

WOODEN SPOIL

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Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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"WE MUST GET THERE IN TIME TO SAVE HIM."

Synopsis.—Hillary Askew, a young American, inherits from an uncle a hundred square miles of forest in Quebec. Upon taking possession he discovers all sorts of queer things. Lamartine, his uncle's lawyer, tells him the property is comparatively worthless and tries to induce him to sell. Lafa Connell, the mill foreman, tells him his uncle has been systematically robbed. Morris, his manager, is associated with the Ste. Marie company, a rival concern owned by Brousseau, the "boss" of the region. Madeleine, the beautiful daughter of Seigneur Rosny, original owner of Askew's land, is pursued by Brousseau, who has her father in his power. The hero decides to stay and manage his property. He discharges Morris and makes Connell manager. He whips "Black" Pierre, foreman of a gang of Brousseau's men cutting on his land. He defies Brousseau. Leblanc, his boss jobber, deserts to the enemy. From Father Lucien Askew learns the story of Marie Dupont, daughter of the captain of a lumber schooner. The girl's mother, now dead, had been betrayed, and she herself is looked on askance and has few friends. Marie knows the name of her mother's betrayer, but has never revealed it to her father. Askew finds Madeleine Rosny hostile to him. Askew and Connell visit Simeon Duval's dance hall in Ste. Marie. Revenue officers raid it and Askew is blamed for the raid. He and Connell rescue Marie Dupont. Askew gives Madeleine Rosny when her horse runs away. She gives the warning, "Look to your boom!" and then the mill boom breaks and Askew's logs are carried away to the St. Lawrence. Who saved the boom? Baptiste, the jealous lover of Marie, deserts Askew. Brousseau brings about a strike of Askew's mill hands. Askew and Connell part in anger over the strike. Askew starts to stop Louis Duval from opening a saloon in St. Boniface. Madeleine asks him not to go. Askew breaks up the liquor selling and runs into a trap, where he fights four of his enemies.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

Pierre reeled, and once again Hillary leaped and caught him under the chin. But this time he was not quick enough to repeat his former maneuver. Leblanc struck at him from behind. The upward thrust would have penetrated his heart had it struck where Leblanc intended; but, by a miracle of luck, it passed between Hillary's arm and his body, only just grazing a rib. The point of the blade caught in the lining of the coat and, before Leblanc could withdraw his arm, Hillary pressed his own left arm against his body, catching Leblanc's hand there and imprisoning it.

This movement swung him round, forcing him to release Pierre, and the ensuing bovine rush which the outlaw made threw them both against the embrasure of the second window, on the opposite side of the door. Men were yelling outside, and a furious hammering was maintained, but none of the fighters was conscious either of the shouts or of the blows. As Hillary and Leblanc fell against the window-shelf the rotted wood broke inward. The second lamp tottered and then crashed down beside them, going out as the first had done, and leaving the stable in complete darkness. With a swift movement Hillary managed to draw Leblanc's arm further through his. With the pressure of his combined biceps and triceps he could hold it there indefinitely, if he had only Leblanc to contend with. But he could not use his right hand to force Leblanc's open and take the knife, which the jobber was making frantic efforts to use. He needed his right hand for Pierre; and Leblanc managed to twist the knife so that its edge was against Hillary's side, and with the sinews of his fingers he was scraping it backward and forward, ripping open the coat lining and inflicting a succession of scratches and little punctures under the heart.

Hilary backed suddenly, jarring Leblanc's spine against the edge of the window shelf. Leblanc groaned and made a frantic effort to twist himself free, hacking at Hillary's shins and shouting to Pierre to finish the job. Pierre's forward rush had flung him between the two. Hilary felt him groping in the darkness, trying to gauge the position in which he was leaning; Pierre was evidently puzzled by the position of the two, and by the termination of Leblanc's shoulder against Hillary's. Hilary sensed that Pierre had finally satisfied himself and had raised his right arm to strike. He flung away the revolver, which he still held, reached up and seized the hand as it was about to descend.

Thus holding the right wrist of each of his assailants he plunged forward, bringing them to the floor. He let go suddenly and sprang to his feet. Pierre's knife grazed his sole; as Leblanc tried to rise Hilary caught him beneath the chin with the other foot. Leblanc groaned and his head went back on the floor.

