NEDL TRANSFER
HN 1RRV /

CARMEN'S MESSENGER

HAROLD BINDLOSS

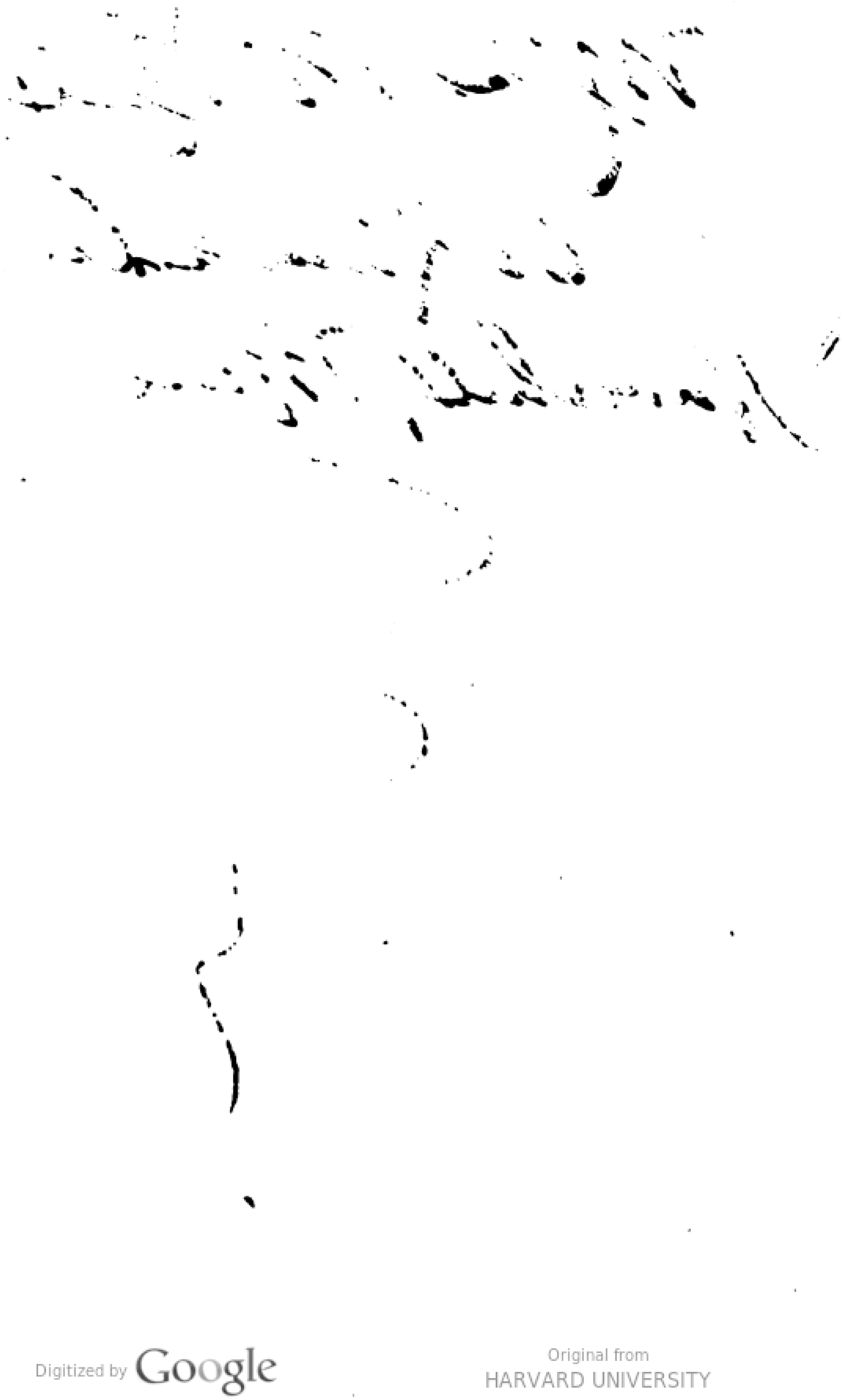
Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

KD 6144

Mike Mizell,
60 Linwood Ave.
Haverhill, Mass.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CARMEN'S MESSENGER

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"WAITING IN AN AGONY OF SUSPENSE, SHE SAW WALTERS GRASP HIS SHOULDER"—*Page 298*

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CARMEN'S MESSENGER

BY

HAROLD BINDLOSS

AUTHOR OF

JOHNSTONE OF THE BORDER,
PRESCOTT OF SASKATCHEWAN, ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE IN COLORS.

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

KD 6144

Copyright, 1917, by
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY

All rights reserved

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	FEATHERSTONE CHANGES HIS PLANS	1
II.	THE MILL-OWNER	11
III.	FOSTER MAKES A PROMISE	20
IV.	THE FIRST ADVENTURE	30
V.	FEATHERSTONE'S PEOPLE	40
VI.	HIS COMRADE'S STORY	50
VII.	THE PACKET	62
VIII.	AN OFFER OF HELP	73
IX.	THE FALSE TRAIL	83
X.	THE DROVE ROAD	92
XI.	THE POACHERS	102
XII.	A COMPLICATION	113
XIII.	FOSTER RETURNS TO THE GARTH	123
XIV.	FOSTER SEES A LIGHT	134
XV.	THE GLOVE	145
XVI.	A DIFFICULT PART	154
XVII.	THE LETTERS	164
XVIII.	SPADEADAM WASTE	175
XIX.	ALICE'S CONFIDENCE	186
XX.	THE RIGHT TRACK	197
XXI.	DALY TAKES ALARM	208

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII.	CARMEN GETS A SHOCK	217
XXIII.	AN UNEXPECTED MEETING	228
XXIV.	LAWRENCE'S STORY	240
XXV.	FOSTER SETS OFF AGAIN	253
XXVI.	THE REAL-ESTATE AGENT	266
XXVII.	THE MINE	277
XXVIII.	THE LOG BRIDGE	288
XXIX.	FOSTER ARRIVES	300
XXX.	RUN DOWN	311
XXXI.	DALY SOLVES THE PUZZLE	321
XXXII.	FEATHERSTONE APOLOGIZES	333

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CARMEN'S MESSENGER

I

FEATHERSTONE CHANGES HIS PLANS

IT was getting dark, and a keen wind blew across the ragged pines beside the track, when Jake Foster walked up and down the station at Gardner's Crossing in North Ontario. Winter was moving southwards fast across the wilderness that rolled back to Hudson's Bay, silencing the brawling rivers and calming the stormy lakes, but the frost had scarcely touched the sheltered valley yet and the roar of a rapid throbbed among the trees. The sky had the crystal clearness that is often seen in northern Canada, but a long trail of smoke stretched above the town, and the fumes of soft coal mingled with the aromatic smell of the pines. Gardner's Crossing stood, an outpost of advancing industry, on the edge of the lonely woods.

The blue reflections of big arc-lamps quivered between the foam-flakes on the river, a line of bright spots, stretching back along the bank, marked new avenues of wooden houses, and, across the bridge, the tops of tall buildings cut against the glow that shimmered about the town. At one end rose the great block of the Hulton factory, which lost something of its utilitarian ugliness at night. Its harsh, rectangular

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

outline faded into the background of forest, and the rows of glimmering windows gave it a curious transparent look. It seemed to overflow with radiance and filled the air with rumbling sound.

In a large measure, Gardner's Crossing owed its rapid development to the enterprise of the Hulton Manufacturing Company. Hulton was ready to make anything out of lumber for which his salesmen found a demand; but his firm grip on the flourishing business had recently relaxed, and people wondered anxiously what would happen if he did not recover from the blow that had struck him down. Fred Hulton, his only son, and assistant treasurer to the Company, had been found in the factory one morning with a bullet-hole in his head, and it was believed that he had shot himself. His father gave his evidence at the inquiry with stern self-control, but took to his bed afterwards and had not left it yet. So far as the townsfolk knew, this was the first time he had shown any weakness of body or mind.

The train was late, but Foster enjoyed the pipe he lighted. It was ten years since he landed at Montreal, a raw lad without friends or money, and learned what hard work was in a lumber camp. Since then he had prospered, and the strenuous life he led for the first few years had not left much mark on him. Now he thought he had earned a holiday, and all arrangements for his visit to England were made. Featherstone, his partner, was going with him. Their sawmill, which was run by water-power, had closed for the winter, when building material was not wanted, and the development of a mineral claim they owned would be stopped by the frost. They had planned to put in a

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

steam engine at the mill, but the Hulton Company had delayed a contract that would have kept the saws running until the river thawed.

Foster, however, did not regret this. Except on Sundays, he had seldom had an hour's leisure for the last few years. Gardner's Crossing, which was raw and new, had few amusements to offer its inhabitants; he was young, and now he could relax his efforts, felt that he was getting stale with monotonous toil. But he was a little anxious about Featherstone, who had gone to see a doctor in Toronto.

A whistle rang through the roar of the rapid and a fan-shaped beam of light swung round a bend in the track. Then the locomotive bell began to toll, and Foster walked past the cars as they rolled into the station. He found Featherstone putting on a fur coat at a vestibule door, and gave him a keen glance as he came down the steps. He thought his comrade looked graver than usual.

"Well," he said, "how did you get on?"

"I'll tell you later. Let's get home, but stop at Cameron's drug store for a minute."

Foster took his bag and put it in a small American car. He drove slowly across the bridge and up the main street of the town, because there was some traffic and light wagons stood in front of the stores. Then as he turned in towards the sidewalk, ready to pull up, he saw a man stop and fix his eyes on the car. The fellow did not live at the Crossing, but visited it now and then, and Foster had met him once when he called at the sawmill.

"Drive on," said Featherstone, touching his arm.

Although he was somewhat surprised, Foster did

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

as he was told, and when they had passed a few blocks Featherstone resumed: "I can send down the prescription to-morrow. That was Daly on the sidewalk and I didn't want to meet him."

A minute later Foster stopped to avoid a horse that was kicking and plunging outside a livery stable while a crowd encouraged its driver with ironical shouts. Looking round, he thought he saw Daly following them, but a man ran to the horse's head and Foster seized the opportunity of getting past.

"What did the doctor tell you?" he asked.

"He was rather disappointing," Featherstone replied, and turned up the deep collar of his coat.

Foster, who saw that his comrade did not want to talk, imagined that he had got something of a shock. When they left the town, however, the jolting of the car made questions difficult and he was forced to mind his steering while the glare of the headlamps flickered across deep holes and ruts. Few of the dirt roads leading to the new Canadian cities are good, but the one they followed, though roughly graded, was worse than usual and broke down into a wagon trail when it ran into thick bush. For a time, the car lurched and labored like a ship at sea up and down hillocks and through soft patches, and Foster durst not lift his eyes until a cluster of lights twinkled among the trees. Then with a sigh of relief he ran into the yard of a silent sawmill and they were at home.

Supper was waiting, and although Foster opened a letter he found upon the table, neither of the men said anything of importance during the meal. When it was over, Featherstone sat down in a big chair by the stove, for the nights were getting cold. He was about

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

thirty years of age, strongly built, and dressed in city clothes, but his face was pinched. For part of the summer, he and Foster had camped upon their new mineral claim in the bush and worked hard to prove the vein. June, as often happens in Canada, was a wet month, and although Featherstone was used to hardship, he sickened with influenza, perhaps in consequence of digging in heavy rain and sleeping in wet clothes. As he was nothing of a valetudinarian he made light of the attack, but did not get better as soon as he expected on his return, and went to see the Toronto doctor, when Foster urged him.

The latter lighted his pipe and looked about the room. It was warm and well lighted, and the furniture, which was plain but good, had been bought, piece by piece, to replace ruder articles they had made at the mill. One or two handsome skins lay upon the uncovered floor, and the walls were made of varnished cedar boards. A gun-rack occupied a corner, and the books on a shelf indicated that their owners had some literary taste, though there were works on mining and forestry. Above the shelf, the huge head of a moose, shot on a prospecting journey to the North, hung between the smaller heads of bear and caribou.

Foster, who had hitherto lived in tents and shacks, remembered his misgivings when they built the house. Indeed, he had grumbled that it might prove a dangerous locking up of capital that was needed for the enlargement of the mill. Featherstone, however, insisted, and since most of the money was his, Foster gave in; but they had prospered since then. They were good friends, and had learned to allow for each other's point of view during several years of strenu-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ous toil and stern economy. Still, Foster admitted that their success was not altogether due to their own efforts, because once or twice, when they had to face a financial crisis, the situation was saved by a check Featherstone got from home. By and by the latter turned to his comrade.

"Your letter was from Hulton, wasn't it? What does he want?"

"He doesn't state, but asks us to call at the factory to-morrow evening. That's all, but I heard in town that the doctor and nurse had left; Cameron told me Hulton fired them both because they objected to his getting up."

"It's possible," Featherstone agreed. "Hulton's not the man to bother about his health or etiquette when he wants to do a thing. Anyhow, as he has been a pretty good friend of ours, we will have to go, but I wouldn't have imagined he'd have been ready to talk about the tragedy just yet."

"You think that is what he wants to talk about?"

Featherstone nodded. "We knew Fred Hulton better than anybody at the Crossing, and at the inquiry I tried to indicate that his death was due to an accident. I imagined that Hulton was grateful. It's true that I don't see how the accident could have happened, but I don't believe Fred shot himself. Though it was an open verdict, you and I and Hulton are perhaps the only people who take this view."

"We'll let it drop until to-morrow. What did you learn at Toronto?"

"Perhaps the most important thing was that I'll have to give up my trip to the Old Country."

"Ah," said Foster, who waited, trying to hide his

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

disappointment and alarm, for he saw that his suspicions about his partner's health had been correct.

"The doctor didn't think it wise; said something about England's being too damp, and objected to a winter voyage," Featherstone resumed. "It looks as if you were better at calculating the profit on a lumber deal than diagnosing illness, because while you doctored me for influenza, it was pneumonia I had. However, I admit that you did your best and you needn't feel anxious. It seems I'm not much the worse, though I'll have to be careful for the next few months, which I'm to spend on the Pacific slope, California for choice. It's a bit of a knock, but can't be helped."

Foster declared his sympathy, but Featherstone stopped him. "There's another matter; that fellow Daly's here again. I expect you guessed what he came for the last time?"

"I did. The bank-book showed you drew a rather large sum."

"No doubt you thought it significant that the check was payable to myself?"

Foster was silent for a moment or two. He trusted his comrade, but suspected that there was something in his past history that he meant to hide. For one thing, Featherstone never spoke about his life in the Old Country, and Foster was surprised when he stated his intention of spending a few months there. It looked as if Daly knew his secret and had used his knowledge to blackmail him.

