

4 COMRADES OF THE TRAILS

caked with black mud to his arm-pits. He was spattered with it to the crown of his soft felt hat. His hands were begrimed and scratched, from numerous tumbles, and his high-topped moccasins were full of clay and water. He looked at the horses, now quietly eating their oats, and saw that they, too, were coated with the black mud through which they had plunged so valiantly.

On Dick's right, as he faced the further and untested trails of the wilderness, stood a deserted shack that had been built, ten years ago, by a half-breed trapper. Behind the shack arose a high hill, its sides clothed with towering spruces, rank on rank. On his left a steep bank sloped down to the narrow, brawling waters of Little Beaver. Beyond the river the land rose steeply again, with thick, gloomy forests of pine and spruce on its strong shoulders. Before the shack squatted Billy Blunt, busily engaged in frying bacon at a little fire. Westward, the sun was dipping its lower rim behind the crests of the far hills and flooding the dusky spires of the forest with crimson.

"Well," murmured Dick, cheerfully, as he scraped a hand-full of half-dry mud off the front of his short blanket "jumper," "this is even