That left only Pierre in action. Hilary withdrew a step or two. He heard the outlaw breathing heavily as he crouched in the darkness. For the first time he began to be aware of the knocking at the door. It sounded now as if a crowbar was being applied. The yells of the lumbermen came to his ears; but the absurdity of his position did not dawn on him, nor the fact that, when he had settled with Pierre he would have to reckon with the mob outside. He meant to deal with Pierre as he had dealt with the others. But in the darkness he could guide himself only by Pierre's breathing, which sounded now on one side of him and now on the other. Further away Leblanc was moaning.

Out of the darkness Pierre leaped forward. The knife blow flashed past Hilary, who got Pierre by the arms. They began to wrestle as they had done that day in the woods. Here Pierre was Hilary's superior; his physical strength was greater, though he had no force in his blows; and, though Hilary had beaten him that day at the camp, it was by a stratagem which could not be repeated successfully. Gradually the strength of Pierre's arms began to tell. The two

panted, straining together, but Pierre winning. The knife arm was surely slipping out of Hilary's clutch. It reached upward. But at the moment when it was evading Hilary dropped Pierre's left hand and struck the outlaw between the eyes. As he did so he heard the breathing on the other side of him.

Pierre staggered, and in a flash Hilary had both his hands upon Pierre's right wrist, kneading the veins and sinews till the fist opened. The knife clattered upon the floor. Hilary stooped and seized it.

That was the precise instant when the knife that had been dropped by Louis Duval, welded by Simeon and thrust upward, found its home beneath Hilary's shoulder.

Hilary, who was still bending forward, stumbled and pitched upon the floor and lay there.

CHAPTER X.

Unexpected Allies.

Lafa Connell, at Monsieur Tremblay's hotel, stretched out his legs upon a chair and puffed viciously at his pipe, while Monsieur Tremblay leaned against the wall and listened to his guest's semi-soliloquy.

"Yep, Tremblay, I'm through now," Lafa was saying. "I'm through for good, and I'm going to wait here till the boat comes tomorrow and then beat it for Shoeburport. Lord, I'll be glad to see Clarice—my wife—and the kids again."

"I've put up a good fight, Tremblay. I've dropped eight thousand dollars in this fool game, and Clarice and me will have to start buying our home again when I get back to Shoeburport, and maybe I won't hear nothing about it, neither. But when it's a case of throwing away a few thousand dollars' worth of lumber, just because you look upon a strike as a personal offense, and me losing my home, I've finished. I've come to the end. The end—finish—no more. You understand me, Tremblay. I'm going to leave him to his fate," continued Lafa, trying to draw a few more mouthfuls of tobacco smoke from his burned-out plug. "It's his fault."

He shook his pipe out angrily. "Oui," said Tremblay; and the word conveyed any significance that its hearer might choose to put upon it. "Oui," he continued thoughtfully, though what he was thinking about was incomprehensible.

"It ain't my job," Lafa pursued. "I'm a family man. I got my wife and kids to think about, and I'm against preparedness. It ain't reasonable to hire a man for manager and then expect him to go round saloon-busting, is it, Tremblay?"

"Oui," answered Tremblay. "You're right," said Lafa. "Of course it ain't." He filled his pipe again, lit and puffed at it. "I don't know what in thunder's wrong with this tobacco tonight," he said, and emptied it. He crossed his right leg over his left, uncrossed them, and then crossed his left over his right. Then he got up.

"I guess I'll take a stroll up the road and see if the stars are out," he said. Lafa's stroll was a rapid one. As soon as he had left the porch he almost ran up the hill road toward the cliff. As he panted toward the summit he heard the rumble of wheels in the distance, and presently he saw the cure's rig coming toward him. He halted.

"Say, Father Lucy, d'you mind giving me a lift into St. Boniface?" he called.

The rig stopped and Lafa perceived Madeleine Rosny seated at the cure's side. Her hands were clasped, her face agitated and deathly pale. Lafa's hand went up to his hat awkwardly. "I beg pardon, Father Lucy," he muttered.

"Jump in, Mr. Lafa," said the cure. "I'm glad that we met. We need you. We are going to St. Boniface. Jump in and I shall tell you on the way."

Lafa entered the buggy, and Father Lucien urged on the horse; then he turned and said:

"Louis Duval has opened a saloon in Baptiste's old house, and Monsieur Askew has gone to stop him."

"I guessed so, Father Lucy," answered Lafa. "I was just on my way there, in case there was going to be trouble. I guess there isn't likely to be, though. Mr. Askew knows how to take care of himself."

