and never a glance but registered something of disapproval. But it was the man's words that most interested the boy. Why had he asked what Hurley was paying him? And what [105] did he mean by his observation that there was no rake-off on the wanagan? Also, there was his reference to the fact that in the woods there was plenty of room for brains. That might mean anything or nothing.

"At any rate," thought the boy, as he attacked his food, "you're going to be a pretty good man to throw in with—for a while."

Presently the man pushed back his bench and arose: "If you ever git that holler in under yer ribs filled up we'll go over an' I'll give you the names of the men that stays here an' the ones that goes on with me."

"'Lead on, MacDuff,'" grinned Connie, misquoting a line from a play Waseche Bill had taken him to see in Fairbanks.

"Magee's my name," corrected the man gruffly, and led the way to the office.

It was only after much deliberation and growling that Slue Foot finally succeeded in rearranging his crew, but at last the task was completed and Connie leaned back in his chair.

"So you think there ain't going to be any rake-off on the wanagan?" he asked, as the man sat [106] scowling at his list of names. Slue Foot glanced up quickly and the boy met the glance with a wink: "I thought maybe——"

"It don't make no difference what you thought mebbe!" the man interrupted. "If you know'd Hurley like I do you'd know a whole lot better'n to try it." Connie looked disappointed and the boss eyed him intently.

"They's other ways of killin' a cat without you choke him to death on butter," he observed drily, and lapsed into silence while the restless gimlet eyes seemed to bore into the boy's very thoughts.

Suddenly the man brought his fist down with a bang upon the top of the pine desk: "Why should Hurley be drawin' down his big money, an' me an' you our seventy-five an' forty a month?" he demanded.

"Well, he's the boss, and they say he can get out the logs."

"I'm a boss, too! An' I kin git out the logs!" he roared. "I was bossin' camps when Hurley was swampin'." Again he paused and regarded the boy shrewdly. "Mind you, I hain't sayin' Hurley hain't a good logger, 'cause he is. But jest between me and you there's a hull lot about this here [107] timber game that he hain't hep to. Any one kin draw down wages workin' in the woods—but if you want to make a real stake out of the game you've got to learn how to play both ends ag'in' the middle. An' that's where the brains comes in."

"That's why I thought——"

"—you could soak it to 'em on the wanagan an' shove the rake-off in your pocket," finished the man. "Well, you'd better fergit it! Some bosses would stand fer it, but not Hurley. He'd tumble to yer game in a minute, an' you'd be hikin' down the tote road with yer turkey on yer back a-huntin' a new job."

"Do you mean there's nothing in it for me but my forty dollars a month?" asked Connie, with apparent disgust.

"M-m-m-m, well, that depends," muttered Slue Foot. "Be you goin' to keep the log book, or

Hurley?"

"I am. He told me the other day he'd show me about that later."

"They'll be a little somethin', mebbe, in shadin' the cut when the time comes—nothin' big, but [108] enough to double our wages. Wait 'til the crew gits strung out an' layin' 'em down an' we'll fix that up."

"Will the scaler throw in with us?" ventured the boy.

"What! Lon Camden! Not on yer life, he won't! Hurley picked him, an' he picked Saginaw Ed, too. What you an' me do we got to do alone."

Connie smiled: "Yes, but he picked you, and he picked me, too."

"He did," agreed the other, with a leer. "I don't know nawthin' about why he picked you, but he give me a job 'cause he thinks I done him a good turn onct. Over in Idaho, it was, an' we was gittin' out logs on the Fieldin' slope. Old Man Fieldin' had a contrac' which if he didn't fill it by a certain day, he'd lose it, an' the Donahue crowd that was operatin' further down would deliver their logs an' take over the contrac'. That's when I got it in fer Hurley. Him an' me was working fer Fieldin' an' he made Hurley boss of a camp he'd ort to give to me.

"The Donahue crowd worked politics an' got holt of the water rights on Elk Creek, an' Fieldin' couldn't float his logs. It looked like it was good-night fer Fieldin' an' his contrac' but Hurley [109] grabbed all the men he could git holt of an' started buildin' a flume. Old Man Fieldin' said it couldn't be done, but fer Hurley to go ahead, 'cause he was ruint anyhow. So Hurley worked us night and day, an' by gosh, he built the flume an' got his logs a-runnin'!

"When the flume was up the Donahues seen they was beat, so they come to me an' offered me a bunch of coin if I'd blow it up. It was resky 'cause Hurley was expectin' some such play, an' he had it guarded. But I got on guardin' nights an' I planted the dynamite and got the wires strung, an' it was all set. Then I went an' overplayed my hand. I thought I seen the chanct to git even with Hurley, as well as Old Man Fieldin', an' make me a nice little stake besides. So I tips it off to Hurley that I seen a fellow sneakin' around suspicious an' he'd better take the shift where I'd be'n, hisself. You see, I made it up with the Donahues to send three of their men over to explode the shot so I'd have a alibi, an' I figgered that Hurley'd run onto 'em, an' they'd give him an' awful lickin'." The man paused and crammed tobacco into his pipe.

"And did he?" asked Connie, eagerly [110]

"Naw, he didn't he!" growled the man. "He run onto 'em all right—an' when the rookus was over the hull three of 'em was took to the horspital. When it comes to mixin' it up, Hurley, he's there. He found the dynamite, too, an' after that the guards was so thick along that flume that one couldn't do nawthin' without the next ones could see what he was up to.

"Fieldin's logs was delivered on time an' the old man handed Hurley a check fer twenty-five hundred dollars over an' above his wages. Hurley slipped me five hundred fer tellin' him—but I'd of got five thousan' if I'd of blow'd up the flume. I had to skip the country 'fore them three got out of the horspital, an' I've swore to git even with Hurley ever since—an' I'll do it too. One more winter like last winter, an' they won't no outfit have him fer a boss."

It was with difficulty Connie refrained from asking what had happened last winter but he was afraid of arousing the man's suspicion by becoming too inquisitive, so he frowned: "That's all right as far as your getting even with Hurley, but it don't get me anything."

Slue Foot leaned forward in his chair: "I see you've got yer eye on the main chanct, an' that [111] shows you've got somethin' in your noodle. Folks can talk all they want to, but the only thing that's any good is money. Them that's got it is all right, an' them that hain't got it is nowhere. Take Hurley, he's got the chanct to make his everlastin' stake right here, an' he's passin' it up. The owner of this here trac' lives up in Alaska or somewheres, an' he hain't a loggin' man nohow —an' here Hurley would set and let him git rich—offen Hurley's work, mind you—an' all Hurley gits out of it is his wages. An' if you throw in with him you'll go out in the spring with yer forty dollars a month minus yer wanagan tab."

"Guess that's right," agreed the boy. "I'd like to make a lot of money, but it looks like there's nothin' doing in this camp."

"Oh, I don't know," replied the man. "I'm a-goin' to git mine, an' the way things is, I kin use a party about your size that kin keep his eyes open and his mouth shet. Looks like, from here, they might be considerable in it fer you, long about spring." He paused and glanced about the office. "You sleep in here don't you?" Connie nodded, and Slue Foot seemed satisfied, "I kin use you, [112] 'cause you're right here on the job where you kin keep tab on the boss, an' Saginaw, an' Lon Camden." The man paused abruptly and peered through the window.

"What's the game?" asked Connie boldly. "I can't do any good going it blind."

The man silenced him with a gesture: "Shet up! Here comes Saginaw. That'll keep 'til later. Meanwhile, it don't pay fer me an' you to seem none too friendly. When any one's around I'll kick an' growl about the books and you sass me back." He rose from his chair and was stamping about the room when Saginaw entered.

"Here it's took a good hour to git them names down that any one with half sense had ort to got down in fifteen minutes! If you can't check in them supplies no quicker'n what you kin write down names, the grub will rot before we git it onloaded. Come on, we'll go up to the camp an' git at it."

The man turned to greet the newcomer. "Hello Saginaw! I hear you're a boss now. Well, good luck to you. How's the new camp, 'bout ready?"

"Yes, a couple of days will finish her up. Yer storehouse an' men's camp, an' cook's camp is [113]

done, so you can go ahead an' move in."

Slue Foot scowled: "I seen Hurley comin' out an' he says I should leave you fifteen men out of my crew, so I done it. Seems funny he'd give a green boss the biggest crew, but he's got you right here where he kin keep his eye on you, so I s'pose he knows what he's doin'."

"I 'spect he does," agreed Saginaw. "When you git to camp send them men back with mine."

Slue Foot nodded. "Well come on, kid," he ordered, gruffly. "We'll go up on the tote wagon."

Connie picked up his book and followed, and as he went out the door he turned to see Saginaw regarding him curiously.

CHAPTER IX

SAGINAW ED IN THE TOILS

CONNIE hoped that during the ride to Camp Two Slue Foot would further enlighten him concerning his various schemes for defrauding his employers, but the man sat silent, eyeing the tall pines that flanked the roadway on either side.

"Pretty good timber, isn't it?" ventured the boy, after a time.

The boss nodded: "They hain't much of them kind left. If I owned this trac' an' could afford to pay taxes I'd never lay down a stick of it fer ten year—mebbe twenty."

"Why not?"

"Why not! 'Cause it'll be worth ten dollars where it's worth a dollar now—that's why. Pine's a-goin' up every year, an' they've cut the best of it everywheres except here an' there a strip that [115] fer one reason an' another they couldn't git holt of."

"The Syndicate's cutting theirs now, and surely they can afford to pay taxes."

Slue Foot grinned: "They wouldn't be cuttin' their white pine along Dogfish if this trac' wasn't bein' cut."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Mebbe if you kind of stick around, like I told you, you'll see. I'm one of these here hairpins that never tells no one nawthin' about anythin' 'til the time comes—see?"

"You're all right, Slue Foot," laughed the boy. "I guess I'll stick around."

"It's a good thing fer you you got sense enough to know who to tie to. No one never made nawthin' workin' fer wages—an' no one ever will."

As they drew into Camp Two's clearing Slue Foot cocked a weatherwise eye skyward. "Shouldn't wonder an' the snow'll be comin' tonight or tomorrow—them clouds looks like it. Come on, le's git at them supplies. They's two wagons in a'ready an' two more comin' an' we want to git 'em onloaded by night."

Slue Foot called a dozen men to help with the unloading and stowing, and for the rest of the [116] afternoon Connie had his hands full checking off the goods as they were carried past him at the door. At last the task was completed and after supper the boy struck out for Camp One. As he plodded through the jet blackness of the tote road his mind was busy with the problem that confronted him. What should he do? Manifestly the easiest course would be to go straight to Hurley and tell him just what Slue Foot had told him, and let the boss deal with him as he saw fit. But, in that case Hurley would, in all probability, fly off the handle and either discharge Slue Foot or "beat him up" or both. In which event the man would go unpunished for last winter's work, whatever that had been, and worst of all, there would be absolutely no evidence against the Syndicate. And he had no intention of pocketing last year's loss without at least an attempt to recover it and bring its perpetrators to justice.

From what he had seen of Hurley, and what Saginaw and Slue Foot had told him, the boy was confident that the big boss was square and honest as the day is long—but there was Mike Gillum, himself an honest man and a friend of Waseche, who had reported that Hurley was in the pay of [117] the Syndicate; and Connie knew that men like Mike Gillum did not lie about other men, nor would they make an open accusation unless reasonably sure of their ground. Therefore there was a bare possibility that, despite all evidence to the contrary, Hurley, unknown to either Slue Foot or Saginaw, was playing into the hand of the Syndicate.

"I wonder what's the matter with Saginaw," muttered the boy as he stumbled on through the darkness. "He looked at me kind of funny when we left the office. As if he knows Slue Foot is crooked, and thinks I have thrown in with him." His fists clenched and his lips drew into a hard, straight line. "I'll get to the bottom of it if it takes all winter!" he gritted. "And when I do, someone is going to squirm." Something prickled sharply against his cheek and he glanced upward. He could see nothing in the inky blackness, but the prickling sensation was repeated and he knew that it was snowing. The wind rose and the snow fell faster. By the time he reached the clearing it whitened the ground. The little office was dark as he let himself in. The sound of heavy [118] breathing told him that Saginaw was already in bed, and, without lighting the lamp, he undressed and crawled between his blankets.

When Connie awoke the following morning the fire was burning brightly in the stove and Saginaw stood staring out through the little window that showed a translucent grey square against the dark log wall. He turned at the sound of the boy's feet upon the floor. "Snow's held off fer a long time this year, but when she come she come a-plenty," he observed.

"Still snowing?" asked the boy, as he wriggled into his clothing. "It started last night while I was coming down from Camp Two."

"Yeh, it's still snowin.' Foot deep a'ready an' comin' down in fine flakes an' slantin' like she's a-goin' to keep on snowin'!"

"Are you going to begin laying 'em down today?"

Saginaw shook his head: "No. I'm a-goin' to set 'em overhaulin' the sleds, an' the sprinkler, an' the drays, an' gittin' the skidways in shape, an' breakin' out the road. It's cold enough fer to make a good bottom an' things ort to go a-whoopin' when this snow lets up."

Connie snickered. "I bet Slue Foot's growling this morning, with no roof on his office and [119]
blacksmith shop, and his stable and oat house only about half chinked."

"He'd growl if his camp was 'lectric lit an' steam het. I'm ready fer breakfast, if the cook's saved us some. You go on over an' I'll be 'long when I git the men strung out." Saginaw filled the stove with chunks and together they left the office, the older man heading for the men's camp, while Connie made directly for the cook's camp. As the boy lowered his head to the sting of the sweeping snow and plodded across the clearing, a feeling of great loneliness came over him, for he knew that there lurked in the man's mind a feeling of distrust—a feeling that he had studiously attempted to conceal. Nothing in the spoken words revealed this distrust, but the boy was quick to note that the voice lacked something of the hearty comradery that had grown up between them.

"This is almost like Alaska," Connie muttered, as he breathed deeply of the clean, cold air. "I wish I was in Ten Bow right now—with Waseche Bill, and MacDougall, and Dutch Henry and the [120]
rest of 'em—or else over on the Yukon with Big Dan McKeever, and Rickey." The boy's fists clenched within his mittens, as was their habit when he faced a difficult situation. "If it wasn't that Waseche is depending on me to straighten out this mess, I'd strike out for Ten Bow today. But I've just naturally got to see it through—and I've got to go it alone, too. If I should let Saginaw in, and it should turn out that Hurley is crooked, my chance of nailing him would be shot, because Saginaw and Hurley are one, two, three.

"The first thing I better do," he decided, as he stamped the snow from his boots before the door of the cook's camp, "is to slip up and see Mike Gillum and find out how he knows Hurley is in the pay of the Syndicate."

During the breakfast the boy was unusually silent and when the meal was finished he returned directly to the office, and stood for a long time staring out into the whirling white smother. As he turned to his desk his eye encountered Hurley's snow-shoes hanging from their peg on the opposite wall. "It's only ten miles to Willow River," he muttered, "and I've just got to see Mike Gillum."

A moment later he stepped through the door, fastened on the snow-shoes and, hastening [121]
across the clearing, plunged into the timber.

It was nearly noon when Saginaw Ed returned to the office and found it empty. Almost instantly he noticed that the boss's snow-shoes were missing and he grinned: "Kid's out practising on the rackets, I guess." Then he stepped to the door. The snow had continued to fall steadily—fine, wind-driven flakes that pile up slowly. The trail was very faint, and as the man's eye followed it across the clearing his brows drew into a puzzled frown. "That don't look like no practice trail," he muttered. "No, sir! They ain't no greener ever yet started off like that." He pinched his chin between his thumb and forefinger and scowled at the trail. "One of two things: Either the kid ain't the greener he lets on to be, or else someone else has hiked off on the boss's snow-shoes. An' either which way, it's up to me to find out." Crossing swiftly to the cook shack he returned a few minutes later, the pockets of his mackinaw bulging with lunch, and drawing his own snow-shoes from beneath his bunk, struck out upon the fast dimming trail.

"I mistrust Slue Foot, an' I didn't like the way he started to bawl out the kid yeste'day. It [122]
seemed kind of like it wasn't straight goods. He's a beefer an' a growler, all right, but somehow, this time it seemed as if it was kind of piled on fer my special benefit."

In the timber, sheltered from the sweep of the wind, the track had not drifted full, but threaded the woods in a broad, trough-like depression that the woodsman easily followed. Mile after mile it held to the north, dipping into deep ravines, skirting thick windfalls, and crossing steep ridges. As the trail lengthened the man's face hardened. "Whoever's a-hikin' ahead of me ain't no greener an' he ain't walkin' fer fun, neither. He's travellin' as fast as I be, an' he knows where he's a-goin', too." He paused at the top of a high ridge and smote a heavily mittened palm with a mittened fist. "So that's the way of it, eh? I heard how the Syndicate was runnin' a big camp on Willow River—an' this here's the Willow River divide. They ain't only one answer, the kid, or whoever it is I'm a-follerin', has be'n put in here by the Syndicate to keep cases on Hurley's camps—either that, or Slue Foot's in with 'em, an' is usin' the kid fer a go-between. They're pretty smart, all right, headin' way up to this here Willow River camp. They figgered that [123]
no one wouldn't pay no 'tention to a trail headin' north, while if it led over to the Syndicate camp on Dogfish someone would spot it in a minute. An' with it snowin' like this, they figgered the trail would drift full, or else look so old no one would bother about it. They ain't only one thing to do, an' that's to go ahead an' find out. What a man knows is worth a heap more'n what he can guess. They's a-goin' to be some big surprises on Dogfish 'fore this winter's over, an' some folks is a-goin' to wish they'd of be'n smarter—or stayed honester."

Saginaw descended the slope and, still following the trail, walked steadily for an hour. Suddenly he paused to listen. Distinctly to his ears came the measured thud of pounded iron, punctuated at regular intervals by the metallic ring of a hammer upon an anvil. "It's the Syndicate's Willow River camp," he muttered, and advanced cautiously. Presently he gained the clearing and, skirting it, halted at the edge of a log road that reached back into the timber. The man noted that whoever made the trail had made no attempt to conceal his visit from the Syndicate crew, for the tracks struck into the road which led directly into the clearing. Not a soul [124]
was in sight and, hurriedly crossing the road, Saginaw continued to skirt the clearing until he arrived at a point directly opposite a small building that stood by itself midway between the men's camp and the stable. "That had ort to be the office," he said as he studied the lay of the camp and the conformation of the ground. Several large piles of tops lay between the edge of the clearing and the small building, against the back of which had been placed a huge pile of firewood. Across the clearing upon the bank of the river a crew of men were engaged in levelling

off the rollways, and other men were busy about the open door of the blacksmith shop, where the forge fire burned brightly. The storm had thinned to a scarcely perceptible downfall and the rising wind whipped the smoke from the stovepipe of the building. "I've got to find out who's in that office," he decided and, suiting the action to the word, moved swiftly from one pile of tops to another, until he gained the shelter of the woodpile.

[125] It is a very risky thing to peer into the window of a small room occupied by at least two people in broad daylight, and it was with the utmost caution that Saginaw removed his cap and applied his eye to the extreme corner of the pane. Seated facing each other, close beside the stove, were Connie and Mike Gillum. The boss's hand was upon the boy's knee and he was talking earnestly. At the sight Saginaw could scarce refrain from venting his anger in words. He had seen enough and, dodging quickly back, retraced his steps, and once more gained the shelter of the timber.

"So that's yer game, is it, you sneakin' little spy? Takin' advantage of Hurley the minute his back's turned! You've got him fooled, all right. An' you had me fooled, too. You're a smart kid, but you ain't quite smart enough. You can't do no harm now we're onto yer game, an' 'fore them logs hits the water in the spring yer goin' to find out you ain't the only smart one in the timber—you an' Slue Foot, too."

It was well past the middle of the afternoon when Saginaw took the back trail and struck out at a long swinging walk for the camp on Dogfish. The flash of anger, engendered by the sight of the boy in friendly conference with the boss of the Syndicate camp, gave way to keen disappointment as he tramped on and on through the timber. He had liked Connie from the first, [126] and as the days went by his regard for the boy, whose brains and nerve had won the respect and admiration of the whole camp, grew. "I've a good mind to git him off to one side an' give him a good straight talk. He ain't like that Steve. Why, doggone it! I couldn't feel no worse about findin' out he's headed wrong, if he was my own boy. An' if he was my own boy, it would be my job to talk things over with him an' try to steer him straight, instead of layin' for to catch him in some crooked work an' send him over the road for it. By gum, I'll do it, too! An' I'll give it to him right straight, without no fancy trimmin's neither. Tonight'll be a good time when him an' I'll be alone."

His cogitations had carried him to within a mile of Camp Two, which the trail carefully avoided, when suddenly, at the bottom of a deep ravine, a man stepped in front of him:

"Hands up!" It was some seconds before Saginaw realized that he was staring straight into the muzzle of a rifle that the man held within six inches of his nose. Two other men stepped from behind trees and joined the leader.

"Makes a difference which end of the gun yer at when ye hear them words, don't it?" sneered [127] the man, and in the deep twilight of the thick woods Saginaw recognized the men as the three I. W. W.'s that he and Connie had arrested in their attempt to burn the stable. Also he recognized the boss's rifle.

"Where's Hurley?" he cried, as full realization of the situation forced itself upon him.

"I said *'hands up'!*" reminded the man with the gun, "an' I meant it. An' if I wus you I'd put 'em up. I guess when we git through with ye ye'll think twict before ye lock folks up in a oat house to freeze to death all night—you an' that smart alec kid."

"Where's Hurley?" repeated Saginaw, with arms upraised.

The man laughed, coarsely: "Hurley, we fixed his clock fer him. An' we'll fix yourn, too. We'll learn ye to fool with the I. W. W. when it's a-goin' about its business. An' we'll learn everyone else, too. We're stronger 'n the law, an' stronger 'n the Government, an' when we git ready we'll show the bosses an' the capitalists where to git off at!"

"You're a bunch of dirty crooks, an' thieves, an' murderers—an' you ain't got the brains to [128] show nobody nawthin'."

"Search him!" commanded the leader, his face livid with rage. "We'll show you somethin', 'fore we git through with you—jest like we showed Hurley. Come on, now, git a move on. We got to see a party an' git holt of some grub. 'Fore we git started, though, ye kin jest take off them snow-shoes, I kin use 'em myself, an' you kin see how it feels to waller through the snow like we be'n doin'." The transfer was soon accomplished, and marching Saginaw before them, the three headed off at a right angle from the trail.

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[129]

CHAPTER X

CONNIE DOES SOME TRAILING

CONNIE MORGAN halted abruptly and stared down at the snow. At the point where, a couple of hours before, he had emerged into the tote road, another, fresher, snow-shoe track crossed the road and struck out upon his back trail. For some moments he studied the track, his trained eye taking every slightest detail. "Whoever it was followed my trail to here, and for some reason didn't want to follow it on into the clearing. So he kept on, and it wasn't long before he took the back trail." He bent closer, and when he once more stood erect his face was very grave. "It's Saginaw," he muttered. "I helped him restring that left racket." Swiftly the boy followed the tracks to the point where the man had struck into the clearing at the rear of the little office. "He followed me and found me talking to Mike Gillum."

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SWIFTLY THE BOY FOLLOWED THE TRACKS TO THE POINT WHERE THE MAN HAD STRUCK INTO THE CLEARING.

As Connie struck out on the back trail he smiled grimly: "Gee, I bet he thinks I'm a bad one. He knows the Syndicate put one over on Hurley last winter, and now he thinks I'm hand in glove with 'em. I would like to have run this thing down alone, but I guess I'll have to let Saginaw in on it now. Maybe he won't believe me, and maybe Hurley won't, and then I'll get fired! Anyhow, he broke a good trail for me," grinned the boy as he swung swiftly through the timber. Travelling light, he made rapid progress, and as he walked, his brain was busy trying to solve his riddle of the woods. Mike Gillum had told him that he had worked on several jobs with Hurley, that he was a good lumberman, that he could handle men, and get out the logs. Knowing this, he had recommended him to Waseche Bill, as foreman of his camp. Gillum said that by accident he had seen Hurley's name on the Syndicate pay roll and had asked one of the clerks in the office about it, and that the clerk had winked and told him that Hurley was well worth all the Syndicate paid him because he was boss of an independent outfit that was logging up on Dogfish. It was then that Gillum had written to Waseche Bill. He had known nothing of the latter's loss of last winter [131] until Connie had told him at the time of their first meeting. Despite the man's statements, Connie [132] could not bring himself to believe that Hurley was guilty. "There's a mistake somewhere," he muttered as he trudged on, "and I've got to find out where. I can't let Hurley in on it, because he's hot-headed and he'd jump in and spoil every chance we had of catching the real culprit, or, if he is mixed up in it, he'd have all the chance in the world to cover his tracks so I never could prove anything on him. But he isn't guilty!" This last was uttered aloud and with the emphasis of conviction. For the life of him the boy could not have given a good and sufficient reason for this conviction. Indeed, all reason was against it. But the conviction was there, and the reason for the conviction was there—even if the boy could not have told it—and it ran a great deal deeper than he knew.

