

# The Blazed Trail

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE

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By Stewart Edward White

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said he simply in his native tongue, and with a sudden gesture held out before them—a scalp.

The medieval barbarity of the thing appalled them for a moment. The days of scalping were long since past, had been closed away between the pages of forgotten histories, and yet here again before them was the thing in all its living horror. Then a growl arose. The human animal had tasted blood.

All at once, like wine, their wounds mounted to their head. They remembered their dead comrades. They remembered the heart-breaking days and nights of toil they had endured on account of this man and his associates. They remembered the words of Collins, the little bookkeeper. They hated. They shook their fists across the skies. They turned and with one accord struck back for the railroad right of way which led to Shingleville, the town controlled by Morrison & Daly.

The railroads lay for a mile straight through a thick tamarack swamp, then over a nearly treeless cranberry plain. The tamarack was a screen between the two towns. When half way through the swamp Red Jacket stopped, removed his coat, ripped the lining from it and began to fashion a rude mask.

"Just as well they don't recognize us," said he.

"Somebody in town will give us away," suggested Shorty, the chore boy.

"No, they won't; they're all here," assured Kertie.

It was true. Except for the women and children, who were not yet about, the entire village had assembled. Even old Vanderhoof, the fire catcher of the yard, hobbled along breathlessly on his rheumatic legs. In a moment the masks were fitted; in a moment more the little band had emerged from the shelter of the swamp and so came into full view of its objective point.

Shingleville consisted of a big mill, the yards, now nearly empty of lumber, the large frame boarding house, the office, the stable, a store, two saloons and a dozen dwellings. The party at once fixed its eyes on this collection of buildings and trodged on down the right of way with unobscured grimaces.

Their approach was not unobserved. Daly saw them, and Baker, his foreman, saw them. The two at once went forth to organize opposition. When the attacking party reached the mill yard it found the boss and the foreman standing alone on the sawdust, revolvers drawn.

Daly traced a line with his toe.

"The first man that crosses that line gets it," said he.

They knew he meant what he said. An instant's pause ensued, while the big man and the little faced a mob. Daly's river men were still on drive. He knew the mill men too well to depend on them. Truth to tell, the possibility of such a raid as this had not occurred to him for the simple reason that he did not anticipate the discovery of his complicity with the forces of nature. Skillfully carried out, the plan was a good one. No one need know of the weakened link, and it was the most natural thing in the world that Sadler & Smith's drive should go out with the increase of water.

The men grouped swiftly and silently on the other side of the sawdust line. The pause did not mean that Daly's defense was good.

"Do you know what's going to happen to you?" said a voice from the group. The speaker was Radway, but the contractor kept himself well in the background. "We're going to burn your mill; we're going to burn your yards; we're going to burn your whole shooting match, you low lived whelp!"

"Dyer," said Injun Charley simply, shaking the wet scalp arm's length toward the lumbermen.

At this grim interruption a silence fell. The owner paled slightly; his foreman chewed a nonchalant straw. Down the still deserted street crossed and recrossed the subtle occult influences of a half hundred concealed watchers. Daly and his subordinate were very much alone and very much in danger. Their last hour had come, and they knew it.

With the recognition of the fact they immediately raised their weapons in the resolve to do as much damage as possible before being overpowered.

Then suddenly, full in the back, a heavy stream of water knocked them completely off their feet, rolled them over on the wet sawdust and finally jammed them both against the trestle,

where it held them, kicking and gasping for breath, in a choking cataract of water. The platoon flew harmlessly into the air. For an instant the Fighting Forty stared in paralyzed astonishment. Then a tremendous roar of laughter saluted this easy vanquishment of a formidable enemy.

Daly and Baker were pounced upon and captured. There was no resistance. They were too nearly strangled for that. Little Bolly and old Vanderhoof turned off the water in the fire hydrant and disconnected the hose they had so effectively employed.

"There, blast you!" said Rollway Charley, jerking the mill man to his feet. "How do you like too much water, hey?"

The unexpected comedy changed the party's mood. It was no longer a question of killing. A number broke into the store and shortly emerged bearing coils of kerosene, with which they deluged the slabs on the windward side of the mill. The flames caught the structure instantly. A thousand sparks, borne by the offshore breeze, fastened like so many stinging insects on the lumber in the yard.

It burned as dried balsam thrown on a camp fire. The heat of it drove the onlookers far back in the village, where in silence they watched the destruction.

Daly and his man were slapped and cuffed hither and thither at the men's will. Their faces bled, their bodies ached as one bruise.

"That squares us," said the men. "If we can't cut this year, neither kin you. It's up to you now!"