"Trouble?" questioned the cure, sharply. "They are going to murder him."

"I heard some yarn like that from Tremblay," said Lafa, "but I guessed that was all talk."

"It was not talk. It is their plan," said Father Lucien. "Mademoiselle Rosny heard of it from Monsieur Brousseau days ago—it was on the day when you went to Ste. Marie. He rode with her toward Ste. Marie and told her so. She did not believe him. This afternoon she learned of it again from little Baptiste, who asked her to warn Monsieur Askew. Everybody knew he would go alone to St. Boniface to stop the sale of liquor. Mademoiselle Rosny rode up to the camp to warn Monsieur Askew, as Baptiste had begged her. He would not listen to her. She came to me. It is a devil's plot," he said sternly, "and if they hurt one hair of his head they shall go to prison for it."

"We must get there in time to save him. You will do all you can to save him, will you not, Mr. Connell?" asked the girl, looking earnestly at Lafa. As their eyes met Lafa realized suddenly that her agitation had more than an impersonal cause behind it. The swift knowledge came home to him with a shock; it cleared up many things, among them the fogs of rancor that had clouded his mind.

"I'll do everything that's in my power, Mademoiselle," he said. "I'll stand by him—I'll fight for him if there's any fighting."

"There will be none," said Father Lucien. "But Mademoiselle Rosny understands now what Brousseau is. She knows his character and his evil mind. And she has learned, fortunately, before it is too late."

Not another word was spoken. The buggy descended the hill and rolled toward St. Boniface. As it crossed the rickety bridge they heard the sound of distant shouting in Duval's saloon. About the front of it was gathered the entire male population of St. Boniface, gesticulating and chattering.

They fell back in dismay as the cure leaped from the buggy and assisted Madeleine Rosny down. Lafa followed. He tried to urge the girl to remain in the rig, but she paid no attention to him. She listened with anxious intensity as the cure addressed the crowd, her lips compressed, her bosom rising and falling quickly. All eyes were fixed on Father Lucien, but each, as the priest turned to him, tried to shrink back behind his neighbor.

They were pointing inside the saloon. The cure hurried through the doorway, Madeleine Rosny immediately behind him, and Lafa following them. The saloon, though lit by an oil lamp, was empty, as seemed to be the dark stable beyond it, seen through the open doorway.

Father Lucien snatched down the lamp and carried it hastily toward the stable door. He raised it and looked in, then turned and tried to bar Madeleine from entering. But she pushed past him, saw, cried, wrung her hands, and ran into the middle space between the rows of stalls. Lafa, following her, saw her seated upon the floor, and Hilary, covered with blood, lying



Hilary, Covered With Blood, Lying Stretched Out and Motionless, His Head in Her Lap.

stretched out and motionless, his head in her lap. She bent over him and Lafa never forgot the look of anguish in her eyes, or the tension of the white face.

Still supporting Hilary's head, she began tearing long strips off her petticoat, frantically, as if she hardly knew what she was doing. Hilary's clothing was so drenched with blood that it was difficult to determine where the wound lay. There were livid bruises about his mouth and cheeks, and on

his forehead, as if his assailants, after stabbing him, had kicked him.

Father Lucien half turned him over and, uttering an exclamation, pointed to the shoulder, from which fresh blood was slowly welling. Lafa saw that Hilary was alive; he breathed very faintly, but his face was the color of death, more bloodless than that of Madeleine. The cure began cutting away the coat, then the lining, which would not come with it; then the shirt. He looked up.

"Bring some water," he said.

Lafa hurried out, the few curious lumbermen scattering in panic and scurrying before him. As he stood among them, shouting, a window in a nearby house went up, and a woman handed out a pail, three parts full. Lafa took it. As he re-entered the shanty the crowd slowly gathered behind him again. He hurried into the stable. The cure took a strip of the girl's petticoat, dipped it in the pail and began to cleanse the wound, prying his lips and shaking his head the while. Lafa could see that the wound, while not long, was terribly deep, and it was still bleeding. It was impossible to do more than clean it superficially, owing to the need for haste.

Having done this, Father Lucien made a pad and placed it in position, while Madeleine, working with steady fingers which gave the lie to her face, began to wind the strips over it round the chest. All the while she worked her face was agitated, and yet composed, and only the tortured eyes betrayed what she was suffering; but when the wound was bound she broke down.

"It is my fault," she cried in French, sobbing despairingly. "I warned him and he would not hear me, and I rode away. I knew it long before and I would not believe it. I have killed him."

