

# Who Only Stand and Wait

By Donal Hamilton Haines

Horace Gibbs let his elbows rest on the top rail of the lane gate and ran his eye over as much of his own acres as he could see. Before him, the lane slipped downhill between picket fences, crossed the shaky bridge over Atwater's Creek, curved around the knoll dense with big oak-trees, and disappeared. On both sides of the lane the fields sloped rather sharply down to the brown, sedgy levels of the marsh, and a quarter of a mile to the left the slanting rays of sunlight glinted on the blue waters of Limekiln Lake, where it showed between groves of hardwood.

"It's good land, John," said Mr. Gibbs to the tall young fellow at his side, "and you'll make it better. I ain't sayin' you done wrong to stay; I dunno—"

"Both the Balches down the road went with the Thirty-third," said the younger man, without shifting his gaze from the distant hills.

His father kicked at a corn cob lying in the dirt and lifted one foot to the lowest rail.

"I know they did, I know they did," he admitted, "and their land needs 'em as much as ours does us. Old Balch is late with his wheat, an' he never will get his buck-wheat in."

They stood silent, watching a lone mallard curving gracefully through the air above the blue waters of the creek. Something in the rushes caught its attention and, after circling warily, it slid silently into the marsh.

"If I'd known the war was comin' right at us this way, I'd 'a' gone," John began nervously. "But I didn't know."

His father nodded his head slowly several times.

"An' I wanted to get married, too," the boy went on eagerly. "I'd waited long enough—an' Mary was tired o' waitin', too."

In the afternoon stillness, both heard plainly the roar and splatter of the mallard's wings as it swept into the air and shot off on a line for the lake.

"An' now the baby's comin' an' I can't go," John said slowly. "I can't go 'way an' leave things. Folks 'll say I'm a coward, I s'pose, but I don't care. A man's got to take care o' his folks an' his land."

Again the father nodded. His hair was grey, and his shoulders were bowed by years of toil. A recruiting sergeant would have put him aside quickly; the problem did not cut so deep with him. His son's conscience, however, would not lie easy.

"What do I care about this here war, anyhow?" he blazed out suddenly. "All the difference it can make to me is if we get licked I pay more taxes! It ain't any odds to me whether they keep slaves or not—guess that's what they're fightin' about. Is that anything for me to get shot to pieces for? No, sir; I'll stick to my farm!"

They left their position at the gate and walked toward the house in the gathering dusk. John paused to swing to the gaping door of a shed, his father watching him idly.

"It's gettin' closer to us than anybody ever thought 't would," John panted, as he tugged at a refractory hook, "but it ain't comin' any closer. Them fellers is headin' for the city, an' they won't come near this place—town ain't important enough."

"I hope they won't," his father said. "I jest hope they won't!"

As they started to enter the house, the creak of wheels sounded in the road, and a big voice hailed them.

"Hey, John!" it called: "heard the news?"

Father and son slouched down toward the road, where one of their neighbors sat in his light buggy. He began to talk before they had reached his buggy wheel.

"We're in for it," he fairly shouted. "They've been fightin' to-day over by Brookville, an' they're headed this way. Town's full o' soldiers an' guns, an' everybody down there in the valley"—he jerked his thumb to the north-east, where the city lay—"is scared stiff!"

The two men unconsciously strained their ears. All they could hear was the chirping of insects and the rumble of a homeward-bound wagon down at the turn of the road toward town. They had heard these same sounds for years.

"Jest a scare," announced John, with an air of dismissal which did not reveal the cold feeling gripping at his heart; "jest one o' them newspaper scares!"

The man in the buggy shook his head ominously and spat over the off wheel.

haired woman was busy about the stove, while a dark-haired woman—hardly more than a girl—was arranging the four plates at the table, which was covered by a red cloth. The two men dropped into their chairs in silence, watching the preparations for supper. John reached out his hand to the younger woman as she passed him.

"Feel all right?" he inquired anxiously. "Sure," she said with a smile.

As soon as the food was set before them, the two men commenced their meal. The women took their places at the table when chance offered. There was no talking until they had finished; then Mr. Gibbs pushed aside his plate and sat back in his chair. A moment later his son followed suit. The women rose and commenced clearing away the dishes.

"What was Zeb Prout tellin' ye out by the gate?" inquired the older woman.

