

The Free Press Short Story

THE SWIFT

By HENRY CARLETON

BARRY CONWAY, his crippled leg tucked under his frail body, leaned forward eagerly to hear Edward Curtis' words. "I hear old Cadwell is going to sell that paper mill land," stated Middleville's leading and only merchant as he left the desk which served as post office, and started weighing sugar on the counter between the overalls and the hardware. "I guess the Consolidated must have bought some timber near the mill. If it's that river land, it's enough to last 'em a good many years."

It was on the tip of Barry's tongue to ask for further information, but he remembered that Charles Barnes, sitting on the other side of the big wood stove, was as much interested as himself.

That was at one o'clock of a spring afternoon. Barry sat still, determined to out-stay the man on the other side of the sheet-iron heating plant. At four o'clock Curtis decided it was time to break the ice of their chilly silence. It is doubtful if a country store had ever been quiet for so long a time. "Haven't you two got anything to do?" inquired Curtis. "Not that I object to your wearing out my chairs, but—well, I'm going to close up in a couple of hours, anyway."

Barry Conway grunted. Charles Barnes grunted. The waiting was beginning to be tedious.

"Well, as I was saying," Curtis went on, blandly ignoring the three hours that had elapsed in the conversational interval, "old Cadwell is coming up here next—"

Barry, on his side of the stove, pressed a finger to his lips. Barnes, on the other side, signalled frantically.

Curtis, however, affected not to notice. "As I was saying, old Julius is coming up here next Wednesday. He wrote to Jones, the foreman, to be ready to clean up the camp, and Jones says that means he's going to sell the land. Of course, if they've bought that piece over on the river, they wouldn't need this for a long time."

Barry slid out of his chair and limped to the front of the stove. "Well," he said from the door, "I'll be going now, Good-by," and he went out to his rickety one-horse wagon, between the shafts of which Molly, a third old bay mare, drowsed over the hitching rail. It had been silly to wait, Barry reflected. He might as well have asked Curtis to sit the first place and saved three hours waiting. As it happened, Barnes had an even start.

While the crippled boy was untying Molly's rope from the rail, Barnes stamped down the store steps, climbed into his red roadster, stopped on the starter, and roared away down the road.

Holding himself into the spring seat, Barry flicked the reins over Molly's back and started slowly homeward. It was five miles from Middleville, the only settlement in Sandy Creek township, to his home, and Barry had time to think.

Three miles from Middleville, Barry passed the new frame house occupied by Charles Barnes and James, the Japanese cook. Barnes was the engine of Sandy Creek township. A man of less than twenty-five years, tall and athletic, he had come there the year before with the announced intention of showing the woodmen how to make money. First he had built the house; then he had hired men to cut the timber from the two sections of land he had bought. The experiment had ended abruptly. Barnes found, as any native could have told him, that he could not market his timber, for the only available stream was that running through the holdings of the Consolidated Paper Company.

"A mile further on, Barry crossed Sandy Creek, and on both sides of him, to the north and to the south, stretched the forests owned by the Consolidated Paper Company, of which Julius Cadwell was president. Sandy Creek ran through all of the four sections in this tract, but touched neither the two sections held by Barnes on the west, nor the one section which Barry Conway and his sister, Mildred, had inherited upon the death of their father. As a result, neither Barnes nor the Conways could float their logs down the stream to the river.

It was growing dusk in the woods when Barry reached the little clearing in which his father, coming to the north ten years ago from Chicago, had built their log house. A light could be seen through the window, and smoke rose lazily from the generous chimney. From the open door came the soft voice of his sister, singing. "Yoo-hoo," he called as he turned in.

"Yoo-hoo," came the girl's answer, and she ran out to meet him and to help him put the horse in the stable. "You are late," she said. "I had supper ready an hour ago."

"Never mind," Barry answered her. "I've great news for you. The paper company is going to sell its land."

"Then we can get to the creek?"

"If we can buy the company's holdings. We'll try. Cadwell is coming Wednesday."

"Does Barnes know about it?" Barry nodded.

His sister's face fell and the joyous look in her eyes faded suddenly. "He'll probably get it. We haven't the money to compete with him."

"There's the five thousand from father's insurance."

Mildred shook her head sadly.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking," Harry went on. "You're thinking that my ideas and ideals of lumbering will be a handicap."

"They're my ideals, too," said Mildred. "I can't bear to think of all these splendid forests cut down and the land left barren."

"Charles Barnes probably will offer twice as much for a down payment, and he will be willing to cut enough timber the first year or two to pay the rest. We'll have to come to that, too, if we want to compete with him."