The cure's hand fell on her shoulder. Lafa noticed, too, and thought it significant afterward that, wild though her words were, and untrue, he did not then deny them.

Mademoiselle looked up and, meeting his eyes, grew calm. Lafa stepped forward, bent down and gently raised Hilary's head from her knee. He placed his hands beneath the shoulders, supporting them, while Father Lucien lifted the lower part of the body, and thus they carried the stricken man through the shanty toward the buggy.

The cure made a motion to Lafa to enter. "You and Mademoiselle Rosny will drive to my house," he said. "As there is no room for me, I walk. I give you the key, because my housekeeper is gone to bed and must not be frightened."

"No, to the Chateau," said Mademoiselle Rosny. "Do you think he shall go anywhere else, monsieur, when he is like this?"

Her voice rang proudly, the tone admitted of no opposition. The cure was silent.

Lafa drew Hilary into the bottom of the buggy and crouched there, supporting the head and the upper part of his body. But Madeleine, watchful, uttered a low cry. A little blood was leaking through the bandage. She hastened to the other side of the rig and began adjusting it, while the cure turned toward the crowd, which was looking on in panicky silence, broken only by low words and mutterings.

"This is a bad night's work that you have done!" he cried. "You shall pay for it, every man here, and the assassins too. I know them all."

The man who stepped forward was the foreman of the mill, by name MacPherson, a decent workman and a descendant of one of Wolfe's Highlanders who had settled along the coast and perpetuated their names and something of their stanch character, if nothing else of their race survived.

"We are not all guilty, Monsieur Tessier," he said. "I knew nothing of this until the deed was done, or I should have used every effort to prevent it. These people asked me to speak for them. They say that they broke down the stable door and saved his life when he was about to be cut to pieces."

"His life!" cried Father Lucien, scornfully. "His life hangs by a thread; and if he dies his murderers shall hang for it. And you are guilty equally," he continued, addressing the crowd, which seemed to melt under his burning tones. "You left him lie there and bleed to death. And listen further. You think that Monsieur Askew brought the revenue officers to Ste. Marie. Do I not hate Ste. Marie more than he? Yet even I would not bring the officers here until I had used every means to clean up the evil there. It was Monsieur Morris who brought them, for he told me so."

There was a sensation at the priest's words. An excited babble broke out. Madeleine, who had just completed the bandaging, halted with one foot upon the step of the buggy and turned to the lumbermen.

"Yes, you left him to die!" she cried in scorn. "You were afraid, and you forgot that strangers who come upon our land, upon our signory, are under our protection." Her eyes blazed as she denounced them. "You have forgotten your ancient loyalty in these days, Messieurs. You have no memory

of your Seigneur and what you owe to him—still your Seigneur, although you no longer grind and hew for him! You have forgotten!"

There was another movement among the crowd. Her words seemed to stir them even more than the priest's had done. "No, no, mademoiselle!" cried several voices. "No! We have not forgotten!"

MacPherson came forward again. "They thought," he said, "Mademoiselle, that Monsieur Brousseau's enemies were yours."

Lafa saw the girl stagger as if she had received a blow. She put her hand upon the buggy wheel and leaned thus for a moment, staring into MacPherson's face. Then, without a word, she stepped in, took up the reins and began to urge the horse, very slowly, along the road. The cure came to the side of the vehicle.

"I shall come to the Chateau, then, Mademoiselle Rosny," he said.

Mademoiselle did not answer him. Presently Lafa, crouching in the bottom of the buggy, heard her sobbing again, low, heartbroken sobs that she could not check for a long time. Sometimes she took her eyes from the road to look for a moment into Hilary's face, and once she stopped for a moment.

"How is he?" she asked.

"He is living, Mademoiselle," said Lafa. And that was all he dared to say.

There was no lantern, and Madeleine needed all her watchfulness to avoid the stones and ruts in the road. Luckily the moon was bright and the horse steady. Once, as the buggy swung round a bend, Lafa, looking out, saw the cure trudging behind, shaking his heavy stick. He heard Madeleine still sobbing. His own heart was heavy



Mademoiselle Was Already Established at Hilary's Bedside.

enough; he blamed himself for Hilary's misfortune. He should have stood by him. And he had meant to do so. But he had not calculated that Hilary would walk so fast or go to St. Boniface so soon.