Then, like a destroying horde of locusts, they gutted the office and the store, smashing what they could not carry to the fire. The dwellings and saloons they did not disturb. Finally, about noon, they kicked their two prisoners into the river and struggled back along the right of way.

"I surmise we took that town apart some!" said Shorty with satisfaction.

"I should rise to remark," replied Kertie.

At the boarding house they found Wallace Carpenter and Hamilton seated on the veranda. It was now afternoon. The wind had abated somewhat, and the sun was struggling with the still flying clouds.

"Hello, boys," said Wallace, "been for a little walk in the woods?"

"Yes, sir," replied Hyland, "we—"

"I'd rather not hear," interrupted Wallace. "There's a quite a fire over east. I suppose you haven't noticed it."

Hyland looked gravely eastward.

"Sure 'nough," said he.

"Better get some grub," suggested Wallace.

After the men had gone in he turned to the journalist.

"Hamilton," he began, "write all you know about the drive and the break and the rescue, but as to the burning of the mill—"

The other held out his hand.

"Good," said Wallace, offering his own.

And that was as far as the famous Shingleville raid ever got. Daly did his best to collect even circumstantial evidence against the participants, but in vain. He could not even get any one to say that a single member of the village of Carpenter had absented himself from town that morning. This might have been from loyalty or it might have been from fear of the vengeance the Fighting Forty would surely visit on a traitor. Probably it was a combination of both. The fact remains, however, that Daly never knew surely of but one man implicated in the destruction of his plant. That man was Injun Charley; but Injun Charley promptly disappeared.

After an interval Tim Shearer, Radway and Kertie came out again.

"Where's the boss?" asked Shearer.

"I don't know, Tim," replied Wallace seriously. "I've looked everywhere. He's gone. He must have been all cut up. I think he went out in the woods to get over it. I am not worrying. Harry has lots of sense. He'll come in about dark."

"Sure!" said Tim.

"How about the boys' stakes?" queried Radway. "I hear this is a bad smash for the firm."

"We'll see that the men get their wages all right," replied Carpenter, a little disappointed that such a question should be asked at such a time.

"All right," rejoined the contractor. "We're all going to need our money this summer."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

THORPE walked through the silent group of men without seeing them. He had no thought for what he had done, but for the triumphant discovery he had made in spite of himself.

It was then about 6 o'clock in the morning. Thorpe passed the boarding house, the store and the office, to take himself as far as the little open shed that served as a railway station. There he set the semaphore to flag the east bound train from Duluth. At 6:36, the train happening on time, he climbed aboard. He dropped heavily into a seat and stared straight in front of him until the conductor had spoken to him twice.

"Where to, Mr. Thorpe?" he asked.

"Oh! Mackinaw City."

Thorpe descended at Mackinaw City to find that the noon train had gone.

He ate lunch at the hotel, borrowed \$100 from the agent of Louis Sands, a lumberman of his acquaintance, and sent himself rigidly in the little waiting room, there to remain until the 9:20 that night. When the cars were backed down from the siding he boarded the sleeper. In the doorway stood a disappearing colored porter.

"Yo'll fin' the smokin' cab up fo'w'u'd, sah," said the latter, firmly barring the way.

"It's generally forward," answered Thorpe.

"This yeah's the sleepah," protested the functionary. "Yo' pays extry."

"I am aware of it," replied Thorpe curtly. "Give me a lower."

"Yes, sah," acquiesced the darky, giving way, but still in doubt. He followed Thorpe cautiously, peering into the smoking room on him from time to time. A little after 12 his patience gave out. The stolid, gloomy man of lower 6 seemed to intend sitting up all night.

"Yo' berth is ready, sah," he delicately suggested.

Thorpe arose obediently, walked to lower 6 and without undressing threw himself on the bed. Afterward the porter in conscientious discharge of his duty looked diligently beneath the seat for boots to polish. Happening to glance up after fruitless search he discovered the boots still adorning the feet of their owner.

"Well, for the land's sake!" ejaculated the scandalized negro, beating a hasty retreat.

Thorpe descended at Twelfth street in Chicago without any clear notion of where he was going. For a moment he faced the long, parklike expanse of the lake front, then turned sharp to his left and picked his way south up the interminable reaches of Michigan avenue. Block after block he clicked along, the calks of his boots striking fire from the pavement.

After an interval he seemed to have left the smoke and dirt behind. The street became quieter; boarding houses and tailors' shops ceased; here and there appeared a bit of lawn, shrubbery and flowers. By and by he came to himself to find that he was staring at the deep carved lettering in a stone horse block before a large dwelling.

His mind took the letters in one after the other, perceiving them plainly before it accorded them recognition. Finally he had completed the word "Farrand." He whirled sharp on his heel, mounted the broad white stone steps and rang the bell.

