

Rank fireweeds grew along the black muck road and sifted little clouds of down with every breeze; straggling blackberry vines white with blossoms dotted the thick green undergrowth and here and there a pink wild rose blossomed modestly, but Ted had appreciative eyes for their commonplace everyday beauty. He was pondering the situation of affairs. It was something unusual for him. He wanted twenty-five dollars by the first of September. How he was to get it he had not the slightest idea, but he meant to have it.

'Aunt Jane will figure it out someway, I s'pose, but I'd rather cipher it out for myself. She'll have enough to do with the work and the milkin', and watchin' out that John don't slight none of the chores if I go out to Uncle Theodore's to school this winter. If there ain't any if about it. I'm a'goin', he decided, doggedly, as the waggon jolted along over the crossway that ran alongside the big cedar swamp. The grass grew rank and green over the fence. It was the only piece of woodland fenced in about the country with the exception of their own. There were so many pit-falls and sink-holes, and so many cattle had strayed away and mired there that the men had clubbed together and built a brush hedge around it as a safeguard.

Nathan Dayhoff stood by the road fence as he drove past.

'Hello, Ted! Got your buckwheat in yet?'

'Not quite. I'll sow to-morrow if it don't rain.'

'Bet you won't sow to-morrow.' Nathan's tones were quizzical.

'Bet you I will.' Ted's tones were obstinate.

Nathan laughed tantalizingly. 'Don't want to earn twenty-five dollars then, I s'pose. Make more money scatterin' a peck o' buckwheat.'

'What you drivin' at, anyhow?'

'You're doin' the drivin' 'pears to me.'

'Oh, g'wan. I can't gab here all day.' Ted flected a big Pontiac fly from Barney's back with his braided whiplash.

'Ever hear tell of my Uncle Ezra? Well, he's come here visitin'. Him and dad have gone out around the country to ask the folks to a loggin' bee here to-morrow, and Ezra is going to offer twenty-five dollars to the best broke, smartest yoke of oxen that can put up three logheaps the neatest and the quickest. I s'pose you calculate yourn's the best broke and the smartest. I know Dan Purdy thinks his'n is, and prob'ly there's several more that's just as conceity. Reckon we'll get our patch clogged up pretty spry.'

Ted opened his eyes in amaze at such a reckless expenditure of money. 'What is he goin' to do that for? He ain't got anything in it, has he?'

'Oh, money ain't no object with Uncle Ezra. He ain't no slouch with a yoke of cattle, himself; says there ain't one man in fifty knows enough to break a yoke of steers. He used to own some pretty smart cattle himself. Guess he has got an idee there ain't any more such in the country. He's willin' to pay something to find out, you see.'

Ted nodded. He could understand the pride of ownership in a fine yoke of cattle broke to hand. 'What's the time?' he asked.

'One o'clock sharp! But you're goin' to sow buckwheat, you know,' he called as the waggon jolted down the road.

Twenty-five dollars! and his steers were the smartest and best broke, except, perhaps, Dan Purdy's black Galloways, and they were no better. They were heavier, but not so quick motioned, and they couldn't obey the word any more quickly. There were no others in the

country of whom he need stand in fear. Twenty-five dollars in one afternoon. It seemed like a fortune that had come to him unexpectedly, for he meant to try for it and to win.

Perhaps Dan would not go; he was odd about some things. Maybe his steers were off in the woods; if so it would take a day at least to hunt them up. It was the custom among the farmers in that vicinity to turn their cattle out to feed in the unfenced woodland, after the spring work was over, and they sometimes strayed to a considerable distance. Dan had turned his out last year, and he had finished putting in his buckwheat over a week ago. If they would only lose themselves for a day or so. Dan didn't need the money so very much. He had a father to take the brunt of things.

It was sundown when he hitched the steers to the waggon and started for home. The mosquitoes rose in a cloud from the rank grass about the big swamp as he bumped over the crossway, whistling cheerily. He usually whistled when he was out alone with the steers; they seemed to like it someway. Half-way across a spring bubbled clear and cold from under an upturned cedar. He generally stopped here for a drink, and sometimes he watered the steers. Now they stopped and waited for him to do so again. He got down and dipping up a pailful set it before Bob, who drank it down in long satisfying gulps. Barney threw up his head and lowed loudly. He was answered immediately by another ox away to the right in the dense verdure of the swamp.

Ted jumped up on a log and peered into the intricate network of growth. He could hear an occasional crackling of brush and once he caught sight of a dark moving object. He gave a start of surprise.