"I'll go to California with you," he said. "One place is as good as another for a holiday, and I'm really not keen on going home. I've no near relations and have lost touch with my friends."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"No," said Featherstone, with a grateful look. "I want you to go to England and stay with my people. I haven't said much about them, but you'll find they will do their best to make things pleasant. Anyhow, it's time you knew that I left home in serious trouble and meant to stop away until I thought the cause of it forgotten. Well, not long ago, I heard that the man I'd injured was dead, but had sent me word that as I had, no doubt, paid for my fault in this country, I'd nothing more to fear. Then Daly got upon my track."

Foster nodded sympathetically. "How much does he know?"

"Enough to be dangerous, but I don't know how he learned it and don't mean to keep on buying him off. Now I want you to go home and tell my people what we're doing; if you can give them the impression that I've, so to speak, made good in Canada, so much the better. This is not entirely for my sake, but because it might be a relief to them. You see, they've had to suffer something on my account and felt my disgrace, but, although I deserved it, they wouldn't give me up."

"Very well," said Foster, "I'll do as you wish."

He knocked out and re-filled his pipe, as an excuse for saying nothing more, because he was somewhat moved. He guessed that Featherstone had not found it easy to take him into his confidence, and felt that he had atoned for his errors in the past. Still, there was a point he was doubtful about. His comrade had a well-bred air, and Foster imagined that his people were rich and fastidious.

"I'm not sure your relatives will enjoy my visit," he resumed after a time. "My father and mother died when I was young, and I was sent to a second-rate

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

school and kept there by an uncle who wanted to get rid of me. Then I'd a year or two in a merchant's office and cheap lodgings, and when I'd had enough of both came out to Canada with about five pounds. You know how I've lived here."

Featherstone gave him an amused glance. "You needn't let that trouble you. It's curious, but the bush seems to bring out the best that's in a man. I can't see why getting wet and half frozen, working fourteen hours a day, and often going without your dinner, should have a refining influence, but it has. Besides, I'm inclined to think you have learned more in the Northwest than they could have taught you at an English university. Anyhow, you'll find my people aren't hard to please."

"When are you going to California?" Foster, who felt half embarrassed, asked.

"Let's fix Thursday next, and I'll start with you."

"But I'm going east, and your way's by Vancouver."

"Just so," said Featherstone dryly. "For all that, I think I'll start east, and then get on to a west-bound train at a station down the line. The folks at the Crossing know I'm going home, and I don't want to put Daly on my track." He smoked in silence for a few moments, and then added: "I wonder whether Austin helped the fellow to get after me?"

Foster looked up with surprise, but admitted that his partner might be right. Austin was a real-estate agent who now and then speculated in lumber and mineral claims. He had some influence at the Crossing where, however, he was more feared than liked, since he lent money and bought up mortgages. On

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

three or four occasions he had been a business rival of Foster and Featherstone's, and the former thought he might not have forgiven them for beating him.

"It's possible," he said thoughtfully. "But you don't imagine Daly told him what he knows about you?"

"I should think it most unlikely," Featherstone rejoined. "Daly means to keep all he can get for himself, but if he gave Austin a hint that he could injure me, the fellow might be willing to help. He's pretty often up against us; but we'll let that go. You're a friend of Carmen Austin's, and as you'll meet her at the reunion, it might be better if you didn't tell her I have changed my plans. Of course, I don't mean to hint that she has anything to do with her father's schemes."

Foster laughed. He liked Carmen Austin and was mildly flattered by the favor she showed him, but thought he knew her well enough not to attach much importance to this. Carmen was clever and ambitious, and would, no doubt, choose a husband who had wealth and influence. Though very young, she was the acknowledged leader of society at the Crossing.

"You needn't be afraid of hurting my feelings," he said. "To some extent I do enjoy Miss Austin's patronage, but I know my drawbacks and don't cherish any foolish hopes. If I did, I believe she'd tactfully nip them in the bud."

"On the whole, I'm pleased to hear it," Featherstone replied. "Now, if you don't mind, there's something I want to read."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

II

THE MILL-OWNER

BIG arc-lamps flared above the railroad track that crossed the yard of the Hulton factory, but except for a yellow glimmer from a few upper windows, the building rose in a huge dark oblong against the sky. The sharp clanging of a locomotive bell jarred on the silence, for the mill hands had gone home and the wheels that often hummed all night were still. It seemed to Foster, who glanced at his watch as he picked his way among the lines, that the shadow of the recent tragedy brooded over the place.

"I don't know that I'm imaginative; but I wouldn't like the night-watchman's job just now," he remarked to Featherstone. "Hulton's illness can't have spoiled his nerve, or he'd have asked us to meet him at his house, in view of what he probably wants to talk about."

"I suspect that Hulton's nerve is better than yours or mine, and although I'm sorry for the old man, it was a surprise to me when he broke down," Featherstone replied. "This is the first time I've been in the mill since Fred was shot, and I'll own that I'd sooner have come in daylight."

They went round a row of loaded cars to the timekeeper's office, where a man told them that Hulton was waiting and they were to go right up. A dark

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

passage, along which their footsteps echoed, led to a flight of stairs, and they felt there was something oppressive in the gloom, but a small light burned near the top of the building, and when they reached a landing Featherstone touched his partner. It was at this spot Fred Hulton had been found lying on the floor, with a fouled pistol of a make he was known to practice with near his hand. Foster shivered as he noted the cleanness of the boards. It indicated careful scrubbing, and was somehow more daunting than a sign of what had happened there.

A short flight of stairs led to the offices of the head of the firm, and the treasurer, whose assistant Fred Hulton had been. They went on and entered a small, plainly-furnished room, well lighted by electric lamps, where Hulton sat at a writing-table and signed them to sit down. His shoulders were bent, his clothes hung slackly on his powerful frame, and Featherstone thought his hair had grown whiter since he saw him last. He looked ill, but his face was hard and resolute, and when he let his eyes rest on the young men his mouth was firmly set. Hulton's business acumen and tenacity were known, and it was supposed that the latter quality had helped him much in the earlier part of his career. The other man, who sat close by, was the treasurer, Percival.

"To begin with, I want to thank you for the way you gave your evidence," Hulton said to Featherstone, who had been one of the last to see Fred Hulton alive.

"I don't know that thanks are needed," Featherstone replied. "I had promised to tell the truth."

"Just so. The truth, however, strikes different people differently, and you gave the matter the most

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

favorable look you could. We'll let it go at that. I suppose you're still convinced my son was in his usual health and spirits? Mr. Percival is in my confidence, and we can talk without reserve."

"Yes, sir; I never found him morbid, and he was cheerful when I saw him late that night."

"In fact, you were surprised when you heard what happened soon after you left?" Hulton suggested in a quiet voice.

"I was shocked. But, if I catch your meaning, I was puzzled afterwards, and had better say I see no light yet."

"Is this how you feel about it?" Hulton asked Foster.

"It is," said Foster, noting the man's stern calm, and Hulton turned to Percival.

"That's my first point! These men knew my son."

Then he looked at Featherstone. "Fred went with you now and then on hunting and prospecting trips, and that probably led to a certain intimacy. You say he was never morbid; did you ever find him anxious or disturbed?"

Featherstone pondered. Fred Hulton, who was younger, had spent a year or two in Europe before he entered the factory. He had moreover told Featherstone about some trouble he had got into there, but the latter could not tell how much his father knew.

"You can talk straight," Hulton resumed. "I guess I won't be shocked."

"Very well. I did find him disturbed once or twice. Perhaps you knew he had some difficulties in Paris."

"I knew about the girl," Hulton answered grimly. "I found that out not long since; she was a clever

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

adventuress. But I don't know where Fred got the money he sent her. Did you lend it him?"

"I lent him some," Featherstone admitted, hesitatingly. "He told me afterwards she had promised to make no further claim, and I understand she kept her word."

Hulton turned to the treasurer. "You will see Mr. Featherstone about this to-morrow. I've cleared up another point; Fred was not being urged to send more money." Then he asked Foster: "Do you know if he had any other dangerous friends?"

"There was Daly. They were friends, in a way, and I wouldn't trust the fellow. Still, I don't know how far his influence went, and imagine Fred hadn't much to do with him for some months. Besides, Daly wasn't at the Crossing when——"

Hulton said nothing for the next few moments and Foster mused. Fred Hulton had been very likable, in spite of certain weaknesses, and he thought it cost his father something to talk about him as he did. Hulton, however, seldom showed what he felt and would, no doubt, take the line he thought best with a stoic disregard of the pain it might cause. He rested his elbow on the table, as if he were tired, and sat very quiet with his chin on his hand, until he asked Featherstone:

"Why did you lend Fred the money he sent the girl?"

"For one thing, because he was my friend," Featherstone answered with a flush. "Then I knew into what straits the need of money can drive a young man. I got into trouble myself some years ago."

Hulton nodded. "Thank you. You helped him

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

out. You have no ground to think he was embarrassed by the need of money on the night he died?"

"I feel sure he was not. He kept me some time talking cheerfully about a hunting trip we meant to make."

"Well," said Hulton quietly, "you're going to be surprised now. I did not give my evidence as frankly as you claim to have done, but kept something back. Mr. Percival was away for two or three weeks, and Fred was the only person besides myself who knew the combination that opens the safe. On the morning after we found him dead I examined the safe. A number of bonds and a wad of small bills for wages had gone. It was significant that Percival was due back next day."

Featherstone started, but his face was hot with scornful anger.

"That had no significance! I'd as soon suspect myself or my partner of stealing the bonds, but the safe's being open throws a new light upon the thing. Somebody you haven't thought of yet knew or found out the combination."

"Then, in face of what you have heard, you do not believe my son fired the shot that took his life?"

"No, sir," said Featherstone, with quiet earnestness. "I never thought it, and it is impossible to believe it now."

"My partner's opinion's mine," Foster broke in.

Hulton looked from one to the other and a curious steely glitter came into his eyes. It hinted at a pitiless, unchangeable purpose, and bracing himself with an effort he clenched his fist.

"Nor do I believe it! If necessary, I'll let my busi-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ness and factory go and spend the last dollar I've got to find the man who killed my boy."

Next moment he sank limply back in his chair, as if the strain and vindictive emotion, reacting on his physical weakness, had overcome him, and there was silence until he recovered. Foster felt it something of a relief that the man's icy self-control had broken down.

"Very well," Hulton resumed in a shaky voice. "I brought you here because you knew my son and I wanted your support. Then I meant to convince Percival, whose help I may need to clear the boy's good name. We'll let that go and try to be practical."

"Were the bonds negotiable?" Foster asked. "Could they be easily sold?"

Percival, who was about fifty years of age and had a reserved manner, answered: "Some were bearer bonds, and, if the thief acted quickly, would be as good as cash. Most, however, were registered stock, and it is probable that he would be afraid to sell them in Canada or America. The transfers would require to be forged."

"What about Europe?"

"That is where the danger lies. If he had clever confederates, a large part of the value of the bonds could be borrowed from a bank, or they might be sold to unsuspecting buyers on a French or German bourse."

"But this would depend on the publicity you gave their theft."

"Exactly," Percival agreed with some dryness. "I have been trying to make Mr. Hulton recognize it."

Hulton's tense look softened and he smiled. "Per-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

cival seems to have forgotten that I am a business man. At the inquiry I shirked my duty by keeping something back, and now he expects me to brand my son's good name. The money must go. In a sense, it is a trifling loss."

"At last, you put me wise," said Percival. "But to prove that Fred was innocent you must find the thief."

"That's so. It must be done with skill and tact by the best New York private investigation man that I can hire. The job's too delicate for the regular police."

Featherstone, who had been sitting thoughtfully silent, looked up. "Perhaps it's lucky the wage clerk went into the treasurer's office after I left, though I spoke to the watchman, Jordan, as I went out."

"No," said Percival sharply. "It wasn't Jordan's week on night-guard."

There was silence for a moment, and then Hulton asked: "Where did you meet the man you thought was Jordan? Did he answer you?"

"He was going along the ground-floor passage in front of me, and the only light was in the pay-office at the end. He stood in the doorway as I passed and I said, 'It's a cold night, Tom.' I'd gone a few yards when he answered, 'It will be colder soon.'"

"Then as you passed the door he must have seen your face, though you could not see his," said Hulton, who turned to Percival. "Clark was on night-guard and his name's not Tom. Where was he when Mr. Featherstone left?"

"In the lathe-room at the other end of the building. The punch in the check-clock shows it," Percival replied.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Hulton pondered, knitting his brows, before he said, "Since you thought the man was Jordan, you wouldn't know him again."

"No; he was about Jordan's height and build, but I only saw his figure. It showed dark and rather indistinct against the light."

"Well," said Hulton, "you see the importance of this. We have something to go upon; a stranger was in the factory." Then he got up with a look of keen relief in his worn face. "I thank you and your partner; you have given me hope. Some day all who knew my boy will believe what you believe. Now I have something to say to Percival, and then he must help me home to bed."

He shook hands with them and let them go. They left the factory in silence, but as they crossed the yard Foster remarked: "I'm sorry for Hulton. For all his quietness, he takes the thing very hard."

"I imagine the fellow who shot Fred Hulton will need your pity most," Featherstone replied. "The old man will run him down with the determination and energy that helped him to build up his business. Money with brains behind it is a power, but I wouldn't like Hulton on my track if he hadn't a cent. There's something relentless about the man." He paused and resumed: "Well, he has a clew. It's curious I didn't think of mentioning before that I spoke to the watchman, but I thought the fellow was Jordan. I wonder how the thief will get the bonds across to Europe."

"There would be some danger in carrying them; anyhow, he'd imagine so, although it looks as if Hulton doesn't mean to tell the police much just yet. Of

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

course, there's the mail, but the thief might be afraid to post the papers."

Featherstone nodded: "I think it's in Hulton's favor that he'll be satisfied with one of the private detective agencies to begin with, while the man he's looking for will be on his guard against the police. Besides, it's possible that the fellow won't take many precautions, since there's a plausible explanation of Fred Hulton's death."

"Do you think the man you passed saw you well enough to know you again?"

"He may have done so."

"Then if he imagined that you saw him, it would make a difference," Foster said thoughtfully. "He'd reckon that you were the greatest danger he had to guard against."

Featherstone stopped and caught his comrade's arm as the yard locomotive pushed some cars along the track they were about to cross, and the harsh tolling of the bell made talking difficult. When the cars had passed they let the matter drop and went back to the hotel where they had left their automobile.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

III

FOSTER MAKES A PROMISE

THERE was keen frost next evening and Foster drove to the Crossing without his comrade, who thought it wiser to stay at home. The reunion he was going to attend was held annually by one or two mutual-improvement societies that combined to open their winter sessions. It had originally begun with a lecture on art or philosophy, but had degenerated into a supper and dance. Supper came early, because in Canada the meal is generally served about six o'clock.