"No, I'd rather we'd lose the chance than sacrifice that. Besides, the race is not always to the swift."

Harry grinned. "I knew you'd say that. But in this case there is more than one race. If we are to get the land, we'll have to meet Cadwell in Kingston when he arrives by train and get an option."

"Very well," said Mildred, quietly. "We'll do that. Perhaps old Molly is not so fast as a sixty horsepower motor, but she'll have to do her best."

Dawn, on Tuesday, found them driving west on the road toward Middleville, where they would strike the road to Kingston. When the two passed there was no sign of life around the home of Charles Barnes, and Harry was encouraged.

"Jensen are too slow," said Barry gruffly.

"The day was uneventful. Noon found the brother and sister twenty miles from home. By night they were only fifteen miles from Kingston. Still, they would have to get an early start if they were to meet the nine-thirty train."

The farmer with whom they stayed was an early riser, though, and by sunrise they were two miles on the road. At eight o'clock they were on a hilltop seven miles from the city and could see the church steeple and the roofs of some of the buildings. Just as they were nearing the outskirts of the city an hour later, Barnes' red roadster came up beside them and stopped.

"Well, I see you got here," said Barnes. "But little good it will do you. I intend to buy that land. See you later." In a moment he was gone.

Old Molly plodded on through the dusty gravel, and a half mile farther on they caught up with Barnes. The red roadster was parked at the roadside and Barnes was repairing a tire. "Good luck to you, but it doesn't matter, really. I had my offer in a month ago, and I doubt if you can better it."

When the train came to a stop, Barry was the first to greet the ruddy, gray-mustached old lumberman who alighted and looked around for a cab. "Alay I see you for a moment?" asked Barry.

"What's this? What's this?" "I am Barry Conway. This is my sister, Mildred. You know our father, I think."

"Sure. If got stuck on that land he bought, and now you want more? Got nerve, though." The manufacturer's face softened into a smile. "What's your offer?" he asked more kindly.

Barry hesitated. "What is it worth?" he asked.

"Fifty thousand," snapped Cadwell, "that's more than twenty dollars an acre."

"I knew it. It's worth it. Anyway, I've been offered that much. A higher bid would take it."

"Barnes" asked Barry. "Yes. Did he tell you?"

"Well, not exactly. But—but—" faltered Barry. "We can't offer more than that. Fifty thousand would be our limit, so if he's offered that, there's no use in our talking any more."

"All right; but I've got to get to Middleville. Have you a car?"

"No. We drove a horse down here."

"You want?" Cadwell stared in amazement. "We've got to talk more about this. I did just the same sort of thing when I was a lad. Guess you'll do, you two."

The older man crowded into the spring seat with them, and they drove to the hotel, arriving just as Charles Barnes drove up.

"Well, I got that tire fixed," called the other, "and then a speed cop caught me, but I'm here. Am I in time?" Cadwell grunted. "Come on in, all of you. We'll talk this thing over." When the little group was seated in a parlor, he asked, "Is fifty thousand your limit, Barnes?"

Barnes nodded.

"Then," said the manufacturer, "it's just a matter of terms."

"I have ten thousand in cash," said Barnes confidently, "and I'll pay the rest in two years. How's that?" He turned triumphantly to Barry.

"We—we can't do anything like that," said the other boy, feeling that already he had lost. "We have only five thousand cash, and we'd wait fifteen years to pay the balance."

Cadwell, looked puzzled. "Fifteen years?" he repeated. "Will it take you that long to take the timber off?" Barry looked at his sister and she nodded. "We won't take the timber off," he replied, "but it will take that long