From the moment three years before, when he had landed, a forlorn and friendless little figure, upon the dock at Anvik, he had been thrown among men—men crude and rough as the

land they lived in. His daily associates had been good men—and bad. He had known good men [133]
with deplorable weaknesses, and bad men with admirable virtues. In his association with these men of the lean, lone land the boy had unconsciously learned to take keen measure of men. And, having taken his measure, he accepted a man at his worth. The boy knew that Mike Gillum had not lied to him—that under no circumstances would he lie to injure another. But, despite the man's positive statement, Connie's confidence in Hurley remained unshaken. Hurley had assumed a definite place in his scheme of things, and it would take evidence much more tangible than an unsubstantiated statement to displace him.

Under the heavily overcast sky and the thickly interlaced branches of the pines, daylight passed into twilight, and twilight fast deepened to darkness as the boy pushed on through the forest. Suddenly he halted. To his surprise, the trail he was following turned abruptly to the west. He knew that the fresher tracks of Saginaw's snow-shoes had been laid over his own back trail, and he knew that he had made no right angle turn in his trip to Willow River. Bending close to the snow he made out in the deep gloom other tracks—the tracks of three men who had not worn [134]
snow-shoes. The three had evidently intercepted Saginaw and a powwow had ensued, for there had been much trampling about in the snow. Then Saginaw had abandoned his course and accompanied the men to the westward.

[135]

THE BOY HASTENED UNNOTICED TO THE EDGE OF A CROWD OF MEN THAT ENCIRCLED FRENCHY LAMAR.

"Camp Two is west of here," muttered the boy. "I guess the men were part of Slue Foot's crew, and he went over to the camp with 'em." Darkness prevented him from noting that the trail that led to the westward was a clumsier trail than Saginaw would have made, or he never would have dismissed the matter so lightly from his mind. As it was, he continued upon his course for Camp One, where he arrived nearly an hour later to find the camp in a turmoil. The boy hastened, unnoticed, to the edge of a crowd of men that encircled Frenchy Lamar, who talked as fast as he could in an almost unintelligible jargon, which he punctuated with shrugs, and wild- [136]
flung motions of his arms.

"*Oui*, dat be'n w'en de las' of de Camp Two tote teams be'n pass 'bout de half hour. We com' 'long by de place w'er de road she twis' 'roun an' slant down de steep ravine. Woof! Rat on de trail stan' de leetle black bear, an', *Sacre!* Ma leaders git so scare dey stan' oop on de hine leg lak dey gon for dance. Dey keek, dey jomp, dey plonge, an', *Voila!* Dem wheelers git crazy too. I'm got ma han' full, an' plenty mor', too, an' de nex' t'ing I'm fin' out dey jomp de wagon oop on de

beeg stomp an' she teep ovaire so queek lak you kin say Jac Robinshon. Crack! Ma reach she brek in two an' ma front ax' she git jerk loose from de wagon an' de nex' t'ing I'm drag by de lines 'cross de creek so fas' dat tear ma coat, ma shirt, ma pants mos' lak de ribbon. I'm bomp ma head, an' lose ma cap, an' scratch ma face, but by gar, I'm hang holt de lines, an' by-m-by dem horse dey git tire to haul me roun' by de mout', and dey stan' still a minute on top de odder side. I'm look back an', *Sacre!* Hurley is lay on de groun' an' de boss I. W. W. is hit heem on de head wit' de gon. De res' is cuttin' loose deir han's. I'm yell on dem to queet poun' on de boss head, wit [137] de rifle, an' de nex' t'ing I'm know: Zing! de bullet com' so clos' eet mak de win' on ma face, an' de nex' t'ing, Zing! Dat bullet she sting de horse an' I'm just got tam to jomp oop on de front ax', an' de horses start out lak she got far business away from here queek. Dey ron so fas' I'm got to hol' on wit' ma han's, wit' ma feet! Dem horses ron so fas' lak de train, dem wheels jomp feefty feet high, an' dey only com' on de groun' 'bout once every half a mile an' den I'm git poun', an' bomp, an' rattle, 'til I'm so black lak de, w'at you call, de niggaire!

"De neares' doctaire, she down to Birch Lak'. I'm leave ma team een de store-keeper stable, an' Ol' Man Niles she say de train don' stop no mor' today, so I can't go to Birch Lak' 'til mornin'. I t'ink, by gar, I'm mak' de train stop, so I'm push de beeg log on de track an' lay on ma belly in de weeds, an' pret' soon de train com' long an' she see de beeg log an' she stop queek, an' dey all ron opp front an' I'm climb on an' tak' de seat in de smokaire. De train go 'long w'en dey git de log shov' off, an' de conductaire, he com' long an' seen me sit dere. 'We're you git on dis train?' [138] she say, an' I'm tell heem I'm git on to Dogfish, w'en de train stop. 'I'm goin' to Birch Lak' for git de doctaire for man w'at git keel,' I'm say, an' he say de train don' stop to Birch Lak', neider. She t'rough train, an' we'n we git to de firs' stop, she gon' for hav' me arres'. I ain' say no mor' an' I'm look out de window, an' de conductaire she go an' set down in de back of de car. De train she gon' ver' fas' an' by-m-by she com' to de breege, an' Birch Lak' is wan half mile.

"I'm travel on de car before, an' I'm see dem stop de train mor' as once to put off de lumbaire-jack w'en dey git to fightin' *Voila!* I'm jomp oop on ma feet ver' queek an' pull two, t'ree tam on de leetle rope, an' de las' tam I'm pull so hard she bre'k in two. De train she stop so queek she mak' fellers bomp 'roun' in de seat, an' de conductaire she so mad she lak to bus', an' she holler ver' mooch, an' com' ronnin' down de middle. She ain' ver' beeg man, an' I'm reach down queek, de nex' t'ing she know she light on de head in de middle w'ere four fellers is playin' cards. Den, I'm ron an' jomp off de car an' fin' de doctaire. Dat gittin' dark, now, an' she startin' to snow, an' [139] de doctaire she say we can't go to Dogfish 'til mornin', day ain' no mor' train. I'm see de han' car down by de track, but de doctaire she say we ain' can tak' dat for 'cause we git arres'. But I'm laugh on heem, an' I'm say I'm tak' dat han' car, 'cause I'm got to git arres' anyhow—but firs' dey got to ketch—eh? So I'm tak' a rock an' bus' de lock an' we lif' her on de track an' com' to Dogfish. Ol' Man Niles she tak' hees team an' gon' oop an' got Hurley an' de cookee, an' breeng heem to de store. De doctaire she feex de boss oop, an' she say eef eet ain' for dat cookee stay 'roun' an' mak' de blood quit comin', Hurley she would be dead befor' we com' long. Dis mornin' I'm tak' ma team an' Ol Man Niles's wagon an' com' to de camp. Hurley she won' go to de hospital, lak de doctaire say, so de doctaire she com' 'long. Eet tak' me all day long, de snow she so d'ep, an' by gar——"

Connie left in the middle of the Frenchman's discourse and hurried into the office. In his bunk, with his head swathed in bandages, lay Hurley. The doctor stood beside the stove and watched Steve feed the injured man gruel from a spoon. The big boss opened his eyes as the boy [140] entered. He smiled faintly, and with ever so slight a motion of his head indicated Steve: "An' I said they wasn't the worth of a lath in his hide," he muttered and nodded weakly as Connie crossed swiftly to the boy's side and shook his hand. Hurley's voice dropped almost to a whisper: "I'll be laid up fer a couple of days. Tell Saginaw to—keep—things—goin'."

"I'll tell him," answered Connie, grimly, and, as the boss's eyes closed, stepped to his own bunk and, catching up the service revolver from beneath the blankets, hurried from the room.

Connie Morgan was a boy that experience and training had taught to think quickly. When he left the office it was with the idea of heading a posse of lumberjacks in the capture of the three I. W. W.'s, for from the moment he heard of their escape the boy realized that these were the three men who had intercepted Saginaw Ed on his return from Willow River. His one thought was to rescue the captive, for well he knew that, having Saginaw in their power, the thugs would stop at nothing in venting their hatred upon the helpless man. As he hurried toward the crowd in front of the men's camp his brain worked rapidly. Fifty men in the woods at night would make fifty times [141] as much noise as one man. Then again, what would the men do if they should catch the three? The boy paused for a moment at the corner of the oat house. There was only one answer to *that* question. The answer had been plain even before the added outrage of the attack upon Hurley—and Hurley was liked by his men. Stronger than ever became the boy's determination to have the I. W. W.'s dealt with by the law. There must be no posse.

His mind swung to the other alternative. If he went alone he could follow swiftly and silently. The odds would be three against one—but the three had only one gun between them. He fingered the butt of his revolver confidently. "I can wing the man with the gun, and then cover the others," he muttered, "and besides, I'll have all the advantage of knowing what I'm up against while they think they're safe. Dan McKeever was strong for that. I guess I'll go it alone."

Having arrived at this decision the boy crossed the clearing to the men's camp where he singled out Swede Larson from the edge of the crowd. "Saginaw and I've got some special work to do," he whispered; "you keep the men going 'til we get back." Without waiting for a reply, he [142] hastened to the oat house, fastened on his snow-shoes, and slipped into the timber.

It was no hardship, even in the darkness, for him to follow the snow-shoe trail, and to the point where the others had left it his progress was rapid. The snow had stopped falling, and great

rifts appeared in the wind-driven clouds. Without hesitation Connie swung into the trail of the four men. He reasoned that they would not travel far because when they had intercepted Saginaw there could not have been more than two or three hours of daylight left. The boy followed swiftly along the trail, pausing frequently to listen, and as he walked he puzzled over the fact that the men had returned to the vicinity of the camp, when obviously they should have made for the railway and placed as much distance as possible between themselves and the scene of their crimes. He dismissed the thought of their being lost, for all three were woodsmen. Why, then, had they returned?

Suddenly he halted and shrank into the shelter of a windfall. Upon the branches of the pine [143] trees some distance ahead his eye caught the faint reflection of a fire.

Very cautiously he left the trail and, circling among the trees, approached the light from the opposite direction. Nearer and nearer he crept until he could distinctly see the faces of the four men. Crouching behind a thick tree trunk, he could see that the men had no blankets, and that they huddled close about the fire. He could see Saginaw with his hands tied, seated between two of the others. Suddenly, beyond the fire, apparently upon the back trail of the men, a twig snapped. Instantly one of the three leaped up, rifle in hand, and disappeared in the woods. Connie waited in breathless suspense. Had Swede Larson followed him? Or had someone else taken up the trail? In a few moments the man returned and, taking Saginaw by the arm, jerked him roughly to his feet and, still gripping the rifle, hurried him into the woods away from the trail. They passed close to Connie, and the boy thanked his lucky star that he had circled to the north instead of the south, or they would have immediately blundered onto his trail. A short distance further on, and just out of sight of the camp fire, they halted, and the man gave a low [144] whistle. Instantly another man stepped into the circle of the firelight—a man bearing upon his back a heavily laden pack surmounted by several pairs of folded blankets. He tossed the pack into the snow and greeted the two men who remained at the fire with a grin. Then he produced a short black pipe, and, as he stooped to pick up a brand from the fire, Connie stared at him in open-mouthed amazement.

The newcomer was the boss of Camp Two!

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[145]

CHAPTER XI

CONNIE FINDS AN ALLY

WHER'S Pierce?" asked Slue Foot Magee, as he glanced down upon the two figures that crouched close about the little fire.

"He went on ahead to hunt a place to camp. We waited to pack the stuff," lied the man, nodding toward the pack sack that the boss of Camp Two had deposited in the snow.

"I sure was surprised when Sam, here, popped out of the woods an' told me ye'd got away an' needed blankets an' grub. Wha'd ye do to Hurley? An' how come ye didn't hit fer the railroad an' make yer git-away?"

"We beat Hurley up a-plenty so'st he won't be in no hurry to take no I. W. W.'s nowheres ag'in. An' as fer hittin' fer the railroad, it's too cold fer to ride the rods or the bumpers, an' we hain't got a dollar between us. You'll have to stake us fer the git-away."

Slue Foot frowned: "I hain't got a cent, neither. Come into the woods on credick—an' hain't draw'd none." [146]

"That's a fine mess we're in!" exclaimed the leader angrily. "How fer d' ye figger we're a-goin' to git on what little grub ye fetched in that pack? An' wher' we goin' to—bein' as we're broke? We hit back fer you 'cause we know'd ye stood strong in the organization an' we had a right to think ye'd see us through."

"I'll see ye through!" growled Slue Foot, impatiently. "But I can't give ye nawthin' I hain't got, kin I?" He stood for a few moments staring into the fire, apparently in deep thought. "I've got it!" he exclaimed. "The Syndicate's got a camp 'bout ten mile north of here on Willer River. They're short handed an' the boss'll hire anything he kin git. Seen him in town 'fore I come out, an' he wanted to hire me, but I was already hired to Hurley—got a boss's job, too, an' that's better'n what I'd got out of him. If youse fellers hadn't of be'n in such a hurry to pull somethin' an' had of waited 'til I come, ye wouldn't of botched the job an' got caught."

"Is that so!" flared the leader. "I s'pose we'd ort to know'd ye was goin' to be hired on this job! [147] An' I s'pose our instructions is not to pull no rough stuff onless you're along to see it's done right!"

"They hain't nawthin' in standin' 'round argerin'," interrupted Slue Foot. "What I was a-goin' on to say is that youse better hike on up to Willer River an' git ye a job. There's grub enough in the pack to last ye twict that fer."

"Wher'll we tell the boss we come from? 'Taint in reason we'd hit that fer into the woods huntin' a job."

"Tell him ye got sore on me an' quit. If they's any questions asked I'll back ye up."

The leader of the I. W. W.'s looked at Sam, and Sam looked at the leader. They were in a quandary. For reasons of their own they had not told Slue Foot that they had picked up Saginaw —and with Saginaw on their hands, how were they going to follow out the boss's suggestion?

Behind his big tree, Connie Morgan had been an interested listener. He knew why the men stared blankly at each other, and chuckled to himself at their predicament.

"What's to hinder someone from Camp One a-trailin' us up there?" suggested Sam.

"Trailin' ye! How they goin' to trail ye? It was a-snowin' clean up to the time ye got to Camp [148] Two, an' if any one sees yer tracks around there I'll say I sent some men up that way fer somethin'. An' besides," he continued, glancing upward where the clouds that had thinned into flying scuds had thickened again, obliterating the stars, "this storm hain't over yet. It'll be snowin' ag'in 'fore long an' ye won't leave no more trail'n a canoe. Anyways, that's the best way I kin think of. If you've got a better one go to it—I've done all I kin fer ye." There was finality in Slue Foot's voice as he drew on his mittens, and turned from the fire. "So long, an' good luck to ye."

"So long," was the rather surly rejoinder. "If that's the best we kin do, I s'pose we gotta do it. Mebbe if it starts snowin' we're all right, an' if we make it, we'll be safer up there than what we would down along the railroad, anyways. They won't be no one a-huntin' us in the woods."

"Sure they won't," agreed Slue Foot, as he passed from sight into the timber.

The two beside the fire sat in silence until the sound of Slue Foot's footsteps was swallowed up in the distance. Then Sam spoke: "What we goin' to do with this here Saginaw?" he asked. [149]

The leader glanced skyward. "It's startin' to snow—" he leered and, stopping abruptly, rose to his feet. "Wait till we git Pierce in here." Producing some pieces of rope from his pocket, he grinned. "Lucky I fetched these along when I cut 'em off my hands. We'll give him a chanct to see how it feels to be tied up onct." The man stepped into the timber and a few minutes later returned accompanied by Pierce, to whom they immediately began to relate what had passed between them and the boss of Camp Two.

The moment they seated themselves about the fire, Connie slipped from his hiding place behind the tree and stole noiselessly toward the spot where the men had left Saginaw. Snow was falling furiously now, adding the bewildering effect of its whirling flakes to the intense blackness of the woods. Removing his snow-shoes to avoid leaving a wide, flat trail, the boy stepped into the tracks of the two who had returned to the fire and, a few moments later, was bending over a dark

form that sat motionless with its back against the trunk of a tree.

"It's me, Saginaw," he whispered, as the keen edge of his knife blade severed the ropes that [150] bound the man's hands and feet.

"WHAT IN THE NAME OF TIME BE YOU DOIN' HERE?" EXCLAIMED SAGINAW.

The man thrust his face close to Connie's in the darkness. "What in the name of time be you doin' here?" he exclaimed.

"Sh-sh-sh," whispered the boy. "Come on, we've got to get away in a hurry. There's no tellin' [151] how soon those fellows will finish their powwow."

"What do you mean—git away? When we git away from here we take them birds along, er my name ain't Saginaw Ed! On top of tryin' to burn up the camp they've up an' murdered Hurley, an' they'd of done the like by me, if they'd be'n give time to!"

"We'll get them, later. I know where they're going. What we've got to do is to beat it. Step in my tracks so they won't know there were two of us. They'll think you cut yourself loose and they won't try to follow in the dark, especially if the storm holds."

"But them hounds has got my rackets."

"I've got mine, and when we get away from here I'll put 'em on and break trail for you."

"Look a here, you give me yer gun an' I'll go in an' clean up on them desperadoes. I'll show 'em if the I. W. W.'s is goin' to run the woods! I'll——"

"Come on! I tell you we can get 'em whenever we want 'em——"

"I'll never want 'em no worse'n I do right now."

"Hurley's all right, I saw him a little while ago."

"They said they——" [152]

"I don't care what they said. Hurley's down in the office, right now. Come on, and when we put a few miles behind us, I'll tell you all you want to know."

"You'll tell a-plenty, then," growled Saginaw, only half convinced. "An' here's another thing—if you're double crossin' me, you're a-goin' to wish you never seen the woods."

The boy's only answer was a laugh, and he led, swiftly as the intense darkness would permit, into the woods. They had gone but a short distance when he stopped and put on his rackets. After that progress was faster, and Saginaw Ed, mushing along behind, wondered at the accuracy with which the boy held his course in the blackness and the whirling snow. A couple of hours later, Connie halted in the shelter of a thick windfall. "We can rest up for a while, now," he said, "and I'll tell you some of things you want to know."

"Where do you figger we're at?" asked Saginaw, regarding the boy shrewdly.

"We're just off the tote road between the two camps," answered the boy without hesitation.

A moment of silence followed the words and when he spoke the voice of Saginaw sounded [153] hard: "I've be'n in the woods all my life, an' it would of bothered me to hit straight fer camp on a night like this. They's somethin' wrong here somewheres, kid—an' the time's come fer a showdown. I don't git you, at all! You be'n passin' yerself off fer a greener. Ever sence you went out an' got that deer I've know'd you wasn't—but I figgered it worn't none of my business. Then when you out-figgered them hounds—that worn't no greener's job, an' I know'd that—but, I figgered you was all to the good. But things has happened sence, that ain't all to the good—by a long shot. You've got some explainin' to do, an' seein' we're so clost to camp, we better go on to the office an' do it around the stove."

"We wouldn't get much chance to powwow in the office tonight. Hurley's there, and the doctor, and Steve, and Lon Camden."

"The doctor?"

"Yes, those fellows beat Hurley up pretty bad, but he's coming along all right. Steve stayed by him, and the doctor said it saved his life."

"You don't mean that sneakin' cookee that throw'd in with the I. W. W.?"

"Yup." [154]

"Well, I'll be doggoned! But, them bein' in the office don't alter the case none. We might's well have things open an' above board."

Connie leaned forward and placed his hand on the man's arm. "What I've got to say, I want to say to you, and to no one else. I wanted to play the game alone, but while I was trailing you down from Willow River, I decided I'd have to let you in on it."

"You know'd I follered you up there?"

"Of course I knew it. Didn't I help you string that racket?"

Saginaw shook his head in resignation. "We might's well have it out right here," he said. "I don't git you. First off, you figger how to catch them jaspers with the goods an' lock 'em up. Then you throw in with Slue Foot. Then you hike up to the Syndicate camp an' is thicker'n thieves with the boss. Then you pop up in a blizzard in the middle of the night an' cut me loose. Then you turn 'round an' let them hounds go when we could of nailed 'em where they set—seems like you've bit off quite a contract to make all them things jibe. Go ahead an' spit 'er out—an' believe me, it'll be [155] an earful! First, though, you tell me where them I. W. W.'s is goin' an' how you know. If I ain't satisfied, I'm a-goin' to hit right back an' git 'em while the gittin's good."

"They're going up to work for the Syndicate in the Willow River Camp."

"Know'd they was loose an' slipped up to git 'em a job, did you?" asked Saginaw sarcastically.

Connie grinned. "No. But there's a big job ahead of you and me this winter—to save the timber and clear Hurley's name."

"What do you know about Hurley an' the timber?"

"Not as much as I will by spring. But I do know that we lost $14,000 on this job last winter. You see, I'm one of the owners."

"One of the owners!" Saginaw exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes. I've got the papers here to prove it. You couldn't read 'em in the dark, so you'll have to take my word for it 'til we get where you can read 'em. Waseche Bill is my partner and we live in Ten Bow, Alaska. Soon after Hurley's report reached us, showing the loss, a letter came from [156] Mike Gillum, saying that Hurley was in the pay of the Syndicate——"

"He's a liar!" cried Saginaw wrathfully shaking his mittened fist in Connie's face. "I've know'd Hurley, man an' boy, an' they never was a squarer feller ever swung an axe. Who is this here Mike Gillum? Lead me to him! I'll tell him to his face he's a liar, an' then I'll prove it by givin' him the doggonest lickin' he ever got—an' I don't care if he's big as a meetin' house door, neither!"

"Wait a minute, Saginaw, and listen. I know Hurley's square. But I didn't know it until I got acquainted with him. I came clear down from Alaska to catch him with the goods, and that's why I hired out to him. But, Mike Gillum is square, too. He's boss of the Syndicate camp on Willow River. A clerk in the Syndicate office told him that the Syndicate was paying Hurley, and Mike wrote to Waseche Bill. He's a friend of Waseche's—used to prospect in Alaska——"

"I don't care if he used to prospeck in heaven! He's a liar if he says Hurley ever double crossed any one!"

"Hold on, I think I've got an idea of what's going on here and it will be up to us to prove it. [157] The man that's doing the double crossing is Slue Foot Magee. I didn't like his looks from the minute I first saw him. Then he began to hint that there were ways a forty-dollar-a-month clerk could double his wages, and when I pretended to fall in with his scheme he said that when they begin laying 'em down he'll show me how to shade the cut. And more than that, he said he had something big he'd let me in on later, provided I kept my eyes and ears open to what went on in the office."

"An' you say you an' yer pardner owns this here timber?"

"That's just what I said."

"Then Slue Foot's ondertook to show you a couple of schemes where you kin steal consider'ble money off yerself?"

Connie laughed. "That's it, exactly."

Saginaw Ed remained silent for several moments. "Pervidin' you kin show them papers, an' from what I've saw of you, I ain't none surprised if you kin, how come it that yer pardner sent a kid like you way down here on what any one ort to know would turn out to be a rough job anyways you look at it?"

"He didn't send me—I came. He wanted to come himself, but at that time we thought it was [158] Hurley we were after, and Hurley knows Waseche so he could never have found out anything, even if he had come down. And besides, I've had quite a lot of experience in jobs like this. I served a year with the Mounted."

"The Mounted! You don't mean the Canady Mounted Police!"

"Yes, I do."

There was another long silence, then the voice of Saginaw rumbled almost plaintively through the dark, "Say, kid, you ain't never be'n *President*, have you?"

Connie snickered. "No, I've never been President. And if there's nothing else you want to know right now, let's hit the hay. We've both done some man's size mushing today."

"You spoke a word, kid," answered Saginaw, rising to his feet; "I wouldn't put no crookedness whatever past Slue Foot. But that didn't give this here Gillum no license to blackguard Hurley in

no letter."

"Has Hurley ever worked for the Syndicate?" asked Connie.

"No, he ain't. I know every job he's had in Minnesoty an' Westconsin. Then he went out West [159] to Idyho, or Montany, or somewheres, an' this here's the first job he's had sence he come back."