The wooden hall was decorated with flags and cedar boughs, and well filled with young men and women, besides a number of older citizens. The floor and music were good, and Foster enjoyed two dances before he met Carmen Austin. He had not sought her out, because she was surrounded by others, and he knew that if she wanted to dance with him she would let him know. It was generally wise to wait Carmen's pleasure.

When he left his last partner he stood in a quiet nook, looking about the hall. The girls were pretty and tastefully dressed, though generally paler than the young Englishwomen he remembered. The men were athletic, and their well-cut clothes, which fitted somewhat tightly, showed their finely developed but

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

rather lean figures. They had a virile, decided look, and an ease of manner that indicated perfect self-confidence. Indeed, some were marked by an air of smartness that was half aggressive. A large number were employed at the Hulton factory, but there were brown-faced farmers and miners from the bush, as well as storekeepers from the town.

On the whole, their dress, manners and conversation were American, and Foster was sometimes puzzled by their inconsistency. He liked these people and got on well with them, but had soon discovered that in order to do so he must abandon his English habits and idiosyncrasies. His neighbors often showed a certain half-hostile contempt for the customs of the Old Country, and he admitted that had he been less acquainted with their character, it would have been easy to imagine that Gardner's Crossing was situated in Michigan instead of Ontario. Yet they had rejected the Reciprocity Treaty on patriotic grounds, and in a recent crisis had demonstrated their passionate approval of Britain's policy. He had no doubt that if the need came they would offer the mother country the best they had with generous enthusiasm, and nobody knew better that their best was very good.

By and by Carmen dismissed the young men around her and summoned him with a graceful motion of her fan. He crossed the floor, and when he stopped close by with a bow that was humorously respectful she gave him a cool, approving glance. Foster was twenty-eight, but looked younger. Though he had known hardship, his face was smooth, and when unoccupied he had a good-humored and somewhat languid air. He was tall and rather thin, but athletic

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

toil had toughened and strengthened him, and he had frank gray eyes that generally smiled. A glove that looked significantly slack covered his left hand, which had been maimed by a circular saw when he worked in his mill.

Carmen was a blonde, but with none of the softness that often characterizes this type of beauty. Her features were sharply cut, her well-proportioned figure was firmly lined, and the lack of color in her face was made up for by the keen sparkle in her eyes. As a rule, Carmen Austin's wishes were carried out. She knew how to command, and rival beauties who now and then ventured to oppose her soon found that her power was unshakable.

"You haven't thought it worth while to ask for a dance yet," she remarked, and Foster could not tell if she was offended or not.

"No," he replied, smiling, "I was afraid of getting a disappointment, since I didn't know your plans, but only made a few engagements in case you sent for me. One finds it best to wait your orders."

Carmen studied him thoughtfully. "You generally take the proper line; sometimes I think you're cleverer than you look. Anyway, one isn't forced to explain things to you. Explaining what one wants is always annoying."

"Exactly. My business is to guess what you would like and carry it out as far as I can. When I'm right this saves you some trouble and gives me keen satisfaction. It makes me think I am intelligent."

"Our boys are a pretty good sample, but they don't talk like that. I suppose you learned it in the Old

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Country. You know, you're very English, in some respects."

"Well," said Foster, "that is really not my fault. I was born English, but I'll admit that I've found it a drawback since I came to Canada."

Carmen indicated the chair next her. "You may sit down if you like. You start for the Old Country on Thursday, don't you?"

"Thank you; yes," said Foster. "One likes to be in the fashion, and it's quite the proper thing to make the trip when work's finished for the winter. You find miners saving their wages to buy a ticket, and the Manitoba men sail across by dozens after a good harvest. As they often maintain that the Old Country's a back number, one wonders why they go."

"After all, I suppose they were born there."

"That doesn't seem to count. As a rule, there's nobody more Canadian first of all than the man who's only a Canadian by adoption."

"Then why do you want to go?"

"I can't tell you. I had a hard life in England and, on the whole, was glad to get away. Perhaps it's a homing instinct, like the pigeon's, and perhaps it's sentiment. We came out because nobody wanted us and have made ourselves pretty comfortable. America's our model and we have no use for English patronage, but every now and then the pull comes and we long to go back, though we wouldn't like to stop there. It's illogical, but if there was trouble in Europe and the Old Country needed help, we'd all go across."

"In a mild way, the journey's something of an adventure," Carmen suggested. "Doesn't that appeal to a man?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It does," Foster agreed. "One might imagine that there was enough adventure here, but it really isn't so. The lone trail has a mineral claim at the end of it; you look forward to the elevator company's receipt when you break the new furrow. Hardship gets as monotonous as comfort; you want something fresh, a job, in fact, that you don't undertake for money. Of course, if you look at it economically, this is foolish."

"I like you better as a sentimentalist than a philosopher," Carmen answered. "It's the former one goes to when one wants things done. However, if you would like a dance——"

She danced well and Foster knew there were men in the hall who envied him. He, moreover, imagined that Carmen knew it would be remarked that she had banished her other attendants and shown him special favor. This, of course, would not trouble her, because Carmen generally did what she pleased, but he felt inclined to wonder about her object. He knew her well enough to think she had an object. When the music stopped she said, "Now you may take me in to supper."

Supper was served in an ante-room, but, although this was contrary to local custom, the guests came in when they liked and were provided with small, separate tables. Instead of Foster's leading, Carmen guided him to a quiet nook, partly screened by cedar branches, where they could see without being seen. He thought it significant that a spot with such advantages should be unoccupied, but this did not cause him much surprise. Things generally happened as Carmen wanted, and it was a privilege to sup with the prettiest and cleverest girl in the hall.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"You are going to stay at Featherstone's home in England, aren't you?" she asked by and by.

"Yes," said Foster, who wondered how she knew. "Since I've spent ten years on the plains and in the bush, it will be a rather embarrassing change. You see, I'm better used to bachelor shacks and logging camps than English country houses."

Carmen firmly brought him back to the subject. "Do you know much about your partner's relatives? It's obvious that he belongs to a good family. However, you'll have him with you."

Foster smiled. He did not mean to tell her that Featherstone was not going with him.

"I know nothing about them. In fact, my ignorance of the habits of a good family rather weighs on my mind."

Carmen gave him a level, critical glance. "They won't be able to find much fault with you, and if they did, you wouldn't guess it, so it wouldn't matter. But that is not what I meant. You have been Featherstone's partner for some time, and it's curious that he has told you nothing about his home."

"He's reserved," said Foster, who looked up as Daly came into the room with a laughing girl, at whom Carmen glanced somewhat coldly. "Do you know what that man is doing here?"

"I don't, but as he's agent for an engineering company, I dare say he's looking for orders. Hulton's are buying new plant."

"But he's often in your father's office and at your house, and Mr. Austin doesn't buy machines."

"Then perhaps he's speculating in building lots; we deal in them," Carmen rejoined with a laugh. "I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

sometimes meet my father's friends, but don't ask them about their business."

She went on with her supper, and Daly and his companion sat down not far off. The fellow was well dressed and on the whole a handsome man, though there was nothing about him to excite marked attention. He looked a little older than Foster, who studied him thoughtfully. Daly had sold one or two machines in the neighborhood of the Crossing, but the business he did there hardly seemed to warrant his visit. It was possible that he made it an excuse for watching Featherstone, but Foster fancied that Carmen knew more about him than she confessed.

"Perhaps you will visit Scotland before you come back," she said by and by.

"It's possible. Featherstone's relations live near the Border."

"Then I dare say you will take a packet for me to Edinburgh."

"Of course," said Foster, who felt some surprise, and thought Carmen saw this although she looked at him gratefully.

"I know you'll take care of it, and you don't ask questions; but you wonder why I want to send it by you. Well, the girls are inquisitive in our post office, and I'm sending the packet to a man. Besides, I wouldn't like it damaged, and things sometimes get broken in the mail."

Foster said this often happened and hinted that the man was fortunate, but Carmen laughed.

"Oh," she said, "he's as old as my father; we have friends in the Old Country. But there really is a little

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

secret about the matter, and I don't want anybody but you to see the packet."

"Very well; but I believe the Customs searchers, who examine your baggage, are sometimes officious. They might think I was trying to smuggle and make me open the thing."

"No; they wouldn't suspect you. You have such a careless and innocent look. For all that, your friends know you can be trusted."

"Thank you! I suppose I'm lucky, because one meets people whose looks are against them. Anyhow, I'll take the packet, and if necessary, protect it with my life."

"It won't be necessary," Carmen answered, smiling. Although she talked about other matters for some minutes before she told him to take her back to the hall, he imagined this was tactful politeness and she did not want to dismiss him too soon after obtaining her object.

He danced one or two dances with other partners and enjoyed them keenly. His work was finished for the winter, and after the strenuous toil of the last ten years, it was a new and exhilarating experience to feel at liberty. Then there was no reason he should deny himself the pleasure he expected to derive from his trip. Their small mill was only adapted for the supply of certain kinds of lumber, for which there was now not much demand, and they had not enough money to remodel it, while business would not get brisk again until the spring.

By and by he went to the smoking-room and lighting a cigarette, thought over what Carmen had said to him. At first she had seemed anxious to find out

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

something about Featherstone, but he was not surprised by this. Carmen liked to know as much as possible about everybody she met, and used her knowledge cleverly when it was to her advantage. The other matter was more puzzling and he wondered why she wanted to send a packet secretly to a man as old as her father. It might, of course, be a caprice, because girls were fond of mystery, but, as a rule, Carmen had a practical object for what she did. She had stated that they had friends in England, and this might mean that she had a lover. Perhaps she had exaggerated his age, and in any case, Foster thought it would not be a great drawback, if the man were rich. Carmen was rather ambitious than romantic.

Her plans, however, were not his business, and he felt no jealousy. He liked Carmen and had some respect for her abilities, but thought he would sooner not marry her, even if she were willing, which was most improbable. Since he had promised to take the packet, he would do so and say nothing about the matter.

He left the hall early, and driving home found his partner sitting by the stove.

"Was Daly at the reunion?" Featherstone asked.

Foster said he was there, and Featherstone resumed thoughtfully: "It's curious he hasn't come to the mill yet, but if he doesn't turn up before Thursday, he'll be too late. I'll be ready to start with you by the afternoon train, and as there's no use in spoiling a good plan for a few dollars, I'll buy a ticket and check my baggage to Ottawa. Then I'll get off at Streeton Creek, where I won't have long to wait if the west-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

bound train's on time. You can express my things on from Ottawa. The Montreal express stops about an hour."

"That ought to throw Daly off the track," Foster agreed, and they talked about something else.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

IV

THE FIRST ADVENTURE

IT was about ten o'clock at night and the Montreal express sped through the lonely forest of North Ontario. The train was light, for there were few passengers on board, and the road was by no means good, but in spite of the jolting Foster enjoyed his cigarette in a corner of the smoking compartment at the end of a car. A colored porter had told him his berth in the sleeper was ready, Featherstone had left the train, and most of the passengers were already in bed, but Foster did not want to follow them just yet. For a time, he had done with business, and was on his way to England. He relished the unusual sense of freedom.

A half-moon shone down upon the rugged wilderness, and he could see the black pines rush past. The cars lurched and he heard the great locomotive snort on the inclines. Now and then there was a roar as they sped across a bridge, and water glimmered among the rocks below; afterwards the roar sank into a steady clatter and a soothing throb of wheels. The car was warm, and Foster, who had given the porter his overcoat, was lighting another cigarette when a man came in and sat down opposite. He looked hard at Foster, who quietly returned his gaze. The man was about his own height but some years older, and his expression was disturbed.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Foster felt interested. He had faced danger in the northern wilderness, where he had risked starvation and traveled on frozen rivers when the ice was breaking up. Besides, he had once or twice been involved in savage fights about disputed mining claims, and knew how men looked when they bore a heavy strain. He thought the stranger was afraid but was not a coward.

"You're going to Ottawa, aren't you? I heard you talking to your friend," said the man.

"I'm going to Montreal, but don't see what that has to do with you."

The other made a sign of impatience. "Well, I dare say you can be trusted, and I've got to take a risk."

"It is a risk to trust a man you don't know," Foster rejoined. "But how can I help?"

"I want you to put on my coat and cap, and stay here, reading the *Witness*, for about ten minutes."

"Holding the newspaper in front of my face, I suppose? Well, it's rather an unusual request and I must know a little more. If there's a detective on your trail and you expect me to hold his attention while you hide or try to jump off the train, I must refuse."

The stranger smiled. "I've wired for the police to meet me at Ottawa; the trouble is that I mayn't get there. Time won't allow of a long explanation, but there are men on board who'd stop at nothing to prevent my arrival. In fact, to some extent, I'm putting my life in your hands."

Foster looked at him, surprised. He had not expected an adventure of this kind on a Canadian Pa-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

cific train, but did not think the other was exaggerating.

"How many men?" he asked.

"I've seen one, but know there are more."

"Then why not tell the conductor and have the train searched?"

"It wouldn't work. I might find one enemy, but I'd warn the others that I was on my guard, and to let them think I suspect no danger is the best chance I have. The conductor's making his way up the train, and I'm going to see if he can get me into the express car. It's the only safe place; the clerks are armed. Well, my business is lawful and in the public interest, and I take it you're a patriotic citizen."

Foster saw that he must decide quickly. Somehow he did not doubt the man, who kept his eyes on the door as if he expected somebody to come in. Moreover, he expected to be met by the police at Ottawa.

"It looks as if I'd run your risk when I put on your coat," he said.

"The porter's sweeping up the car, and if you keep the door open, you'll be safe while he's about. Besides, if I can't get into the express car, I'll come back. Give me ten minutes, and then, if I don't turn up and you feel uneasy, take off the coat and put the newspaper down."

"Very well," said Foster. "Perhaps you had better take my hat."

The stranger gave him his heavy fur coat. "I'll ask you for it at Ottawa. You're going to Montreal. What's your name?"

Foster told him and he resumed: "Then, if you don't see me, stop at the *Windsor,* where I can tele-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

graph, a day or two. You'll be repaid for any expense or inconvenience. Well, I'm going. Thanks!"

"Good luck!" said Foster, who sat down and opened the *Witness*.