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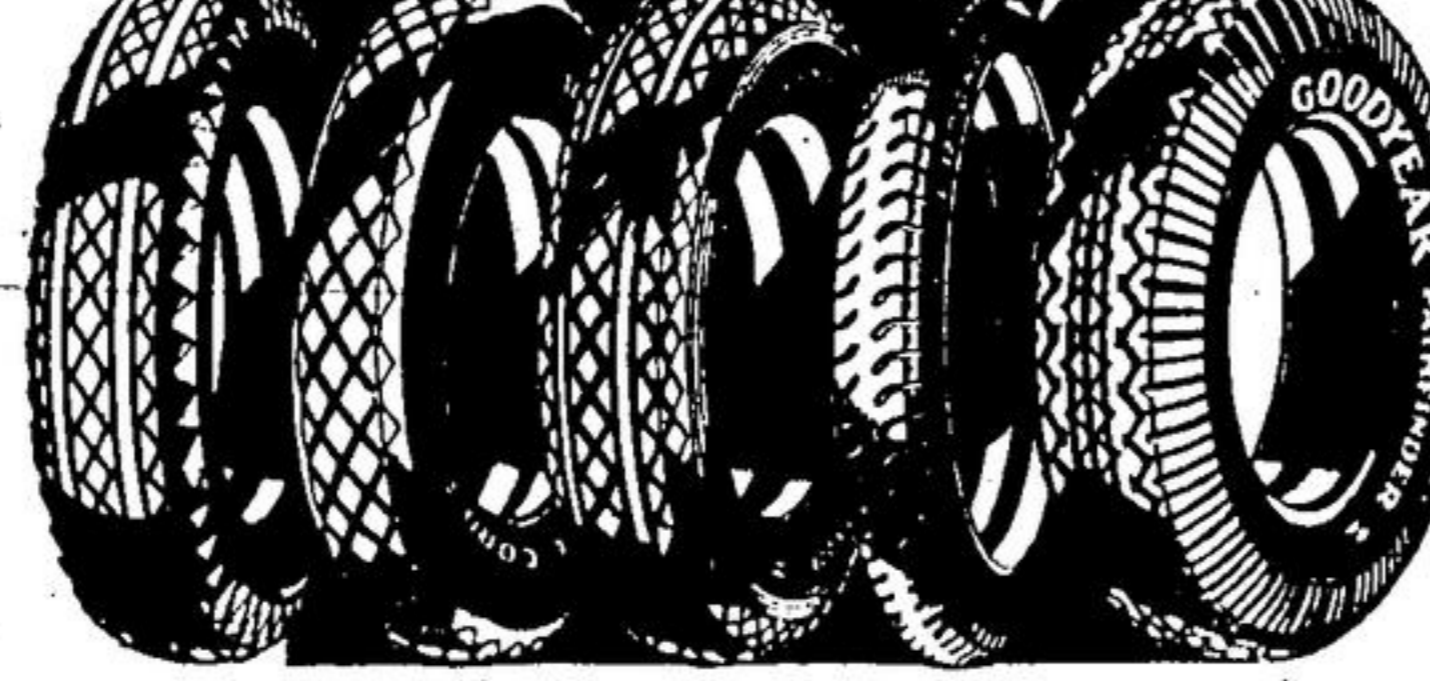
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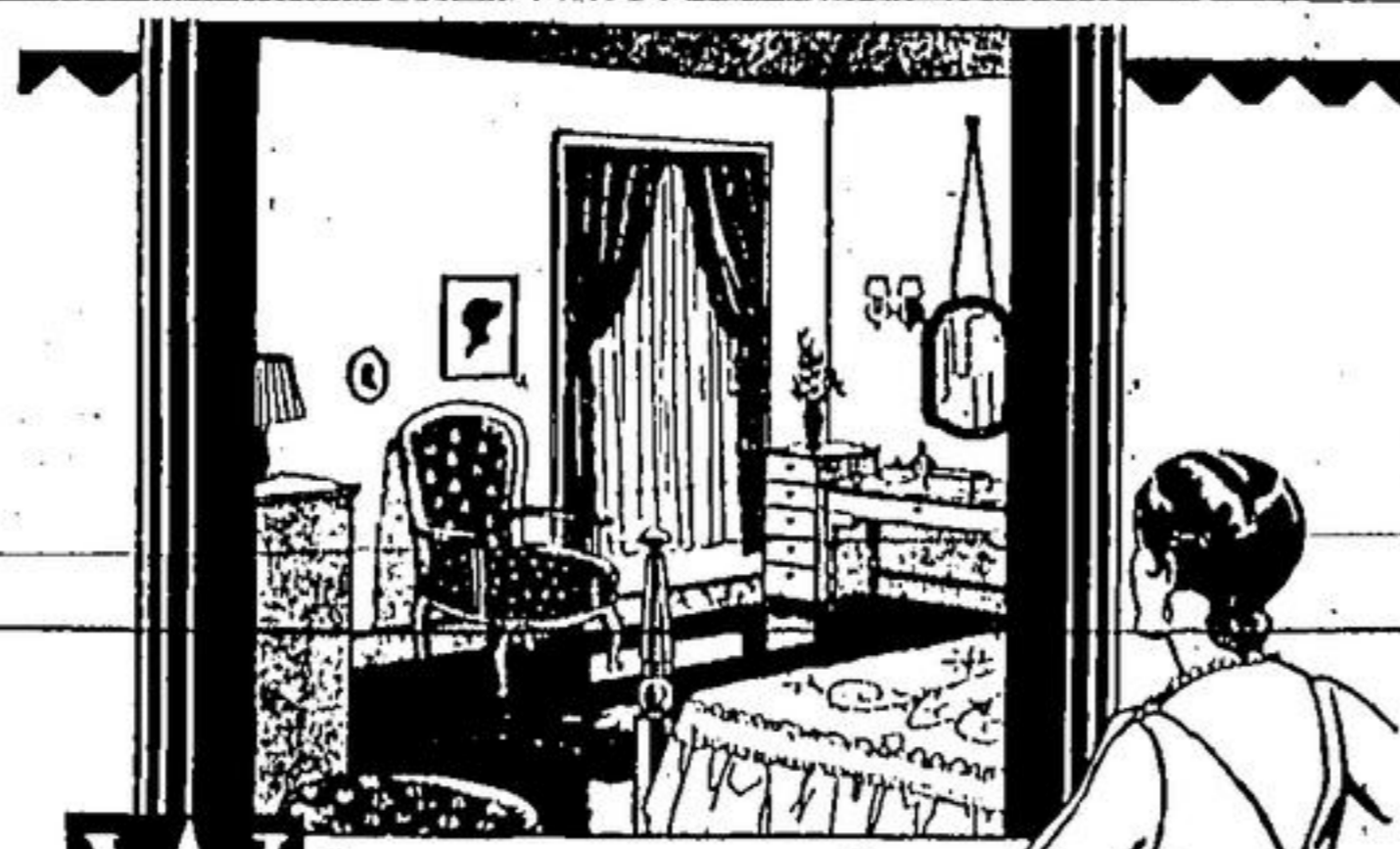