"What I've been thinking is that Slue Foot has passed himself off to the Syndicate as Hurley. They know that Hurley is boss of this camp, but they don't know him by sight. It's a risky thing to do, but I believe Slue Foot has done it."

"Well, jumpin' Jerushelam! D'you s'pose he'd of dared?"

"That's what we've got to find out—and we've got to do it alone. You know Hurley better than I do, and you know that he's hot-headed, and you know that if he suspected Slue Foot of doing that, he couldn't wait to get the evidence so we could get him with the goods. He'd just naturally sail into him and beat him to a pulp."

Saginaw chuckled. "Yes, an' then he'd squeeze the juice out of the pulp to finish off with. I guess yer right, kid. It's up to me an' you. But how'd you know them I. W. W.'s is headin' fer Willer River?"

"Because I heard Slue Foot tell them to."

"Slue Foot!" [160]

"Yes, I forgot to tell you that Slue Foot is an I. W. W., too. I didn't know it myself 'til tonight. You see, when I got back to camp and found that Hurley's prisoners had made a get-away, I knew right then why you had turned off the back trail from Willow River. I knew they'd treat you like they did Hurley, or worse, so I hit the trail."

"Wasn't they no one else handy you could of brung along?" asked Saginaw, drily.

"The whole camp would have jumped at the chance—and you know it! And you know what they'd have done when they caught 'em. I knew I could travel faster and make less noise than a big gang, and I knew I could handle the job when I got there. I had slipped up and was watching when Pierce took you into the timber. He did that because they heard someone coming. It was Slue Foot, and he brought 'em a grub stake and some blankets. They knew he was an I. W. W., and they'd managed to slip him the word that they were loose. They wanted him to stake them to some money, too, but Slue Foot said he didn't have any, and told them to get a job up on Willow [161] River. He told them they'd be safer there than they would anywhere down along the railroad."

"Yes, but how'd you know they'll go there?"

"They can't go any place else," laughed the boy. "They're broke, and they've only got a little bit of grub."

"When we goin' up an' git 'em?" persisted Saginaw.

"We'll let the sheriff do that for us, then the whole thing will be according to law."

"I guess that's right," assented the man, as the two swung down the tote road.

"We'd better roll in in the men's camp," suggested Connie, as they reached the clearing. A little square of light from the office window showed dimly through the whirling snow, and, approaching noiselessly, the two peeked in. Mounded blankets covered the sleeping forms of the doctor and Lon Camden; Hurley's bandaged head was visible upon his coarse pillow, and beside him sat Steve, wide awake, with the bottles of medicine within easy reach.

"Half past one!" exclaimed Saginaw, glancing at the little clock. "By jiminetty, kid, it's time we was to bed!"

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[162]

CHAPTER XII

SHADING THE CUT

IT was nine o'clock the following morning when Connie was awakened by someone bending over him. It was Saginaw, and the boy noticed that his cap and mackinaw were powdered with snow.

"Still snowing, eh? Why didn't you wake me up before?"

"It's 'bout quit, an' as fer wakin' you up," he grinned, "I didn't hardly dast to. If I was the owner of an outfit an' any doggone lumberjack woke me up 'fore I was good an' ready I'd fire him."

"Oh, you want to see my papers, do you?" grinned Connie.

"Well, I might take a squint at 'em. But that ain't what I come fer. The boss is a whole lot better, an' the doctor's a-goin' back. What I want to know is, why can't he swear out them [163] warrants ag'in them three I. W. W.'s an' have it over with? I didn't say nothin' to Hurley 'bout them bein' located, er he'd of riz up an' be'n half ways to Willer River by now."

"Sure, he can swear out the warrants! I'll slip over to the office and get their names out of the time book, and while I'm gone you might look over these." The boy selected several papers from a waterproof wallet which he drew from an inner pocket and passed them over to Saginaw, then he finished dressing and hurried over to the office. Hurley was asleep, and, copying the names from the book, Connie returned to the men's camp.

"You're the goods all right," said Saginaw, admiringly, as he handed back the papers. "From now on I'm with you 'til the last gap, as the feller says. You've got more right down nerve than I ever know'd a kid could have, an' you've got the head on you to back it. Yer good enough fer me—you say the word, an' I go the limit." He stuck out his hand, which Connie gripped strongly.

"You didn't have to tell me that, Saginaw," answered the boy, gravely, "if you had, you would never have had the chance."

Saginaw Ed removed his hat and scratched his head thoughtfully. "That there'll strike through [164] 'bout dinner time, I guess. But I suspicion what you mean, an'—I'm obliged."

"Here are the names for the doctor—better tell him to swear out warrants both for arson and for attempted murder."

"Yes, sir," answered Saginaw, respectfully.

"Yes, *what!*"

The man grinned sheepishly. "Why—I guess—bein' I was talkin' to the owner——"

"Look here, Saginaw," interrupted the boy, wrathfully, "you just forget this 'owner' business, and don't you start 'siring' me! What do you want to do—give this whole thing away? Up where I live they don't call a man 'sir' just because he happens to have a little more dust than somebody else. It ain't the 'Misters' and the 'Sirs' that are the big men up there; it's the 'Bills' and the 'Jacks' and the 'Scotties' and the 'Petes'—men that would get out and mush a hundred miles to carry grub to a scurvy camp instead of sitting around the stove and hiring someone else to do it—men that have gouged gravel and stayed with the game, bucking the hardest winters in the world, sometimes with only half enough to eat—men with millions, and men that don't own the [165] tools they work with! My own father was one of 'em. 'The unluckiest man in Alaska,' they called him! He never made a strike, but you bet he was a man! There isn't a man that knew him, from Skagway to Candle, and from Candle to Dawson and beyond, that isn't proud to call him friend. Sam Morgan they call him—and they don't put any 'Mister' in front of it, either!"

Saginaw Ed nodded slowly, and once more he seized the boy's hand in a mighty grip. "I git you, kid. I know they's a lot of good men up in your country—but, somehow, I've got a hunch they kind of overlooked a bet when they're callin' your pa onlucky." He took the slip of paper upon which Connie had written the names. At the door he turned. "We begin layin' 'em down today," he said. "Shouldn't wonder an' what Slue Foot'll be down 'fore very long fer to give you yer first lesson."

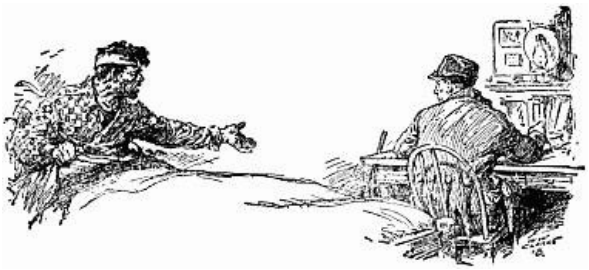
"Hurley will think I'm a dandy, showing up at ten o'clock in the morning."

"Never you mind that," said Saginaw; "I fixed that part up all right—told him you was up 'til [166] after one o'clock helpin' me git things strung out fer to begin work today."

Connie bolted a hasty breakfast, and, as he made his way from the cook's camp to the office, sounds came from the woods beyond the clearing—the voices of men calling loudly to each other as they worked, the ring of axes, and the long crash of falling trees. The winter's real work had begun, and Connie smiled grimly as he thought of the cauldron of plot and counter-plot that was seething behind the scenes in the peaceful logging camp.

The boy found Hurley much improved, although still weak from the effects of the terrible beating he had received at the hands of the escaped prisoners. The big boss fumed and fretted at his enforced inactivity, and bewailed the fact that he had given the doctor his word that he would stay in his bunk for at least two days longer. "An' ut's partly yer fault, wid yer talk av th' law—an' partly mine fer listenin' to yez," he complained fiercely, in rich brogue, as Connie sat at his desk. The boy's shoulders drooped slightly under the rebuke, but he answered nothing. Suddenly Hurley propped himself up on his elbow. "Phy don't yez tell me Oi'm a big liar?" he roared. "Ye [167] was right, an' Oi know ut. Don't pay no heed to me, kid. Oi've got a grouch fer lettin' them shpalpeens git away. Furst Oi was thryin' to lay ut on Frinchy, an' him the bist teamster in th'

woods! Ut's loike a sp'ilt b'y Oi am, thryin' to blame somewan f'r what c'udn't be helped at all. Ut was an accident all togither, an' a piece av bad luck—an' there's an end to ut. Bring me over yer book, now, an' Oi'll show ye about kaypin' thim logs."



"PHY DON'T YEZ TELL ME OI'M A BIG LIAR?" HE ROARED.

Connie soon learned the simple process of bookkeeping, and hardly had he finished when the door opened and Slue Foot Magee entered.

"Well, well! They sure beat ye up bad, boss. I heerd about it on my way down. I'd like to lay [168] hands on them crooks, an' I bet they'd think twict before they beat another man up! But yer a fightin' man, Hurley; they must of got ye foul."

"Foul is the word. When the wagon tipped over my head hit a tree an' that's the last I remember 'til I come to an' the boy, Steve, was bathin' my head with snow an' tyin' up my cuts with strips of his shirt."

"Too bad," condoled Slue Foot, shaking his head sympathetically; "an' they got plumb away?"

"Sure they did. It wasn't so far to the railroad, an' the snow fallin' to cover their tracks. But, Oi'll lay holt av 'em sometime!" he cried, relapsing into his brogue. "An' whin Oi do, law er no law, Oi'll bust 'em woide open clane to their dirty gizzards!"

"Sure ye will!" soothed Slue Foot. "But, it's better ye don't go worryin' about it now. They're miles away, chances is, mixed up with a hundred like 'em in some town er nother. I started the cuttin' this mornin'. I'm workin' to the north boundary, an' then swing back from the river."

Hurley nodded: "That's right. We want to make as good a showin' as we kin this year, Slue [169] Foot. Keep 'em on the jump, but don't crowd 'em too hard."

Slue Foot turned to Connie: "An' now, if ye hain't got nawthin' better to do than set there an' beaver that pencil, ye kin come on up to Camp Two an' I'll give ye the names of the men."

"If you didn't have anything better to do than hike down here, why didn't you stick a list of the names in your pocket?" flashed the boy, who had found it hard to sit and listen to the words of the double-dealing boss of Camp Two.

"Kind of sassy, hain't ye?" sneered Slue Foot. "We'll take that out of ye, 'fore yer hair turns grey. D'ye ever walk on rackets?"

"Some," answered Connie. "I guess I can manage to make it."

Slue Foot went out, and Hurley motioned the boy to his side. "Don't pay no heed to his growlin' an' grumblin', it was born in him," he whispered.

"I'll show him one of these days I ain't afraid of him," answered the boy, so quickly that Hurley laughed.

"Hurry along, then," he said. "An' if ye git back in time I've a notion to send ye out after a [170] pa'tridge. Saginaw says yer quite some sport with a rifle."

"That's the way to work it, kid," commended Slue Foot, as Connie bent over the fastenings of his snow-shoes. "I'll growl an' you sass every time we're ketched together. 'Twasn't that I'd of made ye hike way up to my camp jest fer to copy them names, but the time's came fer to begin to git lined up on shadin' the cut, an' we jest nachelly had to git away from the office. Anyways it won't hurt none to git a good trail broke between the camps."

"There ain't any chance of getting caught at this graft, is there?" asked the boy.

"Naw; that is, 'tain't one chanct in a thousan'. Course, it stan's to reason if a man's playin' fer big stakes he's got to take a chanct. Say, where'd you learn to walk on rackets? You said you hadn't never be'n in the woods before."

"I said I'd never worked in the woods—I've hunted some."

The talk drifted to other things as the two plodded along the tote road, but once within the [171] little office at Camp Two, Slue Foot plunged immediately into his scheme. "It's like this: The sawyers gits paid by the piece—the more they cut, the more pay they git. The logs is scaled after they're on the skidways. Each pair of sawyers has their mark they put on the logs they cut, an' the scaler puts down every day what each pair lays down. Then every night he turns in the report to you, an' you copy it in the log book. The total cut has got to come out right—the scaler knows all the time how many feet is banked on the rollways. I've got three pair of sawyers that's new to the game, an' they hain't a-goin' to cut as much as the rest. The scaler won't never look at your books, 'cause it hain't none of his funeral if the men don't git what's a-comin' to 'em. He keeps his own tally of the total cut. Same with the walkin' boss—that's Hurley. All he cares is to make a big showin'. He'll have an eye on the total cut, an' he'll leave it to Saginaw an' me to see that the men gits what's comin' to 'em in our own camps. Now, what you got to do is to shade a little off each

pair of sawyers' cut an' add it onto what's turned in fer them three pair I told you about. Then, in the spring, when these birds cashes their vouchers in town, I'm right there to collect the overage." [172]

"But," objected Connie, "won't the others set up a howl? Surely, they will know that these men are not cutting as much as they are."

"How they goin' to find out what vouchers them six turns in? They hain't a-goin' to show no one their vouchers."

"But, won't the others know they're being credited with a short cut?"

"That's where you come in. You got to take off so little that they won't notice it. Sawyers only knows *about* how much they got comin'. They only guess at the cut. A little offen each one comes to quite a bit by spring."

"But, what if these men that get the overage credited to 'em refuse to come across?"

Slue Foot grinned evilly: "I'll give 'em a little bonus fer the use of their names," he said. "But, they hain't a-goin' to refuse to kick in. I've got their number. They hain't a one of the hull six of 'em that I hain't got somethin' on, an' they know it."

"All right," said Connie, as he arose to go. "I'm on. And don't forget that you promised to let me in on something bigger, later on." [173]

"I won't fergit. It looks from here like me an' you had a good thing."

An hour later Connie once more entered the office at Camp One. Steve sat beside Hurley, and Saginaw Ed stood warming himself with his back to the stove.

"Back ag'in," greeted the big boss. "How about it, ye too tired to swing out into the brush with the rifle? Seems like they wouldn't nothin' in the world taste so good as a nice fat pa'tridge. An' you tell the cook if he dries it up when he roasts it, he better have his turkey packed an' handy to grab."

"I'm not tired at all," smiled Connie, as he took Saginaw's rifle from the wall. "It's too bad those fellows swiped your gun, but I guess I can manage to pop off a couple of heads with this."

"You'd better run along with him, Steve," said Hurley, as he noted that the other boy eyed Connie wistfully. "The walk'll do ye good. Ye hain't hardly stretched a leg sense I got hurt. The kid don't mind, do ye, kid?"

"You bet I don't!" exclaimed Connie heartily. "Come on, Steve, we'll tree a bunch of 'em and then take turns popping their heads off." [174]

As the two boys made their way across the clearing, Hurley raised himself on his elbow, and stared after them through the window: "Say, Saginaw," he said, "d'ye know there's a doggone smart kid."

"Who?" asked the other, as he spat indifferently into the wood box.

"Why, this here Connie. Fer a greener, I never see his beat."

"Yeh," answered Saginaw, drily, his eyes also upon the retreating backs, "he's middlin' smart, all right. Quite some of a kid—fer a greener."

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[175]

CHAPTER XIII

SAGINAW ED HUNTS A CLUE

"HELLO!" cried Saginaw Ed, as he stared in surprise at a wide, flat trail in the snow. The exclamation brought Connie Morgan to his side. The two were hunting partridges and rabbits, and their wanderings had carried them to the extreme western edge of the timber tract, several miles distant from the camps that were located upon the Dogfish River, which formed its eastern boundary. Despite the fact that the work of both camps was in full swing, these two found frequent opportunity to slip out into the timber for a few hours' hunt, which answered the twofold purpose of giving them a chance to perfect their plans for the undoing of Slue Foot Magee, and providing a welcome addition to the salt meat bill of fare.

"Wonder who's be'n along here? 'Tain't no one from the camps—them's Injun snow-shoes. An' [176] they ain't no one got a right to hunt here, neither. Hurley posted the hull trac' account of not wantin' no permiscu's shootin' goin' on with the men workin' in the timber. Them tracks is middlin' fresh, too."

"Made yesterday," opined Connie, as he examined the trail closely. "Travelling slow, and following his own back trail."

Saginaw nodded approval. "Yup," he agreed. "An', bein' as he was travellin' slow, he must of went quite a little piece. He wasn't carryin' no pack."

"Travelling light," corroborated the boy. "And he went up and came back the same day."

"Bein' as he headed north and come back from there, it ain't goin' to do us no hurt to kind of find out if he's hangin' 'round clost by. They ain't nothing north of us, in a day's walk an' back, except the Syndicate's Willer River camp. An', spite of yer stickin' up fer him, I don't trust that there Mike Gillum, nor no one else that would claim Hurley throw'd in with the Syndicate." The man struck into the trail, and Connie followed. They had covered scarcely half a mile when Saginaw once more halted in surprise.

"Well, I'll be doggoned if there ain't a dugout! An' onless I'm quite a bit off my reckonin', it's [177] inside our line." For several moments the two scrutinized the structure, which was half cabin, half dugout. From the side of a steep bank the log front of the little building protruded into the ravine. Smoke curled lazily from a stovepipe that stuck up through the snow-covered roof. The single window was heavily frosted, and a deep path had been shovelled through a huge drift that reached nearly to the top of the door. The trail the two had been following began and ended at that door, and without hesitation they approached and knocked loudly. The door opened, and in the dark oblong of the interior stood the grotesque figure of a little old man. A pair of bright, watery eyes regarded them from above a tangle of grey beard, and long grey hair curled from beneath a cap of muskrat skin from which the fur was worn in irregular patches. "Phwat d'yez want?" he whined, in a voice cracked and thin. "Is ut about me money?"

"PHWAT D'YEZ WANT?" HE WHINED.

"Yer money?" asked Saginaw. "We don't know nothin' about no money. We're from the log camps over on Dogfish. What we want to know is what ye're doin' here?"

"Doin' here!" exclaimed the little old man. "Oi'm livin' here, that's what Oi'm doin'—jest like [178] Oi've done f'r fifteen year. Come on in av ye want to palaver. Oi'm owld an' like to freeze standin' [179]

here in th' dure, an' if ye won't come in, g'wan away, an' bad cess to yez f'r not bringin' me back me money."

Saginaw glanced at Connie and touched his forehead significantly. As they stepped into the stuffy interior, the old man closed the door and fastened it with an oak bar. Little light filtered through the heavily frosted window, and in the semi-darkness the two found difficulty picking their way amid the litter of traps, nets, and firewood that covered the floor. The little room boasted no chair, but, seating himself upon an upturned keg, the owner motioned his visitors to the bunk that was built along the wall within easy reach of the little cast iron cooking stove that served also to heat the room.

"Ye say ye've lived here for fifteen years?" asked Saginaw, as he drew off his heavy mittens.

"Oi have thot."

"Ye wasn't here last winter."

"Thot's whut Oi'm afther tellin' yez. Last winter I wuz to the city."

"This here shack looks like it's old, all right," admitted Saginaw. "Funny no one run acrost it last winter."

"Ut snowed airly," cut in the little man, "an' if they ain't no wan here to dig her out, she'd drift [180] plumb under on th' furst wind."

"Who are you?" asked Connie. "And what do you do for a living? And what did you mean about your money?"

"Who sh'd Oi be but Dinny O'Sullivan? 'An' phwat do Oi do fer a livin'?' sez ye. 'Til last winter Oi worked f'r Timothy McClusky, thot owned this trac' an' w'd died befoor he'd av sold ut to th' Syndicate. Good wages, he paid me, an' Oi kep' off th' timber thayves, an' put out foires, an' what not. An' Oi thrapped an' fished betoimes an' Oi made me a livin'. Thin, McClusky sold th' timber. 'Ye betther come on back wid me, Dinny,' sez he. 'Back to the owld sod. Ut's rich Oi'll be over there, Dinny, an' Oi'll see ye'll niver want.'

"But, ut's foorty year an' more since Oi come to Amurica, an' Oi'd be a stranger back yon. 'Oi'll stay,' Oi sez, 'f'r Oi've got used to th' woods, an' whin they cut down th' timber, Oi'll move on till somewheres they ain't cut.' 'Ut's hatin' Oi am to lave yez behind, Dinny,' sez he, 'but, Oi won't lave ye poor, fer ye've served me well,' an' wid thot, he puts his hand in his pocket loike, an' pulls [181] out some bills, an' he hands 'em to me. 'Put 'em by f'r a rainy day, Dinny,' he sez, an' thin he wuz gone. Oi come insoide an' barred th' dure, an' Oi counted th' money in me hand. Tin bills they wuz, all bright an' new an' clane, an' aich bill wuz foive hunder' dollars. 'Twas more money thin Oi'd iver see, or thought to see, an' ut wuz all moine—moine to kape or to spind, to t'row away er to save. 'Oi'll save ut,' sez Oi, 'loike McClusky said, ag'in' a rainy day.' An' Oi loosed a board in th' flure—'tiz th' wan to th' left in under th' bunk, yonder—an' Oi put th' bills in a tobaccy tin an' put 'em in th' hole Oi'd scooped out, an' put back th' board." The little old man paused and poked noisily at the stove, fumbled in his pockets and produced a short, black cutty pipe and a pouch of tobacco, and continued:

"Oi've wor-rked hard from six years owld to siventy, but ut's not in th' name av O'Sullivan to lay an-nything by. 'Twus come hard an' go aisy—but f'r a month Oi niver lifted th' board. Thin wan day Oi tuk 'em out an' counted 'em. Th' nixt wake Oi done th' same. Th' days begun to git shorter, an' th' noights colder, an' th' ducks come whistlin' out av th' narth. Ivery day, now, Oi'd [182] take thim bills out an' count 'em. Oi cut three little notches in the carners wid me knife—'tis the mark Oi file on me thraps, so whin an-nyone sees 'em, 'Tiz Dinny O'Sullivan's bill,' they'll say, an' Oi can't lose 'em. ''Tiz a cowld winter comin', Dinny,' sez Oi, 'f'r th' mushrats is buildin' airly. Yer gittin' owld f'r th' thrappin',' sez Oi, but Oi know'd 'twuz a loie whin Oi said ut; 'beloike ye'd betther go to th' city.' 'Ye'll not!' sez Oi, moindin' what McClusky said about a rainy day. An' Oi put back th' bills an' covered thim wid th' board. Th' nixt day ut wuz cloudy an' cowld, an' Oi set be th' stove an' counted me bills. 'Th' loights is bright av an avenin' in th' city, Dinny,' Oi sez, 'an' there's shows an' what not, an' min av yer koind to palaver. Ut's loike a mink ye'll be livin' in yer hole in th' woods av ye stay. There's too much money, an-nyhow,' Oi sez; 'av ye don't git sick, ye don't nade ut, an' if ye do, 'twill outlast ye, an' whin ye die, who'll have th' spindin' av thim clane new bills? They's prob'ly O'Sullivans lift unhung yit in Oirland,' sez Oi—though av me mimory's good, they's few that aught to be—'Oi'll spend 'em mesilf.' Th' wind wailed t'rough th' trees loike [183] th' banshee. Oi looked out th' windie—'twuz rainin'. ''Tis a token,' sez Oi; ''tiz th' rainy day thot McClusky said w'd come.'" The old man chuckled. "'Tiz loike thot a man argys whin ut's himself's th' judge an' jury.

"So Oi put th' bills in me pocket an' tuck th' thrain fer St. Paul. Oi seen Moike Gillum on th' thrain an' Oi show'd um me money. 'Go back to th' woods, Dinny,' he sez. 'There's no fool loike an owld fool, ye'll moind, an' they'll have ut away from yez.' 'They'll not!' sez Oi. 'An' Oi'll be betther fer a year av rist.' He thried to argy but Oi'd have none av ut, an' Oi put up wid th' Widdy MacShane, 'twuz half-sister to a cousin av a frind av moine Oi know'd in Brainard in nointy-sivin. Foive dollars a week Oi paid fer board an' room an' washin'—Oi'd live in style wid no thought fer expince. Oi bought me a hat an' a suit wid brass buttons t'w'd done proud to Brian Boru himsilf."