Now he was alone, he began to wonder if he had been imposed upon. The man, however, did not look like a criminal; though alarmed, he had an air of quiet authority. In a sense, it seemed absurd that he should think himself in danger. Violence was not common in Canada, where the carrying of weapons was prohibited, and Foster had never heard of any sensational crime on the big expresses. Still he thought the man would not be afraid without good cause. He did not look like a detective, and Foster felt nearly sure he had not got on board at the Crossing. This seemed to indicate that he could not have been investigating the tragedy there, particularly since Hulton had only recovered from the shock a few days ago. Then Hulton had stated that he meant to send for a New York man, and not that he had done so. The fellow, however, might be a confidential agent of the Government's, who had perhaps found out something about certain mysterious attempts to damage public property.

By and by Foster smiled. Carmen had given him a valuable packet to take care of, and now this stranger had asked his help. Both had stated their confidence in him, but it was getting obvious that to look as if one could be trusted had its drawbacks. He did not feel much disturbed as he read the newspaper, which reported the arrest of two strangers with dynamite cartridges near the locks of a big canal, but presently put it down and glanced at his watch. The ten

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

minutes had nearly gone and he looked out of the window. A frozen lake shimmered at the edge of the track and then, with a harsh uproar, the train plunged into the shadow of a cliff. On the summit stunted pines cut against the sky, and Foster knew they ran from the Manitoban border to the Ottawa across as rugged and stony a wilderness as there is in the Dominion. The stations were small and sometimes only places where the locomotives stopped for water. He could not remember when they had passed the last.

Looking at his watch again, he saw that he had kept his promise, but decided to give the man a few more minutes, and then go to his berth, unless he could learn something about him from the conductor. The berth was in the Pullman farther along the train, and after walking through the empty car he opened the door of a vestibule and stepped out on the platform. It was unprotected except for a brass rail at the side, which was divided in the middle where the steps went down. The floor jolted and a bitter wind that whistled between the vestibules buffeted him. Although he wore the fur coat, he shivered, and as he stepped across the gap between the platforms the door behind him rattled.

Turning sharply round, he saw a man's dark figure in the shadow of the curving roof, and felt his heart beat. Then the door he had been making for swung back, and he knew he had another antagonist to deal with. He carried no pistol and there was not much chance of a shout for help being heard, but he did not wait to be attacked, and with a sudden spring threw himself upon the man in front. He felt his knuckles jar and heard the fellow's head crash against the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

vestibule, but the other seized him as he turned. Foster surmised that they feared the report of a pistol but might use the knife, and determined to throw the fellow down the steps. If this proved impossible, he must try to jump off the train.

So far as he could remember, the savage struggle only lasted a few moments. His assailant had apparently not room enough to draw a weapon and Foster kept his grip on him, so that he could not free his right arm, although this left his own face exposed. He was breathless and exhausted when he fell against the rail, but with a tense effort he lifted the fellow off his feet. Since there seemed to be no other way, they must both fall off the train. He lost his balance and his foot slipping from the top step threw him backward. Then he missed the rail he clutched at and felt a heavy shock.

When his senses came back he found that he was lying on hard-frozen ground. There were dark firs about, but, a little farther on, the rails glistened in the moonlight, and he dully realized that he had fallen off the car. A faint snorting and a rumble that echoed across the forest showed that the train was going on. Foster lay still and listened until the sound died away. It looked as if nobody but the men who had attacked him knew there had been a struggle and he was left behind. Then he cautiously raised his head and leaning on his elbow looked about. It was a relief to find that he could do so, but he must see if his antagonist had fallen off with him, because if the fellow was not badly hurt he might renew the attack.

There was nothing in the shadow beside the line, the gap where the rails ran into the moonlight was

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

empty, and everything was still, except for the sigh of the cold breeze among the firs. For all that, Foster hesitated about getting up. The train was probably going at forty miles an hour, the ground was hard, and he might find that some bones were broken when he tried to move. The shock had perhaps dulled his senses and prevented his feeling much pain. It was, however, bitterly cold, and making an effort he got shakily upon his feet. To his surprise, he discovered that he was not much the worse although he felt sore and dizzy, and he sat down on a fallen branch to think what he should do.

The next station was probably only marked by an agent's office and a water-tank. Besides, his antagonists might get down there and come back to look for him, in which case he would be at their mercy if they met. It was a long way to the station they had passed, but he thought the safest plan would be to make for it. This meant a walk of some hours, with nothing to eat on the way, but a train from Winnipeg would stop early in the morning, and the others would not expect him to resume his journey east. If they had found out their mistake, they would take it for granted that he was a confederate of the man they followed and most likely calculate on his trying to reach the new Canadian Northern line. Foster felt angry with the fellow who had lured him into the adventure and resolved to extricate himself from it as soon as possible.

Getting up, he started west along the track, and after a time found himself embarrassed by the fur coat. It was heavy and too warm, but he would need it when he stopped. Then he wore thin city boots, and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the track, as usual, was roughly ballasted with coarse gravel. The stones rolled about under his feet, and the ties were irregularly spaced, so that he could not step from one to another except by an awkward stride. He went on, however, and by and by began to wonder where he could get a drink, for the struggle or the shock had made him thirsty.

The big coat proved troublesome to carry when he took it off. After a time his feet got sore and he tried to walk in the shallow drain beside the line, but this was filled with ice, on which he slipped. He had traveled by rougher trails and carried heavy loads, but that was some years ago and he wore different boots and fastened on his pack by proper straps. Moreover, one got soft when leading a business life.

By and by he heard the roar of water and pushing on faster came to a foaming creek that plunged down a stony ravine. A bridge crossed the gorge, and leaving the track he clambered down the rocky bank. Where the spray had fallen there were patches of ice, but Foster felt that he must get a drink. When he was half-way down his foot slipped and he slid the rest of the distance, bringing up with a shock at the edge of the water, where he struck a projecting stone. He felt shaken, but got a drink, and when he began to climb back found that he had wrenched his knee. Some movements were not painful, but when his weight came upon the joint it hurt. He must get up, for all that, and reached the top, where he sat down with his lips firmly set, and after putting on the coat felt in the pocket for a cigarette.

The case he took out was not his, and he remembered that he was wearing another man's coat. The

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

cigarettes were of Turkish tobacco, which is not much used in Canada, and he thought the quality remarkably good. This seemed to imply that their owner had a cultivated taste, and Foster began to wonder whether he was after all not a business man running away from his creditors, but rejected the theory. It was strange that although the cigarettes were expensive the case was of the kind sold in Western stores for fifty cents, but Foster presently gave up speculating about the man.

The moon was getting low and ragged pine branches cut against the light. The track was wrapped in shadow that was only a little less dense than the gloom of the surrounding bush. It was not really cold for North Ontario, but the fur coat was hardly enough protection to make a bed in the open air comfortable. Foster had slept in the Athabasca forests when the thermometer marked forty degrees below zero, but he then wore different clothes and had been able to make a roaring fire and build a snow-bank between him and the wind. Moreover, he was still liable to be overtaken by the men on the train.

Getting up, he found his knee sore and stiff, but limped on for an hour or two after the moon sank. He seemed to be stumbling along the bottom of a dark trench, for the firs shut him in like a wall and there was only an elusive glimmer of light above their serrated tops. He did not expect to find a house until he reached the station, for much of North Ontario is a wilderness where the trees are too small for milling and agriculture is impossible among the rocks. To make things worse, he felt hungry. The train had stopped at about seven o'clock at a desolate station

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

where the passengers were given a few minutes to get supper, but Foster's portion was too hot for him to eat. He tried to encourage himself by remembering that he had once marched three hundred miles across the snow with a badly frozen foot, but this did not make his present exertion easier.

As he got hungry he got angry. He had gone away to enjoy himself, and this was how his holiday had begun! The Government agent, if that was what he was, ought not to have dragged a confiding stranger into his difficulties. He was now safe in the express car and chuckling over the troubles he had left his substitute to face. Then Foster tried to remember if he had left any papers with his address in his overcoat and decided that he had not done so. His wallet was now in his jacket pocket. This was satisfactory, because he meant to have nothing more to do with the matter. Tying the fur coat round his waist to take some of the weight off his shoulders, he trudged on as briskly as he could through the gloom.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

V

FEATHERSTONE'S PEOPLE

AFTER walking for some time, Foster heard a rumble in the distance behind him and climbed the rocky bank of the single-line track. There was not much room between the bank and rails, and he was glad of an excuse for sitting down. Taking out the stranger's case, he lighted another of the Turkish cigarettes. They were the only benefit he was likely to derive from the adventure, and he felt some satisfaction in making use of them.

In the meantime, the rumble grew into a roar that rolled across the forest with a rhythmic beat, and a ray of light pierced the gloom up the track. It was very bright and he knew it was thrown by a locomotive headlamp. A west-bound freight train was coming and he must wait until it passed. Freight trains were common objects, but as a rule when Foster saw one approaching he stopped to watch. The great size and power of the locomotive appealed to his imagination, and he liked to think of the reckless courage of the men who drove the steel road through eight hundred miles of rugged wilderness to Port Arthur, and then on again through rocks and muskegs to the Western prairie. It was a daring feat, when one remembered the obstacles and that there was no traffic to be developed on the way.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The beam of light became a cone of dazzling radiance; the rocks throbbed, and the gnarled pines shook as the roar swelled into a tremendous harmony of many different notes. Then there was sudden darkness as the locomotive leaped past, and huge box-cars rushed, lurching and rocking, out of the thick, black smoke. Flying ballast crashed against the rocks, and though the ground was frozen hard a hail of small particles rattled among the trees. Then, as the tail-lights on the caboose sped by, a deep hoot of the whistle came back from about a quarter of a mile off, and soon afterwards the fading glimmer vanished round a curve. It seemed to be going slower, and the rumble died away suddenly. Foster thought there was a side-track ahead, where the freight would wait until a train going in the other direction crossed the switches. If he could reach the spot in time, he might save himself a long walk.

His knee hurt as he stumbled over the gravel at the best pace he could make, but that did not matter much. A few minutes' sharp pain could be borne, and he set his lips as he ran, while the perspiration dripped from him and his breath got short. This was the consequence of leading a soft and, in a sense, luxurious life, he thought, but when he tried to walk next day he understood the reason better. Still, he did not mean to be left behind in the frozen bush, and as he reached the curve was relieved to see lights flicker about the track. When he stopped a man flashed a lantern into his face.

"Looks as if you'd made good time, but the track's pretty rough for breaking records on," he remarked.

"That's so," Foster answered breathlessly. "I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

wanted to get here before you pulled out, because I'm going on with you."

"No, sir; it's clean against the rules. You can't get a free ride now on a C. P. freight."

"The rules apply to hobos. I've got a first-class ticket to Montreal."

"Then why in thunder are you running back to Fort William?"

"I'd have been satisfied to make the next station. You see, I fell off the train."

Another man, who wore big gloves and grimy overalls, had come up, and laughed when he heard Foster's explanation.

"You sure look pretty lively after falling off the Montreal express. Guess you must have done that kind of thing before! But our bosses are getting blamed particular about these free rides."

Foster opened his wallet and took out a strip of paper, folded in sections, but it was not by accident he held two or three dollar bills against it.

"There's my ticket. I bought it at the agent's office, but I expect you know what would have happened if I'd got it on board. Anyway, you've heard of the drummer who beat his passage from Calgary to Toronto at the cost of a box of cigars."

The brakesmen grinned, because the hint was plain. It is said on Western railroads that when a conductor collects a fare he throws the money at the car-roof and accounts to the company for as much as sticks there.

"Well," said the first man, "I guess we'll take our chances and you can get into the caboose. You'll find blankets, and a bunk where you can lie down if

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

you take off your boots. We'll dump you somewheres handy for catching the next east-bound."

Foster found the caboose comfortably warm. There was a stove in the middle and two or three bunks were fixed to the walls. In a few minutes the train they waited for went roaring past, and when the freight started one of the men gave him some supper. Then he got into a bunk and went to sleep.

He caught the next express going east, and on reaching Ottawa, where he had some time to wait, half expected the man he had helped would come, or send somebody, to meet him. Although he wore the fur coat and stood in a conspicuous place, he was not accosted, and presently bought a newspaper. It threw no light upon the matter, and for a time he walked up and down, considering if he would go to the police. This was perhaps his duty, but it looked as if the owner of the coat had not been molested. After all, the fellow might be an absconding debtor, and if not it was obvious that he had some reason for keeping his secret. Foster decided to let him do so, and went back to the train.

When he arrived at Montreal he went to the *Windsor* as he had been told, but there was no letter or telegram waiting and none came during the day or two he stayed. On the evening before he sailed he was sitting in the large entrance hall, which is a feature of American and Canadian hotels, when he thought a man some distance off looked hard at him over his newspaper. Foster only caught a momentary glimpse of his face, because he held up the paper as if to get a better light and people were moving about be-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

tween them; but he thought the man was Daly, and after a few moments carelessly crossed the floor.

A man sat at the spot he had marked and the chairs on both sides were unoccupied, but when Foster sat down in the nearest he saw the fellow was a stranger. This puzzled him, since he did not think he had been mistaken. It was, however, possible that Daly had been there, but had moved off quietly when Foster's view was obstructed. If so, he must have had an object for hiding, and Foster waited some minutes before he went to the office and examined the guest-book. Daly's name did not appear, and he found that nobody from the West had signed the book recently.

"I wanted to see if a man I know is staying here," he told the clerk.

"That's all right," said the other. "Quite a number of people have been looking for friends to-day."

Foster described Daly as well as he could, and asked if he had examined the book.

"No," said the clerk. "Nobody just like that had the register while I've been about; but now I think of it, a man who might meet the bill stood by while another looked at the last page." Then he indicated a figure near the revolving door. "There! that's who he was with!"

As the man pushed the door round Foster saw his face, and knew him for the stranger who had occupied the chair in which he had expected to find Daly. He thanked the clerk and went back thoughtfully to his place, because it looked as if Daly had been there and the other had helped him to steal away. If this surmise was correct, they might be trying to follow Featherstone; but he was, fortunately, out of their

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

reach, and Foster decided that he must not exaggerate the importance of the matter. After all, Daly might have come to Montreal on business, and the rotunda of a Canadian hotel is something of a public resort. Still, he felt disturbed and presently gave the clerk the fur coat, telling him to deliver it when asked for. He felt it a relief to get rid of the thing.

Next day he sailed on an Empress liner, and on the evening after he reached England left the train at a lonely station in the North. It was not yet dark, and for a moment or two he stood on the platform looking about. There had been rain, and the air had a damp freshness that was unusual in Canada. In the east and north the sky was covered with leaden cloud, against which rounded hilltops were faintly marked. Rugged moors rolled in long slopes towards the west, where the horizon was flushed with vivid saffron and delicate green. Up the middle of the foreground ran a deep valley, with blue shadow in its bottom and touches of orange light on its heathy sides. There were few trees, although a line of black firs ran boldly to the crest of a neighboring rise, and stone dykes were more common than the ragged hedges. Foster saw no plowed land, and nothing except heather seemed to grow on the peaty soil, which looked black as jet where the railway cutting pierced it. Indeed, he thought the landscape as savage and desolate as any he had seen in Canada, but as he did not like tame country this had a certain charm.