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to cut enough to pay the forty-five thousand dollars balance.

"Reforestation?" asked the lumberman, studying Barry with his keen eyes. "Yes."

"And what was your plan, Barnes?" Barnes hesitated. "Why," he said, "to cut the timber and sell it. I figure I can take enough off to pay you in two years."

The grizzled old paper manufacturer studied the three young people intently. Finally he said to Barry, "Did you ever hear what my views are on reforestation?"

Barry shook his head. "Very well, then," said Cadwell. "At first I thought you were trying to trade on my pet hobby, but now I see you're in earnest. If you'll come over to the bank with me, we'll clear the deal."

Barnes got to his feet in confusion. "But—but—" he spluttered.

"No 'but' about it," said Cadwell, curtly. "You're one of those people who are out to make money in a hurry, no matter who you hurt."

"The race," quoth Mildred solemnly, "is not always to the swift."

HOTBEDS FOR STARTING EARLY PLANTS

The hotbed should be located in a sunny exposure, preferably on the south side of a building. Fresh horse manure is the most satisfactory heating material. This is left in a pile for five days, when it is forked over evenly a layer at a time, shaking it out well and tramping it. This is continued until the desired height is reached, usually two feet, and the pile is made two feet wider and longer than the frame. The frame is placed on the manure and banked on the sides.

The frame is usually made to support 4 sashes, 3 feet by 6 feet in size, or to carry 18 lights of 10 inch by 12 inch glass. The frame is usually of 3-inch plank, 12 inches high at the back and 8 inches at the front. The sloping end pieces are spiked to these, and three cross pieces of 2 inch by 3 inch lumber are spiked from back to front, level with the top of the plank, to carry the sashes. If flats are to be used two inches of chicken are usually placed over the manure to set the flats on. The sashes are set on, and after a few days of rather violent heating will take place, when the bed should be ventilated to allow the gases to escape. When the temperature of the bed falls to about 80 degrees it can be used for seeding, or for the holding of flats. If flats are not used soil to the depth of 4 to 5 inches is used. The hotbed can be used to better advantage with flats, and less soil is needed. The flats can be taken inside to be transplanted and may be shifted to cold frames as desired, and their place taken by other plants requiring more heat. The most convenient flat is 12 inches by 22 inches, and 3 inches deep. The end pieces are of 1/2 inch lumber 12 inches long, and two side and four bottom pieces are of 1/2 inch lumber 22 inches long and 3 inches wide. If properly cared for these flats will last for many years.

Careful watching during bright days is necessary as the space in the hotbed is small and the temperature may quickly run up and cause injury to the plants. Ample ventilation, by shooting the sashes back a few inches, is necessary. With the bottom heat, a low temperature on top is not a disadvantage, although cold winds blowing on the seedlings may cause injury. During very frosty nights a blanket or old carpet should be placed over the frame. This is rarely necessary, however.