The old man paused and looked out the window. "To make a long story short, be Christmas Oi wuz toired av me bargain. Oi've lived in th' woods too long, an' Oi'll lave 'em no more. Oi stuck ut out 'til th' spring, but, what wid th' frinds Oi'd picked up to hilp me spind ut, an' th' clothes, an' [184] th' shows ut costed me three av me clane new bills. Comin' back Oi shtopped off at Riverville, an' showed Mike Gillum the sivin Oi had lift. 'Yez done well, Dinny,' sez he. 'An' now will yez go to th' woods?' 'Oi will,' sez Oi, 'f'r Oi'm tired av ristin'. But Oi'm glad Oi wint, an' Oi don't begrudge th' money, f'r sivin is aisier thin tin to count an-nyway an' Oi've enough av ut rains f'r a year.' So Oi come back an' wuz snug as a bug in a rug, 'til ut's mebbe two wakes ago, an' snowin' that day, an'

they comed a Frinchy along, an' he sez, 'Oi've a noice fat deer hangin'; ut's a matther av a couple av moile from here. Av ye'll hilp me cut um up, Oi'll give ye th' shoulders an' rib mate—f'r ut's only th' quarters Oi want.' Oi wint along an' we cut up th' deer, an' he give me th' mate an' Oi packed ut home. Whin Oi got back Oi seen somewan had be'n here. Ut wuz snowin' hard, an' th' thracks wuz drifted full loike th' wans me an' th' Frinchy made whin we started off to cut up th' deer, so Oi know'd the other had come jist afther we lift. I dropped me mate an' run in an' pulled up th' board. Th' tobaccy tin wuz impty! Th' thracks headed narth, an' Oi tuck out afther th' [185] dirthy spalpeen, but th' snow got worse an' Oi had to turn back. Whin ut quit Oi wint to Willow River where Mike Gillum is runnin' a Syndicate crew, but he said they wuzn't none av his men gone off th' job. 'Oi'll do all Oi kin to thry an' locate th' thafe,' sez he; 'but yez sh'd put yer money in th' bank, Dinny.' Well, Oi hurd nawthin' more from him, an' this marnin' Oi wint up there ag'in. He'd found out nawthin', an' he sez how he don't think ut wuz wan av his min—so Oi comed back, an' th' nixt thing Oi knows yez two comed along—ye've th' whole story now, an' ye'll know av th' rainy days comes, Dinny O'Sullivan's a-goin' to git wet."

"What d'ye think of yer fine friend, Mike Gillum now?" asked Saginaw Ed, breaking a silence that had lasted while they had travelled a mile or so through the woods from Denny O'Sullivan's cabin.

"Just the same as I did before," answered Connie, without a moment's hesitation. "You don't think Mike Gillum swiped the old man's money, do you?"

Saginaw stopped in his tracks and faced the boy wrathfully. "Oh, no! I don't think he could [186] possibly have swiped it," he said, with ponderous sarcasm. "There ain't no chanct he did—seein' as he was the only one that know'd the money was there—an' seein' how the tracks headed north—an' seein' how he denied it. It couldn't of be'n him! The old man's got his own word fer it that it wasn't."

"If those I. W. W.'s wer'n't locked up safe in jail, I'd think they got the money. I know it wasn't Mike Gillum," maintained the boy, stoutly. "If you knew Mike you wouldn't think that."

"I don't know him, an' I don't want to know him! It's enough that I know Hurley. An' anyone that would claim Hurley was crooked, I wouldn't put it beyond him to do nothin' whatever that's disreligious, an' low-down, an' onrespectable. He done it! An' him writin' like he done about Hurley, *proves* that he done it—an' that's all they is to it."

Connie saw the uselessness of arguing with the woodsman whose devoted loyalty to his boss prevented his seeing any good whatever in the man who had sought to cast discredit upon him. "All right," he grinned. "But I'm going to find out who did do it, and I bet when I do, it won't be [187] Mike Gillum that's to blame."

Saginaw's momentary huff vanished, and he shook his head in resignation, as he returned the boy's grin. "I've saw a raft of folks, take it first an' last, but never none that was right down as stubborn as what you be. But, about findin' out who got the old man's money, you've bit off more than you kin chaw. You ain't got enough to go on." A partridge flew up with a whirr and settled upon the bare branch of a young birch a few yards farther on. Saginaw took careful aim and shot its head off. "I got one on you this time, anyhow. That's five fer me, an' four fer you, an' it's gittin' too dark to see the sights."

"Guess that's right," admitted the boy. "But I'll get even, when I show you who raided the old man's cabin."

"'Spect I'll do a little projektin' 'round myself, if I git time. It might be such a thing I'll git *two* on ye." Thus they engaged in friendly banter until the yellow lights that shone from the windows of the camp buildings welcomed them across the clearing.

The next day Connie hunted up Frenchy Lamar. He found him in the stable carefully removing [188] the ice bangles from the fetlocks of his beloved horses. He had spent the morning breaking trail on the tote road.

"Why don't you get yourself some real horses?" teased the boy. "One of those log team horses will outweigh the whole four of yours."

"Log team! *Sacre!* Dem hosses fat, lak wan peeg! Dey go 'bout so fas' lak wan porkypine! Dey drag de log 'roun' de woods. Dey got for have de ice road for haul de beeg load to de rollway. But, me—I'm tak' ma four gran' hoss, I'm heetch dem oop, I'm climb on ma sleigh, I'm crack ma wheep, an—monjee! Dem hoss she jomp 'long de tote road, de bells dey ring lak de Chreestmas tam, de snow fly oop from de hoof, an' dem hoss dey ron t'rough de woods so fas' lak de deer! Me—I ain' trade wan leetle chonk ma hoss's tail for all de beeg fat log team w'at ees een de woods."

"You're all right, Frenchy," laughed the boy. "But, tell me, why didn't you slip me a chunk of that venison you brought in the other day?"

The Frenchman glanced about swiftly. "*Non!* W'at you mean—de *venaison*? I ain' keel no deer—me. Hurley she say you ain' kin keel no deer w'en de season ees close." [189]

"Sure, I know you didn't kill it. But you brought it in. What I want to know is, who did kill it?"

"I ain' breeng no *venaison* een dis camp since de season git shut."

"Oh, you took it to Camp Two! Slue Foot shot the deer, did he?"

"How you fin' dat out? Hurley ain' lak I'm tak' de *venaison* to Camp Two, no mor' lak Camp Wan. She fin' dat out she git mad, I'm t'ink she bus' me wan on ma nose."

"Hurley don't know anything about it," reassured the boy. "And I'll give you my word he never will find out from me. I just happen to want to know who sent you after that meat. I won't squeal on either one of you. You can trust me, can't you?"

"*Oui*," answered the teamster, without hesitation. "You pass de word—dat good. Slue Foot,

she keel dat deer wan tam, an' hang heem oop to freeze. Wan day she say, 'Frenchy, you go rat ovaire on de wes' line an' git de deer wat I'm got hangin'.' I ain' lak dat mooch, but Slue Foot say: [190] 'She startin' for snow an' you track git cover oop. Me an' you we have wan gran' feast in de office, an' Hurley she ain' gon fin dat out. Wan leetle ol' man she got cabin 'bout two mile nort' of where de deer hang by de creek where four beeg maple tree stan' close beside. You git de ol' man to help you cut oop de meat, an' you breeng de hine qua'ter, an' give heem de res'. He ees poor ol' man, an' lak to git som' meat.' I'm t'ink dat pret' good t'ing Slue Foot lak to giv' som' poor ol' man de meat, so I gon an' done lak he says."

"It was snowing that day, was it?"

"*Oui*, she snow hard all day. I'm git back 'bout noon, an' ma tracks ees snow full."

"Was Slue Foot here when you got back?"

"*Oui*, an' dat night we hav' de gran' suppaire. Slue Foot say dat better you ain' say nuttin' 'bout dat deer, 'cause Hurley she git mad lak t'undaire. I'm tell you 'bout dat 'cause I'm know you ain' gon' try for mak' no trouble. Plenty deer in de woods, anyhow."

Connie nodded. "Yes, but orders are orders. If I were you I wouldn't have anything to do with deer killed out of season. Suppose Hurley had found out about that deer instead of me. You'd [191] have been in a nice fix. When Hurley gives an order he generally sees that it's obeyed."

"Dat rat," agreed Frenchy, with alacrity. "Dat better I ain' got Hurley mad on me, ba goss!"

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[192]

CHAPTER XIV

A PAIR OF SOCKS

AWEEK later Connie was roused from his desk in the little office by the sound of bells. There was a loud "Whoa!" and Frenchy, wearing his long stocking cap of brilliant red yarn, and clad in his gayest mackinaw, pulled up his four-horse tote-team with a flourish before the door, and stepped smiling from the sleigh.

"W'at you t'ink, now, *m's'u l'infant*? S'pose I'm trade ma gran' team for de beeg fat log hoss, de cook she don' git no supply for wan week. Den, mebbe-so you got to eat porkypine an' spruce tea. Me—I'm back to-mor' night, wit ma gran' tote-team, *bien!*"

Connie laughed. "I guess you've got the right team for the job, Frenchy. But it seems to me you picked out a bad day for the trail." It had turned suddenly warm during the night, and the [193] boy indicated a shallow pool of muddy water that had collected in the depression before the door.

"De snow she melt fas' w'ere she all tromp down an' dirty, but on de tote road w'ere she w'ite an' clean she ain' melt so fas'." He paused and cocked an eye skyward. "I'm git to Dogfish before she melt an' tonight she gon' for turn col', an' tomor', ba goss, I'm com' back on de ice, lak de log road."

"WHAT'S THIS?" ASKED THE BOY, PUSHING UP A SMALL BUNDLE.

"What's this?" asked the boy, picking up a small bundle done up in brown wrapping paper that lay upon the seat of the sleigh.

"Oh, dat wan pair wool sock Slue Foot sen' down to Corky Dyer for ke'p he's feet wa'm. I'm [194] mak' dat go on de, w'at you call, de express."

Connie picked up the package and regarded it with apparent unconcern. "Who's Corky Dyer?" he asked, casually.

"Corky Dyer, she ke'p de s'loon down to Brainard. She frien' for Slue Foot, lak wan brudder."

As Frenchy's glance strayed to Steve, who came hurrying toward them with his list of supplies from the cook's camp, Connie's foot suddenly slipped, the package dropped from his hand squarely into the middle of the puddle of dirty water, and the next instant the boy came heavily down upon it with his knee.

"O-o-o-o!" wailed the excitable Frenchman, dancing up and down. "Now I'm ketch, w'at you call, de t'undaire! Slue Foot, she git mad on me now, ba goss! She say, 'You mak' dat leetle package los' I'm bre'k you in two!'"

Connie recovered the package, from which the wet paper was bursting in a dozen places. He glanced at it ruefully for a moment, and then, as if struck with a happy thought, he grinned. "We'll fix that all right," he said reassuringly, and turned toward the door.

"*Non*," protested Frenchy, dolefully, "dat ain' no good, to put on de new *papier*. De sock she [195] got wet, an' de new *papier* she bus', too."

"You just hold your horses——"

"I ain't got for hol' dem hosses. Dey broke to stan' so long I want 'em."

"Come on in the office, then," laughed the boy, "and I'll show you how we'll fix it." Frenchy followed him in, and Connie opened the wanagan chest. "We'll just make a new package, socks and all, and I'll copy the address off on it, and Corky Dyer's feet will keep warm this winter just the same."

"*Oui! Oui!*" approved the Frenchman, his face once more all smiles. He patted the boy admiringly upon the back. "You got de gran' head on you for t'ink."

"You don't need to say anything about this to Slue Foot," cautioned the boy.

The Frenchman laughed. "Ha! Ha! You t'ink I'm gon' hont de trouble? Slue Foot she git mad jes' de sam'. She lak for chance to growl. I tell him 'bout dat, I'm t'ink he bus' me in two."

It was but the work of a few minutes to duplicate the small bundle, and the teamster took it [196] from the boy's hand with a sigh of relief. "So long!" he called gaily, as he climbed into the sleigh and gathered up his reins with an air. "Som' tam' you lak you git de fas' ride, you com' long wit' me." His long whip cracked, and the impatient tote-team sprang out onto the trail.

Footsteps sounded outside the door, and Connie hurriedly thrust the package into his turkey.

Saginaw entered, and, with a vast assumption of carelessness, walked to the wall and took down his rifle. "Guess I might's well take a siyou out into the brush an' see what fer meat they is stirrin'."

"Want a partner?"

"Sure," answered the man, "I wish't you could go 'long, but I don't guess you better. The log roads is softenin' up, an' I give orders to keep the teams offen 'em. They ain't nothin'll sp'ile a log road like teamin' on 'em soft. The teamsters won't have nothin' to do, an' they'll be hornin' in on ye all day, to git stuff out of the wanagan. Hurley an' Lon's both up to Camp Two, so I guess yer elected to stick on the job."

"That's so," answered the boy, "but, I bet the real reason you don't want me is because you're afraid I'd kill more game than you do."

"Well, ye might, at that," laughed Saginaw. "But we'll have plenty of chances to try out that [197] part of it. I'm gittin' old, but I ain't so old but what I kin see the sights of a rifle yet." He drew the rackets from under his bunk and passed out, and as Connie watched him swing across the clearing, he grinned:

"You're hiking out to see if you can't hang a little evidence up against Mike Gillum, and that's why you didn't want me along. Go to it, old hand, but unless I miss my guess when you come in tonight you'll find out that your game has turned into crow."

Saginaw had prophesied rightly. The wanagan did a land-office business among the idle teamsters, and at no time during the day did Connie dare to open the package that lay concealed in his turkey. Darkness came, and the boy lighted the lamp. The teamsters continued to straggle in and out, and, just as the boy was about to lock the office and go to supper, Saginaw returned.

"What luck?" inquired Connie.

"Never got a decent shot all day," replied the man, as he put away his rifle and snow-shoes. "I got somethin' to tell you, though, when we've et supper. Chances is, Hurley an' Lon'll be late if [198] they ain't back by now. We kin powwow in the office onless they come, an' if they do, we kin mosey out an' hunt us up a log."

Supper over, the two returned to the office and seated themselves beside the stove. Saginaw filled his pipe and blew a great cloud of blue smoke toward the ceiling. "I swung 'round by Willer River," he imparted, after a few shorter puffs. Connie waited for him to proceed. "Ye mind, the old man said how it was a Frenchy that got him to help cut up that deer? Well, they's a raft of French workin' up there fer the Syndicate."

"Any of 'em been deer hunting lately?" asked the boy, innocently.

"Gosh sakes! How'd ye s'pose I kin tell? If I'd asked 'em they'd all said 'no.' I jes' wanted to see if they was Frenchmens there."

Connie nodded. "That looks bad," he admitted.

"Yes, an' what's comin' looks worst. On the way back, I swung 'round by the old Irishman's. He hadn't heard nothin' more from this here Mike Gillum, so he went up ag'in yesterday to see him. Gillum claimed he hadn't found out nothin', an' then the old man told him how he was broke [199] an' needed grub to winter through on. Well, Gillum up an' dug down in his pocket an' loant him a hundred dollars!"

"Good for Mike Gillum!" exclaimed Connie. "That's what I call a man!"

"What d'ye mean—call a man?" cried Saginaw, disgustedly. "Look a-here, you don't s'pose fer a minute that if Gillum hadn't of got the old man's pile he'd of loant him no hundred dollars, do ye? How's he ever goin' to pay it back? Gillum knows, an' everyone knows that's got any sense, that what huntin' an' fishin' an' trappin' that old man kin do ain't only goin' to make him a livin', at the best. He ain't never goin' to git enough ahead to pay back no hundred dollars."

"So much the more credit to Gillum, then. What he did was to dig down and give him a hundred."

"Give him a hundred! An' well he could afford to, seein' how he kep' thirty-four hundred fer himself. Don't you think fer a minute, kid, that any one that's low-down enough to blackguard a man like Hurley would give away a hundred dollars—he'd see a man starve first. It's plain as the nose on yer face. We've got a clear case, an' I'm a-goin' to git out a search warrant ag'in' him, [200] 'fore he gits a chanct to send that money out of the woods. He's got it, an' I know it!"

Connie smiled broadly. "He must have got it while we were at supper, then."

Saginaw regarded him curiously. "What d'ye mean—supper?" he asked.

For answer the boy crossed to his bunk, and, reaching into his turkey, drew out the soggy package. "Do you know who Corky Dyer is?" he asked, with seeming irrelevance.

"Sure, I know who Corky Dyer is—an' no good of him, neither. He lives in Brainard, an' many's the lumberjack that's the worse off fer knowin' him. But, what's Corky Dyer got to do with Mike Gillum an' the old man's money?"

"Nothing, with Mike Gillum. I was only thinking I hope Corky can keep his feet warm this winter, I sent him down a nice pair of wool socks today."

Saginaw bent closer, and stared at the boy intently. "Be ye feelin' all right, son?" he asked, with genuine concern.

"Sure, I feel fine. As I was going on to say, Slue Foot felt sorry for Corky Dyer's feet, so he [201] picked out a pair of nice warm socks——"

"Thought ye said——"

The boy ignored the interruption, "and gave them to Frenchy to send to Corky by express.

When Frenchy stopped here for his list I happened to pick up the package and while I was looking at it my foot slipped and I dropped it in a mud puddle and then fell on it. I hated to think of poor Corky wearing those dirty wet socks, and I didn't want Frenchy to get an awful bawling out from Slue Foot for not taking care of his package, so I just took a new pair out of the wanagan and sent them to him. I guess, now, we'd better open this package and wring these wet ones out, or they'll spoil."

Saginaw continued to stare as the boy drew his knife and cut the cord. Then he exploded angrily: "What in thunder d'ye s'pose I care about Corky Dyer's socks? An' what's his socks got to do with gittin' old Denny O'Sullivan's money back fer him? I thought ye was a better sport than that—Ye see yer fine friend's got cornered, an' right away ye switch off an' begin talkin' about Slue Foot, an' Frenchy, an' Corky Dyer's wet socks! Fer my part, Corky Dyer's feet could git wet [202]
an' froze fer six foot above 'em—an' it would be a good thing fer the timber country, at that!"

As Saginaw raved on, Connie unrolled the grey woollen socks and smoothed them out upon his knee. Saginaw watched, scowling disapproval as he talked. "They's somethin' in one of 'em," he said with sudden interest. "What's it got in it?"

Connie regarded him gravely. "I don't know, for sure—I haven't looked, but I think maybe it's Denny O'Sullivan's missing bills."

Saginaw Ed's jaw dropped, and his hands gripped the chair arms till the knuckles whitened, as the boy thrust his hand into the damp sock. "Yes, that's what it is, all right," he said, as he drew forth the missing bills. "They're not quite as new and clean, maybe, as they were, but they're the ones—see the little notches in the corners, just like the marks on his traps."

Saginaw stared in silence while the boy finished counting: "—five, six, seven." Then, as full realization dawned upon him, he burst forth, and the roars of his laughter filled the little log office. "Well, dog my cats!" he howled, when at length he found his voice. "'My foot slipped,' says [203]
he, 'an' I dropped it in a mud puddle an' fell on it!'" He reached over and pounded the boy on the back with a huge hand. "You doggone little cuss! Here you set all the time, with the missin' bills tucked away safe an' sound in yer turkey—an' me trompin' my legs off tryin' to find out what's became of 'em!" He thrust out his hand. "Ye sure outguessed me, kid, an' I don't begrudge it. When it comes to headwork, yer the captain—with a capital K. An' believe me! I'd give a hull lot to be where I could see Corky Dyer's face when he unwrops that package of socks!"

Connie laughed. "So you see," he said, as he shook the extended hand, "we've got a clear case, all right—but not against Mike Gillum."

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[204]

CHAPTER XV

HURLEY PREPARES FOR THE DRIVE

THE two camps on Dogfish hummed with activity. Both Saginaw Ed and Slue Foot Magee had their crews "laying 'em down" with an efficiency that delighted the heart of Hurley, who came into the little office of Camp One after an inspection of the rollways, fairly radiating approval and good humour. That evening around the roaring stove the big walking boss lighted his pipe, and tilting back in his chair, contentedly wriggled his toes in the woollen socks, cocked comfortably upon the edge of his bunk, the while he held forth upon the merits of his crews to Lon Camden and Saginaw Ed and Connie Morgan who shared the quarters with him:

"The best crews ever went into the woods!" he began, "barrin' none. I've logged from Westconsin to the coast, an' never I seen the like. It's partly because the men is doin' what they [205] never thought to be doin' again—layin' down white pine. An' it's partly the bosses, an' the cook, an' the scaler, an' the clerk. I'll show the owner a profit this year that'll make him fergit last year's loss like a busted shoestring. I've twict as many logs on the rollways of each camp as I had altogether last year."

Lon Camden shook his head: "Yeh, that's so, Hurley, but logs on the rollways ain't logs at the mills. Ye had enough banked along the river last year to show a good profit—an' ye can bet yer last dollar the Syndicate's foulin' our drive wasn't no accident."

"But our brands was on the logs," insisted Hurley. "Even the Syndicate wouldn't dare to saw branded logs."

The scaler shook his head doubtfully: "I do'no, boss, some one sawed 'em. To my certain knowledge there was better than two million feet on the landin's when we broke 'em out—an' two million feet of white pine ort to showed a good profit."

Hurley nodded, glumly: "Sure it ort," he agreed. "I seen the logs myself on the rollways, an' when they got to the mills, the boom scale was—" The big boss paused and scratched his head [206] thoughtfully, "—well, I ain't got no noodle fer figgers, an' I disremember jest what it was, but it was short enough so it et up the profits an' handed us a fourteen-thousan'-dollar loss, or thereabouts. An' me with the owner way up in Alasky, an' thinkin' mebbe I done him out of his money. 'Twas a long head I had when I stuck out fer a two-year contrack, an' this year if we don't roll eight million feet in the river my name ain't Jake Hurley!"

"Yes," broke in Saginaw Ed, "an' if we make the same rate of loosin', the loss this year'll figger somewheres up around fifty thousan'."

Hurley's eyes grew hard "They ain't a-goin' to be no loss this year!" he replied savagely. "The Syndicate had more logs in Dogfish than me last year, an' a bigger crew, an' more white-water birlers amongst 'em, so Long Leaf Olson, the foreman of the Syndicate camp, ordered me to take the rear drive. I tuk it—an' be the time I'd got through cardin' the ledges, an' sackin' the bars, an' shovin' off jill-pokes, the main drive was sorted an' the logs in the logans, an' I was handed me boom scale at the mills. But, this year it's different. I'll have agin as many logs as them, an' two [207] crews, an' when we git to the mills I'll have men of my own at the sortin' gap."

"If they was dams on Dogfish the rear drive wouldn't be so bad," opined Saginaw.

"If they was dams on Dogfish, we'd be worse off than ever," growled Hurley, "because the Syndicate would own the dams, an' we'd stand a fat show of sluicin' anything through 'em. No sir! We'll go out with the ice, an' me on the head of the drive, an' if Long Leaf fouls us, I won't be carin'. I see through the game he done me last year—keepin' me on the rear, an' it worked like this: Dogfish runs out with a rush an' then falls as quick as it run out. All the logs that ain't into the big river on the run-out is left fer the rear drive, an', believe me, we had a plenty dry-rollin' to do. For why? Because that thievin' Long Leaf nipped every jam before it started, an' left me with a month's work gittin' the stranded logs out of Dogfish. This year, it'll be me that's boss of the main drive, an' if a jam starts I'll let 'em pile up—an' I'll see that one starts, too—that'll back the water up behind 'em an' give the rear plenty of river to float down on, then when everything's caught up, I'll put some canned thunder in under her an' away we go to the next jam." [208]

"Ye' talk like ye could jam 'em whenever ye wanted to," said Lon Camden.

Hurley regarded him gravely: "It's twenty-three miles from here to the big river. There'll be a jam ten miles below here, an' another, one mile above the mouth." The three stared at him in surprise. "You see," the boss continued, with evident satisfaction in their astonishment, "when I got the boom scale last summer, it turned me sick. I made out me report an' sent it to Alasky, an' then I went home to Pine Hook an' hoed me garden a day, an' put in the next one choppin' firewood. It was after supper that day an' the kiddies to bed, the wife comes out to where I was an' sets down on the choppin' log beside me. I smokes me pipe, an' don't pay her no mind, 'cause I was sore in the heart of me. After while she lays a hand on the sleeve of me shirt. 'Jake,' she says, 'all the winter an' spring the childer gabbles about the fun they'll be havin' when daddy comes home.'" The man paused and grinned, slyly. "It's like a woman to begin at the backwards of a thing an' work up to the front. I bet when one gits to heaven it'll be the health of Adam an' [209] Eve they'll be inquirin' about furst, instead of John L. Sullivan, roight out. Anyway, that's what she says, an' I replies in the negative by sayin' nothin'. 'An' here you be'n home two days,' she goes on, an' stops, like they's enough be'n said.

"'An' I've hoed the garden, an' cut the firewood,' says I. 'What would you be havin' me do?'"