While he looked about a man came up. He was elderly and dressed with extreme neatness in old-fashioned dark clothes, but he had the unmistakable look of a gentleman's servant. Though there was a

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

small car in the road, he was obviously not a professional chauffeur.

"You'll be Mr. Foster, sir, for the Garth?" he said.

Foster said he was and the man resumed: "Mr. Featherstone sent the car and his apologies. He had to attend the court, being a magistrate, and hoped you would excuse his not coming."

Then he picked up Foster's portmanteau and called a porter, who was moving some clanging milk cans, to bring his bag.

"Never mind; I'll take it," Foster told him.

"As you like, sir, but it's perhaps not quite usual in this country," the other answered in a deprecatory tone.

"I suppose I ought to have remembered that," Foster agreed smiling.

They crossed the platform, and while they waited for the bag the man said respectfully, "Might I ask if Mr. Lawrence was better when you left, sir? It was a disappointment to us when we heard he could not come home."

Foster liked the fellow. He was very formal, but seemed to include himself in his master's family.

"Yes," he said. "In fact, I expect he'll be quite well in a month or two. I suppose you were at the Garth before my partner left?"

"I've served Mr. Featherstone for thirty years, sir, and led Mr. Lawrence's first pony and cleaned his first gun. It wasn't my regular duty, sir, but he was the only son and I looked after him. If I may say so, we were much upset when we heard that he was ill."

Then the bag was brought, and as the car ran across the moor Foster noted the smooth, hard surface of the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

wet road. The country was wild and desolate, but they had no roads like this in Canada, except perhaps in one or two of the larger cities. Indeed, in Western towns he knew, it was something of an adventure to cross the street during the spring thaw. The light got red and angry as they dipped into the valley; the firs on the hillcrest stood out black and sharp, and then melted into the gray background. A river pool shone with a ruby gleam that suddenly went out, and the dim water vanished into the shadow, brawling among the stones.

There was smooth pasture in the valley, broken by dark squares of turnip fields and pale stubble; but here and there the heath appeared again and wild cotton showed faintly white above the black peat-soil. By and by a cross, standing by itself on the lonely hillside, caught Foster's eye, and he asked his companion about it.

"The Count's Cross, sir; a courtesy title they held in the next dale. He was killed in a raid on a tower down the water, before the Featherstones came."

"But did they bury him up there?"

"No, sir; they were all buried at night by the water of Langrigg, but when they were carrying him home in the mist by the hill road the Scots from the tower overtook them. The Count's men were wounded and their horses foundered, but the Scots let them go when they found that he was dead. About 1300, sir. Somebody put up the cross to commemorate it."

"They seem to have been a chivalrous lot," Foster remarked. "I wonder if that kind of thing would happen nowadays!"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I'm afraid one couldn't expect it, sir," the old fellow answered and Foster smiled.

The cross faded into the hillside; it got dark and the valley narrowed. Trees grew in sheltered spots; the faint, delicate tracery of birch branches breaking the solid, black ranks of the firs. The road wound along the river, which roared, half seen, in the gloom. Now and then they ran through water, and presently the glare of the headlamps bored through breast-high mist. There was a smell of wet soil and rotting leaves. It was very different from the tangled pine bush of Ontario and the stark bareness of the plains, but it was somehow familiar and Foster felt that he was at home.

By and by the moon came out, and the mist got thinner as they ran into an opening where the side of the glen fell back. Lights twinkled at the foot of a hill, and as they sped on the irregular outline of a house showed against a background of trees. It glimmered, long and low, in the moonlight, and then Foster lost it as they ran through a gate into the darkness of a belt of firs. A minute or two later, the car slowed and stopped after passing round a bend.

A wide door stood hospitably open, and a figure upon the steps cut against the light. There were two more figures inside the hall, and as he got down Foster heard voices that sounded strangely pleasant and refined. Then a man whom he could not see well shook hands with him and took him in, and he stopped, half dazzled by the brightness.

The hall was large and a fire burned on a deep hearth. There were oil lamps on tall pillars, and in the background a broad staircase ran up to a gallery in

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the gloom. Foster, however, had not much time to look about, for as soon as he had given up his hat and coat his host led him towards the fire and two ladies came up. He knew one was his partner's mother and the other his sister, but although they were like Lawrence he remarked a difference that was puzzling until he understood its origin. Mrs. Featherstone had an unmistakable stamp of dignity, but her face was gentle and her look very friendly; her daughter was tall and Foster thought remarkably graceful, with an air of pride and reserve, although this vanished when she gave him a frank welcoming smile. Featherstone, who was older than his wife, had short, gray hair, and a lined, brown face, but looked strong and carried himself well.

Foster, who liked them at once, wondered rather anxiously whether he had pleased or disappointed them. But he imagined that they would reserve their opinion. They were, of course, not the people to show what they thought, and if he had felt any embarrassment, they would have known how to put him at his ease. Still his type was, no doubt, new to them and his views might jar. He did not remember what they said, but they somehow made him feel he was not a stranger but a friend who had a claim, and when he went to his room he knew he would enjoy his stay with Featherstone's people.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VI

HIS COMRADE'S STORY

FOSTER spent the most part of the next day in the open air with his host. Featherstone had a quiet, genial manner and seemed to have read much, though he held the narrow views that sometimes mark the untraveled Englishman. He appeared to be scrupulously just and showed sound judgment about matters he understood, but he had strong prejudices and Foster did not think him clever. With his rather sensitive pride and fastidiousness he was certainly not the man to make his mark in Canada, and Foster began to understand certain traits of his comrade's that had puzzled him. Lawrence, although he had keener intelligence, was not quite so fine a type as his father, and in consequence stood rough wear better. But he too, in spite of his physical courage, now and then showed a supine carelessness and tried to avoid, instead of boldly grappling with, things that jarred.

They set out to go shooting, but Featherstone stopped to talk to everybody they met, and showed keen interest in such matters as the turnip crop and the price of sheep. It was clear that he was liked and respected. Sometimes he turned aside to examine tottering gates and blocked ditches, and commented to Foster upon the economics of farming and the burden of taxes. The latter soon gathered that there was not

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

much profit to be derived from a small moorland estate and his host was far from rich. It looked as if it had cost him, and perhaps his family, some self-denial to send the money that had once or twice enabled Lawrence, and Foster with him, to weather a crisis.

At noon they were given a better lunch than Foster had often been satisfied with at a lonely farm, where Featherstone spoke of him as his son's partner, and seemed to take an ingenuous pride in making it known that Lawrence was prospering. This gave Foster a hint that he acted on later. They, however, shot a brace of partridges in a turnip field, a widgeon that rose from a reedy tarn, and a woodcock that sprang out of a holly thicket in a bog. It was a day of gleams of sunlight, passing showers, and mist that rolled about the hills and swept away, leaving the long slopes in transient brightness, checkered with the green of mosses and the red of withered fern. The sky cleared as they turned homewards, and when they reached the Garth an angry crimson glow spread across the west.

Tea was brought them in the hall and Foster, who had changed his clothes, which was a rare luxury in Canada, sat with much content in a corner by the hearth. He had been out in the raw wind long enough to enjoy the rest and warmth, and the presence of two English ladies added to the charm. Mrs. Featherstone was knitting, but Alice talked to her father about the shooting and what he had noted on the farms. Foster thought her cleverer than the others, but it was obvious that her interest was not forced. She understood agriculture and her remarks were singularly shrewd.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

In a sense, this was puzzling, for she had, in an extra degree, the fastidious refinement that marked the rest, and with it a touch of quiet haughtiness. Although she often smiled, she was characterized by a restful calm, and her glance was steady and level. Alice was tall, with unusually regular features, brown eyes, and brown hair, but Foster could not analyze her charm, which was somehow strengthened by a hint of reserve. He was in the glow of the fire, and imagined that she once or twice gave him a glance of thoughtful scrutiny.

The room was getting dim, but lights had not been brought, and the red glow outside filled the large oblong of the casement window. Dark fir branches cut against the lurid color and Foster, looking out, saw the radiance strike through the straight rows of trunks.

"Something like Ontario, isn't it?" said Featherstone, indicating the trees.

"Yes, in a way, but there's a difference," Foster replied. "In eastern Manitoba and Ontario the bush is choked and tangled, and runs nearly eight hundred miles. The small pines are half burned in places; in others they're wrecked and rotten, and lean across each other as if they were drunk. Then you can travel all day without finding an opening, unless it's a lonely lake or a river tumbling among the rocks."

"It sounds depressing," Mrs. Featherstone remarked. "We must hope you will find your stay here a pleasant change."

"The curious thing is that it doesn't feel strange. All I've seen so far, including the Garth, seems familiar."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"But perhaps that isn't remarkable. You are English and were, I dare say, brought up in the country and used to our mode of life."

Foster saw Alice glance at him and felt he must be frank.

"No," he said, "my life in England was different from yours. It was spent in monotonous work, and when I went home at night to a shabby room in a street of small dingy houses it was too late, and I was often too dejected, to think of amusements. Twice I spent a glorious ten days among the hills, but that was all I saw of England unspoiled by tramway lines and smoke, and the holidays cost a good deal of self-denial. Railway fares were a serious obstacle."

Alice smiled, but he thought the look she gave him hinted at approval.

"Self-denial isn't so unusual as you seem to think. We know something about it at the Garth."

"But you sent my partner money when he needed it," Foster answered, wondering how far he could go. "The last time it was a large amount and helped us to turn an awkward corner. In fact, we should have gone under for a time if it hadn't come, and I remember feeling that I owed much to friends I might never see, because I shared the benefit with your brother. In its Western sense, partner means more than a business associate."

"That is obvious," Alice rejoined quietly, but with meaning.

"The main thing is that the money seems to have been well spent," Featherstone interposed. "For all that, we don't know much about what Lawrence did with it or, indeed, about his life in Canada."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It's curious that one gets out of the way of writing home in the West, and it's often difficult to give one's friends a clear idea of how one lives. Things are different——"

Mrs. Featherstone smiled, and Foster saw that his wish to make excuses for his comrade's negligence was understood. Featherstone, however, was franker than he expected.

"There were good reasons for Lawrence's not writing home and they made it awkward for us to write to him for a time. You can now tell us what he has done in Canada. We want to know."

Foster began with some hesitation by relating how he had first met his comrade in the churned-up mud outside a logging camp after a dispute with the bullying manager. The men were beaten, but Lawrence and two or three more from the river-gang would not give in, and started in the rain, without blankets and with very little food, which a sympathetic cook stole for them, on a long march to the nearest settlement. There they took a contract for clearing land, and Foster described how they lived in a rude bark shack while they felled the trees and piled them up for burning. It was strenuous work, and having been unable to collect their wages from the lumber firm, the clothes they could not replace went to pieces and they slept, for the most part, in the wet rags they wore by day. But they held out until the work was done and paid for. Foster tried to do his comrade justice and thought he had not exaggerated, for Lawrence's philosophic good humor had encouraged the rest and smoothed over difficulties that threatened to break up the gang.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Then he stopped and glanced at the others, wondering whether he had said too much and had drawn a picture they shrank from contemplating. Alice's eyes were steadily fixed on him. Mrs. Featherstone looked grave, but there was a hint of proud satisfaction in her husband's face. Somewhat to his surprise, Foster saw that he had not jarred or bored them.

"You made good; I believe that's the proper phrase," said Featherstone. "Go on, please."

Foster did so. His adventures had not appeared remarkable when they happened, and he did not think himself much of a story-teller, but he meant to do his best, for his partner's sake. It would be something if he could show Lawrence's people the courage and cheerfulness with which he had faced his troubles. Still, he thought it better to vary the theme, and related how they engaged themselves as salesmen at a department store, where Lawrence rashly undertook to serve the drugs and prescribed for confiding customers until a mistake that might have had disastrous consequences led to his being fired. Foster went with him, and they next undertook to cook, without any useful knowledge of the art, for a railroad construction gang. Their incompetence became obvious when Lawrence attempted to save labor by putting a week's supply of desiccated apples to soak at once, with the consequence that the floor of the caboose was covered with swollen fruit that had forced itself out of the pot. One of the gang, who went in to steal some fried pork, declared that the blamed apples chased him down the steps.

Featherstone's chuckle was encouraging, but Foster glanced at Alice and thought he read another emotion

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

than amusement in her sparkling eyes. It was now nearly dark, but the glow of the fire touched the others' faces and nobody seemed to think of ringing for lights.

He went on to describe their retreat in winter from a worthless mineral claim, where they had remained until the snow surprised them when their food was nearly gone. Eight or nine miles a day was the most they could drag their hand-sledge through the tangled bush, and Foster got his foot frozen through sleeping in wet boots. The frozen part galled into a wound, but with provisions running out they could not stop to rest. The tent and half their blankets had to be thrown away and Lawrence hauled him on the sledge over rocks and fallen logs, with the temperature at forty degrees below, until they reached a frozen river, down which he struggled against a savage wind.

Then came a profitable contract, which Lawrence obtained against keen opposition, for supplying telephone posts, and Foster was surprised to find that the description of their efforts to get the logs out of a rugged wilderness made a stirring tale. Although he paused once or twice apologetically, the others made him resume, and he began to wish he was not in the firelight when he saw that Alice was quietly studying him. It was his partner's story he meant to tell, but since they were together he could not leave himself out.

He could, however, change the scene, and skipping much, came to their start as general contractors at Gardner's Crossing. The Hulton Company, which was not so large then, gave them work, but they were hampered by want of capital, and had to meet the competition of richer and sometimes unscrupulous

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

antagonists. Still they made progress; staking all they had on the chance of carrying out risky work that others would not touch, sometimes testing the patience of creditors, and now and then outwitting a rival by an ingenious ruse. Lawrence lived in the single-room office, cooking for himself on an oil-stove, while Foster camped with their men where they were at work.

Then they built the sawmill with the help of Lawrence's check from home, and soon afterwards met with their worst reverse. They had engaged to supply the Hulton Company with lumber of a certain kind for some special work, and then found that few of the trees they required grew near the river. This meant that a skidway must be made over a very rough hill and a gasolene winding engine bought or hired to haul the logs out of the next valley. There was, however, another fir easily accessible that might suit the purpose, but not quite as well, and Foster related how he and his partner sat up late one night, calculating costs and wondering whether they should pay Hulton a fine to break the bargain. He added naïvely that they were some time arguing if they should substitute the inferior wood.

