

# HAWK in the WIND

By  
**Helen Topping Miller**

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## CHAPTER XIV

The men at the mill had worked all night, unloading the wrecked car, repairing the track, loading again. Disregarding the raw wind that blew through the valley, the occasional spit of snow, Branford Wills had worked with them, observing and listening, making himself as helpful and unobtrusive as possible. He did not deceive himself. Something was wrong at the mill. There was much shouting and rough talk, but there was also a secretiveness, a watchfulness. It appeared to Wills that among the older hands there was also an uneasy discomfort.

They were uncertain of each other. And a few had an air of insolence, a tendency to swagger. But Wills could not discover that any definite animosity was directed toward him. They were curt and one or two were a bit scornful of his ability in matters of strength or skill, but there were no covert sneers to be detected, no goading or insults. He was a tenderfoot and an outsider and they let him know it, but that was all.

It was growing day when he returned to his room at the Clark cottage to snatch a few hours of sleep. His legs were a trifle shaky, his throat felt raw, but he was grimly resolute. Some undercurrent was working in the Morgan mill and he intended to know what it was and what force impelled it. He had a double motive. He was indebted to Virgie and if he could solve this riddle of sabotage and put an end to it, it was little enough to do to repay that debt. And there was Marian.

Somehow he had to repair his blundering, make himself a man again in her eyes. He slept uneasily, awakened when the morning whistle blew.

Ada Clark's mother protested as he set out again, sheepskin collar shrugged high around his ears.

"You'll be down again and worse than ever if you don't take better care of yourself," she declared.

But he gave her a one-sided grin and tramped off, his two sandwiches in his coat-pocket.

At the mill office he found Virgie already at her desk, with Lucy and Daniels standing about, their faces worried.

"Come along in," Virgie ordered as he opened the door. "You'll have to know about this. Seven men quit this morning."

"The Spains—and the two Andersons," Lucy added. "Billy Mount and his boy and Lucius." Her eyes were sorrowful and accusing. Her manner said louder than words, "This is your fault," Daniels was fiddling nervously with the bunch of keys in his fingers. For an instant Branford Wills got the impression that Daniels was evading, that there was something defensive in his manner, but he put that aside. They were all worried, Virgie most of all.

"That West Virginia stuff has to go through," she said. "We'll have to have somebody to tend the decker." For twenty years Billy Mount had tended the great machines, taken a fierce pride in the texture of the pulp that rolled through the presses.

"Could I do it?" Wills volunteered. "I have ordinary intelligence. I think I could do what Billy Mount could do."

"I need you outside," Virgie said. "With the Andersons gone we'll need somebody to get stuff in."

"But—why should those fellows quit?" Wills asked. "There's no other place for them in town. You treated them well—"

"They probably had reasons—fairly good reasons," Daniels was a trifle dry.

"Look here—if I'm in any way responsible for this—" Wills began vigorously, but Virgie waved a hand.

"Sit down—and keep your head on and your shirt-tail in! I'm responsible for this. Wallace Withers wants to buy this mill. Somehow or other he's working against me. How, I don't know yet. But I will know. It's a fight. Wallace says he'll put me out of business if I don't sell. Maybe he will—but he'll have a merry little time doing it. If you people want to stick with me—"

"Of course we'll stick," said Lucy eagerly.

"It might," Stanley Daniels suggested, "be possible to compromise."

Virgie blazed at him. "Compromise? Do I look like a woman who would compromise?"

"Business," Daniels defended, "is built on compromises. It has to be. Individualism cannot always survive."

"And so you think," Virgie cut back, "that I ought not to fight? That I ought to let Wallace Withers

threaten to cut me out and yet lift a hand? Is that what you think?"

"I think you are fighting a definite trend, Mrs. Morgan. Daniels grew a trifle oratorical. You're living in an era which will see the death of the small business, of individual enterprise—personal control. There is an inevitability in it that you do not recognize. It may mean defeat for you and I think you are the sort of person who would suffer pretty badly in defeat."

"So you're thinking about my feelings, are you? Well, these are my feelings, in case any of you are in the dark. I had rather see the mill every brick, every wheel, every bolt in it—than to haggle with Wallace Withers—or surrender if that's crazy, I'm crazy. Now get to work, all of you! Lucy get Champion on the wire and tell 'em I want seven hands for a few days. Decker men and outside hands. They've got part-time people always on hand they can spare. We won't grind today, we'll clean the mill. Come along, you boys."

She was fiercely executive all day. The atmosphere of the mill, already tense, grew galvanic as she cracked the whip of her indomitable will. Lucy Fields went about breathing excitedly but Wills, helping old Frank Emmet to clean and oil the drum-barkers and the toothy cables that grinded the green wood in for grinding, kept a thoughtful watch.