Again Hurley grinned: "I dropped a match in the bung of an empty gasoline bar'l onct, that had laid in the sun behind the store, thinkin' to see if it would make a good rain bar'l. It didn't. Part of it made fair kindlin's, though, an' I was out an' around in a week. Giant powder, gasoline, an' wimmin is all safe enough if ye don't handle 'em careless—but, if ye do, ye git quick action—an' plenty of it.

"'Do!' she says, in the same tone of voice used by the gasoline bar'l that day. 'Well, if you can't think of nothin' else to do, give the poor darlints a beatin' just to let 'em know you're around!' Then she gits up an' starts fer the house." Hurley held a match to his pipe and puffed deeply for a few moments, "I never believed much in signs," he grinned, "but they's some signs I heed—so I [210] laughed. The laugh come from the throat only, an' not from the heart, an' at the sound of it she turned, an' then she come back slow an' set down agin on the choppin' log. 'Tell me what's wrong, Jake,' she says. 'Two kin carry a load better than one.' So I up an' told her, an' she set for quite a while an' looked out over the slashin'.

"'Is that all?' she says, after a bit. 'Is that what ye've be'n hoein' an' choppin' over fer two days, an' gittin' madder with every whack—an' not payin' no heed to the important things that's been pilin' up to be done.' 'What's to be done?' says I, 'if it ain't the wood an' the garden?' 'It's the first time ye ever come back from the woods an' didn't see fer yerself what's to be done,' she says. 'With two wheels busted off Jimmy's tote wagon, an' Paddy's logs in the crick an' on his landin's waitin' fer daddy to show him how to build his dam an' sluice, an' Jimmy with the timber all out fer his Injun stockade, an' waitin' fer daddy to tell him does the logs go in crossways or up an' down!'

"So the next week I put in loggin' on the crick behind the pig pen. We put in a dam an' sluice, an' run a season's cut through, an' sorted 'em an' boomed 'em, an even rigged a goat-power saw-mill that would jerk the logs out of the crick but wouldn't cut 'em. An' by gosh, when the [211] week was gone I had some good schemes in me own head, an' takin' five men with me, I went off up Dogfish an' studied the stream, an' this spring they'll be jams where I want jams! An' I'm the bucko that'll be on the head end, an' I'll bust 'em when I want to!"

"You ain't obstructed navigation, have ye?" asked Lon, with concern. "Cause if you have the Syndicate'll take it up in a minute, an' they'll law ye out of ten seasons' profit. Buckin' the Syndicate has cost many a little feller his pile. If they can't steal ye poor, they'll law ye poor—an' it's the same thing fer the small operator."

"Never you fret about the lawin', Lon. What I an' me five hearties put into Dogfish last summer looks like drift piles from a summer rain, an' the same charge of canned thunder that busts the jam will blow the log-an' rock foundations of the drift piles to smithereens."

Lon smoked in silence for a few moments, as though pondering the boss's words, and as he smoked his lips gradually expanded into a grin of approval. Hurley noted the smile: "An' it all [212] come of me workin' out the problems of a six-year old kid on the little crick behind the pig pen. An' what's more, I've got some of the problems of the big river more clear in me noodle."

Saginaw Ed winked at Connie; and leaning over, whispered into the boy's ear: "Hurley's done a smart thing," he confided, "an' it'll hurry the drive out of Dogfish. But he ain't got to the meat of the trouble—an' that's up to you an' me."

As the season progressed Hurley had increased his crews until each numbered one hundred and twenty-five men, and the daily work of these men was an unceasing source of interest to Connie. Every moment that could be spared from his duties, the boy was out among them, swinging an axe with the swampers, riding the huge loads of logs that slipped smoothly over the iced log roads on their trips to the landings, standing beside Lon Camden as he scaled the incoming loads, or among the sawyers, watching some mighty pine crash to earth with a roar of protest.

"I never seen a clerk before that ye could prize away from the office stove with a pickpole," remarked Lon Camdon, one day, as he and Hurley watched the boy riding toward them balanced [213] upon the top log of a huge load.

"He'll know more about loggin' be spring," replied the boss, "than many an' old lumberjack. It's the makin' of a fine boss the kid has."

"He kin scale as good as me, a'ready," admitted Lon. "An' that other kid, too—why just from trottin' 'round with this one he's got so he shows some real stuff. If ever I picked a kid fer a bad egg it was him."

"Me too," admitted Hurley. "But Connie stuck up for him, even after he'd throw'd in with the I. W. W's. Steve kin have anything I've got," he added, after a pause. "He saved me life, an' after the drive I'm goin' to take him home with me up to Pine Hook, instead of turnin' him loose to go to the bad around such dumps as Corky Dyer's where I picked him up. He'd got a wrong start. It's like he was follerin' a log road, an' got switched off onto a cross-haul—but, he's back on the main road again, an' it's Jake Hurley'll keep him there."

"He's all right, an' the men like him—but he ain't got the head the other one has."

"Sure he ain't!" agreed Hurley. "You kin take it from me, Lon, before that there Connie is [214] thirty, he'll be ownin' timber of his own."

"I'd almost bet money on it," said Saginaw Ed, who had come up in time to hear Hurley's prophecy. "Say boss, them irons come in fer the cook's bateau; I expect we better put to work on it. Month from now, an' we'll be listenin' night an' day fer the boomin' of the ice."

The boss assented: "Hop to it, fer we don't want no delay when this drive starts."

Saginaw turned toward the blacksmith shop to give his orders regarding the scow, in which the cook would follow the drive and furnish hot meals for the rivermen. His eye fell upon Connie

as the boy slid from the load: "Better get over to the office, son," he grinned. "Slue Foot's over there just a-meltin' the snow, 'cause you ain't around to sell him a plug of terbacker." The boy joined him, and Saginaw cast a look at the rollways: "Lots of logs on the landin's, son," he remarked.

"Seven million, three hundred thousand feet, up to last night," said the boy proudly. "Everything looks fine."

"Fine as frog hair, son—which some folks holds is too fine to last."

"What do you mean?" [215]

"Well nothin' that I could name—only, what you said about Slue Foot's bein' mixed up with the I. W. W. It's like I told you, them birds gits jobs just so they kin git a chanct to distroy property. They don't want to work, an' they don't want no one else to work. We caught three of 'em tryin' to burn the stables, which is about their size, an' if the sheriff served Doc's warrants, I guess they're in jail now. But how do we know that them three was *all* the I. W. W.'s in the outfit? An' how do we know that Slue Foot ain't plottin' some move that'll put a crimp in us somehow er other?"

The boy smiled: "I've thought of that, too," he answered. "But I don't think there is much danger from the I. W. W.'s. I've been watching Slue Foot, and I know that he's not going to start anything. He was glad to get those I. W. W.'s off the works. You see he's got a fish of his own to fry. He belongs to the I. W. W. just because it's natural for him to throw in with crooks and criminals, but he's so crooked himself that he won't even play square with his gang of crooks. He saw a chance to make some crooked money for himself, so he threw his friends over. We're all right, because the more logs we put into the river the bigger his graft is. And we've got him right [216] where we want him. We can nail him in a minute, if we want to, for swiping the old Irishman's money—but I don't want to spring that unless I have to until I get the goods on the Syndicate."

Saginaw nodded: "I guess that's good dope, all right. But, if I was you, I'd git a line on his scheme as soon as I could. You can't never tell what'll happen in the woods—an' when it does, it's most generally always somethin' different."

As the boy continued his way to the office, after parting from Saginaw at the blacksmith shop, he decided to carry out Saginaw's suggestion at once. In fact, for a week or ten days Connie had been watching for an opportunity to force Slue Foot to show his hand. And now he decided, the time had come. There was no one in sight; the boss of Camp Two had evidently gone into the office.

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[217]

CHAPTER XVI

SLUE FOOT "COMES ACROSS"

AS Connie pushed open the door he was greeted with a growl: "It's a doggone wonder ye wouldn't stay 'round an' tend to business onct in a while! Here I be'n waitin' half an' hour fer to git a plug of terbacker, an' you off kihootin' 'round the woods——"

"Save your growling, 'til someone's round to hear it," grinned the boy, as he produced the key to the chest. "Here's your tobacco, twenty cents' worth—makes thirty-two dollars and sixty cents, all told."

"Thirty-two sixty!" Slue Foot glared: "Thought Hurley's outfits never gouged the men on the wanagan?" he sneered. "My tab ain't over twenty-five dollars at the outside."

"Get it out of your system," retorted the boy. "You can't bluff me. Thirty-two sixty's down here. [218] Thirty-two sixty's right—and you know it's right! What's on your mind? You didn't walk clear down from Camp Two for a twenty-cent plug of tobacco, when you've got the biggest part of a carton in your turkey."

With his back to the stove, the boss scowled at the boy! "Smart kid, ain't you?" The scowl faded from his face, an' he repeated: "Smart kid—an' that's why I tuk a notion to ye, an'—'" he paused abruptly and crossing to the window, took a position that commanded the clearing. "—an' let ye in on some extry money."

Connie nodded: "Yes, and it's about time you were loosening up on the proposition—you haven't let me in yet."

"Ain't let ye in!" exclaimed Slue Foot. "What ye mean, 'ain't let ye in'? How about shadin' the cut?"

"Shading the cut," exclaimed the boy, with contempt. "What's a couple of hundred dollars? That's a piker's job—Injun stealing! You promised to let me in on something big—now, come across."

Slue Foot stared at him: "Say, who's runnin' this, you? Yer all-fired cocky fer a kid. When I [219] was your age a couple hundred dollars looked big as a township o' timber to me."

"Well, it don't to me," snapped the boy. "And you might as well come across."

Slue Foot advanced one threatening step: "Who d'ye think ye're talkin' to?" he roared. "I'll break ye in two!"

"And when I break, you break," smiled the boy. "Let me tell you this, Slue Foot Magee, I've got these books fixed so that if anything happens to me, your nose goes under, and all that's left is a string of bubbles—see? I've been doing some figuring lately, and I've decided the time's about right for me to get in on the other. According to the talk, it will be twenty or thirty days yet before the break-up. But, suppose the break-up should come early this year—early and sudden? You'd have your hands full and couldn't waste time on me. And besides you'd never let me in then, anyway. You're only letting me in because I'm supposed to furnish the dope on what's going on here. I'm playing safe—see the point?"

Slue Foot glowered: "An' what if I've changed my mind about lettin' ye in?" he asked truculently.

"Oh, then I'll just naturally sell your cut-shading scheme out to Hurley and his boss for what I [220] can get—and let you stand the gaff."

Slue Foot's fists clenched, a big vein stood out upon his reddened forehead, and he seemed to swell visibly: "You—you'd double-cross me, would you?"

"Sure, I would," said the boy, "if you don't come through. Look here, Slue Foot, business is business. I wouldn't trust you as far as I can throw a saw log, and you may as well get that right now."

"How do I know you won't double-cross me on the big deal?" asked the man.

"Matter of figures," answered Connie. "You don't suppose Hurley and his boss would pay me as much as we can get out of the logs do you? Of course they won't—but they might agree to pay me as much as I'll get out of the cut-shading—especially if I tell them that you've got a bigger game up your sleeve. You might as well be reasonable. It'll be better all around if you and I understand each other. They're beginning to talk in here about the drive. If I don't know what your scheme is, how am I to know what to remember? I can't remember everything they say, and [221] if I'm onto the game I can pick out what'll do us good, and not bother with the rest."

Once more Slue Foot took up his place by the window, and for some minutes the only sound in the little office was the ticking of the alarm clock. Finally the man spoke: "I figgered you was smart all right—smarter'n the run of kids. But I didn't figger you could out-figger me—or believe me, I'd of laid off of ye." The boss of Camp Two sat and scowled at the boy for several minutes. Then he spoke, sullenly at first, but as he warmed to his topic, the sullenness gave place to a sort of crafty enthusiasm—a fatuous pride in his cleverly planned scheme of fraud. "I was goin' to let ye in anyhow, so I s'pose it might's well be now as later. But, git this, right on the start: ye ain't bluffed me into takin' ye in, an' ye ain't scared me into it. You've augered me into it by common sense ... what ye said about they might come a sudden thaw, an' we'd be too busy to git together —an' about you knowin' what to remember of the talk that goes on here.

"It's like this: The logs is paint-branded, an' the mark of this outfit is the block-an'-ball in red on the butt end. They're branded on the landin's, an' I done the markin' myself. Last year Hurley [222] inspected 'em an' so did Lon, an' they know the brands showed up big an' bright an' sassy. But when them logs reached the booms an' was sorted they wasn't near as many of them wearin' the red block-an'-ball as when they started—an' the difference is what I split up with the Syndicate—boom-toll free!"

"You mean," asked the boy, "that the Syndicate men changed the brands, or painted them out and painted their own over them?"

Slue Foot sneered. "Ye're pretty smart—some ways. But ye ain't smart enough to change a red block-an'-ball to a green tripple X. An' as fer paintin' over 'em, why if a log hit the big river with a brand painted out they'd be a howl go up that would rock the big yaller ball on top of the capital. No sir, it takes brains to make money loggin'. The big ones has stole and grabbed up into the millions—an' they do it accordin' to law—because they've got the money to make the law an' twist it to suit theirselves. They put up thousands fer lobbys an' legislaters, an' fer judges an' juries, an' they drag down millions. The whole timber game's a graft. The big operators grab water rights, [223] an' timber rights, an' they even grab the rivers. An' they do it legal because they own the dummies that makes the laws. The little operator ain't got no show. If he don't own his own timber he has to take what he can get in stumpage contracks, an' whether he owns it or not they git him on water-tolls, an' when he hits the river there's boom-tolls an' sortin'-tolls, an' by the time he's got his logs to the mills an' sold accordin' to the boom scale he ain't got nawthin' left, but his britches—an' lucky to have them. All business is crooked. If everyone was honest they wouldn't be no millionaires. If a man's got a million, he's a crook. It ain't no worse fer us little ones to steal agin' the law, than it is fer the big ones to steal accordin' to law." Fairly started upon his favourite theme, Slue Foot worked himself into a perfect rage as he ranted on. "This here outfit's a little outfit," he continued. "It ain't got no show, nohow. I seen the chanct to git in on the graft an' I grabbed it—if I hadn't, the Syndicate would have had it all. An' besides I got a chance to git square with Hurley. They's two kinds of folks in the world—them that has, an' them that hain't. Them that has, has because they've retch out an' grabbed, an' them that hain't, hain't [224] because they wasn't smart enough to hang onto what they did have." Connie listened with growing disgust to the wolfish diatribe. Slue Foot's eyes blazed as he drove his yellow fangs deep into his tobacco plug. "But people's wakin' up to their rights," he continued. "There's the Socialists an' the I. W. W.'s, they're partly right, an' partly wrong. The Socialists wants, as near as I kin make out, a equal distribution o' wealth—that ain't so bad, except that there's only a few of 'em, an' they'd be doin' all the work to let a lot of others that don't do nawthin', in on their share of the dividin'. What's the use of me a-workin' so someone else that don't help none gits a equal share? An' the I. W. W.'s is about as bad. They try to bust up everything, an' wreck, an' smash, an' tear down—that's all right, fer as it goes—but, what's it goin' to git 'em? Where do they git off at? They ain't figgered themselves into no profit by what they do. What's it goin' to git me if I burn down a saw-mill? I don't git the mill, do I? No—an' neither don't they. What I'm after is gittin' it off them that's got it, an' lettin' it stick to me. I ain't worryin' about no one else. It's every man fer hisself—an' I'm fer *me!*" The boss prodded himself in the chest, as he emphasized the last word. [225] "An' if you want yourn, you'd better stick with me—we'll gather."

It was with difficulty that Connie masked the loathing he felt for this man whose creed was more despicable even than the creed of the organized enemies of society, for Slue Foot unhesitatingly indorsed all their viciousness, but discarded even their lean virtues.

For three years the boy's lot had been cast among men—rough men of the great outland. He had known good men and bad men, but never had he known a man whom he so utterly despised as this Slue Foot Magee. The bad men he had know were defiant in their badness, they flaunted the law to its face—all except Mr. Squigg, who was a sneak with the heart of a weasel, and didn't count. But this man, as bad as the worst of them, sought to justify his badness. Connie knew what Waseche Bill, or big MacDougall would have done if this human wolf had sought to persuade them to throw in with him on his dirty scheme, and he knew what Hurley or Saginaw Ed would do —and unconsciously, the boy's fists doubled. Then came the memory of McKeever and Ricky, the [226] men of the Mounted with whom he had worked in the bringing of bad men to justice. What would McKeever do? The boy's fists relaxed. "He'd get him," he muttered under his breath. "He'd throw in with him, and find out all he could find out, and then he'd—*get him!*"

"Whut's that?" Slue Foot asked the question abruptly, and Connie faced him with a grin:

"Your dope sounds good to me," he said, "but come across with the scheme. Hurley or Saginaw may drop in here any time. If the Syndicate didn't change the brands, or paint over them, how did they work it?"

"They didn't work it—it was me that worked it. All they done was to furnish me the paint an' put their own marks on the logs after I'd got 'em into the big river, brand free. It's this way: Brandin' paint will stand water. You kin paint-brand a log here an' the brand will still be on it if it floats clean to New Orleans. That's the kind of paint Hurley furnished. An' that's the kind of paint that went on some of the logs. But another kind went on the rest of the logs. It was just as red an' just as purty lookin' as the other—while the logs stayed on the rollways. After they'd b'en in the [227] water a while they wasn't no paint on 'em. German chemists mixed that paint—an' water'll take it off, like it'll take dirt offen a floor—easier 'cause you don't have to use no soap, an' you don't have to do no scrubbin'—it jest na'chelly melts an' floats off. Hurley bossed the rear end drive, an' when our crews got to the mills, the Syndicate had saw to it that all unbranded logs was took care of an' wore the green tripple X."

Connie nodded and Slue Foot continued: "Pretty slick, eh? But they's more to it than that. It's got to be worked right. I had to slip Long Leaf Olson the word when the rollways would be busted

out so he could foul our drive an' git his logs in on the head end. Then, there was the dickerin' with the Syndicate. It took some rammin' around before I got next to old Heinie Metzger—he's the big boss of the Syndicate. I worked it through passin' myself off fer Hurley to a stuck-up young whipper-snapper name of von Kuhlmann, that's old Heinie's side-kick—confidential secretary, he calls him. Them Germans is slick, but at last we got together an' made the deal, an' they paid me all right, boom scale, when the logs was in. This here von Kuhlmann hisself slipped [228] me the money—he's a funny galoot, always swelled up an' blowin' like he owned the world, an' always noddin' an' winkin', like they was somethin' he was holdin' out on ye, as if he know'd somethin' that no one else know'd—an' brag! You'd ort to hear him brag about Germany, like they wasn't no other reg'lar country, the rest of the world just bein' a kind of place that wasn't hardly worth mentionin'. They say the Syndicate stock is all owned in Germany, an' some of the cruisers that's worked fer 'em say it's a sight the amount of stuff they make 'em put in their reports. Accordin' to his job a cruiser or a land-looker is supposed to estimate timber. But the cruisers that works fer the Syndicate is supposed to report on everything from the number of box cars an' engines on the railroads, to the size of the towns, an' the number of folks in 'em that's Socialists an' I. W. W.'s. an' their name. They don't care nawthin about wastin' postage stamps, neither, 'cause all that stuff is sent over to Germany. What do they care over in the old country how many box cars is on some little old branch loggin' road in the timber country, or how many I. W. W.'s. lives in Thief River Falls?

"An speakin' of I. W. W.'s—them Germans is slick some ways, an' blamed fools in another. [229] With the I. W. W.'s. threatenin' the timber interests, these here Germans, that owns more mills an' standin' timber than any one else, is eggin' 'em on an' slippin' 'em money to keep 'em goin'. The I. W. W.'s., don't know that—an' I wouldn't neither except fer a lucky accident, an' I cashed in on it, too." The man paused and grinned knowingly. "In Duluth, it was, we pulled off a meetin' right under the nose of the police, an' not one of 'em in the hall. Called it a Socialist meetin', an' word was passed that they was a feller name of Mueller, from Germany, a student that was wised up to every wrinkle from blowin' up dams to wipin' out the Government. He come with greetin's from the 'brothers acrost the sea,' he said, an' what was more to the point, he brung along a nice fat package of cash money which he claimed had be'n raised by subscription fer to help the cause over here. I listened an' kep' a studyin' about where I'd saw this here Mueller before, but it didn't stand to reason I had, an' him just over from Germany. But they was somethin' about him made me sure I know'd him. He was dressed cheap an' wore glasses half an inch thick, an' they hadn't [230] no barber be'n into his hair fer quite a spell; he'd needed a shave fer about three weeks, too, an' he looked like a reg'lar b'ilin' out wouldn't of hurt him none. Anyways, before the meetin' was over, I'd spotted him, so 'long about midnight, after the meetin' had be'n over about an hour I loafs down to the hotel. It was a cheap dump, a hang-out fer lumberjacks an' lake sailors, an' I know'd the clerk an' didn't have no trouble gittin' to his room.

"'Hello, von Kuhlmann,' I says, when he opens the door, an' with a wild look up an' down the hall to see if any one had heard, he reaches out an' yanks me in. Tried to bluff it out first, but it wasn't no use." Slue Foot grinned: "I come out in about a half an hour with five hundred dollars in my jeans. These here 'brothers from acrost the sea' is sure some donaters when you git 'em where you want 'em—'course this here student business was all bunk. But, what I ain't never be'n able to git onto is, what in thunder does the Syndicate want to be slippin' the I. W. W. money fer?"

"Are you an I. W. W.?" Connie shot the question directly.

Slue Foot hesitated a moment and then answered evasively. "Git me right, kid, I'm anything [231] that's agin' capital—an' I'm anything that's agin' the Government. First and foremostly, I'm fer Magee. No man kin make money by workin'. I've got money, an' I'm a-goin' to git more—an' I don't care how it's come by. I'm a wolf, an' I'll howl while the rabbit squeals! I'm a bird of prey! I'm a Government all my own! All Governments is birds of prey, an' beasts of prey. What do you see on their money, an' their seals, an' their flags—doves, an' rabbits, an' little fawns? No, it's eagles, an' bears, an' lions—beasts that rips, an' tears, an' crushes, an' kills!

"You're lucky to git to throw in with a man like me—to git started out right when yer young. If you wasn't smart, I wouldn't fool with ye, but I'll git mine, an' you'll git yourn—an' some day, von Kuhlmann's kind of let it slip, they's somethin' big comin' off. I don't know what he's drivin' at, but it's somethin' he's all-fired sure is a-goin' to happen—an' he's kind of hinted that when it comes he kin use a few like me to good advantage."

"What kind of a thing's coming off?"

"I jest told ye I don't know—mebbe the Syndicate's goin' to grab off all the timber they is, or [232] mebbe it's figgerin' on grabbin' the hull Government, or the State—but whatever it is, he kin count on me bein' in on it—if he pays enough—an' by the time he pays it, I'd ort to know enough about the game so's I kin flop over to the other side an' sell him out. It's the ones that plays both ends from the middle that gits theirn—brains makes the money—not hands."

Slue Foot glanced out the window and turned to the boy. "Here comes Saginaw. When he gits [233] here I'll growl an' you sass. Remember to keep your ears open an' find out when Hurley's goin' to break out the rollways, an' where he's goin' to deliver the logs. I've tended to the brandin'—if they's anything more I'll let ye know." Slue Foot paused and scowled darkly: "An' don't try to double-cross me! They ain't nothin' I've told ye that ye could prove anyhow. An' even if ye could, it's just as you said, this outfit won't pay ye as much as what you'll git out of the deal by playin' square with me."

The door opened and Saginaw Ed entered, to interrupt a perfect torrent of abuse from Slue [234] Foot, and a rapid fire of recrimination from the boy. Presently the boss of Camp Two departed, threatening to have Connie fired for incompetence, as soon as he could get in a word with

Hurley.

SLUE FOOT TURNED. "THINK Y'RE AWFUL SMART, DON'T YE?"

On the tote road at the edge of the clearing, Slue Foot turned and gazed at the little office. And as he gazed an evil smile twisted his lips: "Think yer awful smart, don't ye? Well, yer in on the scheme—'cause I need ye in. An' I'll use ye fer all there is in ye—but when cashin'-in time comes, yer goin' to be left whistlin' fer yourn—er my name ain't Slue Foot Magee!" Then the smile slowly faded from his face, and removing his cap, he thoughtfully scratched his head. "Only trouble is, he *is* smart—an' where'll I git off at, if it turns out he's too *doggone* smart?"