The watering should be carefully done, keeping the soil moist and not wet. Excess moisture and high temperature favor the development of damping-off fungi. It is wise to water about noon so that the surface of the soil will dry out before night, and the air in the bed contain less moisture. High temperature and moist air may cause considerable loss.

The cold frame is the same as the frame for a hotbed, but is placed on the ground and has no bottom heat. It is wise after danger from frost is past to place plants in a cold frame for a week or ten days to harden up before setting them to the open.—W. B. Blair, Superintendent, Dominion Experimental Station, Kentville, N. S.

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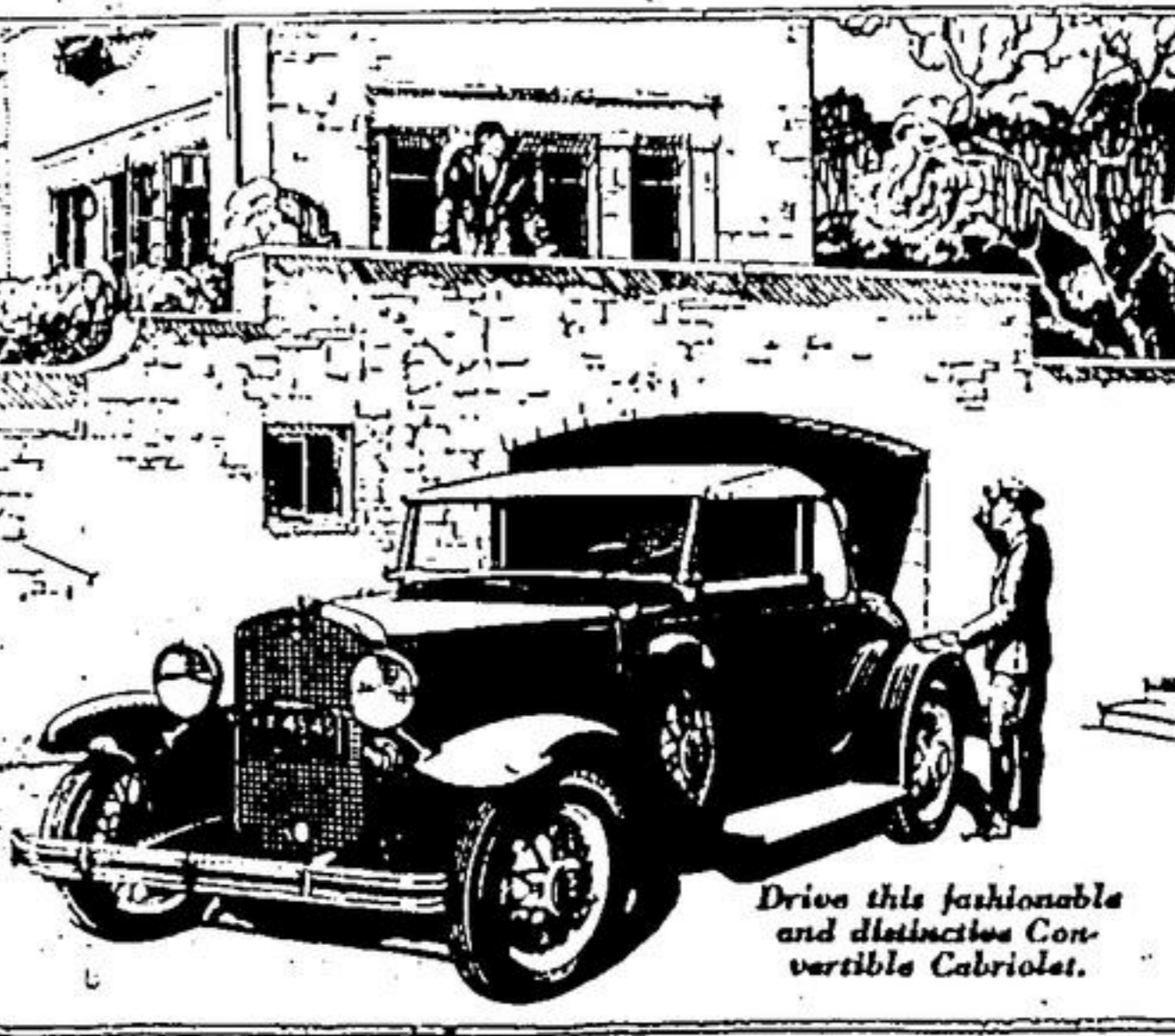
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