It was answered almost immediately by a clean shaved, portly and dignified man with the most impassive countenance in the world. This man looked upon Thorpe with lofty disapproval.

"Is Miss Hilda Farrand at home?" he asked.

"I cannot say," replied the man. "If you will step to the back door I will ascertain."

"The flowers will do. Now see that the south room is ready, Annie," floated a voice from within.

Without a word, but with a deadly earnestness, Thorpe reached forward, seized the astonished servant by the collar, yanked him bodily outside the door, stepped inside and strode across the hall toward a closed portiere whence had come the voice. The river man's long spikes cut little triangular pieces from the hardwood floor. Thorpe did not notice that. He thrust aside the portiere.

Before him he saw a young and beautiful girl. She was seated, and her lap was filled with flowers. At his sudden apparition her hands flew to her heart, and her lips slightly parted. For a second the two stood looking at each other, just as nearly a year before their eyes had crossed over the old pole trail.

To Thorpe the girl seemed more beautiful than ever. The red of this violent unexpected encounter rushed to her face, her bosom rose and fell in a fluttering catch for breath, but her eyes were steady and inquiring.

Then the butler pounced on Thorpe from behind with the intent to do great bodily harm.

"Morris!" commanded Hilda sharply. "what are you doing?"

The man cut short his heroic in confusion.

"You may go," concluded Hilda.

Thorpe stood straight and unwinking by the portiere. After a moment he spoke.

"I have come to tell you that you were right and I was wrong," said he steadily. "You told me there could be nothing better than love. In the pride of my strength I told you this was not so. I was wrong."

He stood for another instant looking directly at her, then turned sharply and, head erect, walked from the room.

Before he had reached the outer door the girl was at his side.

"Why are you going?" she asked.

"I have nothing more to say."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

She laughed happily to herself.

"But I have—much. Come back."

They returned to the little morning room. Thorpe's calked boots gouging out the little triangular furrows in the hardwood floor. Neither noticed that.

"What are you going to do now?" she catechised, facing him in the middle of the room. A long tendril of her beautiful corn silk hair fell across her eyes; her red lips parted in a faint, wistful smile; beneath the draperies of her loose gown the pure slender lines of her figure leaned toward him.

"I am going back," he replied patiently.

"I knew you would come," said she. "I have been expecting you. Oh, Harry," she breathed, with a sudden flash of insight, "you are a man born to be much misunderstood."

He held himself rigid, but in his veins was creeping a molten fire, and the fire was beginning to glow dully in his eye. Her whole being called him.

And still she stood there before him, saying nothing, leaning slightly toward him, her red lips half parted, her eyes fixed almost wistfully on his face.

"Go away!" he whispered hoarsely at last. The voice was not his own. "Go away! Go away!"

Suddenly she swayed to him.

"Oh, Harry, Harry," she whispered, "must I tell you? Don't you see?"

The flood broke through him. He seized her hungrily. He crushed her to him until she gasped; he pressed his lips against hers until she all but cried out with pain of it; he ran his great brown hands blindly through her hair until it came down about them both in a cloud of spun light.

"Tell me!" he whispered. "Tell me!"

"Oh, oh!" she cried. "Please! What is it?"

"I do not believe it," he murmured savagely.

She drew herself from him with gentle dignity.

"I am not worthy to say it," she said soberly, "but I love you with all my heart and soul."

Then for the first and only time in his life Thorpe fell to weeping, while she, understanding, stood by and comforted him.

The few moments of Thorpe's tears eased the emotional strain under which perhaps unconsciously he had been laboring for nearly a year past. The tenseness of his nerves relaxed. He savored deliberately the joy of a luxurious couch, rich hangings, polished floor, subdued light, warmed atmosphere. He watched with soul deep gratitude the soft girlish curves of Hilda's body, the poise of her flower head, the pliant, half wistful, half childish set of her red lips, the clear starlike glimmer of her dusky eyes. It was all near to him—his.

"Kiss me, dear," she said.

She leaned her cheeks against her hand and her hand against his shoulder.

"I have been reading a story lately," said she, "that has interested me very much. It was about a man who renounced all he held most dear to shield a friend."

"Yes," said Thorpe.

"Then he renounced all his most valuable possessions because a poor common man needed the sacrifice."

"Sounds like a medieval story," said he, with un-conscious humor.

"It happened recently," rejoined Hilda. "I read it in the papers."

"Well, he blazed a good trail," was Thorpe's sighing comment. "Probably

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"you are right, but now I must begin all over again. It will be a long time before I shall be able to claim you. I have my way to make."

"Yes," said she diplomatically.

"But you!" he cried suddenly. "The papers remind me. How about that Morton?"