CHAPTER XVII

HEINIE METZGER

SAGINAW ED listened as Connie detailed at length all that Slue Foot had told him. When the boy finished, the woodsman removed his pipe and regarded him thoughtfully: "Takin' it off an' on, I've know'd some consider'ble ornery folks in my time, but I never run acrost none that was as plumb crooked as this here specimen. Why, along side of him a corkscrew is straight as a stretched fiddle gut. He ain't square with no one. But, a man like him can't only go so far—his rope is short, an' when he comes to the end of it, they ain't a-goin' to be no knot fer to hang holt of. A man that's double-crossed folks like he has ain't got no right to expect to git away with it. If they don't no one else git him, the law will."

"Yes," answered the boy, "and we've got enough on him so that when the law gets through [236] with him he's not going to have much time left for any more crookedness."

"How d'you figger on workin' it?" asked Saginaw.

Connie laughed: "I haven't had time to dope it out yet, but there's no use starting anything 'til just before the drive. Slue Foot's crowding 'em up there in Camp Two, putting every last log he can get onto the landings—he said he'd have close to three million feet branded with his own paint."

"Expects Hurley's goin' to let Long Leaf boss the drive agin, I s'pose an' the Syndicate crew do the sortin'!"

"I guess that's what's he's counting on," answered the boy. "Hurley will tend to that part. And now we know his scheme, the logs are safe—what we want is evidence. When we get him we want to get him right."

Saginaw Ed rose to go. "It's up to you, son, to figger out the best way. Whatever you say goes. Take yer time an' figger it out good—'cause you want to remember that the Syndicate owes ye some thirty-odd thousand dollars they stoled off ye last year, an'——"

"Thirty-odd thousand?"

"Sure—ye stood to clean up twenty thousan', didn't ye? Instead of which ye lost fourteen [237] thousan'—that's thirty-four thousan', ain't it? An' here's somethin' fer to remember when yer dealin' with the Syndicate: Never law 'em if you can git out of it. They've got the money—an' you ain't got no square deal. Git the dope on 'em, an' then settle out o' court, with old Heinie Metzger."

When Saginaw had gone, Connie sat for hours at his desk thinking up plans of action, discarding them, revising them, covering whole sheets of paper with pencilled figures.

When, at last, he answered the supper call and crossed the clearing to the cook's camp, a peculiar smile twitched the corners of his lips.

"I've got to go up the road a piece an' figger on a couple of new skidways," said Saginaw, when the four who bunked in the office arose from the table. "It's good an' moonlight, an' I kin git the swampers started on 'em first thing in the morning."

"I'll go with you," decided the boy, "I've been cooped up all the afternoon, and I'll be glad of the chance to stretch my legs."

Leaving Hurley and Lon Camden, the two struck off up one of the broad, iced log roads that [238] reached into the timber like long fingers clutching at the very heart of the forest. The task of locating the skidways was soon finished and Saginaw seated himself on a log and produced pipe and tobacco. "Well, son," he said, "what's the game? I watched ye whilst we was eatin', an' I seen ye'd got it figgered out."

After a moment of silence, Connie asked abruptly: "How am I going to manage to get away for a week or ten days?"

"Git away!" exclaimed Saginaw. "You mean leave camp?"

The boy nodded: "Yes, I've got to go." He seated himself astride the log and talked for an hour, while Saginaw, his pipe forgotten, listened. When the boy finished Saginaw sat in silence, the dead pipe clenched between his teeth.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

The other removed the pipe, and spat deliberately into the snow. "Think of it?" he replied, "I never was much hand fer thinkin'—an' them big figgers you're into has got me woozy headed. Personal an' private, I'm tellin' ye right out, I don't think it'll work. It sounds good the way you [239] spoke it, but—why, doggone it, that would be outfiggerin' the *Syndicate!* It would be lettin' 'em beat theirself at their own game! It can't be did! They ain't no one kin do it. It ain't on."

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

"Matter with it! I can't find nothin' the matter with it—That's why it won't work!"

Connie laughed: "We'll make it work! All you've got to remember is that if any stranger comes into the camp asking for Hurley, you steer him up against Slue Foot. This von Kuhlmann himself will probably come, and if he does it will be all right—he knows Slue Foot by sight. The only thing that's bothering me is how am I going to ask Hurley for a week or ten days off? Frenchy's going in tomorrow, and I've got to go with him."

Saginaw Ed slapped his mittened hand against his leg: "I've got it," he exclaimed. "There was

three new hands come in today—good whitewater men fer the drive. One of 'em's Quick-water Quinn. I've worked with him off an' on fer it's goin' on fifteen year. He'll do anything fer me, account of a little deal onct, which he believed I saved his life. I'll slip over to the men's camp an' write a letter to you. Then later, when we're all in the office, Quick-water, he'll fetch it over an' [240] ask if you're here, an' give it to ye. Then ye read it, and take on like you've got to go right away fer a week er so. You don't need to make any explainin'—jest stick to it you've got to go. Hurley'll prob'ly rave round an' tell ye ye can't, an' bawl ye out, an' raise a rookus generally, but jest stick to it. If it gits to where ye have to, jest tell him you quit. That'll bring him 'round. He sets a lot of store by you, an' he'll let ye go if ye make him."

And so it happened that just as the four were turning in that night, a lumberjack pushed open the door. "Is they any one here name o' C. Morgan?" he asked.

Connie stepped forward, and the man thrust a letter into his hand: "Brung it in with me from the postoffice. They told me over to the men's camp you was in here."

Connie thanked the man, and carrying the letter to the light, tore it open and read. At the end of five minutes he looked up: "I've got to go out with Frenchy in the morning," he announced.

Hurley let a heavy boot fall with a thud, and stared at the boy as though he had taken leave of [241] his senses. "Go out!" he roared, "What'ye mean, go out?"

"I've got to go for a week or ten days. It's absolutely necessary or I wouldn't do it."

"A wake er tin days, sez he!" Hurley lapsed into brogue, as he always did when aroused or excited. "An' fer a wake or tin days the books kin run theirsilf! Well, ye can't go—an' that's all there is to ut!"

"I've got to go," repeated Connie stubbornly. "If I don't go out with Frenchy, I'll walk out!"

The boss glared at him. "I know'd things wuz goin' too good to last. But Oi didn't think th' trouble wuz a-comin' from ye. Ye can tell me, mebbe, what, Oi'm a-goin' to do widout no clerk whoilst yer gaddin' round havin' a good toime? Ye can't go!"

"Steve can run the wanagan, and Lon, and Saginaw, and Slue Foot can hold their reports 'til I get back. I'll work night and day then 'til I catch up."

"They ain't a-goin' to be no ketch up!" roared Hurley. "Here ye be, an' here ye'll stay! Av ye go out ye'll stay out!"

Connie looked the big boss squarely in the eye: "I'm sorry, Hurley. I've liked you, and I've [242] liked my job. But I've got to go. You'll find the books all up to the minute." Hurley turned away with a snort and rolled into his bunk, and a few minutes later, Connie blew out the lamp and crawled between his own warm blankets, where he lay smiling to himself in the darkness.

By lamplight next morning the boy was astir. He placed his few belongings in his turkey, and when the task was accomplished he noticed that Hurley was watching him out of the corner of his eye. He tied the sack as the others sat upon the edge of the bunks and drew on their boots. And in silence they all crossed the dark clearing toward the cook's camp.

With a great jangle of bells, Frenchy drew his tote-team up before the door just as they finished breakfast. Connie tossed his turkey into the sleigh and turned to Hurley who stood by with Lon Camden and Saginaw Ed. "I'll take my time, now," said the boy, quietly. "And good luck to you all!"

For answer the big boss reached over and, grabbing the turkey, sent it spinning into the boy's bunk. "Ye don't git no toime!" he bellowed. "Jump in wid Frenchy now, an' don't be shtandin' [243] 'round doin' nawthin'. Tin days ye'll be gone at the outsoide, an' av' ye ain't at yer disk here be th' 'leventh day, Oi'll br-reak ye in two an' grease saws wid the two halves av ye!" Reaching into his pocket, he drew forth a roll of bills. "How much money d'ye nade? Come spake up! Ye kin have all, or par-rt av ut—an' don't ye iver let me hear ye talk av quittin' agin, er Oi'll woind a peavy around yer head."

Connie declined the money and jumped into the sleigh, and with a crack of the whip, Frenchy sent the horses galloping down the tote road. When they were well out of hearing the Frenchman laughed. "Dat Hurley she lak for mak' de beeg bluff, w'at you call; she mak' you scairt lak she gon' keel you, an' den she giv' you all de mon' she got."

"He's the best boss in the woods!" cried the boy.

"*Oui* dat rat. Ba goss, we'n she roar an' bluff, dat ain' w'en you got for look out! Me—A'm know 'bout dat. A'm seen heem lick 'bout fifty men wan tam. Ovaire on——"

"Oh, come now, Frenchy—not fifty men."

"Well, was seex, anyhow. Ovaire on Leech Lak' an' *sacre!* He ain' say nuttin', dat tam—joos' [244] mak' hees eyes leetle an' shine lak de *loup cervier*—an' smash, smash, smash! An', by goss, 'bout twenty of dem feller, git de busted head."

Connie laughed, and during all the long miles of the tote road he listened to the exaggerated and garbled stories of the Frenchman—stories of log drives, of fights, of bloody accidents, and of "hants" and windagoes. At the railroad, the boy helped the teamster and the storekeeper in the loading of the sleigh until a long-drawn whistle announced the approach of his train. When it stopped at the tiny station, he climbed aboard, and standing on the platform, waved his hand until the two figures whisked from sight and the train plunged between its flanking walls of pine.

In Minneapolis Connie hunted up the office of the Syndicate, which occupied an entire floor, many stories above the sidewalk, of a tall building. He was a very different looking Connie from the roughly clad boy who had clambered onto the train at Dogfish. A visit to a big department store had transformed him from a lumberjack into a youth whose clothing differed in no marked particular from the clothing of those he passed upon the street. But there was a difference that [245]

had nothing whatever to do with clothing—a certain something in the easy swing of his stride, the poise of his shoulders, the healthy bronzed skin and the clear blue eyes, that caused more than one person to pause upon the sidewalk for a backward glance at the boy.

Connie stepped from the elevator, hesitated for a second before a heavily lettered opaque glass door, then turned the knob and entered, to find himself in a sort of pen formed by a low railing in which was a swinging gate. Before him, beyond the railing, dozens of girls sat at desks their fingers fairly flying over the keys of their clicking typewriters. Men with green shades over their eyes, and queer black sleeves reaching from their wrists to their elbows, sat at other desks. Along one side of the great room stood a row of box-like offices, each with a name lettered upon its glass door. So engrossed was the boy in noting these details that he started at the sound of a voice close beside him. He looked down into the face of a girl who sat before a complicated looking switchboard.

"Who do you wish to see?" she asked.

Connie flushed to the roots of his hair. It was almost the first time in his life that any girl had [246] spoken to him—and this one was smiling. Off came his hat. "Is—is Heinie Metzger in?" he managed to ask. Connie's was a voice tuned to the big open places, and here in the office of the Syndicate it boomed loudly—so loudly that the girls at the nearer typewriters looked up swiftly and then as swiftly stooped down to pick up imaginary articles from the floor; the boy could see that they were trying to suppress laughter. And the girl at the switchboard? He glanced from the others to this one who was close beside him. Her face was red as his own, and she was coughing violently into a tiny handkerchief.

"Caught cold?" he asked. "Get your feet dry, and take a dose of quinine, and you'll be all right —if you don't get pneumonia and die. If Heinie ain't in I can come again." Somehow the boy felt that he would like to be out of this place. He felt stifled and very uncomfortable. He wondered if girls always coughed into handkerchiefs or clawed around on the floor to keep from laughing at nothing. He hoped she would say that Heinie Metzger was not in.

"Have you a card?" the girl had recovered from her coughing fit, but her face was very red. [247]

"A what?" asked the boy.

"A card—your name."

"Oh, my name is Connie Morgan."

"And, your address?"

"Ma'am?"

"Where do you live?"

"Ten Bow."

"Where? Is it in Minnesota?"

"No, it's in Alaska—and I wish I was back there right now."

"And, your business?"

"I want to see Heinie Metzger about some logs."

A man passing the little gate in the railing whirled and glared at him. He was a very disagreeable looking young man with a fat, heavy face, pouchy eyes of faded blue, and stiff, close-cropped reddish hair that stuck straight up on his head like pig's bristles. "Looks like he'd been scrubbed," thought Connie as he returned glare for glare. The man stepped through the gate and thrust his face close to the boy's.

"Vat you mean, eh?"

"Are you Heinie Metzger?"

"No, I am not *Herr* Metzger. *Unt* it pays you you shall be civil to your betters. You shall say [248] *Herr* Metzger, *oder* Mister Metzger. *Unt* he has got not any time to be mit poys talking. Vat you vanted? If you got pusiness, talk mit me. I am *Herr* von Kuhlmann, confidential secretary to *Herr* Metzger."

"I thought you were the barber," apologized the boy. "But anyhow, you won't do. I want to see Heinie Metzger, or 'hair' Metzger, or Mister Metzger, whichever way you want it. I want to sell him some logs."

The other sneered: "Logs! He wants to sell it some logs! *Unt* how much logs you got—on de vagon a load, maybe? Ve dondt fool mit logs here, exceptingly ve get anyhow a trainload—*unt Herr* Metzger dondt mention efen, less dan half a million feets. Vere iss your logs?"

"I've got 'em in my pocket," answered the boy. "Come on, Dutchy, you're wasting my time. Trot along, now; and tell this Metzger there's a fellow out here that's got about eight or nine million feet of white pine to sell——"

"Vite pine! Eight million feets! You krasy?" The man stooped and swung open the little gate. [249] "Come along *mit* me, *unt* if you trying some foolishness *mit Herr* Metzger, you vish you vas some blace else to have stayed avay." He paused before a closed door, and drawing himself very erect, knocked gently. A full minute of silence, then from the interior came a rasping voice:

"Who is it?"

"It is I, sir, von Kuhlmann, at your service, *unt* I have *mit* me one small poy who say he has it some logs to sell."

Again the voice rasped from behind the partition—a thin voice, yet, in it's thinness, somehow suggesting brutality: "Why should you come to me? Why don't you buy his logs and send him about his business?"

Von Kuhlmann cleared his throat nervously: "He says it iss vite pine—eight million feets."

"Show him in, you fool! What are you standing out there for?"

Von Kuhlmann opened the door and motioned Connie to enter:

"*Herr* Morgan," he announced, bowing low.

"Connie Morgan," corrected the boy quickly, as he stepped toward the desk and offered his hand to the small, grey-haired man, with the enormous eyeglasses, and the fierce upturned [250] mustache. "I suppose you are Heinie Metzger," he announced.

The man glared at him, his thin nostrils a-quiver. Then, in a dry, cackling voice, bade Connie be seated, giving the extended hand the merest touch. Von Kuhlmann withdrew noiselessly, and closed the door. Metzger opened a drawer and drew forth a box of cigars which he opened, and extended toward the boy. Connie declined, and replacing the cigars, the man drew from another drawer, a box of cigarettes, and when the boy declined those he leaned back in his chair and stared at Connie through his glasses, as one would examine a specimen at the zoo.

HE LEANED BACK IN HIS CHAIR AND STARED AT CONNIE THROUGH HIS GLASSES, AS ONE WOULD EXAMINE A SPECIMEN AT THE ZOO.

"Young man, how do I know you have any logs?" the question rasped suddenly from between half-closed lips.

"You don't know it," answered the boy. "That's why I came here to tell you."

"White pine, you said," snapped the man, after a pause. "Eight million feet?"

"Yes, white pine—at least eight million, maybe nine, and possibly more, if we continue to have good luck."

"Where are these logs?" [251]

"On our landings on Dogfish River." [252]

"Dogfish! You're the man from Alaska that bought the McClusky tract?"

"I'm his partner."

"Show a profit last year?"

"No. But we only had one camp then, and this year we have two and each one has cut more than the one we had last year."

"Who did you sell to, last year?"

"Baker & Crosby."

"Satisfied with their boom scale?"

"Well, no, we weren't. That's why we thought we'd offer the cut to you this year, if you want it."

"Want it! Of course we want it—that is, if the price is right."

"What will you pay?"

Herr Heinrich Metzger removed his glasses and dangled them by their wide black ribbon, as he glanced along his thin nose. "Sure you can deliver eight million feet?" he asked.

"Yes, our foreman reports eight million already on the rollways, or in the woods all ready for the rollways. Yes, I can be sure of eight million."

"We have a big contract," said Metzger, "that is just about eight million feet short of being [253] filled. If we can be sure of getting the entire eight million in one lump, we could afford to pay more—much more, in fact, than we could if there was anything short of eight million feet."

Connie nodded: "There will be eight million feet, at least," he repeated. "What will you pay?"

For a long time the other was silent, then he spoke: "It is a large deal," he said. "There are many things to consider. Lest we make haste too quickly, I must have time to consider the transaction in all it's phases. Meet me here one week from today, at eleven o'clock, and I will give you a figure."

"A week is a long time," objected the boy, "And I am a long way from home."

"Yes, yes, but there are others—associates of mine in the business with whom I must consult." The boy had risen to go, when the man stayed him with a motion. "Wait," he commanded. "Your name is——?"

"Morgan—Connie Morgan."

"To be sure—Connie Morgan." He picked the receiver from the hook of his desk phone. "Get me the Laddison Hotel," he commanded, and hung up the receiver. "The delay is of my own [254] making, therefore I should pay for it. You will move your luggage into the Laddison Hotel, which is the best in the city, and shall remain there until our deal is closed, at the expense of this company——"

"But," objected the boy, "suppose the deal don't go through?"

"The expense will be ours whether the deal goes through or not. You see, I am confident that we can deal."

The telephone rang and Metzger made the arrangements, and again, turned to the boy. "Each evening at dinner time, you are to ask at the desk for an envelope. In the envelope you will receive a ticket to the theatre. This, also, at our expense." He smiled broadly. "You see, we treat our guests well. We do not wish them to become tired of our city, and we wish those with whom we have dealings to think well of us."

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[255]

CHAPTER XVIII

CONNIE SELLS SOME LOGS

CONNIE MORGAN left the office of the Syndicate, and once more upon the sidewalk, filled his lungs with the keen air. "It's going to work!" "It's going to work!" he repeated over and over to himself as he made his way toward the store where he had left his discarded clothing stuffed into a brand new brown leather suitcase. The boy returned unhesitatingly to the store, not by means of street signs, but by the simple process of back-trailing. Trained in observation, his eyes had unfailingly registered the landmarks in his brain—even when that brain had been too busy wondering what was to be the outcome of his conference with Heinie Metzger, to know that it was receiving impressions. It was this trained habit of observation that had enabled him to select his wearing apparel and the brown leather suitcase. He had simply studied the passengers on the [256] train, and selecting a man who looked well dressed, had copied his apparel and even his suitcase.

The clerk at the store directed him to his hotel, and a few minutes later he stood in the window of a thickly carpeted room, and stared out over the roofs of buildings. "It's—it's like the mountains," he mused, "stretching away, peak after peak, as far as you can see, and the streets are the canyons and the valleys—only this is more—lonesome." Tiring of looking out over the roofs, he put on his overcoat and spent the afternoon upon the streets, admiring the goods in the store windows and watching the people pass and repass upon the sidewalks. It was a mild, sunshiny afternoon and the streets were thronged with ladies, the browns, and greys, and blacks, and whites of their furs making a pretty kaleidoscope of colour.

At the Union Station he procured a folder and after looking up the departure of trains, returned to his hotel. He walked back at the time when factories, stores, and office buildings were disgorging their human flood onto the streets, and the boy gazed about him in wonder as he elbowed his way along the sidewalk. He smiled to himself. "I guess I don't know much about [257] cities. In the store I was wondering where in the world they were going to find the people to buy all the stuff they had piled around, and when I was looking out the window, I wondered if there were enough people in the world to live in all the houses—and now I'm wondering if there is enough stuff to go around, and enough houses to hold 'em all."

In this room Connie glanced at his watch, performed a hasty toilet, and hurried into the elevator. "Gee, it's most six!" he muttered, "I bet I'm late for supper." He was surprised to find men in the lobby, sitting about in chairs or talking in groups, as they had been doing when he left in the afternoon. "Maybe they don't have it 'til six," he thought, and seating himself in a leather chair, waited with his eyes on the clock. Six o'clock came, and when the hand reached five minutes after, he strolled to the desk. "Anything here for me?" he asked. The clerk handed him an envelope. "Heinie's making good," thought the boy, and then, trying not to look hungry, he turned to the clerk: "Cook hollered yet?" he asked casually.

The man smiled: "Grill's down stairs," he announced, pointing to a marble stairway at the [258] other end of the room.

"I ain't too late, am I?" asked the boy.

"Too late! Too late for what?"

"For supper. It ain't over is it?"

"The grill is open from eight in the morning until midnight," explained the man, and as Connie turned away, he called after him: "Oh, Mr. Morgan——"

"Connie Morgan," corrected the boy gravely.

"Well, Connie, then—you are not to pay your checks, just sign them and the waiter will take care of them."

"That suits me," smiled Connie, and as he crossed the tiled floor he muttered: "If they hadn't wasted so much space making the office and rooms so big, they wouldn't have to eat in the cellar. In Fairbanks or Skagway they'd have made four rooms out of that one of mine." At the door of the grill a man in black met him, conducted him through a maze of small tables at which men and women were eating, and drew out a chair at a table placed against the wall. Another man in black appeared, filled a glass with water from a fat bottle, and flipped a large piece of cardboard in [259] front of him. Connie scanned the printed list with puckered brow. Way down toward the bottom he found three words he knew, they were tea, coffee, milk. The man in black was waiting at his side with a pencil poised above a small pad of paper. "Go ahead, if you want to write," said the boy, "I won't bother you any—I'm just trying to figure out what some of these names mean."

"Waiting for your order, sir."

"Don't 'sir' me. You mean you're the waiter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'm hungry, suppose you beat it out and bring me my supper."

"What will it be, sir? I will take your order, sir."

"Cut out that 'sir,' I told you. If these things they've got down here stand for grub, you'll just have to bring along the whole mess, and I'll pick out what I want."

"Might I suggest, s——"

"Look here," interrupted the boy, grasping the idea. "If any of these names stand for ham and

eggs, or beefsteak, or potatoes, or bread and butter, you bring 'em along."

The man actually smiled, and Connie felt relieved. "Whose place is that?" he indicated a chair [260] across the table.

"Not reserved, sir."

Connie glanced around the room: "You ain't very busy, now. Might as well bring your own grub along, and if you can ever remember to forget that 'sir' business, we'll get along all right—I'm lonesome."

When the waiter returned with a tray loaded with good things to eat, Connie again indicated the empty chair. "Against the rules," whispered the waiter, remembering to leave off the "sir."

Connie did justice to the meal and when he had finished, the man cleared the dishes away and set a plate before him upon which was a small bowl of water and a folded napkin. "What's that?" asked the boy, "I drink out of a glass."

"Finger bowl," whispered the waiter. "Do you wish a dessert?"

"Might take a chance on a piece of pie," answered the boy, "here take this along. I washed up-stairs."

When the waiter presented his check, Connie took the pencil from his hand, signed it, and passed it back.

"Very good. One moment, 'til I verify this at the desk." He hurried away, and returned a [261] moment later. "Very good," he repeated.

Connie handed him a dollar: "I'm going to be here a week," he said, "I want three good square meals a day, and it's up to you to see that I get 'em. No more lists of stuff I can't read. No more 'yes sir,' 'no sir,' 'very good sir.'"

The waiter pocketed the dollar: "Thank you, s—. Very good. Always come to this table. I will reserve this place for you. You will find your chair tilted, so. I shall speak to the head waiter."

Connie went directly to his room and putting on his cap and overcoat, returned to the lobby and again approached the man at the desk: "What time does the show start?" he asked.

"Curtain rises at eight-fifteen."

"Where is it?"

"Which one?"

The boy reached for his envelope and handed the ticket to the clerk.

"Metropolitan," informed the man, with a glance at the cardboard. "Marquette, between Third and Fourth." The boy glanced at the clock. It was a quarter past seven. Hurrying to Nicollet [262] Avenue, he walked rapidly to the depot and accosted a uniformed official: "Is the seven-fifty-five for Brainard in yet?"

"Naw, third gate to yer right, where them folks is waitin'."

