

"McNaughton," said Haliburton when the time-keeper entered, "Mr. Murphy here wants to know why it was that Simpson and Joregson were not able to run their rafts to Sarnia without spilling them along the shore. Can you tell him?"

"I don't know, sir; I've never been over the route."

"You are of the opinion, then, that the trouble lay in the route; not the men?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Is there anything you do know, young man?" questioned Murphy curtly.

"Enough not to criticize what I've never tried myself, sir."

"McNaughton," said Haliburton, very quietly leaning across the table and flicking the ashes of his cigar with infinite care; "the question is just this: Can you run a raft to Sarnia safely?"

"Yes, sir!"

There was no trace of indecision now, nor was there the least suggestion of bravado. The words were uttered with an air of quiet, simple confidence, and carried conviction accordingly.

"You've guessed the riddle right," cried Murphy. "That's the answer! When will you be ready to start?"

"It'll take a week to get the logs ready."

"Neither Joregson or Simpson took more than half that time," commented the contractor. "A week's an awful long time."

"It's the best I can do."

"All right," said Murphy shortly, "do it your own way, only for goodness sake, get it done. Make a start on it as soon as you can."

McNaughton wasted no time. Within an hour, he had his gang picked for the undertaking. For his right hand man, he chose Long John Anderson, both by reputation and demonstration, the best raftsman on the shores of the Georgian Bay. French Pickett, Pete Lacroix, Harry Lomass, and George Currie formed the rest of the crew. Of the five, two were English, two French and one Scotch, and a greater set of dare-devils were never gotten together in any lumber camp.

"I'm thinkin' they're a mighty brash lot to try runnin' a raft," croaked Simpson, when Murphy questioned him. "They'll find

some raw winds to beat along o', an' it's more stayin' power than pluck that'll count. Seems to me he'd a done better to got a bunch o' Scotchmen."

"Leave it to the boy," said Haliburton, coming up at that moment; "let him do it his own way. Then the credit or blame—whichever it is—will all be on his shoulders."

McNaughton took no chances. From the very moment the first logs were lashed together into a boom for the side work of the crib, he and his men put in their days on the slippery timbers directing operations. Chance was an unknown quantity; care counted every time. Not a bolt or chain anywhere got past the eye of some one of the crew, and not a main lashing was there in the whole raft, but what McNaughton saw himself. Never was raft so carefully put together.

The raft was a large one, the heaviest of the three that had been sent out. When the other two had been sent down, it had been the intention to follow them up later with others. Now, such a course was out of the question; the season was too far advanced. In another two weeks the winter would be on, and then it would be impossible to get a raft together, much less send it out. Enough timber must be on hand in the spring to keep the men going until the Lake opened up, and unless every stick necessary was gotten now, there was little use in taking any. The hour for half-measures was past; it was sink or swim this time.

Saturday morning, the last boom was firmly lashed into place. There was little expectation in the lumber camp that a start would be made that day, however. Outside, a stiff gale was piling the white-caps one after another on the shore.

"When do you think you'll be able to get out?" asked Haliburton. "Weather's not very favorable looking."

"I've just told the tugs to be ready at noon, sir."

Haliburton whistled and smiled under his moustache.

"I'll bet he pulls through," said he to Murphy. "I'll gamble, we get a telegram inside ten days saying that 'That there mess of logs is lying in Sarnia Bay.'"

The other snorted.