

Le Page Lacked Nerve

By Frank H. Sweet, Copyright, 1905, by Frank H. Sweet.

"Tut, factor, it seems to me like putting our hands into another's cache," remonstrated Le Page bluntly.

"It's putting our hands upon shoulders that are bending over our own cache," retorted the factor angrily. "Our company came into this country first and razed it from the divide to the snow line unmolested, and now these interlopers sneak in and appropriate the best trapping valley in the whole section. They must be driven out, Le Page, and you must do it."

"Well," thoughtfully, "I suppose I could do it. But from the divide to the snow line is a big territory for one company to claim, factor, and I don't think any of our men have been into that particular valley for more than two years. It is fifty miles away and off our regular line of work. I generally scatter my men along the river country on account of the animals coming to drink and the easier transportation. That family could remain in the valley a lifetime and not really hurt us. You know that, factor. Besides, they have just as much right here as we have. And there is another thing," coolly, and ignoring the wrath that was flaming to the factor's face, "ever since I heard how they went to the valley last winter, just a young man and his wife, across 300 miles of bleak country as even a trapper ever turned his back to, I have wished that I could meet them and shake hands."

"You seem to know all about them," sneered the factor.

"Not a word more than you. Antoine was up that way trapping and told you what he told the rest of us. He met the man himself and heard him say that he had not been married long and that the

as strength lasted and on whom he could depend. The work was not such as he would like, but that did not matter; it was the company's and he was in the company's service.

The second day they reached the head of the valley, entering it by way of a ravine through which plunged an icy stream. This they waded. Beyond, the ground sloped rapidly and was thickly wooded. They could overlook most of the valley.

"Now, men," said Le Page, "suppose we scatter and work gradually down the valley, examining the woods thoroughly. They have likely built a cabin somewhere, and if they see us first and suspect our errand they may try to keep out of sight."

"Wait a moment," exclaimed one of the men. "Isn't that smoke half a mile or so down yonder, over those pine tops?" And he pointed with his finger.

Le Page shaded his eyes. "Yes, that's smoke," he said after a sharp scrutiny, "and it seems near the stream. They've built there on account of the water. Well, we'll follow right down the bank and settle things at once. But mind, men, no fighting unless there's need. We'll try to persuade them to leave peacefully. If they refuse to go, we'll use force. I think we can get back to the post by tomorrow night."

There was little need of caution, for the ground along the bank was covered with pine needles and gave no sound of their footsteps, and the trees were so thick as to conceal everything a few rods away. It was only when they had approached to within thirty yards that they saw the cabin.

But before they reached it a woman came hurrying out, wringing her hands. "Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!" she cried wildly. "My husband has been hurt by a falling tree and must have a doctor. It is sixty miles, and I have a little baby and cannot leave it and my husband. Oh, messieurs, messieurs, do not let him die!"

Le Page was a man of quick thought and prompt action and of sympathetic heart. Whirling to his men, he said bluntly:

"You will return at once to the factor. Tell him the expedition is a failure. Wait, I will send him a note."

He scribbled a few lines on the back of an envelope and gave it to one of the men. "Now go!" he ordered. The note read:

Factor—I did not have the nerve after all. I am going to the River des Quince post after a doctor for the man, who is hurt. I can go quicker than any one else. Of course I shall lose the £300 due me, since I leave the company's service.

LE PAGE.

But he did not lose the money. Three months afterward a letter reached him through an Indian runner. It was from the company's office in London and read:

By advice of our correspondent at Quebec we have decided to appoint you to the factorship of the trading post which controls your section. Your predecessor we have transferred to another post. Yours respectfully, T. PAYNE, Secretary. P. S.—Any arrears of salary due you will be sent from the Quebec office.

Still Unruffled.

Uncle Rufus was one of the calmest and most equable of mortals. Nobody had ever seen him excited or impatient. But there came a time that tried him. The furnace in the basement of his house was working badly. He had been experimenting with a new variety of coal, in which there was a considerable proportion of "slack," and it did not seem to be burning. He threw open the door of the furnace, thrust the end of a long poker deep into the smoldering mass and stirred it up vigorously.

The result was startling. A fierce burst of flame and smoke came forth, not only enveloping Uncle Rufus, but blowing out the blue caps in the rooms above and filling the house with soot and ashes.

In the midst of the excitement Uncle Rufus came up from the basement with his usual slow and regular step. His face was black with grime, his eyebrows and eyelashes were singed to a crisp, and what was left of his hair and beard was a sight to behold.

He went to a mirror and took a good look at himself.

"Waal," he said slowly and deliberately, "I was needing a shave an' a hair cut anyway."

Stone Forests.

Stone forests are found in various parts of the world. In many cases they are hardened by some peculiarity of the atmosphere and are found standing just as they were when clothed with green foliage thousands of years ago. The Little Colorado river, in Arizona, has long been famous as a locality for such finds. At one place more than 1,500 cords of solid stone tree trunks, sections, limbs and logs were found by the government surveyors. Most of them were silicified, many seven to ten feet in diameter and from twenty to eighty feet in height. Geologists say that the petrified trees of the Little Colorado were once covered with marl over 1,000 feet in depth. Some of the trees have been changed to jasper and have assumed various hues; others resemble opal, and when broken open the core is often found lined with crystals of the most beautiful tints.

Delicate Question of Service.

"Bah Jove, old fel, I was wanting to see you, you know. I had just had my man call you up at your apartments, but got no answer. Not home, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, dear boy. But, you know, my man doesn't like to answer the phone when I am theah myself. He says it puts him too much in the light of a serving man, don't cher know, and of course I could not think of doing it myself when he's theah, old fel," replied Spendrite.—Cincinnati Commercial Tribune.

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"OH, MESSIEURS, MESSIEURS, DO NOT LET HIM DIE."

two had reached the valley in good condition. That is all, only you and I look at things differently."

The factor's wrath could not contain itself longer.

"Perhaps so," he stormed, "but you'll do this just as I look at it. You're under contract to the company."

"For five years," calmly, "to hunt, trap and do the work according to my ability. I am satisfied."

"Well," menacingly, "you will take your men and go to this valley and clear it of its vermin."

"How?"

"Any way you like, so long as it's done thoroughly," snapped the factor. "You never asked a question like that before. You must be losing nerve. Shoot them, burn them, drown them; there are ways enough. Or no"—controlling himself with an effort—"perhaps you'd better not do that. Stories get out and prejudice the country against us. Frighten them off. A good way is to destroy their camp and provisions and take away all their weapons, then give them so many hours to leave the country. They'll go all right. I followed that method until I was given charge of a post. And, Le Page?"

"Yes, factor."

"You will discontinue having your way of looking at things. You belong to the company, and I voice the company's orders. Understand? Any failure on your part, or leaving the service, means losing everything coming to you. That's the contract."

"I have read it," smilingly, "and my way of looking at things has never interfered with my work so far. You know that."

Yes, the factor knew it. But still his eyes followed the strong figure as it strode away with anything but friendly looks. There was bad blood between the two, and but for the fact that Le Page was worth any three men at the post and could control the others as no one else had ever done, and seemed to have an instinctive knowledge of where to obtain the best and most goods, he would long ago have found means of getting rid of him. Moreover, he had an uneasy feeling that the company valued Le Page's services almost as much as it did his own.

Inside of half an hour Le Page had selected ammunition and provisions and picked out the four men who were to accompany him—the best at the trading post, he believed, and men after his own heart; strong, wiry, indefatigable, who would fight or work so long

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