

The Free Press Short Story

THE TEN-MILE SWING

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JOHN OLIVER plodded up the solitary tote road, unexpectedly found some one to answer the question which had been trou-

bling him for the last hour. The some one was a girl standing beside her canoe on the brink of the forest stream not far from the woods highway.

"You're headed for the Ten-Mile Swing. And look!" The girl pointed hastily down the road to where a man with a pack on his back was swinging along with a true woodsman stride.

"That's Harlow, just starting off to help cook at the Ten-Mile lumber camps. Catch up with him if you want a reliable guide and a good place to spend the night."

With a hasty word of thanks Oliver obeyed. The woodsman was not easy to overtake, but the pursuer finally succeeded in coming alongside. "Hello," panted Oliver. "The girl back there said you were Harlow, the cook, and would take me along with you to the lumber camps."

"Sure, Sylvia's dead right as usual," returned the man with a laugh. He was a firmly-built, good-natured, looking fellow about Oliver's own age.

John Oliver quickly explained his plight as the two walked along. Unconsciously he began to talk about himself, a favorite subject with him; it must be confessed, it was foolish enough, he felt, to tell this woods cook about his troubles; but it's a relief to talk after brooding all day and this Harlow had something about him, a sort of friendliness, that drew a fellow out.

Oliver told how he had graduated from the State College last month with first honors in forestry and how his plans for the coming year had been spoiled. "Maybe you folks up here in the woods have heard of the big prize that was offered this semester by the State Forestry Department. The prize was to be given for the best booklet on forestry methods written by an undergraduate of any of the four colleges in the state. The prize is a six months' study trip in England and a visit to the great forests of Europe."

"I worked like a horse over my article and I don't mind telling you I expected to get that trip abroad. No student at our college can much more than keep me in sight in my special line and the other three colleges don't offer much in the way of forestry courses. So I never thought of any serious competition from them. If you'll believe it, a fellow at Huntley, the freshwater college upstate, wrote an article that got away with the prize right under my nose."

Harlow shifted the pack on his back and his friendly glance was really troubled as he asked slowly, "Well, what do you know about that? Who was the fellow?"

"His name is Noone and his father is head of this very company you work for. You know, of course, that the Noone Paper Company owns a slice that goes clear across this part of the state. They live up in the northern part where they have a lot of holdings. Naturally that lily-fingered chap would know more or less about forestry, though I don't suppose he ever set foot in the big woods since he was born. But he goes and scoops in that prize when he could start for England any day, or round the world if he wanted to."

"And you can't go abroad so long as you didn't get the prize?"

Oliver shook his head. "No trips for me, nor anything else till I can earn it with my two hands, and that's pretty slow business. I'm so hard up right now that when I heard the Noone Paper Company had opened a students' forestry camp up here in the big woods, I started right off to see if I could get a job as instructor. No such luck, I'm afraid."

The two young men plodded on rather silently down the dark road. Harlow explained that there was a summer logging crew of one hundred men at Ten-Mile camp, a statement which surprised Oliver a little. He had had an idea that lumbering operations were done chiefly in winter. That, Harlow told him, was the way it used to be, but methods were different these days.

Oliver could have uttered a groan of relief when they saw lights gleaming behind the dark bushes. To tell the truth, the last two miles were almost more than his tired legs could manage. He had been going through the woods for hours on what he had thought was a short cut to the forestry camp. He silently hoped that Harlow would not have to cook supper before they could eat.

To his satisfaction it turned out that there was an elder man in charge of the cook shack with plenty of food ready to serve. It seemed that this Harlow was only a sort of assistant, "the cook," Oliver supposed he would be called. The fellow was popular at the camp. Handshakes and shouts of progress through

a huge mound of steaming baked beans, while vigorous slaps on the back spilled his coffee and sent his doughnut spinning.

"You've been a mighty long while getting around, boy," complained the cook as he refilled the coffee mugs. "Didn't I send you word last week that the invalids were howling for you to come to fix up sick folks' messes for 'em? What's more, the radio is on the blink and—"

"Cut it out, Joe," broke in Harlow with his good-natured grin. "You know well enough that I've been helping out at Forty Mile, where they needed me worse than you do. I've brought my tools and I'll see what I can do with the radio after supper. And Sylvia Carrick gave me a pack of stuff from the farm for the sick ones. I didn't wait for the tote team after I heard about them. She brought me out to the tote road in her canoe and I came on shank's mare."

"That girl is always on the job," observed the cook approvingly, "and so are you, Harlow. Nobody needn't say different with me around."