"Whose opinion was it that you should supply the exact material you had promised?" Featherstone asked.

"Well," said Foster, "Lawrence said so first, but I think we both meant to let them have the best."

Featherstone's glance at his wife indicated relief, but something in Alice's face showed that she had known what Foster's reply would be. She had listened with keen interest, and he stopped, half amused and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

half embarrassed. Perhaps he had talked too much, and while he meant to do Lawrence justice, he did not want to play the part of the indomitable pioneer for the girl's benefit. Moreover, he knew she would detect, and despise him for, any attempt to do so, and as he valued her good opinion, it was not modesty alone that led him to make Lawrence the hero of the piece.

"So you stuck to your bargain!" Featherstone remarked. "Tell us how you carried it out."

Foster forgot himself and the others as he continued, for he had a vivid memory of the struggle. He took charge of the work in the woods, while Lawrence tactfully pressed for payment of outstanding accounts, put off creditors, and somehow provided money for wages. As extra gangs had to be hired, Foster owned that he did not know how the thing was done. He cut a grade for the skidway up the hill, slashing tangled bush and blasting rocks, worked in the snow by moonlight long after his men stopped, and afterwards learned that Lawrence often went without a meal when pay-day got near. But they hauled out the logs and the lumber was delivered. When he stopped, Featherstone looked up with some color in his face.

"Thank you," he said. "It is a moving tale. The money we sent you was well spent. I could have expected nothing better of my son. But I suppose you found it paid to keep your promise."

"In this case, it did," Foster answered with a smile. "Hulton's gave us the first chance of any work they did not care to do themselves; you see, we had put in a few wood-working machines. In fact, after a

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

time, Hulton told Lawrence to walk through the factory now and then and send in anything the heads of departments required. But I've talked long enough and fear you're bored."

"No," said Featherstone simply, "you have given us great pleasure and made us realize the bracing life my son is leading. You could have done us no favor that would equal this."

Then he took Foster off to the gun-room, where they smoked and talked about the day's shooting, until Featherstone said rather abruptly, "Perhaps I had better tell you that I didn't send Lawrence the check that enabled you to build the mill. It was not in my power to do so then."

"But he said the money came from home."

"It did. Alice was left a small legacy and insisted on selling the shares it consisted of in order to help her brother. I must confess that I thought she was rash, but the money was hers. Now it is obvious that the sacrifice she made was justified."

Featherstone began to talk about something else, but Foster felt embarrassed. It looked as if he owed his success in business to the girl's generosity, and although he could not see why this should disturb him, it did.

He went down to dinner rather early and found Alice in the hall. There was nobody else about, and by the way she looked up as he advanced he thought she had been waiting for him. Alice had beauty, but it was her proud reserve he felt most. She did not give her friendship lightly, but he believed it was worth winning.

"I wanted to thank you for explaining things so

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

well," she said. "It's the first time we have really learned much about my brother's life in Canada."

Foster hesitated. "I felt that you wanted to know. But, in a way, it must have sounded rather egotistical. In fact, the thing wasn't as easy as you perhaps think."

Alice smiled. "You couldn't leave yourself out, although it was obvious that you meant to give my brother the leading part."

"I honestly don't think I exaggerated."

"No," she agreed, "it sounded real, and there were touches, little personal characteristics, you couldn't have imagined. You see, I am younger than Lawrence and thought him something of a romantic hero before he left home." Then she paused for a moment. "I got a very bad shock when he was forced to go. You know why he went?"

"I don't; I've sometimes thought he wanted to tell me."

"Then you never asked?"

"I did not; I think I didn't want to know."

She gave him a steady searching glance and he felt that if he had been insincere she would have found out.

"But you knew there was something wrong. If he had injured somebody in England, he might have injured you. What made you so trustful?"

"Your brother himself. Then he was, so to speak, my benefactor. If he hadn't taken me up, I might have been chopping trees in the snow, instead of enjoying a holiday in England and, to emphasize the contrast, staying at a house like this."

"It doesn't follow; you might have found another

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

opportunity. The point is that you did trust Lawrence."

Foster disliked sentiment and knew that if he struck a false note it would jar.

"Well," he said, "I don't claim that I'm a judge of character, but one can't make progress in Canada and be a fool. We had gone hungry in the bush together, and hauled the hand-sledge across the snow, when it was very doubtful if we'd make the settlements. Perhaps there isn't a better way of testing a partner than that. Then a man starts fair in the new countries, and one feels that this is right. He may have given way once to some strong temptation and go the straighter for it afterwards."

Alice looked at him with a curious gleam in her eyes that made his heart beat.

"It was a very strong temptation," she said quietly and stopped as Mrs. Featherstone came in.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VII

THE PACKET

WHEN he had been a few days at the Garth, Foster thought he had better take Carmen's packet to Edinburgh. She had said nothing about its being urgent and he did not want to go, but he must keep his promise and would afterwards be at liberty. Mrs. Featherstone had given him to understand that he was to make the Garth his headquarters as long as he stayed in England, and he looked forward to doing so with much content. The more he saw of his hosts, the better he liked them, and it was a privilege to enjoy Alice Featherstone's friendship. She had, of course, given it him for her brother's sake, but he must try to keep it on his merits.

Since he had seen Alice he began to understand Carmen better. Carmen had charm and knew how to use it to her advantage, while he could not imagine Alice's employing her beauty to gain an object. She was proud, with an essentially clean pride, and sincere, while Carmen had a talent for intrigue. The latter enjoyed using her cleverness to put down a rival or secure a prominent place; she was a hustler, as they said in the West. Alice, he thought, would not even claim what was hers; it must be willingly offered or she would let it go. Yet he knew she would be a staunch and generous friend to anybody who gained her confidence.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

This kind of comparison, however, was profitless and perhaps in bad taste. After all, he was a friend of Carmen's and must do her errand. He left the Garth next morning, and Featherstone, who made him promise to come back as soon as possible, drove him across the moors to a small station on the North British line, where he caught an Edinburgh train.

When they ran out of the hills at Hawick, rain was falling and the valley filled with smoky haze, through which loomed factories and chimney stacks. The station was crowded, and Foster gathered from the talk of the people who got in that a big wool sale was going on and the townsfolk who were not at the auction made it a holiday. His compartment was full, but looking through the window he saw a fashionably dressed girl hurrying along the platform with a porter. They tried one or two carriages, in which there seemed to be no room, and the guard had blown his whistle when they came abreast of Foster's compartment. Opening the door as the train began to move, he held out his hand and pulled the girl in.

"My bag; it mustn't be left!" she cried, trying to get back to the door, but Foster caught the bag as the porter held it up and put it on the rack.

"There's a seat in the corner," he said and went into the corridor.

When they stopped at Galashiels a number of people got out, and he returned to the compartment. It was now unoccupied except by an old man and the girl he had helped, who gave him a grateful smile.

"I hadn't time to thank you, but I should have missed the train if you had not been prompt," she said.

Foster did not know if Scottish etiquette warranted

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

anything more than a conventional reply, but he ventured to remark: "You certainly seemed to have cut things rather fine."

"I had to drive some distance and the hill roads were bad; then when we got to the town the streets were crowded."

"That would be sae," the old man agreed. "Hawick's gey thrang at the wool sales when the yarn trade is guid."

Foster liked to talk to strangers and as the girl had not rebuffed him, he took her cloak, which looked very wet, from the rack.

"Perhaps I'd better shake this in the corridor and then we can hang it up," he said.

She allowed him to do so and the old man remarked: "Guid gear's worth the saving, and I was thinking it would be nane the waur o' a bit shake, but if ye had leeved to my age among the mosses, ye'd no' find yereself sae soople."

"Any kind of gear's worth taking care of."

"That's true," agreed the other. "A verra praiseworthy sentiment, if ye practice it. But I wouldna' say ye were a Scot."

"In a sense, I'm a Canadian, but from what I've seen of the Ontario Scots the difference isn't very marked. Anyhow, they don't buy new material until the old's worn out."

The man chuckled, but Foster thought the girl looked interested.

"Then you come from Canada," she said. "Do you know any of the Ontario cities?"

"I have been in Toronto, but I know the small towns near the Manitoba border best. In fact, I left an am-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

bitious place called Gardner's Crossing about fourteen days ago."

From the quick glance she gave him he imagined that she had heard of the town, but she said, "I have some friends in Ontario and understand that they have had what they call a set-back there. Did this extend to the neighborhood you came from?"

Foster told her something about the development of the lumber trade and mining, but although he had hardly expected her to be interested he thought she was, and the old man's shrewd remarks helped the conversation along.

"Isn't the Crossing where the big factory is? I forget the name of it," she asked by and by.

"Hulton's," said Foster, and afterwards thought she tactfully encouraged him to talk about the manufacturing firm, although he did not mention Fred Hulton's death. Her manner, however, was quite correct; he had been of some small help, which warranted her conversing with him to pass the time. That was all, and when their companion got out and she opened a book he went to the smoking-compartment.

When he left the train at the Waverley station he saw her on the platform and she gave him a slight bow, but he understood that their acquaintance ended there and was content. After lunch he walked along Princes Street and back to the castle. The sky was clear, the sun shone on the old tall houses, and a nipping north-easter blew across the Forth. In spite of its age and modern industry, the town looked strangely clean and cold. No smoke could hang about it in the nipping wind; its prevailing color was granite-gray. The Forth was a streak of raw indigo, and the hills

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

all round were steely blue. Edinburgh was like no English town; it had an austere half-classical beauty that was peculiar to itself; perhaps Quebec, though different, resembled it most of all the cities he had seen.

Then he remembered Carmen's packet, and after asking a passer-by took a tram-car that carried him through the southern quarter of the town into a wide road, lined by well-built stone houses. Standing in small, neat gardens, they ran back to the open country, with a bold ridge of moors in the distance. Foster got down where he was directed and crossed the road to one of the houses. They were all much alike and he thought hinted at the character of their occupants. One would expect to find the people who lived there prosperous citizens with sober, conventional habits.

He went up a short, tiled path and rang the bell. A smart maid-servant showed him into a small, morning-room, where everything was very neat, and after a few moments a man came in. He was the kind of man Foster had expected to find in such a house, well-dressed, with polite but rather formal manners, and Foster briefly stated his business. He thought the man looked at him sharply, but it was about four o'clock in the afternoon and the light was not good.

"Mr. Graham does not live here now; he left a week or two ago," he said. "Do you know him personally?"

"No," said Foster. "Miss Austin asked me to give him the packet."

"Then you know Mr. Austin."

"In a way," said Foster, smiling. "We speak when we meet on the street, but don't get much further. In fact, Austin's a business rival of mine."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The man seemed to ponder for a moment or two. Then he said, "I gather that you want to deliver the packet, not to post it?"

"That's so. I don't know if it matters much, but I'd like to put it in Graham's hands."

"Very well. He's gone to Newcastle, but I have his address somewhere. If you will wait a minute or two, I'll look."

He took the packet, as if he meant to write the address on it, and Foster sat down. The door of the room was half open and while he waited somebody entered the house. Steps came along the hall, and a girl pushed the door back, and then stopped, looking at him in surprise. He understood this as he saw she was the girl he had helped into the train.

"I didn't know you were coming here," she said.

"Nor did I, in a sense," Foster answered with a smile. "I mean I didn't know it was your house."

"My name was on the label of the bag and rather conspicuous."

"It would have meant nothing if I had seen it. In fact, I must own I don't know it now."

The girl looked puzzled, and Foster explained that he had come with a packet, but had merely been given Graham's name and the number of the house. He added that he had found he must look for the man in Newcastle.

"Then you are a friend of Mr. Austin's?" she said.

Foster thought it strange that she had not told him she knew Austin when she asked about the Crossing, but he replied: "I'm a friend of Miss Austin's."

"Ah!" she said thoughtfully; "do you mind explaining what you mean by that?"

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Perhaps it's hardly worth while, but I can't claim that Austin and I are particularly friendly. Our business interests sometimes clash."

She was silent for a few moments, and he wondered why both she and the man had been curious to know how far his acquaintance with Austin went. Then she looked up with a quick movement. "Newcastle is not a charming town, and if you have no other reason for going there, it might be better to post the packet."

Foster was somewhat puzzled. She had spoken meaningly, as if she meant to give him a hint.

"The trouble is that I promised Miss Austin to deliver it."

"You have brought it to England," she persisted. "It will be safe in the post——"

She stopped with a glance at the door, and Foster heard a step in the passage. Then she quietly turned to the man who had taken the packet.

"I would have missed the train at Hawick but for this gentleman's help," she said. "Still, I did not know he was coming here until I saw him as I passed the door."

The other, who had looked at her rather sharply, nodded and gave Foster the packet.

"As there was room enough, I wrote the new address on the cover."

Foster thanked him and took his leave, but as the man went before him to the door the girl made a sign.

"Post it," she whispered and turned back into the room.

After leaving the house Foster walked along the road in a thoughtful mood. The girl was apparently the man's daughter or niece. Their relative ages war-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ranted the surmise, and her quick explanation of how she came to be talking to a stranger indicated that she recognized his authority, while Foster thought she had been disturbed when she heard his step. It was strange that she should urge him to post the packet, and he would sooner have done so, but it was not a long journey to Newcastle and he must keep his promise. Then he saw a tram-car coming and dismissed the matter.

Going back to his hotel, he found there was an evening train and decided to leave by it. Edinburgh had attractions, but he could come back and was anxious to get rid of the packet, moreover he grudged the time he spent away from the Garth. There were not many passengers at the station and he found an empty compartment, where he read a newspaper until he got tired and lifting a corner of the blind looked out. Here and there a light rushed back through the darkness and vanished as the express sped south with a smoothness that was a contrast to the jolting he had been used to in Canada. Indeed, except for the roar when they ran across a bridge and the confused flashing past of lamps as they swept through a station, he could hardly have imagined himself on board a train. There was, however, not much to be seen, and he took out the packet.

It looked somewhat bulkier and he examined it carefully, but the cover did not seem to have been removed. It could not have been replaced by another, because the original address was there and he knew Carmen's hand; then there was a seal, which he did not think could have been tampered with. Besides, the man had only had it for a minute or two, and if he had opened

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

it, would probably have taken something out instead of putting something in. Foster decided that he was mistaken about its size and returned it to his pocket.