Mr. Gibbs started to answer, then looked rather uncertainly at his son. John gave a quick look at his young wife and took the lead.

"He says there's been fightin' at

us 'way to the good. We got to fix things up some."

"I dunno," Mr. Gibbs commenced cautiously: "money's awful scarce—"

"Oh, shucks!" his son broke in on him. "Let's figger this out."

He brought pencil and paper, and the two men leaned over their calculations. Gradually the optimistic enthusiasm of the boy had its effect. The father had visions of the sort of farm he had dreamed of in his own youth—made possible now for his declining years. At the end of half an hour Mr. Gibbs' face was fairly bright. John leaned back in his chair, smiling triumphantly.

"That's the sort of a farm your grandson 'll have to grow up on," he announced.

He rose and walked toward the stove for his box of tobacco. From the road came the sound of several horses, galloping. The two men listened, but the sound had ceased.

"Soldiers maybe," said the older man, peering out of the window. They settled back in their chairs, John thumbing over the columns of figures and the rough sketches he had drawn, while his father smoked silently.

Heavy footsteps sounded suddenly on the porch, accompanied by a metallic tinkle which would have spelled spurs to the accustomed ear. The panels of the door shook under the blows of a fist. Without a word the father rose and opened it. A young major of cavalry, his blue uniform so dirty that the yellow facings had almost disappeared, stood outside.

"How deep's the creek back of your place?" he demanded abruptly.

Mr. Gibbs rubbed his chin and stared speechless.

"Three feet," John answered across his father's shoulder; "but there's no bottom. You can't wade it."

"Will that bridge hold artillery?" continued the cavalryman.

"It'll hold a load of corn," John replied.

The officer appeared to consider something deeply. He seemed to have forgotten the existence of the two men in the doorway, and stood staring intently at the darkness, tapping the floor restlessly with a much-worn boot. Then he whipped out a notebook, studied a page, and wrote a few lines.

The Gibbses, father and son, watched him with interest.

"Come out here," he commanded, without glancing toward them, and strode out into the yard.

John paused uncertainly, flushing uncomfortably at the officer's tone. His father laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Better go," he advised. "We don't want no trouble with these people. I've heard tell that it's bad to go wrong with 'em."

John followed the officer out into the yard. Beneath the big pine-tree near the front gate he saw a little clump of horsemen. Out in the road there sounded a straining of harness and the faint tinkle of metal made only by waiting horses. The officer was standing near the barns, lighting a pipe and peering about the sheds and outhouses. As soon as John reached him, he opened a perfect fusillade of questions as to the nature of the ground on all sides of the farmhouse. Presently he called to a trooper and sent him cantering off down the lane.

Continued Next Week



View of Mount Stephen and Field, B.C.

"Don't you believe it," he warned. "Old man Parsons from over at the Corners says he heard the firin', and—" he lowered his voice and leaned toward them impressively—"there ain't been an Oshtemo man to the city to-day!"

Mr. Gibbs leaned apathetically against the wheel, shaking his head slowly. John thrust his hands deep into his pockets and frowned at the road.

"I don't believe it," he reiterated. "Prob'ly they had a thunderstorm over Brookville way—an' couldn't get to town."

The man in the buggy sniffed with disgust and clucked to his horse.

"Jest thought I'd let ye know," he said, and drove on down the road. The two men stared after him an instant, then walked back into the house. A big collie rose from his place on the porch and followed them through the door, sniffing at their heels.

They entered a room which served both as kitchen and dining-room. A cheap clock ticked above a stove on which stood a variety of steaming vessels. A grey-

Oshtemo—an' it's likely to come this way," he answered.

There was a crash of breaking china as the plate his wife had been carrying smashed into bits on the floor.

"Oh, John," she cried, turning a terror-stricken face toward him, "comin' here?"

He got from his chair in awkward haste and sprang toward her. The chair overturned with a bang, and the nervous woman burst into tears. The old people looked at them dumbly, while John put his arms clumsily about his wife.

"Now don't you worry," he ordered; "it prob'ly ain't so, an' it won't do us no harm if 'tis so. They ain't after us."

But the shadow which his words had spread over them would not lift. They sat about the dingy room for a time, and then the women left. John turned to his father.

"See here," he began almost roughly, "we got to get a move on us next spring. This place ain't all it ought to be for the women. We've broke even with the wheat, an' the corn an' potatoes 'll put