Oliver, following at Harlow's heels when supper was over, soon concluded that the cook was champion handy man of the big woods. From the pack which had been borne on his shoulders came bottles of cream, fresh eggs, and milk with many other dainties. All of them, Harlow explained, were from the big company farm of which Sylvia Carrick's father was madager. With these materials Harlow concocted nourishing dishes for the three men who had been sick and were recovering slowly in a little shack back in the pines. The cook, with his three-times-a-day job of serving food to a hundred men, had been able to do much for the invalids, and it was hard to get proper attendants, or even a doctor, so far into the wilderness.

Harlow repaired the radio, too, and soon had the men listening to a musical programme from the city. He had also brought magazines and a few books which he distributed to eager groups.

"Some of them are great readers," Harlow explained to Oliver, "and those who don't read much are crazy over the magazines just the same. See that Italian chap with his nose in a book? I taught him to read English last summer and now he goes after a scrap of print like a bee after honey. The social service fellows bring reading matter but there is never half enough."

"Social service fellows?" repeated Oliver blankly. "How do workers of that sort happen to get up here?"

"They don't happen; the company hires them and would hire more if it could get them. It means hard work and rough living to come here, and a lot of them aren't equal to it."

All this was so new to Oliver that he pondered a minute; then a thought struck him. "Look here, Harlow, I believe you're a social worker yourself. That's why you don't exactly fit in with my idea of a cook in a lumber camp."

Harlow laughed and shook his head. "No, I'm not a social worker. I'm an honest-to-goodness cook. Don't you try to take away my glory. I went to all kinds of trouble to get it down fine so I could help at the camps in cases like this. Even outdoor workers will be sick sometimes. I'm just a camp helper, a sort of jack-of-all-trades. I like the woods life and being with the men. Come on now, it's high time to turn in."

He was leading Oliver away by a path through the pines when he swung around to say, "If you don't land any job at the forestry camp, I'm pretty sure you can stay here and work for wages."

Oliver nodded but reserved his answer until he had a look at the sleeping quarters. They were satisfactory. A little white tent among the pines welcomed the two boys to a clean bed of boughs.

The next day Oliver began work by helping Harlow with a dozen different jobs about the camp.

He was talking one day with a middle-aged man who had shown some interest in the youngster's ideas about forestry methods. The listener looked up quickly from his work at the mention of reforestation by the persistent planting of spruce. "That was the blunder some of the countries across the water made," he said. "Germany didn't know that spruce robs the soil and if you keep planting it, you'll ruin your chance of a fine forest."

"Whew," said Oliver to himself as he walked away, "how did the old chap know that? It's just the point our professor tried to grind into us last year. When he repeated the man's speech to Harlow, that young fellow merely smiled over the raw egg he was beating up for a patient in the invalid's shack. Men who live and work among trees all their lives are bound to know something about them and Amsten reads every book on forestry that he can get his hands on. Wouldn't it be funny, Oliver, if you could learn enough working for the Noone Paper Company for a year to make up for losing that six months abroad?"

Oliver nodded. The very thought of that trip across the ocean made his heart jump.

Harlow studied his new friend half-wistfully. "I'd have liked mighty well

to have you stay here with me next year," he said.

A few days later Oliver, waving a letter over his head, rushed into the cook shack in search of Harlow. "Come out here, you human egg beater, and look at this!" He thrust the letter under Harlow's eye. "It's from the State Forestry Department to say that 'fellow Noone I told you about—the one who got the prize away from me, you know—can't accept the trip abroad and so it goes to the next best man; that's me. Understand?"

Harlow glanced the letter over and shook hands soberly. "Glad for you, honest I am, old man, but I shall miss you." He put the egg beater back into the bowl and glanced at his watch. "I suppose you'll want to pull out of this right off, so as to go home and get ready to start. Well now, let me tell you the easiest way. Hike back down the tote road to the landing, where you saw the girl and the canoe the day I'll telephone her to meet you and take you to the farm where there will be a spare automobile to get you out to the railroad."

Fifteen minutes later Oliver had said his good-bys and was on his way. He found Sylvia Carrick waiting with her canoe and they had soon made the trip down the winding stream that took them out of the forest to the big farm which was not only a farm but a woods storehouse and headquarters.

The young man who the girl were walking up the driveway to the house when Sylvia said casually, "Mr. Noone will miss you at the camps. I could see by his tone that he has taken a fancy to you, Mr. Oliver."

John Oliver stopped on the path and stared at her. "Mr. Noone?" he gasped. "Who—who is he?"

"Why, Harlow, Harlow Noone, your new friend, son of the head of the company. Goodness, you don't mean to say he managed to keep you from finding that out? It would be just like him to do it, and the men would help him if he said the word. Well, I have put my foot in it!"

