

and grew still. Cairns went around for hours with a wet sack, beating out all remnants of fire within range of his buildings, till there seemed little danger anyway now, and after supper he did chores and turned in.

It was about ten o'clock that he awoke with a slight pungence in his nostrils that was so familiar he gave it at first no care at all. But it continued, and presently he raised his head and listened. There *was* a crackling! His boots were all he stayed for.

This time it was a cedar at the back of his cabin that was spurting crimson—a great tree so near that its fall would threaten his roof. But it wasn't a great fire—just two or three toy flamelets here and there at the forks of the dead branches, with a wisp of smoke, hardly visible in the pallid light, from the ground at the butt. The tree stood in the entrance to a small draw in the bench just behind the cabin. More smoke was drifting over the right hand shoulder of this gully.

He ran up the edge of it. Yes! The breeze had turned at nightfall, had brought the fire again right along the back side of the bench, eating up the litter and small stuff that was thicker on that face of it, and now it was seeking to creep down upon him through the draw, menacing fearfully all that he had. Some sparks blown ahead had caught the scanty bark and the dry rot round the big tree. This was his first job. For the burning bark he cared little—that indeed had nearly burned out, so little there was of it, already. It was the smoke from the bottom hole that scared him, for the fire was eating in there, between the buttressing roots, to the tindery heart of the tree; and once it fairly started up that hollow hole, the whole trunk would presently descend, a hundred and fifty feet of roaring furnace—anywhere! He soused, and dug, and soused again, and rammed wet burlap into the hollow, and that danger was past. Now for the gully!

With filled pails and sacks a-plenty he stumbled up the bench in the darkness, and over the edge. The fire was only a creeping thing, eating its way slowly through the ground debris, with here and there a burst of flame as it passed a dry bush or a pile of twigs. If the ghost of a wind would stay just so—at least no more! Down the steep face of the hill he went, beating and pouring—then back over the edge to refill, and once again to the fight. Back and forth, up and down, along the battle front he travelled, hour after hour in glimmer and darkness, pouring, soaking, beating—his heart in his mouth at every gust of air, a mutter of gratitude as it died down again. He was a ragged figure enough, scorched and scratched and blackened and very weary, when the dawn crept upon the mountains; but a glad man that hour was Cairns, for over all the hill-side not a wisp of smoke floated any more.

#### WHERE THE FIRE DEMON HAS WORKED HIS WILL



A typical portion of one hundred miles of wrecked forest. Every acre of this was owned by the people of Canada and its original state was worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.