Even granting that this man Withers, who coveted the mill had, somehow, been able to engineer the various calamities that had descended on the plant in the past few days, there remained to be discovered the means by which he had worked.



"So you're thinking about my feelings, are you?"

Wills was not satisfied. He meant to do some sleuthing on his own.

He waited till the whistle blew at night and Lucy had put on her shabby green coat and gone out, then went to the office where Virgie sat studying a map on her desk. Outside murky lights burned in the yard and steam drifted down to lie in thin, cold wreaths along the ground.

Virgie looked up at him, and it appeared to Branford Wills that there was something deeper than weariness in her strong face. She looked a little stricken, as though something had been taken away from her that could not be returned.

She showed him the map. "This is what worries me," she said, "this land that belonged to Tom Pruitt. This is what Withers is counting on—this timber acreage. He and Payne and those other fellows—the fellow Tom shot—have got a court order allowing them to cut timber enough to satisfy their claims. And you know what that means. The court can't go up there and scale up stuff. They'll strip it and with what timber is standing there they can set up a mill and run it for three or four years. Long enough to worry me, anyway."

"And you're convinced that Withers is at the bottom of all your troubles?"

"What else can I think? He came to my house last night and made threats. Maybe they're just using him to handle local contracts and connections that outsiders couldn't put over. Mountain people are peculiar. They're suspicious of a stranger but a home-talent crook can do quite a lot with 'em. I reckon Wallace thinks he's in."

"Let me see that map again," Wills said. He had been a maker of maps, Virgie remembered. He anchored the colored sheet with an ink-bottle and a slide rule and studied it.

"I filed an injunction to keep them off this morning," Virgie said. "Filed it for Tom, of course. It may not work. They may have the judge sewed up. Tom does what I tell him usually—but I don't always see there quite soon enough. I went over at daybreak—but I should have done yesterday."

"They'd been there ahead of you? But surely he wouldn't listen to them?"

"I don't know. It's worrying me." She breathed wearily, like a spent runner. "They sent a lawyer to scare Tom, late yesterday. They told him that Cragg was filing suit against him for fifty thousand dollars damages. Perhaps they can do it, in law—I haven't looked into that. That's not the point. They gave him a good scare—and then they offered to settle. So he signed some-

thing—and he doesn't know what he signed."

"So everything you have done for him may be lost? Doesn't he understand that you're looking out for his interest?"

"You couldn't understand a mountain man, I'm afraid. Up to a certain point they'll listen. Beyond that—they're rampant individualists, as young Daniels says. Tom has always been a helpless old body—David looked after him. But no mountain man believes that a woman could know more than he does."

"Is there a blue-print of Pruitt's tract anywhere?"

"It's here in the safe. Do you want it?"

"I want it—and I want to see it for? Even if I keep those men out of it, it will go back to Tom. I'll never timber it."

"I think," Wills said, "that I was once lost in that region. The outline on this map is somehow familiar. It gives me an idea I'd rather not talk about it till I'm sure of it."

"Most young chaps," Virgie was dry, "want to talk first and do something about it afterward."

At home that night Virgie stretched her slippery feet to the fire and faced her daughter resolutely.

"I said you were going!" she stated grimly. "Who else can I trust? This is more important than your silly personal prejudices."

Marian stood stormily, staring out a dark window.

"How do you know it is important? Because he says so? Oh, Mother—can't you see that all this Wallace Withers business is just a coincidence? Wallace Withers heard about the trouble in the mill and he thought it was a good time to jump in and try to bluff and scare you. The Spains and the Andersons and Billy didn't leave because of Wallace Withers—I'll never believe that. They didn't want to work under Wills and they resented his Sherlocking around the mill. You won't believe me—but Lucy thinks the same as I—and so does Stanley Daniels."

"So—you've all got your heads together and decided that I'm a senile old fool, eh?"

"Mother, I didn't say that. Please—"

"I don't ask much from you. I'm not asking now. I'm telling you. You'd better start at seven. Andrew will have the car ready."

Marian sighed. "I'm not trying to be tiresome, Mother. I want to help. If only you would see—"

"I've seen enough and heard enough. I'm tired. I've worked fourteen hours today and had trouble enough. Tomorrow you'll drive the car over to Hazel Fork—and I want to hear no more about it."

Marian set her chin. "Did it ever occur to you, Mother, that I might have something to say about the management of the mill? I'm a stockholder. I own as much stock as you. My father left it to me."

"I suppose," drawled Virgie, scornfully, "you'd like to have all the pulp dyed lavender!"

"There's this about it, Mother. If Tom voted with me—you wouldn't be keeping Branford Wills on to ruin our mill!"

Virgie stood tall. Her face had turned stony and white as death.

"And I suppose if I don't run things to suit you, you'll sell the mill to Wallace Withers—you and Tom?"

"I really think I have some rights, Mother."

"You have. It will be a relief to me, too, if you'll exercise them. You might vote to discharge me and hire somebody else to get out pulp. That would be a help. I'm worn to the bone and I could use some rest. You could also figure out where the pay-rolls are coming from and how that car of chemicals, with bill of lading attached, is going to be unloaded and paid for. I'd like a day in bed—and I could go to the movies. I've only seen a couple of shows since David died. Maybe I'll join the Little Theatre. Could they use a fat old woman with a more or less bass voice and broken-down arches?"

"Mother—you know I never meant—"

"No—you didn't mean that kind of authority. None of you ever do—the young, brash things who want to run the world! You want to give orders in an arrogant tone—but when it comes to getting out in the frosty woods at five o'clock in the morning or up on a hot slope in the middle of May, when there's a hundred acres of fire rolling down into your timber—no, you never mean things like that. You haven't linked up yet the old fundamental that along with authority goes a devilish lot of bone-grinding work. But maybe you're going to discard that, with all the rest of the old-fashioned fundamentals?"

Marian looked small and wan.

"I'm sorry, Mother. I'll go tomorrow. I'll be ready at seven. But—may I go to the Little Theatre meeting now?"

"Baby—" Virgie faltered. She was impatient no more. She was a tired woman, with whitening temples. "If I have to fight you, too—"

Marian gave a little, strangled sob. "I'm horrible," she choked, "to talk like that to you—"

They clasped each other tight. And over her child's shoulder Virgie looked up at the pictured face of David Morgan, and her deep courage returned.

## "As We See It"

By J. A. Strang

DURING THE last couple of months we have heard a good deal about sending city children to the country for a couple of weeks. It looks like a good idea. Not only will these children gain in health but they will also learn how the different things are accomplished in the country. Listen to almost any quiz program and you will likely realize how little many city folk know about the everyday things that are so familiar to anyone brought up in the country. However, the summer holidays are almost over and the Canadian National Exhibition is next on the program. If we who live outside the cities, owned a broadcasting station this might be a good time to sponsor a movement to have the city folk entertain the country children for a couple of weeks in order to allow them to attend the Exhibition. Country children need a change just as city children do and they could also learn a great deal about city life in a couple of weeks. Often these city children that are sent to the country obtain permission to stay an extra two weeks and even then dislike going back to town. We wonder if the country children would feel the same way about the situation should they be entertained for the same length of time by the city folk. We imagine that they might be glad when their two weeks were up, and they could get back home, away from the noise and rush of city life. They might then appreciate more their own peace and quietness not to mention the abundance of fresh air that is every day available for the country youngster.

SKUNKS SEEM to be plentiful this summer. Two full grown ones, had the nerve to march across the garden the other day just a few feet behind us as we were cultivating. Of course we didn't bother to dispute their right to do so. In a letter from Sundridge, Ontario, received this week they report black bear very plentiful in that locality. The writer mentioned that eight had been seen in his district. The scarcity of blueberries may have had something to do with the bears coming out more in the open. Unless well armed we don't suppose anyone would attempt to dispute a black bear's action anymore than we would the action of these skunks. By the way one of these skunks has gone to the happy hunting ground with some lead in his carcass. When the wind is in the right direction we can say that the skunk is gone—but not forgotten.

IN MR. McILVRAV'S "News Parade Column" in last week's Herald he mentioned the coming local Fall Fair. There are many simple innovations that are easily included that all help to pep up the fall fair. We haven't attended the local fair as yet and are not familiar with any special attractions that may have been introduced. One novelty that we thought was both popular and amusing was a race for pairs of boys 12 years of age and under with a home-made wagon. During the race one boy rode the wagon while the other boy shoved it for half the distance, they then turned around, changed places and the first pair back home got the money. The race was on bare ground rather than on pavement.

Another innovation that we introduced one year created not a little interest. We donated a three-storey wedding cake to the local I.O.O.F. and suggested to them that they raffie it off at the fair. They sold tickets on it at 10c or 3 for 25c and it went over big. Incidentally it was a good advertisement for us. We had hoped that some old bachelor would win the cake, however, it was a middle aged widow that drew the lucky ticket.

STILL HAVING the fall fair in mind, we always gave a special prize for the best essay on some named subject open to boys and girls 14 years of age and under. We recall one girl in particular winning the prize for three years in succession then the following year when she would be 15, winning a special prize sponsored by the Central Ontario Bus Lines on the subject "My Home Town." The prize for this essay was \$50.00 in cash and you can imagine how pleased that young lady was over that prize. Come to think of it we were rather proud of that young lady ourselves. Incidentally she is now

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WE ARE CONSTANTLY being reminded to save gas and oil these days. While going through the huge Chippawa power plant at Queenston our guide asked us what we thought this particular machine was in the corner. We told him that we thought it was a cream separator. Curiously enough that is just what it was and we wondered what it would be doing down in that huge building among all those large machines. He told us that they used it to clean the used oil. Instead of the machine throwing the cream to the outer spout it threw the impurities that would be in the used oil, enabling them to use it over and over again. He told us how much money this machine saved them per year. We aren't very well up in oil information, however, we wondered if this same idea couldn't be applied to used oil from our crank case, especially in these war days.

Another FULL PAGE of photographs showing ALL the famous Dionne Quintuplet Family will be found in the August 24 issue of The Detroit Sunday Times. See Mama and Papa Dionne as they look today! Compare the resemblances of the Quints and their numerous brothers and sisters! You need these photos for your Quintuplet Scrapbook! Be sure to get The Detroit Sunday Times this week and every week.

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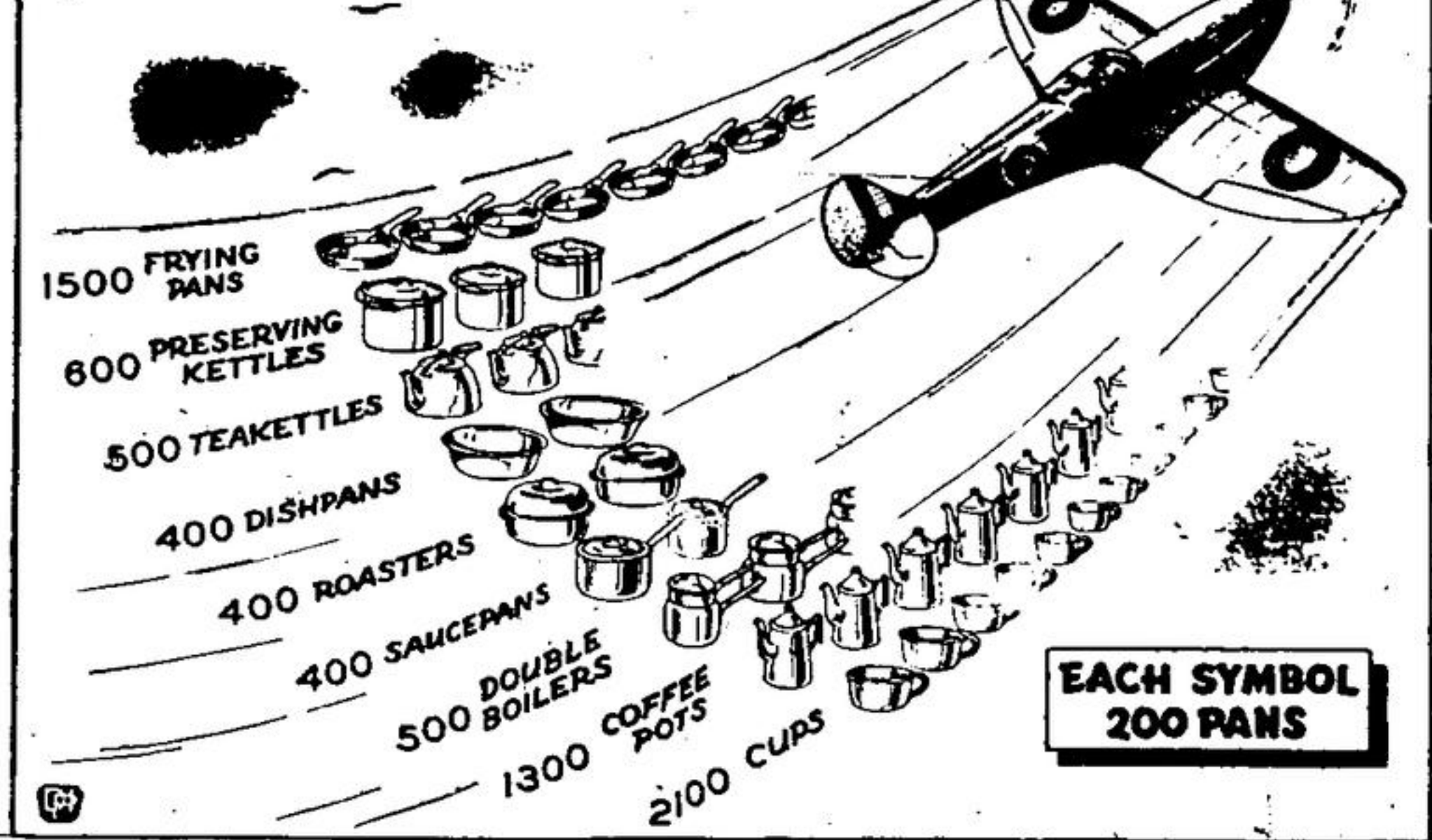
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