Oliver's head was whirling. "You called him Harlow and said he was the cook?"

"I said he was going up to help with the cooking. He always does when he hears that any of the men are sick. I called him Harlow without thinking. He lived here at the farm when we were both children."

"But," stammered Oliver, "I've always heard he lived up in the northern part of the state and I know he is a graduate of Huntley in this year's class. How could I suppose he would be down here and doing such funny jobs?"

Sylvia spoke proudly. "You see, you don't know anything about him. There isn't a foot of his father's holdings in any part of the state that he doesn't visit. He lives in the woods all his spare time, getting acquainted with the men and learning their needs. Some day he will have to take his father's place as head of the company and he wants to know enough to go at it the right way."

"Would you be kind enough," said Oliver, quickly, "to take me right back to the landing where you found me? I've got to see Harlow again."

When Oliver returned to the lumber camp, he found that trouble had arrived in his absence. A forest fire which had been burning quietly for days, away to the northeast, had swept down upon Ten-Mile before a sudden wind. The woods north of the camps were a curtain of fire, which kept billowing outward until it seemed almost to engulf the hundred men who were fighting it. They had grubbed a fire line around the camps and they had one portable fire pump at work. That two-inch stream it threw was doing its best, but it could not be everywhere at once.

Looking about for Harlow, Oliver discovered him out on the top of the dam that spanned the stream. He was working mightily with a bucket and pall to keep the boards wet. The destruction of the dam meant the spilling of a whole summer's work.

The lone worker on the dam acknowledged Oliver's arrival by dousing him with a bucket of water. In that shower of red-hot brands the first need was to keep the clothing from getting in a blaze. Half a dozen times the top of the dam caught fire, and as often, the flames were quenched by the bucket brigade of two. Suddenly Harlow uttered a warning yell. "Look out, here she comes! Down with you, Oliver, into the river!"

The two slid off the top of the dam and covered in its shelter while the curtain of fire swung over their heads. It was past before Oliver could believe it. The fire had jumped the camps, too, and was roaring away into the woods below.

Up on the dam a few minutes later two dripping, sooty, figures faced each other laughing. "I see Sylvia has let the cat out of the bag," began Harlow. "Well, now I can tell you how mean I've been feeling about getting that prize. I jumped at that chance to write something on my favorite subject and I never expected to win. Didn't want to go abroad yet, anyhow. You needn't think I've done you any favor in giving it up."

"I've been thinking," said Oliver, "that if I give it up, too, it will fall to the fellow who got third place—a hard-working chap named Eyer. I've thought of something else I want to do this next year. I'm going to hire out with you right here, if you'll have me."

PERSONAL SERVICE

Neighbor's Boy—Yes, please, Mr. Jones. Pa says could you like him with the 'ol' of a corkcraw."

John—A corkcraw? Certainly! You run along, Bobby—I'll bring it around myself."

SLATS' DIARY BY ROSS PARQUINAR

Friday—When pa seen my report Cord today witch the teacher sent home for him to huk it over he kinda grinned srouly and . . . well Sunny it luks like you must of ben haveling a grate deel of Minus trubble at skool. I gess that was his joak for today.

Saturday—Jake and Blasters and me is all w. emly suchy thing as the 13th mounth. Calender becuz they wood probly be just 1 more mounth of skool and that wood mean 1 more mounthly Report to get bailed out about and us kids has it turf enuff as it is now.

Sunday—ma wanted pa to take she and Ant Emmy and I to the museum up to the city today as she had hard they had sum new Gargolls they was Xibiting to the on lookers and Ant Emmy was anxious to go to becuz she sed she was very very Tired of using

these common mouth Warshes they ad-verse on the Raydock. Munday—well the way New York brags about her self it luks like she wood have had the Decoration of Ind-ependents sined there. I am affry sorry they diddnt sine it there becuz That's what it was sined in the histry lesson & if that anser had of ben rite I woodent of got a 0 for my Grade.

Tuesday—pa says the noose paper where he wrks at has got a grate peace of news for the paper this week. He sed that they have had 4 people wrking on-it and they cant find where they was a single solitary Bridge game in town this week.

Wednesday—well I gess I will get to stay up late tonite and hear a sertin raydeo program witch cums on at 11 a clock. I have tyed both of my shoe strings into Hard note and it will take me a long time to get them untied, even if I shud try.

Thursday—well I dont no weather I am lucky or teacher is giving me a brake. I question she ast was please Define Allamony and I sed. Give up, and she sed Yes thats rite.

An efficacious household remedy—Douglas' Erythran Liniment. Brings immediate relief to lame back and muscular rheumatism. Also relieves inflammation, burns, sores, corns and warts.

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