'Somebody's cattle are in the swamp. I wonder—' He would not voice the question that sprang suddenly into his mind, but he could not resist a feeling of elation. After all, it was none of his business; all he had to do was to attend strictly to his own affairs. 'Folks ought to keep track of their cattle.'

He dipped up a pail of water for Barney and walked along a few steps. Yes, here was where they had broke in. Such a fence as that was no good, anyway; anybody could see it was not fit to turn stock. He hesitated a moment, then he furtively replaced a few saplings that had been pushed off the top and went back to the waggon and drove on, but he did not whistle. Instead he scanned the darkening forest eagerly, but he did not see anything. Only once he heard an ox bawl long and mournfully.

At home he could not bring himself to tell mother and Aunt Jane of his prospects for to-morrow. He only said he had promised Nate Dayhoff to help them log in the afternoon.

He spent the next forenoon in the barn polishing up his old yoke. He had a bright new one, but he knew better than to let them wear it. 'Old shoes fit best,' he said to himself. If any of the neighbors passed he did not see them. After dinner he yoked the steers and threw the log chain over the yoke.

There were several pairs of cattle standing about when he drove into the yard, but Dan Purdy's black Galloways were not among them. He watched each new arrival anxiously, but he did not ask any questions.

The piece of ground had been fitted up in excellent shape. It was burned clear of brush and everything had been cut into handy logging lengths. There were to be four rollers to each team and each team was to make three heaps; that would give them all an equal

chance and allow for any extra roughness of ground.

Two teams would operate at one time which would give a better opportunity to contrast their manner of handling logs. Ted stood back with his arm over Barney's neck and watched proceedings.

Sam Whitbeck was first in the field with old Duke and Dime. Ted remembered seeing them at logging bees at least eight years ago. It took noise and buckskin lash to get them down to business, but Sam knew how to use both. They were matched against Andrew Thompson's mulleys, who were used to being driven with a brad. Ted shivered every time he saw the sharp point thrust cruelly into their bones followed by drops of bright blood. The dumb cowed look in their great eyes turned him sick. He was glad when Ezra Dayhoff ruled them and their driver off the field.

Lanty Moore took his place. His oxen were common scrubs, but they put up their heaps in sixty minutes, beating Sam by a good quarter of an hour. The Bijah Bump and Posy Hale took their places. They finished up in an hour and a quarter and an hour and twenty minutes, and were met with shouts of derision.

Then Nate motioned to Ted. 'Go on and show 'em some drivin', Ted,' he urged eagerly, but Ted shook his head.

'No use waitin' fer Dan; he's hunted all day for Nig and Darky. Something must have happened to them, I guess; they never stayed away so before,' continued Nate.

He watched Ote Higging and Shorty Rogers take the field, in a dream. He did not notice the cheers that greeted their admirable management; he heard instead the long-drawn, plaintive bellow of an ox calling for help. He hooked the log chain over the gate post and slipped away unnoticed. It was only half an hour's walk to the place where he had put up the saplings the night before.

There were no paths through the big swamp except those made by the wild creatures and he jumped from one moss grown log to another. The bogs shook and trembled beneath his impetuous plunges, but he kept on. Here and there he saw tracks half filled with miry ooze, leading deeper and deeper into the cool depths where the grass lay in luxuriant swaths, too heavy to stand. A slim dapper blue racer glided swiftly across his path and a spotted water snake slid lazily off a log into the slimy water, but he only gave them passing notice.

Upruned cedars held deep sullen pools under their branching roots any one of which was of sufficient depth to mire an ox; treacherous pitfalls yawned beneath tempting masses of verdure. He came upon a pile of bleached bones. They were all that remained of Dave McBain's only cow. He had pried her out of the slough for the poor pittance of her hide which was all she had to give him. Ted turned his head away from their suggestive ghastliness. He was realizing the existence of several kinds of danger to-day. Barney had known of one sort; his ox sense had told him to give a warning call, but he, Ted, had been content with putting up the fence. Once he paused to listen and call, 'Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!' It was the call Dan had always used. Dan's father had come from New Jersey. Ted had always laughed to hear it; now it came awkwardly from his lips. 'Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!'

Away to the right he heard an answering low, and his heart gave a joyous bound.

It was almost sunset when he drove Darky and Nig into old man Purdy's barnyard, covered with mud and slime.

He came out to meet them. 'Found 'em in the big swamp, eh? Well, I swan! Never