Then he wanted a cigarette and took out the case he had got in the fur coat. Since he had left the coat in Montreal, the case was the only record of his adventure on the train, and he wondered whether he would ever be able to restore it to its owner and speculated languidly about the man. As the latter knew his name, it was strange that he had not communicated with him at the *Windsor*, as he had promised. He had obviously not been attacked, because there had been nothing about it in the Canadian newspapers. The thing was puzzling, but after all it did not concern Foster much and he thought about something else.

It was late when he arrived at Newcastle and went to an hotel. There was fog and rain next morning, and he saw very little of the town, which seemed filled with smoke. Taking a tram-car that carried him past rows of dingy buildings and shops where lights twinkled, he got out at the corner of a narrow street that ran back into the haze. After looking at the address on the packet, he plunged into the gloom beside a row of tall, sooty buildings. There was no pavement, and here and there a cart stood beneath an opening in the wall. The buildings were apparently warehouses, but some of the doors had brass plates and lights shone in the upper windows. By and by he found the number he wanted and entered a dirty arch, inside which a few names were painted on the wall. Graham's was not there, but he went up the steps to inquire at the first office he reached.

The lower stories were used as a warehouse and he

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

came to the top landing before he saw a name that seemed to be Danish or Scandinavian painted on a door. Going in, he knocked on the counter. The office was small and shabby and smelt of bacon, which he thought indicated that its occupant dealt in provisions, but he could not see much because of a glass partition. When he was getting impatient, an old man came to the counter.

"Can you tell me if there's a Mr. Graham in this building?" Foster asked.

"Yes, he's here," said the other. "What do you want?"

Foster said he had brought a packet from Canada, and the old man, who looked rather hard at him, lifted a flap in the counter and told him to pass through. A door in the partition opened as he advanced and another man beckoned him to come in. It looked as if the latter had heard what had passed, but this saved an explanation and Foster, who asked if he was Graham, put the packet on a table. There was not much else in the small, dusty room, except a cupboard fitted with pigeon-holes, a desk, and a safe.

"This is from Miss Austin of Gardner's Crossing," he remarked.

Graham glanced at the packet carelessly, as if he did not consider it of much importance, and Foster felt puzzled. The fellow was not as old as Carmen's father, but Foster thought there was nothing about him that would attract a girl used to admiration, as Carmen was. He was certainly not handsome and had, on the whole, a commonplace look, while he was obviously in a small way of business.

"Thank you," he said. "It seems you have been to

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Edinburgh. We had a branch there, but closed it recently. Newcastle has more facilities for importing our goods. I'm afraid you have been put to some trouble."

Foster replied that he did not mind this, since he had promised Miss Austin to bring the packet and she was a friend of his, but although he studied the man's face saw nothing to indicate that he was interested.

"Are you staying here?" he asked, and when Foster told him that he was going back as soon as he could, resumed: "If you had been staying, I would have been glad to take you about the town; but, after all, there's nothing much in the way of amusement going on. I might arrange to meet you in the afternoon, but must now finish some letters for the Continental mail."

Foster said he could not wait and went out, feeling that the other was pleased to get rid of him. Graham was obviously a small importer of provisions, and he could not see why the girl in Edinburgh had warned him to post the packet. Carmen's reason for sending such a man something she valued was impossible to discern.

This, however, was not Foster's business, and after lunch he caught a train to Hexham and, finding he could get no farther, spent the night in the old Border town.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VIII

AN OFFER OF HELP

IT rained and the light was going when Foster sat in a window seat of the library at the Garth. He was alone, but did not mind this. The Featherstones treated him as one of the family; he was free to do what he liked, and Alice had just gone away, after talking to him for half an hour. Lighting a cigarette, he mused and looked about.

Outside, the firs rose, black and dripping, above the wet drive. Between their trunks he saw the river, stained with peat, brawling among the stones, and the streaks of foam that stretched across a coffee-colored pool. Then a few boggy fields ran back into the mist that hung about the hills. A red fire threw a soft glow about the library. The room was somewhat shabby but spacious. Rows of old books in stained bindings, which Foster thought nobody read, faded into the gloom at its other end. It was warm and quiet, and he found it a comfortable retreat.

He had now been a fortnight at the Garth and did not want to leave. Featherstone and his wife obviously wished him to stay; he was grateful for the welcome they had given him, and felt as if he belonged to the place. What Alice thought was not clear, but she treated him with a quiet friendliness that he found singularly pleasant. By and by he began to wonder

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

why Lawrence had not written, particularly as he had brought away a bag of his. Foster had one like it, and as both had its owner's initials stamped outside, he imagined the baggage agent had been deceived by the F when he affixed the check. Lawrence's bag, however, had his name engraved upon the lock.

Foster sat down in a big chair by the fire, and imagined he fell asleep, because it had got nearly dark without his noticing it when the opening of the door roused him. Looking up, he saw Featherstone come in with a letter in his hand. The post did not arrive until the afternoon.

"Ah!" he said, "you have heard from Lawrence."

"No, but the letter is about him," Featherstone replied, and sitting down opposite, was silent for a few moments. His pose was slack and he looked as if he had got a shock.

"I don't see how you can help, but perhaps you had better know how matters are," he resumed and gave the letter to Foster.

It was short, but Foster, who was surprised and disturbed, understood his host's alarm. Daly had written from Hexham, asking, or rather summoning, Featherstone to meet him there next day, although he stated that if this was impossible, he would arrive at the Garth in the evening. There was a threat in the intimation that it would be to Lawrence's advantage if Featherstone saw him soon.

"Well," said Foster dryly, "it looks as if our plot had succeeded better than we thought. We certainly didn't expect the fellow would follow me to England."

Featherstone did not seem to understand, and Foster remembered that, with the object of saving him anx-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

iety, he had said nothing about Daly's having extorted money from Lawrence in Canada. He now explained the situation in as few words as possible.

"But Lawrence ought to have told me!" Featherstone exclaimed.

"I don't know that it would have been of much use. You see, Lawrence meant to put Daly off the track, and if he failed in this, to fight. When I heard of it, I quite agreed."

"But he can't fight," Featherstone objected in a strained voice. "I'd have urged him to do so, if it had been possible. We're not cowards."

"Why is it impossible?"

"Don't you know?" Featherstone asked with some surprise.

"I know my partner's in trouble; that's all."

Featherstone hesitated, as if he wanted to take the other into his confidence, but shrank from doing so. Then he said with forced quietness: "If this rogue knows as much as I suspect, he can get my son arrested."

"On a serious charge? I don't ask what it is."

"It would mean a long imprisonment, to say nothing of the humiliation," Featherstone answered brokenly, and was silent for a minute with the firelight on his tense face. Then he went on with an effort: "I must tell you what I can. Lawrence in a desperate moment injured, I had better call it robbed, a relative of ours. The boy had got into difficulties, but hitherto, although he had been a fool, there was a certain generosity in his rashness. He was very hard pressed—I have seen that since—but I can make no excuse for what he did."

"He made good afterwards," Foster interposed.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"We tried to think so, but it looks as if one can't make good. The punishment for a wrong done, or consented to, must be borne. Well, when I learned the truth I went to the man my son had robbed and offered to repay him. He said he would take no money, for reasons that I ought to grasp, and sent me away afraid, because I knew he was hard and very just."

Featherstone paused, and Foster, who murmured a few words of awkward sympathy, waited until he resumed: "I am a magistrate, pledged to do my duty, but I helped my boy to escape, and the man I was afraid of did nothing, though he knew. After a time, I went to him again, and he gave me to understand that he would not interfere so long as Lawrence stayed away, but must be free to take the proper line if he came back. It's plain now that he knew my son's faults and meant to give him the chance of overcoming them by hard work in Canada. At last, when he was very ill, he sent for me and said I could let Lawrence know he was forgiven."

"Ah!" said Foster, "now I understand what my partner meant."

"This was not long before you came," Featherstone continued. "It was a wonderful relief to know the danger was over, and then you told us how Lawrence had grown out of his folly and become a useful man. Although we longed to see him, our satisfaction was complete. Now this letter comes, and I fear my wife is unable to bear the strain again."

Foster was moved by his distress. Featherstone was proud and honorable, and it must have cost him much to help his son to steal away. Indeed, Foster

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

thought what he had done then would always trouble him, and after all it had proved useless. The worst was that his sensitive uprightness might make him an easy victim of the unscrupulous adventurer. But Foster did not mean him to be victimized. As a rule, he was rather humorous than dramatic, but he got up and stood with his hands clenched.

"This thing touches us both, sir. Lawrence is your son, but he's my friend, and I've got to see him through, which warrants my giving you the best advice I can. Very well, you must show a bold front to Daly; to begin with you can't go to Hexham."

Featherstone gave him a grateful glance. He felt dejected and desperate, but Foster looked comfortingly resolute. At first he had welcomed him for his son's sake, but had come to like him for himself.

"No," he agreed. "I can't go; but that doesn't help us; because he'll come here."

"Yes; he must be met. But do you know how he came to learn about the matter?"

"I don't, but my relative, who was interested in politics and social schemes, had a secretary. I can't remember his name, but this might be the fellow."

"Then it's curious he didn't get on Lawrence's track before. Anyway, he must be met with the bluff direct now."

"How can he be bluffed?" Featherstone asked with a hopeless gesture. "He can have my son arrested if I don't agree to his demands."

"He would first have to tell the police all he knew, and as soon as he did this his hold on you would be gone. Then they'd ask why he'd kept the secret, which would be remarkably hard to answer, although

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he might perhaps take the risk out of malice if he saw you meant to be firm. For all that, you must be firm; you can't buy him off. He'd come back later with a fresh demand. Would your estate stand the strain?"

"My wife and daughter would make any sacrifice for Lawrence's sake."

"The sacrifice would benefit this bloodsucker, which is a different thing," Foster rejoined. "Then, even if you impoverished your family, you'd only put off the reckoning, which would come when the fellow had taken all you'd got. In short, he must be bluffed off now."

He sat down and pondered and there was silence for some minutes. It had got dark and he heard the steady patter of the rain. He knew he had undertaken a difficult task, and felt daunted because he could not see his way. Still, it looked as if the happiness of these charming people, and perhaps his partner's future, depended upon him. If that were so, he must not fail them.

"Well," he said by and by, "my opinion is that Daly thinks Lawrence is here, so to speak within his reach, which must be a strong encouragement. If he learns the truth, he'll, no doubt, go back to Canada and get on his track. I'd like to set him searching up and down Great Britain. There would be something amusing in his wasting his time and money, but at present I don't see how it could be done. However, we have until to-morrow to think of a plan."

Featherstone left him soon afterwards and he stayed in the library until dinner, which was a melancholy function. It was necessary to appear undisturbed while the servants were about, and he envied his

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

friends' fine self-control. These people had courage and when they talked carelessly about things of no importance he did his best to play up. Still, although they sometimes laughed, their amusement sounded forced, there was a curious feeling of tension, and he thought Mrs. Featherstone once or twice showed signs of strain.

When the meal was over he made an excuse for leaving them alone, but some time afterwards Alice came into the hall, where he sat quietly thinking. She was calm, but he saw she had heard about the threatened danger. He got up as she advanced, but she beckoned him to sit down.

"My father has told me about the letter, and I understand you know," she said.

"I wish I knew what ought to be done! It's an awkward matter. To tell the truth, it bothers me."

Alice sat down, shielding her face from the fire with her hand.

"You mean you feel you ought to put it right?"

"Something of the kind," said Foster, forcing a smile. "In a sense, of course, that's presumptuous; but then, you see, I'm in your brother's debt."

"You like to pay your debts," Alice remarked, fixing a level glance on him.

"When I can; but that's not all. I'm not in Lawrence's debt alone," Foster answered with some diffidence. "I came over here, a stranger, ignorant of your ideas and customs, and you made me welcome. Of course, if I had jarred you, you wouldn't have let me know; but there are degrees of hospitality."

Alice smiled. "You needn't labor your excuses for wanting to help us, and you are not a stranger now.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

You must have understood this when my father showed you the letter."

"Thank you," Foster replied with feeling, and was silent for the next few moments. Alice, who was proud and reserved, trusted him, and he must somehow justify her confidence. He had a vague plan in his mind, but it needed working out.

"But we must be practical," she resumed. "Can you help? You must see that there is nobody else who can."

Foster made a sign of agreement, for it was plain that Featherstone could not tell his friends about his trouble.

"I begin to think I might; but although I haven't quite made my plans yet, I see some danger. Would you take a risk for your brother's sake?"

The girl's eyes sparkled, and he saw that she had Lawrence's reckless courage. He had heard his partner laugh when they faced starvation on the frozen trail.

"I would take any risk to save him or punish the blackmailer."

"Very well. I rather think your father will leave things to me, and I have a half-formed plan. There ought to be some humor in the plot, if I can work it out. Daly's plainly convinced that your brother's here, and I don't see why he shouldn't be encouraged to stick to his opinion. In fact, the longer he looks for Lawrence, the more amusing the thing will get. Of course, he may turn spiteful when he finds he has been tricked, but he, no doubt, means to do all the harm he can already. However, you must give me until tomorrow."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Alice got up and when he rose said quietly, but with something in her voice that thrilled him: "I think you like my mother and she knows I meant to talk to you. Lawrence is very dear to her and if he were dragged back into disgrace, now when we thought it was all forgotten and he has made a new start in Canada, I am not sure she could bear the shock. There is nobody else who could help us and we trust to you."

"Then I must try to deserve it," Foster answered with a bow. "But what about your old servant, John? Have you much confidence in him?"

The girl's tense face relaxed. "In a sense, John is one of the family, but if you want his help, you must use some tact and not expect Western frankness. He is remarkably discreet."

Foster opened the door for her, and then went to the gun-room, where he found John, who had driven him from the station when he arrived, pouring out some Rangoon oil. Sitting down carelessly, he lighted a cigarette.

"I understand you were rather fond of my partner, Lawrence Featherstone," he remarked.

"If I may say so, sir, I was. A very likable young gentleman."

"I expect you know he got into trouble."

John looked pained at his bluntness. "I heard something about it, sir. Perhaps Mr. Lawrence was a little wild. It sometimes happens in very good families."

"Just so," said Foster. "Would you be surprised to hear he hadn't got out of that trouble yet?"

"Not surprised exactly; I was afraid of something like it, sir."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Foster knew this was as much as he would admit, but felt that he could trust the man.

"Very well. My partner's in some danger, and with Mr. Featherstone's permission I must try to see him through, but may want your help. I suppose you're willing?"

"Yes, sir. If it's for Mr. Lawrence, you can take it that I am."

"You can drive an automobile pretty well?"

"Not like a professional, sir, but now we don't keep a chauffeur I often drive to the station."

"That's satisfactory. I may want the car to-morrow evening, but nobody else must know about this."