Connie turned up his collar, pulled his cap well down over his eyes, and strolled to the edge of the knot of people that crowded close about one of the iron gates. His eyes ran rapidly over each face in the crowd without encountering the object of his search, so he appropriated an inconspicuous seat on a nearby bench between a man who was engrossed in his newspaper, and an old woman who held a large bundle up on her lap, and whose feet were surrounded with other bundles and bags which she insisted upon counting every few minutes. Closely the boy scrutinized each new arrival as he joined the waiting group. Beyond the iron grill were long strings of lighted coaches to which were coupled engines that panted eagerly as they awaited the signal that would send them plunging away into the night with their burden of human freight.

Other trains drew in, and Connie watched the greetings of relatives and friends, as they rushed to meet the inpouring stream of passengers. It seemed to the lonely boy that everybody in [263] the world had someone waiting to welcome him but himself. He swallowed once or twice, smiled a trifle bitterly, and resumed his scrutiny of the faces. A man bawled a string of names, there was a sudden surging of the crowd which rapidly melted as its members were spewed out into the train shed. A few stragglers were still hurrying through the gate. The hands of a clock pointed to seven-fifty-four, and Connie stood up. As he did so, a man catapulted down the stairs, and rushed for the gate. He was a young man, clothed in the garb of a woodsman, and as he passed him, Connie recognized the heavy face of von Kuhlmann.

"That's just what I've been waiting for," he spoke aloud to himself, after the manner of those whose lives are cast in the solitudes. The man glanced up from his newspaper, and the old woman regarded him with a withering scowl, and gathered her bundles more closely about her feet.

The play that evening was a musical comedy, and during the entire performance the boy sat enthralled by the music and the dazzling costumes. He was still in a daze when he reached his hotel, and once more stood in his room and gazed out over the city of twinkling lights. He turned [264] from the window and surveyed his apartment, the thick carpet, the huge brass bed, the white bath tub in the tiny room adjoining, with its faucets for hot and cold water, the big mirror that reflected his image from head to foot—it seemed all of a piece with the play.

Instantly the boy's imagination leaped the snow-locked miles and he saw the tiny cabin on Ten Bow, the nights on the snow-trail when he had curled up in his blankets with the coldly gleaming stars for his roof; he saw the rough camp on Dogfish and in a flash he was back in the room once more. "This ain't real *living*," he muttered, once more glancing about him, "It's—it's like the show—like living in a world of make-believe."

Undressing, he drew the white tub nearly full of water. "I'm going to make it just as hot as I

can stand it. Any one can take a bath in cold water." He wallowed in the tub for a long time, dried himself with a coarse towel, and rummaging in his new suitcase, produced a pair of pink pyjamas which had been highly recommended by the clerk at the big store. Very gingerly he donned the garments and for some moments stood and viewed himself in the mirror. "Gee," he muttered, [265] "I'm sure glad Waseche Bill ain't here!" and switching out the light, he dived into bed. [266]

VERY GINGERLY HE DONNED THE GARMENTS AND FOR SOME MOMENTS STOOD AND VIEWED HIMSELF IN THE MIRROR.

Promptly at eleven o'clock, one week from the day he arrived in Minneapolis, Connie Morgan again presented himself at the office of the Syndicate. That he had been expected was evidenced by the fact that the girl at the switchboard did not ask him any questions. She greeted him by name, and touching a button beneath the edge of her desk summoned a boy who conducted him to Metzger's private office. The lumber magnate received him with an oily smile: "Promptly on the minute," he approved. "That's business. Sit here and we will see whether two business men are able to make their minds meet in a contract that will be profitable to both." The man placed the points of his fingers together and sighted across them at Connie. "In the first place," he began, "the quantity of logs. You are sure you can deliver here at our mills at least eight million feet?"

"Yes."

"Because," continued the man, "owing to the conditions of a contract we have on hand, any less than eight million feet would be practically of no value to us whatever. That is, we have [267] concluded to rely entirely upon your logs to fulfill our big contract, and should you fail us, the other contract would fail, and we would be at the expense of marketing the lumber elsewhere."

"How much more than eight million feet could you use?" asked the boy.

"As much more as you can deliver. Say, anything up to ten million."

Connie nodded: "That's all right," he assented, "and the price?"

"Ah, yes—the price." Metzger frowned thoughtfully. "What would you say to twenty dollars a thousand?"

Connie shook his head. "I can get twenty-five anywhere."

"Well, twenty-five?"

Again the boy shook his head. "You told me you could pay liberally for the logs if you could be sure of getting them all in one lot," he reminded. "I can get twenty-five, anywhere, and by hunting out my market I can boost it to thirty."

Metzger's frown deepened. "What is your price?" he asked.

"Fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars!" The man rolled his eyes as if imploring high heaven to look down upon the [268] extortion. "Ridiculous! Why the highest price ever paid was forty!"

"We'll make a new record, then," answered the boy calmly.

"Forty dollars—if you must have it," offered the man. "Forty dollars or nothing. And, even at forty, we must insist on inserting a protective clause in the contract."

"A protective clause?"

"Yes, it is this way. If we assume to pay such an outrageous price for your logs, we must insist upon being protected in case you fail to deliver. Suppose, for instance, something prevented your delivering the logs, or part of them at our mills. Say, you could deliver only four or five million. We could not pay forty dollars for them, because our price is fixed with the understanding that we are to receive eight million."

"That's fair enough," answered the boy; "we'll fix that. If we don't deliver eight million, then you take what we do deliver at twenty dollars."

Metzger pondered. "And you will bind yourself to sell to us, and not to others, if you deliver a short cut?" [269]

"Sure we will."

"Well, there is fairness in your offer. We will say, then, that we are to pay you forty dollars a thousand for any amount between eight and ten million, and only twenty dollars if you fail to deliver at least eight million."

"I said fifty dollars," reminded the boy.

"And I say we cannot pay fifty! It is unheard of! It is not to be thought of! It is exorbitant!"

Connie arose and reached for his cap: "All right," he answered. "The deal's off." At the door he paused, "I liked your hotel, and the shows," he said, but Metzger cut him short:

"The hotel and the shows!" he cried. "Bah! it is nothing! Come back here. You are an extortionist! You know you have us at your mercy, and you are gouging us! It is an outrage!"

"See here, Metzger." The man flinched at the use of his name, shorn of any respectful *Herr*, or Mister. But he listened. "It's my business to get as much for those logs as I can get. There is nothing more to talk about. If you want 'em at fifty dollars, take 'em, if you don't—good-bye."

Muttering and grumbling, the man motioned him back to his seat. "We've got to have the logs," he whined, "but it is a hard bargain you drive. One does not look for such harshness in the young. I am disappointed. How would forty-five do?" [270]

"Fifty."

"Well, fifty, then!" snapped Metzger, with a great show of anger. "But look here, if we go up ten dollars on our part, you come down ten dollars on your part! We will pay fifty dollars a thousand for all logs between eight and ten million—and ten dollars a thousand for all logs delivered short of eight million—and you bind yourself to sell us your entire drive on those terms."

"That's a deal," answered the boy. "And our crew to work with yours at the sorting gap. When will you have the papers?"

"Come back at two," growled the man, shortly.

When Connie had gone, Metzger touched one of a row of buttons upon his desk, and von Kuhlmann entered, and standing at military attention, waited for his superior to speak.

For a full minute Metzger kept him standing without deigning to notice him. Then, scribbling for a moment, he extended a paper toward his subordinate. "Have a contract drawn in conformity with these figures," he commanded. [271]

Von Kuhlmann glanced at the paper. "He agreed? As it iss so said here in America—he bite?"

Metzger's thin lip writhed in a saturnine grin: "Yes, he bit. I strung him along, and he has an idea that he is a wonderful business man—to hold out against me for his price. Ha, little did he know that the top price interested me not at all! It was the lesser figure that I was after—and you see what it is, von Kuhlmann—*ten dollars a thousand*!"

The other made a rapid mental calculation: "On the deal, at five million feet, we make, at the least, more than three hundred thousand!"

Metzger nodded: "Yes! That is business!" he glared into von Kuhlmann's face, "This deal is based on *your* report. If you have failed us——!"

Von Kuhlmann shuddered: "I haff not fail. I haff been on Dogfish, and I haff mit mine eyes seen the logs. I haff talk mit Hurley, the boss. He iss mit us. Why should he not be mit us? We pay him well for the logs from which comes the paint off. He haff brand with the dissolving paint three million feets. Mineself I apply vater *unt* from the ends, I rub the paint, in each rollway, here and there, a log." [272]

Metzger pencilled some figures on a pad. "If you have failed us," he repeated, "we pay *four hundred thousand* dollars for eight million feet. *Four hundred thousand!* And we lose forty dollars a thousand on the whole eight million feet. Because we expect to pay this Hurley ten dollars a thousand for the three million feet branded with the dissolving paint—and also to pay ten dollars a thousand for the five million that will be delivered under the contract." The man paused and brought his fist down on the desk: "Ha, these Americans!" the thin lips twisted in sneering contempt, "they pride themselves upon their acumen—upon their business ability. They boast of being a nation of traders! They have pride of their great country lying helpless as a babe—a swine contentedly wallowing in its own fat, believing itself secure in its flimsy sty—little heeding the Butcher, who watches even as he whets his knife under the swine's very eyes, waiting—waiting—waiting only for—THE DAY!" At the words both Metzger and von Kuhlmann clicked their heels and came to a stiff military salute. Standing Metzger, continued: "Traders—business men—bah! It is the Germans who are the traders—the business men of the world. Into the very heart of their country we reach, and they do not know it. Lumber here, iron there, cotton, wool, railroads, banks—in their own country, and under protection of their own laws we have reached out our hands and have taken; until today Germany holds the death-grip upon American commerce, as some day she will hold the death-grip upon America's very existence. When the Butcher thrusts [273]

the knife the swine dies. And, we, the supermen—the foremost in trade, in arms, in science, in art, in thought—we, the Germans, will that day come into our place in the sun!"

"*Der Tag!*" pronounced von Kuhlmann, reverently, and with another clicking salute, he retired.

At two o'clock Connie found himself once more in Metzger's office. The head of the Syndicate handed him a copy of a typed paper which the boy read carefully. Then, very carefully he read it again.

"This seems to cover all the points. It suits me. You made two copies, did you?"

Metzger nodded. "And, now we will sign?" he asked, picking up a pen from the desk, and [274] touching a button. Von Kuhlmann appeared in the doorway. "Just witness these signatures," said Metzger.

"If it's just the same to you, I saw Mike Gillum, one of your foremen, waiting out there; I would rather he witnessed the signing."

"What's this? What do you mean?"

"Nothing—only I know Mike Gillum. He's honest. I'd like him to witness."

"Send Gillum in!" commanded Metzger, glaring at the boy, and when the Irishman appeared, he said brusquely. "Witness the signature to a contract for the sale of some logs." Arranging the papers he signed each copy with a flourish, and offered the pen to Connie.

The boy smiled. "Why, I can't sign it," he said. "You see, I'm a minor. It wouldn't be legal. It wouldn't bind either one of us to anything. If the deal didn't suit me after the logs were here, I could claim that I had no right to make the contract, and the courts would uphold me. Or, if it didn't suit you, you could say 'It is a mere scrap of paper.'"

Metzger jerked the thick glasses from his nose and glared at the boy. "What now? You mean [275] you have no authority to make this contract? You have been jesting? Making a fool of me—taking up my time—living at my expense—and all for nothing?"

Connie laughed at the irate magnate: "Oh, no—not so bad as that. I have the authority to arrange the terms because I am a partner. It is only the legal part that interferes. Hurley, our walking boss has the power of attorney signed by my partner, who is not a minor. Hurley is authorized to sell logs and incur indebtedness for us. I will have to take those contracts up to our camp and get his signature. Then everything will be O.K."

Metzger scowled: "Why did you not have this Hurley here?"

"What, and leave a couple of hundred men idle in the woods? That would not be good business, would it? I'll take the contracts and have them signed and witnessed, and return yours by registered mail within two days."

The head of the Syndicate shot a keen sidewise glance at the boy who was chatting with Mike Gillum, as he selected a heavy envelope, slipped the two copies of the contract into it, and passed [276] it over. Connie placed the envelope in an inner pocket and, buttoning his coat tightly, bade Metzger good-bye, and passed out of the door.

Alone in the office Metzger frowned at his desk, he drew quick, thin lined figures upon his blotting pad: "These Americans," he repeated contemptuously under his breath. "To send a boy to do business with *me*—a past master of business! The fools! The smug, self-satisfied, helpless fools—I know not whether to pity or to laugh! And, yet, this boy has a certain sort of shrewdness. I had relied, in case anything went wrong with our plan, upon voiding the contract in court. However, von Kuhlmann is clever. He has been this week on the field. His judgment is unerring. *He is German!*"

Late that evening, clad once more in his woodsman's garb, Connie Morgan sat upon the plush cushion of a railway coach, with his new leather suitcase at his feet, and smiled at the friendly twinkling lights of the farm-houses, as his train rushed northward into the night.

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[277]

CHAPTER XIX

THE UNMASKING OF SLUE FOOT MAGEE

CONNIE MORGAN did not leave the train at Dogfish Spur, but kept on to the county seat. In the morning he hunted up the sheriff, a bluff woodsman who, until his election to office, had operated as an independent stumpage contractor.

"Did you arrest three I. W. W.'s in Mike Gillum's camp on Willow River a while back?" he asked, when the sheriff had offered him a chair in his office in the little court-house.

"D'you mean those two-legged skunks that tried to brain Hurley when he was bringin' 'em in fer tryin' to burn out his camp?"

"Those are the ones."

"They're here. An' by the time they got here they know'd they hadn't be'n on no Sunday-school picnic, too. Doc swore out the warrants, an' I deputized Limber Bill Bradley, an' Blinky Hoy to go [278] an' fetch 'em in. 'Treat 'em kind,' I tells 'em when they started. But, judgin' by looks when they got 'em out here, they didn't. You see, them boys was brought up rough. Limber Bill mixed it up with a bear one time, an' killed him with a four-inch jack-knife, an' Blinky Hoy—they say he eats buzz-saws fer breakfast. So here they be, an' here they'll stay 'til June court. They started hollerin' fer a p'liminary hearin', soon as they got here, but I know'd Hurley was strainin' hisself fer a good showin' this year, an' wouldn't want to stop an' come down to testify, so I worked a technicality on 'em to prevent the hearin'."

"A technicality?"

"Yeh, I shuck my fist in under their nose an' told 'em if they demanded a hearing, they'd git it. But it would be helt up in Hurley's camp, an' Limber Bill, an' Blinky Hoy would chaperoon 'em up, an' provided they was enough left of 'em to bother with after the hearin' them same two would fetch 'em back. So they changed their minds about a hearin', and withdraw'd the demand."

Connie laughed: "I'm Hurley's clerk, and I just dropped down to tell you that if those fellows [279] should happen to ask you how you got wind of where they were hiding, you might tell them that Slue Foot Magee tipped them off."

"If they'd happen to ask!" exclaimed the sheriff. "They've b'en tryin' every which way they know'd how to horn it out of me, ever since they got out here. What about Slue Foot? I never did trust that bird—never got nothin' on him—but always livin' in hopes."

"I happen to know that Slue Foot is an I. W. W., and if these fellows think he doubled-crossed them, they might loosen up with some interesting dope, just to even things up. You see, it was Slue Foot who advised them to go to Willow River."

"O-ho, so that's it!" grinned the sheriff. "Well, mebbe, now they'll find that they *kin* pump me a little after all."

"And while I'm here I may as well swear out a couple of more warrants, too. You are a friend of Hurley's, and you want to see him make good."

"You bet yer life I do! There's a man! He's played in hard luck all his life, an' if he's got a chanct to make good—I'm for him."

"Then hold off serving these warrants 'til just before the break-up. When the thaw comes, you [280] hurry up to Hurley's camp, and nab Slue Foot." The sheriff nodded, and Connie continued: "First I want him arrested for conspiring with the Syndicate in the theft of thirty-four thousand dollars' worth of logs during April and May of last year."

"With the Syndicate—stealin' logs!"

"Yes, if it hadn't been for that, Hurley would have made good last year."

The sheriff's lips tightened: "If we can only rope in Heinie Metzger! He ruined me on a dirty deal. I had stumpage contracts with him. Then he tried to beat me with his money for sheriff, but he found out that John Grey had more friends in the woods than the Syndicate had. Go on."

"Then, for conspiring to defraud certain sawyers by shading their cut. Then, for the theft of three thousand, five hundred dollars from Denny O'Sullivan. And, last, for conspiracy with the Syndicate to steal some three million feet of logs this year."

The sheriff looked at the boy in open-eyed astonishment. "D'you mean you kin *proove* all this?"

"I think so. I can prove the theft of the money, and the shading the cut—when it comes to the [281] timber stealing, with the Syndicate's money back of 'em, we'll have a harder time. But I've got the evidence."

The sheriff grinned: "Well, when Slue Foot let go, he let go all holts, didn't he? If you've got the evidence to back you up, like you say you have, Slue Foot'll be usin' a number instead of a name fer the next lifetime er so."

Shortly after noon of the tenth day, following his departure from camp, Connie stepped off the train at Dogfish Spur, to find Frenchy waiting for him with the tote-team. "Hurley say, 'you go long an' git de kid. She gon' for com' today—tomor'—sure, an' I ain' wan' heem git all tire out walkin' in.' Hurley lak you fine an' Saginaw lak you, but Slue Foot, she roar an' growl w'en you ain' here. Bye-m-bye, Hurley tell heem 'shut oop de mout', who's runnin' de camp?' an Slue Foot gon' back to Camp Two mad lak tondaire."

The trip up was uneventful. Frenchy's "gran' team" was in fine fettle, and just as the men were filing into the cook's camp for supper, he swung the team into the clearing with a magnificent whoop and flourish.

After supper, in the office, Lon Camden began to shuffle his reports, arranging them day by [282] day for the boy's convenience. Saginaw and Hurley filled their pipes, and the former, with a vast assumption of nonchalance, removed his boots and cocked his heels upon the edge of his bunk. Hurley hitched his chair about until it faced the boy, and for a space of seconds glared at him through narrowed eyes.

"Ye made a mistake to come back! Ye dhirty little thayfe! An' me offerin' to lind ye money!" The blood left Connie's face to rush back to it in a surge of red, and his lips tightened. "Oh, ye don't nade to pertind ye're insulted," the huge man's voice trembled with suppressed rage. "Ye had me fooled. Oi'd of soon caught wan av me own b'ys in a dhirty game—Oi thought that well av ye. But whin Slue Foot com' ragin' down whin he heer'd ye'd gon' for a wake er so, Oi misthrusted there was a rayson, so Oi tuk a luk at th' books, an' ut didn't take me long to find out yer dhirty cut-shadin' scheme."

Connie met the glare eye for eye. "Yes," he answered, "it is a dirty deal, isn't it? I don't blame you fer bein' mad. I was, too, when I threw in with it—so mad I came near spilling the beans." [283]

Hurley was staring open mouthed. "Well, av all th' nerve!" he choked out the words.

"But I held onto myself," continued the boy, "and now we've got the goods on Slue Foot—four ways from the jack. You noticed I kept a record of just how much has been shaved off from each man's cut? If I hadn't you would never have tumbled to the deal, no matter how long you studied the books. We are going to return that money to the sawyers who have it coming—but not yet. We want those false vouchers issued first. By the way, how much do you figure we've got on the landings, now?"

"Eight million, seven hundred thousan'—and clost to three hundred thousan' layin' down. Th' thaw's right now in th' air—'an we're t'rough cuttin'. Tomorrow all hands wor-rks gittin' the logs to the rollways. But what's that to ye? An' what d'ye mane settin' there ca'm as a lake on a shtill noight, an' admittin' ye wuz in on a low-down swindle? An-ny wan 'ud think ye wuz accused av shwoipin' a doughnut off the cook!"

"I'll come to that directly," answered the boy. "First, I wish you'd sign this contract. Saginaw [284] or Lon will witness the signature. And we can get it into the mail tomorrow."

"Contrack!" roared Hurley, snatching the paper from the boy's hand. The boss's eyes ran rapidly over the typewritten page, and with a low exclamation he moved the chair to the light. For ten minutes there was tense silence in the little office. Then Hurley looked up. "Fifty dollars a thousan'!" he gasped. "Fer an-nything from eight to tin million! Tin dollars a thousan', fer an-nything less nor eight million! From th' Syndicate!" With a bellow of rage the big boss leaped from his chair and stood over the boy. "Niver Oi've wanted to paste a man so bad!" he foamed. "Oi said ye wuz shmar-rt—an' ye ar-re. But ye ain't shmar-rt enough to put this over on me—ye an' Slue Fut—yer game is bushted!" He shook the paper under the boy's nose. "Somehow, ye figger on soide-thrackin' enough av thim logs to turn in less thin eight million—an the Syndicate gits the cut fer tin dollars a thousan'—an' ye an' Slue Fut divoides up the price av the logs that's missin'."

Connie laughed. "You've hit the idea pretty well, boss—only you've got the wrong boot on the [285] wrong foot."

"What d'ye mane wid yer boots and futs? Oi see yer game, an' Oi know now ut it wuz Slue Fut had a hand in the lasht year's loosin'. Wait 'til Oi git me hands on thot dhirty cur! Wait—" In his wrath the man hurled the paper to the floor, and reached for his mackinaw with one hand, and his peavy with the other.

Lon Camden sat looking on with bulging eyes, and beyond the stove Saginaw Ed shook with silent mirth as he wriggled his toes in his thick woollen socks.

"Hold on, Hurley," said Connie, as he rescued the precious contract from the floor. "Just sit down a minute and let's get this thing straight. As soon as the thaw sets in, John Grey will be up to tend to Slue Foot. I swore out three or four warrants against him, besides what the I. W. W.'s are going to spill."

"John Grey—warrants—I. W. W.'s." The man stood as one bewildered. "An' the kid ca'm as butter, flashin' contracks aroun' th' office, an' ownin' up he's a thayfe—an' Saginaw a-laughin' to hisself." He passed a rough hand across his forehead as the peavy crashed to the floor. "Mebbe, [286] ut's all here," he babbled weakly. "Mebbe thim I. W. W.'s give me wan crack too many—an' me brain's let go."

"Your brain's all right," said Connie. "Just sit down and light your pipe, and forget you're mad, and listen while I explain."

Hurley sank slowly into his chair: "Sure, jist fergit Oi'm mad. Jist set by quiet an' let ye ate th' doughnut ye shwoiped off th' cook. Don't say nawthin' whoilst ye an' Slue Fut an' the Syndicate steals th' whole outfit. Mebbe if Oi'd take a little nap, ut wid be handier fer yez." The man's words rolled in ponderous sarcasm. Lon Camden arose and fumbled in his turkey. A moment later he tendered the boss a small screw-corked flask.

"I know it's again' orders in the woods, boss. But I ain't a drinkin' man—only keep this in case of accident. Mebbe a little nip now would straighten you out."

Hurley waved the flask aside: "No, Oi'm off thot stuff fer good! Ut done me har-rm in me younger days—but ut kin do me no more. Av Oi ain't going crazy, Oi don't nade ut. Av Oi am, ut's [287] betther to be crazy an' sober, thin crazy an' drunk. Go on, b'y. Ye was goin' to mention somethin',

Oi believe—an' av me name's Jake Hurley, ut betther be a chinful. In the first place, what business ye got wid contracks, an' warrants, an-nyhow?"

"In the first place," grinned the boy, "I'm a partner of Waseche Bill, and one of the owners of this outfit. Here are the papers to show it." While Hurley studied the papers, Connie proceeded: "We got your report, and then a letter from Mike Gillum saying that you were in the pay of the Syndicate——"

Hurley leaped to his feet: "Moike Gillum says Oi wuz in the pay of th' Syndicate! He's a dhirty ——"

"Yes, yes—I know all about that. Slue Foot is the man who is in the pay of the Syndicate—and he borrowed your name." Hurley subsided, somewhat, but his huge fists continued to clench and unclench as the boy talked. "So I came down to see what the trouble was. It didn't take me long, after I had been with you for a while, to find out that you are square as a die—and that Slue Foot is as crooked as the trail of a snake. I pretended to throw in with him, and he let me in on the cut- [288]
shading—and later on the big steal—the scheme they worked on you last winter, that turned a twenty-thousand-dollar profit into a fourteen-thousand-dollar loss. When I got onto his game, I asked for a leave of absence and went down and closed the deal with the Syndicate—or rather, I let Heinie Metzger and von Kuhlmann close a deal with me. I had doped it all out that, if Metzger believed Slue Foot could prevent the delivery of part of the logs, he'd offer most anything for the whole eight million, because he knew he would never have to pay it, providing he could get the figure way down on anything less than eight million. So I stuck out for fifty dollars a thousand on the eight million, and he pretended it was just tearing his heart out; at the same time I let him get me down to ten dollars a thousand on the short cut—And we don't care how little he offered for that, because *we're going to deliver the whole cut*!"