"What about him?" asked the girl, astonished. "He is very happily engaged."

Thorpe's face slowly filled with blood.

"You'll break the engagement at once," he commanded, a little harshly.

"Why should I break the engagement?" demanded Hilda, eying him with some alarm.

"You actually don't think he's engaged to me!" she burst out finally.

"Isn't he?" asked Thorpe.

"Why, no, stupid! He's engaged to Elizabeth Carpenter, Wallace's sister. Now where did you get that silly idea?"

"I saw it in the paper."

"And you believe all you see? Why didn't you ask Wallace? But of course you wouldn't. Harry, you are the most incoherent dumb old brute I ever saw. I could shake you. You need a wife to interpret things for you. You speak a different language from most people."

She said this between laughing and crying, between a sense of the ridiculous uselessness of withholding a single timely word and a tender pathetic intuition of the suffering such a nature must endure.

Suddenly she jumped to her feet with an exclamation.

"Oh, Harry, I'd forgotten utterly!" she cried in laughing consternation.

"I have a luncheon here at half past 1. It's almost that now. I must run and dress. Just look at me; just look! You did that!"

"I'll wait here until the confounded thing is over," said Thorpe.

"Oh, no, you won't!" replied Hilda decidedly. "You are going downtown right now and get something to put on. Then you are coming back here to stay."

Thorpe glanced in surprise at his driver's clothes and his spiked boots. "Heavens and earth!" he exclaimed. "I should think so! How am I to get out without ruining the floor?"

Hilda laughed and drew aside the portiere.

"Don't you think you have done that pretty well already?" she asked.

"There, don't look so solemn. We're not going to be sorry for a single thing we've done today, are we?" she stood close to him, searching his face wistfully with her fathomless dusky eyes.

"No, sweetheart, we are not," replied Thorpe soberly.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

SURELY it is useless to follow the sequel in detail, to tell how Hilda persuaded Thorpe to take her money. To a woman such as she this was not a very difficult task in the long run—a few scruples of pride; that was all.

"I hate to do it," he said. "It doesn't look right."

"You must," she insisted. "I will not take the position of rich wife to a poor man. It is humiliating to both. I will not marry you until you have made your success."

"That is right," said Thorpe heartily.

"Well, then, are you going to be so selfish as to keep me waiting while you make an entirely new start, when a little help on my part will bring your plans to completion?"

She saw the shadow of assent in his eyes.

"How much do you need?" she asked swiftly.

"I must take up the notes," he explained. "I must pay the men. I may need something on the stock market. If I go in on this thing I'm going in for keeps. I'll get after those fellows who have been swindling Wallace. Say \$100,000."

"Why, it's nothing!" she cried.

"I'm glad you think so," he replied grimly.

She ran to her dainty escritoire, where she scribbled eagerly for a few moments.

"There," she cried, her eyes shining—"there is my check book all signed in blank. And I'll see that the money is there."

So it was that Hilda Farrand gave her lover confidence, brought him out from his fanaticism, launched him afresh into the current of events. He remained in Chicago all that summer, giving orders that all work at the village of Carpenter should cease. With his affairs that summer we have little to do. His common sense treatment of the stock market, by which a policy of quiescence following an outright buying of the stock which he had previously held on margins, retrieved the losses already sustained and finally put both partners on a firm financial footing. That is another story. So, too, is his reconciliation with an understanding of his sister. It came about through Hilda, of course. Perhaps in the inscrutable way of Providence the estrangement was of benefit, even necessary, for it had thrown him entirely within himself during his militant years.

Let us rather look to the end of the summer. It now became a question of reopening the camps. Thorpe wrote to Shearer and Radway, whom he had retained, that he would arrive on Saturday noon, and suggested that the two begin to look about for men. Friday, himself, Wallace Carpenter, Elizabeth



"Go away!" he whispered.

he had his chance. We don't all of us get that. Things go crooked and get tangled up, so we have to do the best we can. I don't believe I'd have done it."

"Oh, you are delicious!" she cried.

"After a time she said very humbly:

"I want to beg your pardon for misunderstanding you and causing you so much suffering. I was very stupid and didn't see why you could not do as I wanted you to."

"That is nothing to forgive. I acted like a fool."

"I have known about you," she went on. "It has all come out in the papers. It has been very exciting. Poor boy, you look tired."

He straightened himself suddenly.

"I have forgotten—actually forgotten," he cried, a little bitterly. "Why, I am a pauper, a bankrupt. I—"

"Harry," she interrupted gently, but very firmly, "you must not say what you were going to say. I cannot allow it. Money came between us before. It must not do so again. Am I not right, dear?"

She smiled at him with the lips of a child and the eyes of a woman.

"Yes," he agreed after a struggle.