"Very good, sir," said John. "When you're ready you can give me your instructions; they'll go no further."

Then he dipped a rag in the oil and began to rub a gun, and Foster went out, feeling satisfied. It was plain that he could rely upon the old fellow, who he thought was unflinchingly loyal to the Featherstones. After all, it was something to have the respect and affection of one's servant.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

IX

THE FALSE TRAIL

WHEN Foster got up next morning he had made his plan, and spent ten minutes explaining it to John. The old fellow understood his orders, and although he listened with formal deference, the faint twinkle in his eyes showed that he approved. After breakfast, Foster asked Featherstone to come out on the terrace and while they walked about indicated the line he thought it best to take.

Featherstone agreed, but expressed some misgivings. "There may be danger in putting Daly on the track, and after all I'm only delaying a crisis that must be faced."

"The longer it's delayed, the better; something may happen in the meantime," Foster replied. "Then, you see, the track is false. When the fellow finds you obstinate, he'll try to get hold of Lawrence, particularly as he got money from him before; but as he believes Lawrence is in England, he'll have some trouble. The advantage is that he won't be able to bother you while all his time and energy's occupied by following me."

"That is possible," said Featherstone. "But you may find it difficult to get away from the rogue, since you must give him some kind of a clew."

Foster laughed. "I don't mind the difficulty, sir. In fact, I imagine, I'm going to enjoy the chase."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"There's a point that must be thought of. If he goes to the police when he can't find Lawrence, it would be awkward. I should be no better off than I am now."

"It's unlikely. So long as Daly sees the smallest chance of extorting money he'll keep his secret. The reason's obvious."

"Well," said Featherstone, with feeling, "you are doing us a service we can't repay. I frankly don't like the plan, because it can only work at your expense, but it will give us time and I can think of nothing else."

Foster left him with a feeling of pleasant excitement. He was doing his host a favor and this was something, but the adventure appealed to him for other reasons. He had, in Canada, found scope for his energy in profitable work, but there was a reckless vein in him, and it was exhilarating to feel that he could now follow his bent, without being hampered by the necessity for making the undertaking pay. After all, there was not much enjoyment in what one did for money, and he thought he was going to get some amusement out of the game. Still, he did not want to leave the Garth. Alice had treated him with a quiet friendliness he valued and he began to hope he was making some progress in her good opinion. It was, however, comforting to feel that he was going to save her pain, and for the rest of the day he was conscious of a cheerfulness he tried to hide in view of the anxiety the others had to bear.

In the evening John put Lawrence's traveling bag under a small table near the door in the hall and arranged the cloth so that it hung over and covered part of the bag but did not hide it altogether. He

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

took some trouble, and when he was satisfied it looked as if the bag had been carelessly placed where it would be out of sight but ready to be picked up quickly if its owner meant to leave the house in a hurry. Moreover, if anybody thought it worth while to look under the table, the letters L. F. could be distinguished and Lawrence's name was engraved upon the lock. Foster, having learned from the railway guide when Daly would arrive, had arranged that he should be left alone for a minute or two in the hall. If the fellow made good use of the time, so much the better.

After putting on a gray waterproof, leggings, and strong boots, Foster stood at the open door of his room until he heard Daly come in. There was silence for the next minute, and then footsteps echoed along a passage as the visitor was taken to the library, where Featherstone would receive him, and Foster pulled out his watch. As there was no town for some distance and Daly would not expect to be asked to stay, he no doubt intended to return to the station across the moor, where he could catch the last train. Allowing for the long drive, he could not stop long at the Garth; but Foster must give Featherstone time enough. The latter had a rather difficult part, because he must allow Daly to state his terms, and not reject them until the last moment. He was too honest and too proud to dissemble well, but he was not a fool and there was much at stake.

At length, Foster stole quietly down the stairs, and smiled as he remarked that the cloth on the small table had been pulled aside. This had been done cautiously, but a fold that overhung the edge was not in quite its former position. Then he picked up the bag and went

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

out, making noise enough to be heard in the library as he shut the hall door. When he went down the steps he saw the lights of the car that had brought Daly glimmer on the wet gravel of the drive. The back of the car was next him, for it had been turned round ready to start. Then Featherstone's car rolled up quietly, and Foster was getting in when he stopped and felt his heart beat as a slender figure appeared on the terrace. He turned, with his foot on the step, and waited until Alice came up.

"I couldn't let you go without a last word of thanks," she said. "It is splendid! We can't forget."

"I believe I'm going to have an amusing trip," Foster replied. "Then, you see, the Garth is a remarkably nice place to come back to, and there's the pleasure of looking forward to my return. But I'm unselfish enough to hope I won't have that satisfaction all to myself."

Alice smiled, but there was something very friendly in her look and her voice was unusually soft.

"You can always be sure of your welcome and we will miss you when you are away. I very sincerely wish you good luck."

Foster was seldom theatrical, but felt the occasion justified his doing something unusual. John, having already grasped the wheel, had his back to them, and Foster took the girl's hand, which rested on the rail, and kissed it. She made a little abrupt movement, and he thought he saw a tinge of color in her face, but she did not look angry and he felt a strange exultant thrill.

"Make as much noise as you can," he said to John.

The car backed across the rattling gravel, and the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

girl's figure faded into the gloom; then John turned the wheel and they shot forward down the drive. The lights of the other car vanished, there was a splash as they swung into the wet road, and Foster pulled the rug around him when he had struck a match and noted the time.

"You needn't hurry her too much," he said. "If I catch the train by about a minute, it is all I want."

"Very good, sir. If I may remark, the other's a powerful car."

"I don't think they'll try to overtake us until we're near the station," Foster answered with a laugh. "But we can't allow it then."

"No, sir," said John. "I quite understand."

They ran down the valley at a moderate speed, and Foster, looking around when they came to a straight piece of road, was not surprised to see a gleam of light in the distance. He lost it a few moments afterwards, but it flashed out again every now and then, until they plunged into a thick fir wood. They were about half-way to the station, but the light had not got much nearer. He had, however, not expected it to do so, because he thought Daly would be satisfied if he kept his supposititious victim in sight. The danger would arise when they got near the station, and whether they overcame it or not depended on John's coolness and nerve. Foster thought the man would not fail him.

It was a dark night and a damp haze thickened the gloom. Stone walls and ragged thorn bushes leaped up in the glare of the lamps and faded, but one could see nothing outside the bright beam. This was a disadvantage, because Foster could not tell where he was and much depended on his reaching the station with

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

exactly the right time to spare. He was rather anxious about it, since his plan would be spoiled at the start if the train were late. By striking a match in the shelter of the screen, he could see his watch, but it did not seem prudent to distract John's attention often.

By and by the walls vanished and withered heath, glistening with damp, rolled past the car. They were running through a peat moss, with a deep ditch on one side, and climbing an incline, to judge by the heavy throb of the engine. Shallow ruts, filled with water, ran on in the blaze ahead and showers splashed about the wheels. Outside the bright beam the darkness was impenetrable. Foster, however, was conscious of a pleasant thrill. If one looked at the thing in one way, he was plunging into trouble that might have been avoided; but he had been prudent long enough and found a strange satisfaction in being rash. Besides, no matter what difficulties he got into, he would be repaid by the memory of the look Alice had given him. The way the warm color crept into her face had stirred him as nothing else had done. Anyhow, he had started on the adventure and was going to see it through.

After a time, they sped across a bridge, where a burn splashed noisily down a ravine, and John asked: "How long have we got, sir?"

"Ten minutes, if the train's punctual."

"And where's the other car, sir?"

Foster, whose eyes were dazzled by the match he had struck, looked round and saw a misty flash in the dark.

"About half a mile behind, I think."

"Very good, sir. It all depends upon the train now. She's not often late."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The throb of the engine quickened and struck a sharper note, and Foster felt the car leap forward up the hill. Turning in his seat, he watched the flickering gleam behind and saw it grow fainter and then gradually get bright. It looked as if the pursuers had lost sight of the front car's tail lamp and were increasing their speed.

"They're creeping up," he said to John, who did not reply.

Foster thought they had now reached the top of the moor, and as they swung up and down across the heathy undulations a streak of light flashed out in the distance.

"That's the train," he said.

"Yes, sir. You can see her for two or three miles."

Then there was a change in the sound and motion, and Foster knew the engine was running all-out. Showers of small stones and water flew up about the wheels and the wind whipped his face, but the following light was a little nearer when he looked behind. The other car had reached the summit and it would be a close race, but he thought they could keep their lead long enough. Then he looked ahead and saw that the bright streak he had noticed had gone. The fireman had, no doubt, closed the furnace door, but the lights from the carriage windows twinkled faintly across the heath. He could not see the station, but it was obvious that he had not much time to spare.

A few moments later they swept across a low rise and a faint blur of buildings loomed among a cluster of lights. They were now going furiously and he seized the side of the car as they swung round a curve. He felt the near wheels sink as they crushed through

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

spongy sod, and the car tilted, but they got round, and there was a sudden jar when the station lay some fifty yards ahead. Foster jumped out before the car quite stopped.

"Round with her! I'm all right," he said.

"Very good, sir. If I might remark——"

Foster heard nothing more as he ran up the road, carrying the bag. The train was very near; he could hear the roar it made in a shallow cutting, but as he reached the station the sound ceased and the engine rolled past. He took a ticket to Edinburgh, and hurrying across the bridge, picked a compartment that had another occupant and stood at the door, where he could see the steps he had come down. There was nobody on the bridge and he seemed to be the only passenger, but a porter began to drag some packages from the van and leisurely put them on a truck. Foster quivered with impatience as he watched the fellow. If he kept the train another minute, it might be too late. Then he glanced back at the bridge. Nobody came down the steps yet, but the porter had not finished, and one could still catch the train.

He crossed the floor to the opposite window, from which he could see the booking office, but as he losed the strap he felt a jerk. Then the engine panted and the wheels began to turn. He ran back to the other door, but there was only the porter on the platform and the lamps were sliding past. Pulling up the window, he turned to the passenger with a forced smile.

"Sorry if I disturbed you! The man I was looking for hasn't come."

In the meantime, John turned the car round and drove back to the bend. The road was narrow, but

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

there was room for two vehicles to pass, provided that both kept well to the proper side. John, however, took the middle and did not swerve much when a dazzling beam swept round the curve. He blew his horn; there was an answering shriek from an electric hooter, and then a savage shout. John, who was near the left side now, but not so close as he ought to have been, freed the clutch and used the brake, and the other car, missing him by an inch or two, plunged into the wet grass across the road. As he stopped he saw the boggy soil fly up and the lamps sink towards the ground. Jumping off, he found the car had brought up in front of a wall, with the front wheels buried to the axle. The driver and a very angry man in a soft hat were getting out.

"You nearly wrecked us," said the latter. "What d'you mean by fooling about the middle of the road like that?"

"I wasn't quite in the middle, sir. It's an awkward curve and your lights dazzled me."

"Where's the man you brought?"

"I imagine he's caught the train, sir," John answered with imperturbable calm.

He thought the other came near to knocking him down, for he clenched his fist, but after a savage exclamation went back to the car.

"The engine won't move her. How are we going to get her out?" he said.

"I could give you a pull, sir," John replied with respectful gravity. "They keep a rope at the station for shunting. Perhaps you had better send the driver, sir."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

X

THE DROVE ROAD

FOSTER spent the next day lounging about Edinburgh and looking out for Daly, whom he had expected to follow him. He, however, saw nothing of the man, and felt half disappointed, because he missed the excitement of the chase. It was too cold and wet to roam the streets with much enjoyment, there was no good play at the theaters, and he had seen picture palaces in Canada. Moreover, he had led an active life, and having nothing to do soon began to get irksome. It was curious that he had never felt bored at the Garth, even when he scarcely saw Alice during the day, but then the Garth had a peculiar charm. It was possible that Daly had gone back there, and he had been a fool to leave.

He was sitting in the hotel smoking-room next morning when a stranger came up and sat down close by. The man had a quiet, thoughtful air, and lighted his pipe. There was nothing about him to indicate his rank or occupation, and Foster wondered what he wanted.

"I hope you won't object to my asking if you're a Canadian?" he said.

"I don't know if I object or not. Anyhow, I'm English."

"But perhaps you have been in Canada," the stranger remarked politely.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Foster looked hard at him. "I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, but had better hint that you're wasting time if you're a friend of Daly's."

The stranger smiled and Foster saw that he had been incautious. "I don't know the gentleman."

"Then what is your business?"

"If you insist on knowing, I'm connected with the police."

"Well," said Foster, "I'll pay you a compliment by stating that I wouldn't have imagined it; but I don't understand what the police have to do with me."

"It's very possible that they have nothing to do with you, but you can perhaps make that plain. You signed the visitor's book John Foster, which doesn't quite correspond with the letters on your bag."

"Ah!" said Foster, "I begin to understand. No doubt, you noticed Lawrence Featherstone's name on the lock, and the Canadian Pacific label?"

"I did," the other admitted with humorous dryness.

Foster pondered. On the whole, he was glad he had registered in his proper name, though he had been tempted to give Featherstone's, in case Daly made inquiries. He had, however, decided that the latter probably thought they were both in Great Britain and would expect them to keep together. He did not doubt that his visitor belonged to the police, because an impostor would be easily found out.

"Featherstone's my partner and I took his baggage by mistake when we left a small Canadian town," he said, and added after a pause: "I expect the explanation sounds rather lame."

The other smiled, but Foster felt he was being subjected to a very close scrutiny. Although sensible of

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

some annoyance, he felt inclined to like the man, who presently resumed: "You have been in Edinburgh before."

"For a day; I left in the evening and went to Newcastle."

"To Newcastle?" said the other thoughtfully. "Did you stay there?"

"I did not," said Foster, thinking frankness was best. "I went back to a country house in Northumberland that belongs to my partner's father. Lawrence Featherstone and I own a sawmill in Canada, but at present I'm taking a holiday in the Old Country."

He could not tell if the man was satisfied or not, for he asked abruptly: "Who is the Mr. Daly you mentioned?"

"I really don't know. It looks as if he were something of a blackmailer, and I must admit that I was trying to keep out of his way."

The man pondered for a minute, and then getting up gave Foster a card.

"Very well; I don't think I need keep you. You have my address if you should want to communicate with me."

He went out and Foster thought he had not handled the situation with much skill. It was a mistake to mention Daly and perhaps to state that he had been to Newcastle. He thought the man looked interested when he heard this. Then it was curious that he seemed to imagine Foster might want to write to him; but he began to see a possible reason for his being watched. Hulton had, no doubt, sent somebody over to inquire about the stolen bonds, and if the man had discovered anything important, he might have asked

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY