

HAWK in the WIND

By
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CHAPTER IV

The lawyer who came at noon, with Wallace Withers, was a suave stranger.

He was, so he stated, from Baltimore. He represented the Messrs. Payne, Cragg, and Hooper.

"And Withers," added Virgie. "I am not connected with the local enterprises of my clients, Mrs. Morgan. I am retained to prosecute a suit for damages for Mr. Cragg against your—superintendent, I believe—Mr. Thomas Pruitt."

"You didn't overlook anything, did you?" drawled Virgie.

"It is the function of an efficient attorney to overlook nothing. Very wisely, we think, Mr. Pruitt accepted our advice—which was to settle out of court. With more serious action pending it would be unfortunate for him to be involved also in civil matters, to which he could not give his attention. So he decided to make suitable settlement with my client, Mr. Cragg, and I have here," she unfolded a paper—"an order upon you, Mrs. Morgan, to deliver to me fifty shares of stock in the



"You tricked him—a helpless old man—in prison!"

Morgan mill—the property of Mr. Pruitt."

Virgie sprang up. "It's a trick! Tom wouldn't sign away his stock in the mill. He didn't know what he was signing. He told me so. You tricked him—a helpless old man—in prison!"

"I assure you, Mrs. Morgan, that every document was carefully read to Mr. Pruitt."

"What of it? He wouldn't understand. He was scared and numb—you can scare Tom to death with a legal paper. You tricked him! He would have killed all of you before he'd give up his stock in this mill!"

"I can believe that. Mr. Pruitt's mania for homicide must be embarrassing to you. But—we do not trick people, Mrs. Morgan. We find it unnecessary." The oily voice ran like horrid fingers over her. "So, if you will read this order, please? You will notice that you are directed by Mr. Pruitt, as the custodian of his stocks and property, to deliver to me fifty shares of Morgan mill stock, to the amount of fifty thousand dollars par value."

"I won't deliver it. I'll fight you through every court in this country first!"

"Of course, you understand that that attitude is quite futile. We can compel you to deliver the stock, Mrs. Morgan. We can bring an officer here with a writ—"

"Bring a dozen officers—if you can find one who'll serve a writ against me!"

"You exaggerate your importance and your invulnerability, I fear. The stock will be taken to Mr. Pruitt for signature to transfer—"

"Transfer to whom?"

"Mr. Withers has contracted to purchase it, understand."

"I thought so."

"Look here, Virgie, you're wasting your breath." Wallace put in. "This is all settled. You can't do a thing about it."

"I'll see about that."

"I reckon we'll have to fetch a constable." Wallace mustered pious patience with an obdurate woman. "She's hard-headed. Talk won't be any use. She keeps it in that safe—"

"How do you know where I keep it?" Virgie flashed at him. "I suppose you've got some more spies on my pay-roll? Your Mr. Daniels has done pretty well. I suppose you set those fires yourself?"

"You are being very unreasonable, Mrs. Morgan," soothed the lawyer. "We are being very lenient with Mr. Pruitt. My client has been permanently injured without justification or excuse—"

"You might as well hush," declared Withers patiently. "Come along and we'll fetch somebody she will listen to."

The door banged behind them. Virgie stood still in the middle of the room, still shaking with white rage.

"The thieves!" she muttered.

They would be back presently with some county constable, who would turn red when she looked at him, but who would drag from an unsavory pocket a paper with the seal of a magistrate upon it, and compel her to open the safe.

A sudden thought came to her. Swiftly she bent and twisted the combination of the safe. The heavy door moved open slowly, and she flung it back and unlocked the inner compartment. Flat, taped bundles of paper slid out into her hand. She sat on the floor, turning them over rapidly. All the papers on the Hazel Fork property—she knew those well, she had had them out the day before with Wills. Her own stock in the mill tied in an envelope—she counted the shares. All there. But—that was all!

Twice she turned over the entire contents of the compartment. Then in a panic flurry she pulled everything out—old ledgers, old bills, contracts, and leases. Papers that David had filed, papers she herself had put carefully away; tax receipts, deeds to timber lands, insurance policies, she unfolded each, shook it, opened and shook every book, searched frantically.

Tom's stock—and Marian's—was gone!

But—how—who—

No one but Lucy knew the combination. Lucy and Tom. And Tom was locked in jail.

She was still sitting there, shaking out papers, staring at the empty spaces in the safe when the door opened. She started, then saw that it was Marian who stood there.

"Mother! What has happened?" Marian exclaimed.

Virgie tied a tape with cold fingers. "We've been robbed," she said.

A lawyer came—Wallace was with him. They tricked Tom into signing away his stock last night. They're coming back with an officer to make me give it up. And—it isn't here—

It's gone. And your stock—the stock our father left for you—is gone, too!"

Marian closed the door, slid the bolt.

"Mother—get up—and sit down here. You're white as a sheet. You're shaking all over."

"I can't sit down. They'll be here any minute. They won't believe me. Some fool took it. I suppose—some of the sneaks who've been working for Wallace. It couldn't be Lucy—"

"Oh, no—not Lucy—"

"She knows enough to know that the stock's useless until it's signed over. But—nobody else knew the combination."

"Tom knew it. And—I know it."

"You?"

"Tom wrote it down for me. Mother—sit here and let me bring you some cold water. The stock isn't gone, Mother. It's safe. I took it."

Virgie sank limply into the old chair that had been David's.

"You took it?"

"I took it over to the court-house. To be registered. Tom signed it over to me—a week ago. It's mine. He couldn't give it to anyone else—because he has already signed it over to me. He was going to leave it to me—in his will. He told me so."

And I saw the will. He left it over with Lucy that day—when he went up to Hazel Fork. Tom wanted me to have it. So—the last time I went to the jail, he was worrying about it. And—I wanted that stock over—I'm ashamed to tell you any I wanted it. I wanted to control the mill. I wanted to make you fire Branford Wills—and now—I'm ashamed! But—the stock is safe. They can't touch it."

Virgie's hands fell limply. "Pick up that mess," she muttered, sagging back in her chair. "I give up."

"Here—drink this—"

"I'm all right. It's just—too much has been happening behind my back. Even you—"

"I told you I was ashamed. But anyway, we saved Tom's stock. Maybe we can beat them yet."

Virgie looked numbly at her child. David's child—with her finely cut profile, her dark eyes and resolute mouth. Gallant and splendid—and indomitable. Like David.

"So—you own the mill!" she said.

"Are you angry, Mother?"

"I don't know. It was a shrewd thing to do. Your father would have thought of it. I—seem not to think of things—soon enough."

"You're wonderful, Mother. I don't want to run the mill. I couldn't. I'm not wise enough or strong enough."

"I seem not to be wise, either. Lock the safe, Baby—those men will be back."

"They're coming now. It looks like an army."

No one noticed Lucy, coming in at the back door, because so many people were entering by the front way. Lucy's eyes were blazing and a little wild. Her chin had a dogged angle, and scarlet coins burned in her cheeks. She looked younger, brighter, aglow with a sort of fantastic triumph, almost defiant. She pulled out her chair, then waited as the odd procession filed in.

Mr. Payne, the lawyer introduced the newcomers, and Mr. Hooper. And this officer, I suppose,

you know?"

The shuffling, sensible, looking awkward and on fire with curiosity jerked at his hat and said, "Howdy, Mrs. Morgan."

"Hello, Ed," greeted Virgie. "You travel in poor company."

"This here is somethin' I got to do," fumbled Ed. "I ain't so set on it—but you know how things is—"

"Go ahead," ordered Virgie, curtly.

Ed rummaged out his paper, Wallace Withers pulled out his heavy old watch and ran his thumb over the crystal, thudded it back again. Lucy's eyes were big and anxious. Only Marian stood calm, smiling a one-sided smile.

"I got an order here," began Ed, "for some stock—belongs to Tom Pruitt."

"Go on and serve the paper," snapped Withers. "I got to get home. It's most time to milk."

"Don't bother, Ed," Virgie said. "I know what's in that paper. It won't do you any good to read it to me. These gentlemen—and their attorney—are very astute. They know exactly what they are doing. You investigated the ownership of this stock, I suppose, gentlemen?"

"Certainly!" snapped the man Payne.

"You're just stalling, Virgie—and it won't do you a bit of good."

"I'm not trying to do myself any good, Wallace. I'm doing you good. You got that order by fraud—and I can prove it. That might not sound so well in court—"

"We got it square—Pruitt knew what he was doing. He knew he was signing away his stock—he had to save himself."

"Sounds funny," Virgie's voice drawled. "I've known Tom a long time. He was a shrewd old mountain man. He knew what he was doing most of the time—except when he lost his head because he was being robbed. It's hard to believe he'd sign an order to deliver that stock to you—yesterday, that was?—when he had already transferred it—a week ago!"

"I don't believe it!" barked Withers.

"The transfer is recorded. You can see the record at the court-house. That will be about all today, gentlemen—" Virgie drew herself up superbly.

"No—not quite all," said a quiet voice from the door.

Branford Wills stood there, lean and calm and tall, a folded paper in his hand.

"Mr. Payne, I assume?" he said.

"And Mr. Hooper? I have just come from Hazel Fork, gentlemen—"

The lawyer interrupted. "This is another matter, sir. We do not know you."

"I am employed by Mrs. Morgan. My name is Wills—formerly with the National Park Commission. I have been investigating the area on Hazel Fork—upon which I understand you gentlemen, all of you, intend beginning some extensive operations in lumber and pulp wood?"

"What's your business?" demanded Withers. "If you've been interfering up there, Virgie Morgan—"

"Mrs. Morgan has not been interfering," Wills said. "Mrs. Morgan knows nothing about this. I happen to be a government cartographer, formerly, as I have said, with the Park Commission. I made the road maps for that area. There has been, evidently, some confusion and delay in surveys and condemnation suits—owing to the confused condition of the title to the land—a condition you gentlemen were very quick to take advantage of, but—I would not advise you to begin timbering operations on that land, gentlemen—now or ever!"

"You're very smart, young fellow," snapped the man Hooper, "but I happen to have a court order that allows me to timber that area to satisfy my claims and those of my associates. Do you think I'd be fool enough to invest money in a proposition like that if I didn't know what I was doing?"

"Unfortunately," Wills smiled a slow, dry smile, "I do not know what sort of a fool you are, Mr. Hooper. I am merely advising you for your own good. I have sent to Washington for plats and surveys for confirmation of what I know to be the truth—they should arrive by Monday. But—I happen to know that I am right. I went over the land today to be sure. I do not think you will cut any timber on the land formerly belonging to Tom Pruitt."

"What are you crashing in here for, anyway?" demanded Wallace Withers, angrily. "And what are you getting at, anyhow?"

"I'm advising you not to cut timber on Hazel Fork, Mr. Withers—nor anywhere else. Of course, I can't prevent you—but I can bring it to the attention of people who can prevent you—That land up there, gentlemen, belongs to the people of the United States."

"You're a meddling young fool!" stormed Withers. "What do you know about it?"

"Perhaps," suggested the lawyer uneasily, "it might be well to look into this matter, gentlemen."

"We'll look into it. And we'll look into that stock transaction, too. It has a fishy sound to me."

"By all means investigate thoroughly. You'll find—as I found, gentlemen—that that area of land up there is included in the boundaries of the National Park. Probably the condemnation suits to establish ownership are lost somewhere in the maze of other lawsuits and claims."

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GENERAL MANAGER



Do You Know the Answers?

Here are some questions about an industry whose welfare affects you and your community. See how many of these questions you can answer, then try the questions out on your family, friends and neighbours.

1. Are any products of the pulp and paper industry being directly used for war purposes?
2. Canada makes large shipments abroad of pulp and paper products. It also exports wheat and gold. Which of these brings the most money to Canada?
3. What particular industry owes most of its growth to the pulp and paper industry?
4. What other industries derive large benefits from the pulp and paper industry?

1. Yes: pulp for explosives; wrappings and containers for munitions and food; board for army buildings. 2. Pulp and paper products; newsprint paper alone is Canada's largest single source of U.S. dollars. 3. The electric power industry. 4. Nearly every other industry in Canada because of the large purchases of the Pulp and Paper Industry for its diversified requirements—particularly our railways and steamship lines because of the amount of freight shipped; our mines and heavy machine industries; our farms.

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