Hurley was staring into the boy's face in open-mouthed incredulity. "An' ye mane to say, ye wint to Minneapolis an' hunted up Heinie Metzger hisself, an' let him make a contrack that'll lose him three or foor hundred thousan' dollars? Heinie Metzger—the shrewdest lumberman in the [289]
wor-rld. Th' man that's busted more good honest min than he kin count! Th' man that howlds th' big woods in the holler av his hand! An' ye—a b'y, wid no hair on his face, done thot? Done ut deliberate—figgered out befoor hand how to make Heinie Metzger bate hisself—an' thin went down an' *done ut*?"

Connie laughed: "Sure, I did. Honestly, it was so easy it is a shame to take the money. Heinie Metzger ain't shrewd—he just thinks he is—and people have taken him at his own valuation. I told Saginaw the whole thing, before I went down. Didn't I, Saginaw?"

"You sure did. But I didn't think they was any such thing as puttin' it acrost. An' they's a whole lot more yet the kid's did, boss. Fer one thing, he's got them three I. W. W. 's locked in jail. An'——"

Hurley waved his arm weakly: "Thot's enough—an' more thin enough fer wan avenin'. Th' rist Oi'll take in small doses." He struggled into his mackinaw and reached fer the peavy that lay where it had fallen beside the stove.

"Where ye headin', boss?" asked Saginaw.

"Camp Two. Oi've a little conference to howld with the boss up there." [290]

Lon Camden removed his pipe and spat accurately and judiciously into the woodbox. "The kid's right, Hurley," he said. "Let John Grey handle Slue Foot. All reason says so. If anything should happen to you just before the drive, where'd the kid's contract be? He's done his part, givin' the Syndicate the first good wallop it ever got—now it's up to you to do yourn. If you lay Slue Foot out, when John Grey comes he wouldn't have no choist but to take you along—so either way, we'd lose out."

"But," roared Hurley, "s'pose John Grey don't show up befoor the drive? Thin Slue Fut'll be free to plot an' kape us from deliverin' thim logs."

"Slue Foot's done!" cried Connie. "He can't hurt us now. You see, the Syndicate people furnished him with a paint that looks just like the regular branding paint. When the logs have been in the water a short time the paint all comes off—And, last year, with you bossing the rear drive, by the time they got to the mills all the logs they dared to steal were wearing the green triple X."

"An' ye mane he's got thot wash-off stuff on them logs now?" [291]

"On about three million feet of 'em," answered the boy. "All we've got to do is to sit tight until John Grey comes for Slue Foot, and then put a crew to work and brand the logs with regular paint and get 'em into the water." The boy laughed aloud, "And you bet I want to be right at the sorting gap, when old Heinie Metzger sees the sixth, and seventh, and eighth, and ninth million come floating along—with the red block-and-ball bobbing all shiny and wet in the sun! Oh, man! Old Heinie, with his eyeglasses, and his store clothes!"

Hurley banged the peavy down upon the wooden floor. "An' ut's proud Oi'll be to be sthandin' be yer soide whin them logs rolls in. Ut's as ye say, best to let th' law deal with Slue Foot. Yez nade have no fear—from now on 'til John Grey sets fut in th' clearin'—fer all an-ny wan w'd know, me an' Slue Foot could be brother-in-laws."

CHAPTER XX

CONNIE DELIVERS HIS LOGS

[292]

THE following days were busy ones in the two camps in Dogfish. Connie worked day and night to catch up on his books, and while Saginaw superintended the building of the huge bateau, and the smoothing out of the rollways, Hurley and Slue Foot kept the rest of the crew at work hauling logs to the landings. Spring came on with a rush, and the fast softening snow made it necessary for the hauling to be done at night. The thud of axes, the whine of saws, and the long crash of falling trees, was heard no more in the camps, while all night long the woods resounded to the calls of teamsters and swampers, as huge loads of logs were added to the millions of feet already on the rollways.

Then came a night when the thermometer failed to drop to the freezing point. The sky hung heavy with a thick grey blanket of clouds, a steady drenching rain set in, and the loggers knew [293] that so far as the woods were concerned, their work was done. Only a few logs remained to be hauled, and Hurley ordered these peeled and snaked to the skidways to await the next season.

The men sang and danced in the bunkhouse that night to the wheeze of an accordion and the screech of an old fiddle. They crowded the few belongings which they would take out of the woods with them into ridiculously small compass, and talked joyfully and boisterously of the drive —for, of all the work of the woods it is the drive men most love. And of all work men find to do, the log drive on a swollen, quick-water river is the most dangerous, the most gruelling, and the most torturing, when for days and nights on end, following along rough shores, fighting underbrush, rocks, and backwater, clothing half torn from their bodies, and the remnants that remain wet to their skin, sleeping in cat-naps upon the wet ground, eating out of their hands as they follow the logs, cheating death by a hair as they leap from log to log, or swarm out to break a jam—of all work, the most gruelling, yet of all work the most loved by the white-water birlers of the north.

Next morning water was flowing on top of the ice on Dogfish, and the big bateau was man- [294] hauled to the bank and loaded with supplies and a portable stove. Strong lines were loaded into her, and extra axes, pickpoles, and peavys, and then, holding themselves ready to man the river at a moment's notice, the crew waited.

And that morning, also appeared John Grey, worn out and wet to the middle by his all night's battle with the deep, saturated slush of the tote road. He had started from Dogfish with a horse and a side-bar buggy, but after a few miles, he had given up the attempt to drive through, and had unharnessed the horse and turned it loose to find its way back, while he pushed on on foot. After a prodigious meal, the sheriff turned in and slept until noon. When he awoke, his eyes rested for a moment on Connie, and he turned to Hurley: "Quite some of a clerk you got holt of, this season, Jake," he said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Yeh," replied Hurley, drily. "He's done fairly good—for a greener. I mistrusted, after he'd be'n in here a spell, that he wasn't just a pick-up of a kid—but, I didn't hardly think he'd turn out to be the owner."

"Owner?" [295]

"Yup. Him an' his pardner owns this timber, an' the kid come down to find out what the trouble was——"

"Y'ain't tellin' me a kid like him——"

"Yup—they come that way—up in Alasky. He's put in a year with the Canady Mounted, too. I ain't a-braggin' him up none, but I'm right here to tell you that what that there kid don't know ain't in the books—an' he kin put over things that makes the smartest men me an' you ever heer'd of look like pikers."

John Grey smiled, and the boss continued: "Oh, you needn't laff! Old Heinie Metzger busted *you*, didn't he? An' he busted a-many another good man. But this here kid slipped down an' put a contrack over on him that'll cost him between three an' four hundred thousand dollars of his heart's blood. The contrack is all signed and delivered, an' when Dogfish lets go tonight or tomorrow, the logs'll start."

"Where is Slue Foot?" asked the sheriff, after listening to Hurley's explanation.

"Up to Camp Two, we'll be goin' up there now. Me an' you an' the kid an' Lon'll go long. An' a [296] crew of men with paint buckets and brushes. Saginaw, he'll have to stay here to boss the breakin' out of the rollways, in case she let's go before we git back."

At the edge of Camp Two's clearing Hurley called a halt: "We'll wait here 'til the kid gits Slue Foot's signature to them vouchers. When ye git 'em kid, open the door an' spit out into the snow —then we'll come."

"I'll just keep out these," grinned Slue Foot, as he selected the false vouchers from the sheaf of good ones, "so them birds don't git no chanct to double-cross me. You've done yer part first rate, kid. There's a little better than three million feet on the rollways that'll be wearin' the green triple X again they hit the sortin' gap. Von Kuhlmann was up here hisself to make sure, an' they's goin' to be a bunch of coin in it fer us—because he says how the owner is down to Minneapolis an' contracted fer the whole cut, an' old Heinie Metzger made a contrack that'll bust this here Alasky gent. He'll be so sick of the timber game, he'll run every time he hears the word log spoke. An' Hurley—he's broke fer good an' all. I be'n layin' to git him good—an' I done it, an' at the same

time, I made a stake fer myself."

Connie nodded, and opening the door, spat into the snow. A moment later there was a [297] scraping of feet. The door opened, and John Grey, closely followed by Hurley and Lon Camden, entered the office.

"Hullo, John," greeted Slue Foot. "Huntin' someone, er be ye up here tryin' to git some pointers on how to make money loggin'?"

The sheriff flushed angrily at the taunt: "A little of both, I guess," he answered evenly.

"Who you huntin'?"

"You."

"Me! What d'you want of me? What I be'n doin'?"

"Oh, nothin' to speak of. Countin' the four warrants the kid, here, swore out, I only got nine agin ye—the other five is on information swore to by yer three friends down in jail."

With a roar of hate, Slue Foot sprang straight at Connie, but Hurley who had been expecting just such a move, met him half way—met his face with a huge fist that had behind it all the venom of the big boss's pent-up wrath. Slue Foot crashed into a corner, and when he regained his feet two steel bracelets coupled with a chain encircled his wrists. The man glared in sullen defiance while the sheriff read the warrants arising out of the information of the three I. W. W.'s. But [298] when he came to the warrants Connie had sworn out, the man flew into a fury of impotent rage—a fury that gradually subsided as the enormity of the offences dawned on him and he sank cowering into a chair, wincing visibly as he listened to the fateful words. "So you see," concluded the sheriff, "the State of Minnesota is mighty interested in you, Slue Foot, so much interested that I shouldn't wonder if it would decide to pay yer board and lodgin' fer the rest of yer natural life."

"If I go over the road there'll be others that goes too. There's them in Minneapolis that holds their nose pretty high that's into this as deep as me. An' if I kin knock a few years offen my own time, by turnin' State's evidence, yer kin bet yer life I'll spill a mouthful." Suddenly he turned on Connie: "An' you," he screamed, "you dirty little double-crosser! What be you gittin' out of this?"

"Well," answered the boy, "as soon as the crew out there on the rollways get the red block-and-ball in good honest paint on the ends of those logs, I'll get quite a lot out of it. You see I own the timber."

[299]

HURLEY HAD REMAINED AT THE UPPER CAMP, AND AS THE DRIVE AT LAST BEGAN TO THIN OUT, HE CAME FLOATING DOWN, STANDING ERECT UPON A HUGE LOG.

Just at daylight the following morning the Dogfish River burst its prison of ice and "let go" with a rush and a grind of broken cakes; breakfast was bolted, and the men of the drive swarmed to the bank where they stood by to break-out the rollways as soon as the logs from the upper Camp began to thin out. Connie stood beside the big bateau with the cook and John Grey and watched Camp Two's drive rush past—a floating floor of logs that spanned the river from bank to bank. Hurley had remained at the upper Camp and as the drive at last began to thin out, he came floating down, standing erect upon a huge log. When opposite the camp the big boss leaped [300] nimbly from log to log until he reached the bank, where Saginaw stood ready to order out the breaking out of the first rollway. Many of the men of the upper drive had passed, riding as Hurley had done upon logs—others straggled along the shore, watching to see that no trouble started at the bends, and still others formed the rear drive whose business it was to keep the stranded logs and the jill-pokes moving.

So busy were all hands watching the logs that nobody noticed the manacled Slue Foot crawl stealthily from the bateau and slip to the river's brink. A big log nosed into shore and the former boss of Camp Two leaped onto it, his weight sending it out into the current. The plan might have worked, for the next bend would have thrown Slue Foot's log to the opposite bank of the river before any one could possibly have interfered, but luck willed otherwise, for the moment the unfortunate Slue Foot chose as the moment of his escape was the same moment Saginaw Ed gave the word for the breaking-out of the first rollway. There was a sharp order, a few well-directed blows of axes, a loud snapping of toggle-pins, and with a mighty roar the towering pile of logs [301] shot down the steep bank and took the river with a splash that sent a wave of water before it.

Then it was that the horrified spectators saw Slue Foot, his log caught in the wave, frantically endeavouring to control, with his calked boots, its roll and pitch. For a moment it seemed as if he

might succeed, but the second rollway let go and hurtled after the first, and then the third, and the fourth—rolling over each other, forcing the tumbling, heaving, forefront farther and farther into the stream, and nearer and nearer to Slue Foot's wildly pitching log. By this time word had passed to the men at the rollways and the fifth was held, but too late to save Slue Foot, for a moment later the great brown mass of rolling tumbling logs reached him, and before the eyes of the whole crew, the boss of Camp Two disappeared for ever, and the great brown mass rolled on.

"Mebbe ut's best," said Hurley, as with a shudder he turned away, "'tis a man's way to die—in the river—an' if they's an-ny wan waitin' fer him um back there, they'll think he died loike a man." In the next breath he bellowed an order and the work of the rollways went on.

[302] It was at the first of his cleverly planned obstructions that Hurley overtook the head of the drive, and it was there that he encountered Long Leaf Olson and the men of the Syndicate crew.

Long Leaf was ranting and roaring up and down the bank, vainly ordering his men to break the jam, and calling malediction upon the logs, the crew, river, and every foot of land its water lapped. Hurley had ordered Saginaw to the rear drive, promising to hold the waters back with his jams, and now he approached the irate Long Leaf, a sack of dynamite over his shoulder and a hundred picked men of his two crews at his back.

"Call yer men off thim logs!" he bellowed, "Thim's my logs on the head end, an' I want 'em where they're at."

"Go on back to the rear end where you belong!" screeched Long Leaf; "I'll learn you to git fresh with a Syndicate drive! Who d'you think you be, anyhow?"

"Oi'll show ye who I be, ye Skanjehoovyan Swade! An' Oi'll show ye who's runnin' this drive! Oi'm bossin' th' head ind mesilf an' Saginaw Ed's bossin' the rear, an' av ye've fouled our drive, ye'll play the game our way! What do Oi care fer yer Syndicate? Ye ain't boss of nawthin' on this [303] river this year—ye' ain't aven boss of the bend-watchers!"

Long Leaf, who's river supremacy had heretofore been undisputed, for the simple reason that no outfit had dared to incur the wrath of the Syndicate, stared at the huge Irishman in astonishment. Then placing his fingers to his lips he gave a peculiar whistle, and instantly men swarmed from the jam, and others appeared as if by magic from the woods. In a close-packed mob, they centred about their boss. "Go git 'em!" roared Long Leaf, beside himself with rage. "Chase the tooth-pickers off the river!"

"Aye, come on!" cried Hurley. "Come on yez spalpeens! Come on, chase us off th' river—an' whoilst yer chasin' ye bether sind wan av ye down to Owld Heinie fer to ship up a big bunch av long black boxes wid shiney handles, er they'll be a whole lot of lumberjacks that won't go out av the woods at all, this spring!"

As the men listened to the challenge they gazed uneasily toward the crew at Hurley's back. One hundred strong they stood and each man that did not carry an axe or a peavy, had thoughtfully provided himself with a serviceable peeled club of about the thickness of his wrist. [304]

"Git at 'em!" roared Long Leaf, jumping up and down in his tracks. But the men hesitated, moved forward a few steps, and stopped.

"They hain't nawthin' in my contrack calls fer gittin' a cracked bean," said one, loud enough to be heard by the others. "Ner mine," "ner mine," "ner mine." "Let old Metzger fight his own battles, he ain't never done nawthin' to me but skinned me on the wanagan." "What would we git if we did risk our head?" "Probably git docked fer the time we put in fightin'." Rapidly the mutiny spread, each man taking his cue from the utterance of his neighbour, and a few minutes later they all retired, threw themselves upon the wet ground, and left Long Leaf to face Hurley alone.

"Git out av me road," cried the big Irishman, "befoor Oi put a shtick av giant in under ye an' blow ye out!" Long Leaf backed away and, proceeding to a point opposite the jam, Hurley seated himself upon a log, and calmly filled his pipe.

"If you think you're bossin' this drive, why in tarnation ain't you busted this jam," growled Long Leaf, as he came up a few minutes later.

[305] "They ain't no hurry, me b'y, not a bit of a hurry. They'll be another wan just a moile above th' mouth. Ut's a way good river-min has got to let the rear drive ketch up."

"You wait 'til Metzger hears of this!" fumed Long Leaf.

Hurley laughed: "Oi'll be there at th' tellin'. An' you wait 'til Metzger sees eight er noine million feet av my logs slidin' t'rough his sortin' gap—an' him havin' to pay fifty dollars a thousand fer um. D'ye think he'll doie av a stroke, er will he blow up?"

"What do you mean—eight million—fifty dollars——"

Hurley laughed tantalizingly: "Wait an' see. 'Twill be worth th' proice av admission." And not another word could Long Leaf get out of him.

During the previous summer Hurley had studied his ground well. For several miles above the jam the river flowed between high banks, and it was that fact that made his scheme practicable, for had the land extended back from the river in wide flats or meadows, the backwater from the jam would have scattered his drive far and wide over the country. It was mid-afternoon when the rear-drive crew came up and then it was that Hurley, bearing a bundle of yellow cylinders, crept [306] out along the face of the jam. A quarter of an hour later he came crawling back and joined the men who watched from the edge of the timber. Five minutes passed and the silence of the woods was shattered by a dull boom. The whole mass of logs that had lain, heaped like jack-straws in the bed of the river, seemed to lift bodily. A few logs in the forefront were hurled into the air to fall with a noisy splash into the river, or with a crash upon the trembling mass that settled slowly into the stream again. For an instant the bristling wall quivered uncertainly, moved slowly

forward, hesitated, and then with a roar, the centre shot forward, the sides tumbled in upon the logs that rushed through from behind, and the great drive moved.

The breaking of the second jam was a repetition of the first, and when the drive hit the big river there were left on the bars and rock-ledges of the Dogfish only a few stragglers that later could be dry-rolled by a small crew into the stream and rafted down.

The crew worked indefatigably. Lumbermen said it was as pretty a drive as ever took water. [307] In the cook's bateau Connie and Steve worked like Trojans to serve the men with hot coffee and handouts that were kept on tap every minute of the day and night.

At the various dams along the great river the boy never tired of standing beside Hurley and watching the logs sluiced through, and at last, with Anoka behind them, it was with a wildly beating heart that he stepped into a skiff and took his place in the stern beside Hurley, while the brawny men of the sorting crew worked their way to the front of the drive.

As the black smudge that hovered over the city of mills deepened, the boy gazed behind him at the river of logs—his logs, for the most part; a mighty pride of achievement welled up within him—the just pride of a winter's work well done.

News of the drive had evidently preceded them, for when the skiff reached the landing of the Syndicate's sorting gap, the first persons the boy saw, standing at the end of the platform, apart from the men of the sorting crew, were Metzger and von Kuhlmann.

The former greeting Connie with his oily smile. "Ah, here we have the youthful financier, himself," he purred. "He has accompanied his logs all the way down the river, counting them and [308] putting them to bed each night, like the good mother looks after the children. I am prepared to believe that he has even named each log."

"That's right," answered the boy evenly. "The first log to come through is named Heinie, and the last log is named Connie—and between the two of them there are four hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of assorted ones—you're going to pay for them—so I left the naming to you."

Metzger shot him a keen glance: "How many logs have you brought down?"

"About nine million feet of mine, and about three million and a half of yours—from your Dogfish Camp—at least that's what we estimated when we sluiced through at Anoka."

Von Kuhlmann had turned white as paper: "Where's Hurley?" he asked in a shaky voice.

CONNIE PLACED HIS HAND AFFECTIONATELY UPON THE ARM OF THE BIG BOSS WHO STOOD AT HIS SIDE GRINNING BROADLY.

Connie placed his hand affectionately upon the arm of the big boss who stood at his side grinning broadly: "This is Jake Hurley—my foreman," he announced, and then to the boss: "The old one is Heinie Metzger, and the shaky one's von Kuhlmann."

"But," faltered von Kuhlmann—"there iss some mistake! Hurley I haff seen—I know him. I say [309] he iss not Hurley! There iss a mistake!"

"Yes, there's a mistake all right—and you made it," laughed the boy. "And it's a mistake that cost your boss, there, dearly. The man you have been dealing with was not Hurley at all. He [310] passed himself off for Hurley, and last year he got away with it. Your game is up—you crooks! The three million feet that Slue Foot Magee, alias Hurley, branded with your disappearing paint, have all been repainted with good, honest, waterproof paint—and, *here they come!*" As the boy spoke, a log scraped along the sheer-boom, and for a moment all eyes rested upon the red block-and-ball, then instantly lifted to the thousands of logs that followed it.

Several days later when the boom scale had been verified, Connie again presented himself at the office of the Syndicate and was shown immediately to Metzger's private room. The magnate

received him with deference, even placing a chair for him with his own hands. "I hardly know how to begin, *Herr* Morgan——"

"*Connie Morgan*," snapped the boy. "And as far as I can see you can begin by dating a check for four hundred and forty-eight thousand, three hundred and twenty dollars—and then you can finish by signing it, and handing it over."

"But, my dear young man, the price is exorbitant—my stockholders in Germany—they will not understand. It will be my ruin."

"Why did you agree to it then? Why did you sign the contract?" [311]

"Ah, you do not understand! Allow me——"

"I understand this much," said Connie, his eyes flickering with wrath, "that you'd have held me to my bargain and taken my logs for ten dollars a thousand, and ruined me, if I hadn't been wise to your dirty game."

"Ah, no! We should have adjusted—should have compromised. I would have been unwilling to see you lose! And yet, you would see me lose—everything—my position—my friends in Germany—surely your heart is not so hard. There should be fellowship among lumbermen——"

"Is that the reason you ruined John Grey, and Lige Britton, and Lafe Weston, and poor old Jim Buck? Every one of them as square a man as ever lived—and every one of them an independent logger, 'til you ruined them! What did you answer when they sat right in this office and begged for a little more time—a little more credit—a little waiver of toll here and there? Answer me that! You bloodsucking weasel!" The cowardly whine of the beaten German made the boy furious. He was upon his feet, now, pounding the desk with his fist.

A crafty gleam shot from Metzger's eyes, and abruptly he changed his tactics: "Let us not [312] abuse each other. It is probable we can come to an agreement. You are smart. Come in with us. I can use you—in von Kuhlmann's place. I paid von Kuhlmann eighteen-hundred a year. Make a concession to me on the contract and I will employ you with a ten year contract, at ten thousand a year. We are a big corporation; we will crush out the little ones! I can even offer you stock. We will tighten our grip on the timber. We will show these Americans——"

"Yes," answered the boy, his voice trembling with fury, "we'll show these Americans—we'll show 'em what *fools* they are to allow a lot of wolves from across the water to come over here and grab off the best we've got. I'm an American! And I'm proud of it! And what's more, I'll give you just five minutes to write that check, Metzger, and if it isn't in my hands when the time's up, I'll get out an attachment that'll tie up every dollar's worth of property you own in the State, from the mills to your farthest camp. I'll tie up your logs on the rollways—and by the time you get the thing untangled you won't have water enough to get them to the river. You've got three minutes [313] and a half left."

Slowly, with shaking fingers, Metzger drew the check, and without a word, passed it over to Connie, who studied it minutely, and then thrust it into his pocket. At the door he turned and looked back at Metzger who had sloughed low in his chair.

"If you'd listened to those other men—John Grey and the others you've busted, when they were asking for favours that meant nothing to you, but meant ruin to them if you withheld them—if you'd played the game square and decent—you wouldn't be busted now. And, when you get back to Germany, you might tell your friends over there that unless they change their tactics, someday, something is going to happen that will wake America up! And if you're a fair specimen of your kind, when America does wake up, it will be good-bye Germany!" And as the door slammed upon the boy's heels, Metzger for a reason unaccountable to himself shuddered.

THE END

Connie Morgan with the Mounted

By

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Author of "Connie Morgan in Alaska"

Illustrated.

It tells how "Sam Morgan's Boy," well known to readers of Mr. Hendryx's "Connie Morgan in Alaska," daringly rescued a man who was rushing to destruction on an ice floe and how, in recognition of his quick-wittedness and nerve, he was made a Special Constable in the Northwest Mounted Police, with the exceptional adventures that fell to his lot in that perilous service. It is a story of the northern wilderness, clean and bracing as the vigorous, untainted winds that sweep over that region; the story of a boy who wins out against the craft of Indians and the guile of the bad white man of the North; the story of a boy who succeeds where men fail.

Connie Morgan in Alaska

By

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Author of "The Promise," "The Law of the Woods," etc.

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G. P. Putnam's Sons

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Transcriber's Notes

Punctuation and spelling were made consistent when a predominant preference was found in this book; otherwise they were not changed.

Simple typographical errors were corrected.

Illustrations have been moved closer to the relevant text.

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