The trees fell away, disclosing the Rosny chateau. The buggy stopped before the door in front of which the Seigneur and the old retainer were standing, with anxious faces. Madeleine bent swiftly over Hilary and raised his limp hand; then she turned her eyes to Lafa's, mutely asking him that question which could not be spoken.

"He is no worse," said Lafa.

The Seigneur and his man came toward them. "MacPherson telephoned to the post office and they brought me the news," he said. "You did quite right, Mademoiselle. Gently, now, Monsieur," he added, addressing Connell, and together they raised Hilary from the buggy floor. "Remember the steps. Now, I will go backward—so."

They were inside the Chateau, carrying their burden between the rows of portraits into a room which had been a drawing room in bygone days, furnished with spindle-legged furniture, gilt mirrors and ormolu cabinets. A bed in a corner showed that its use had been converted, probably because the upper part of the Chateau was no longer habitable.

Mademoiselle Rosny came in with her arms full of bed linen, diffusing the scent of wintergreen. Lafa and her father got Hilary to bed. He was stirring now, beginning to toss his arms and mutter in delirium. The pulse was stronger, but the flush which had supplanted the pallor denoted fever. Presently the cure entered and went straight to the bedside. The three men looked at Hilary and at each other.

"I have seen men who were wounded worse recover," said Edmond Rosny. "He has bled much, but the heart is uninjured, and unless the lung is gravely hurt . . . well, we shall see to it that he gets well," he ended abruptly.

There was nothing more Connell could do. He would have stayed, but he felt that he must await the issue in patience. Madeleine was already established at Hilary's bedside.

Lafa went in softly. "I shall come early in the morning, Mademoiselle Rosny," he said. "I want to say—about what you said to Father Lucy tonight—I mean it was my fault. I guess I'm the only one to blame. I ought to have stood by him, and I went away. You did more than me, mademoiselle, and it wasn't up to you. I mean, it wasn't your business to save him."

"No!" whispered Madeleine, raising her eyes to his. And Lafa felt like a blundering fool.

"You'll save him," he said. "We can't lose him. We want him—we all want him. I guess I didn't realize

how white he was till—till this happened."

He was half way to his boarding-house before he stopped as a thought struck him.

"I guess Father Lucy does get results in his own way," he said.

CHAPTER XI.

Dreams and Dangers.

Thanks to a constitution inured by hard work and healthy living, Hilary improved rapidly under Madeleine's nursing, aided by her father's skilled treatment of the wound. On the second day Hilary was conscious, on the fourth Rosny announced that the crisis was past; upon the ninth the patient was sitting up in bed and demanding solid food.

Lafa was the happiest man in the world when, at last admitted to the bedside, he asked and received attention for his desertion.

"Now I've got some good news," he said, when Hilary persisted in asking about the work. "We've got that shipment off, and Dupont will have both vessels back in a few days for the next. The mill's working overtime and the gang's back on the job." "You paid them two dollars?"

"Not a cent more," said Lafa triumphantly. "They asked to go back to work, and you ought to see them working! I guess they feel that they haven't given you a square deal, and Mr. Rosny's been having a few words with them, I hear. Anyway, they know now it's Morris who tipped off the revenue people, in order to make trouble for you, and the result is this part of the country has grown too hot for him. So he's gone away. I hear he had a quarrel with Brousseau over the share of their plunder, and they almost came to blows over it. Well, that's the first of the gang out. And MacPherson has turned out a trump, working overtime and making the hands work, and it begins to look to me as if we'll win out after all."

This was good news. It was now September, and in little more than a month the snow should extend considerably their cutting area. So they discussed their plans, until Madeleine, coming in, drove Connell away. Hilary would not ask him about his assailants, and Lafa was glad to avoid the subject. It was Father Lucien who took it up later, when Hilary was convalescent.

He hummed and hawed a good deal, and finally the truth came out. It would be easy enough to get the police up from Quebec, but the quartette would have to be laid by the heels before the advent of winter made further action impossible for months. Of the four, Pierre had disappeared. Leblanc was said to have gone into the woods for the winter to trap, having apparently abandoned his pretense of a sub-lease on the Ste. Marie limits. Simeon Duval was running his saloon wide open, and swearing that Hilary having assaulted him, he had struck with his knife in self-defense, while in a half-stunned condition. Little Louis, his brother, scared out of his wits, had been to see the cure with a view to making his peace.

Hilary had no desire to punish Louis any further, though he meant to deal with Pierre and Leblanc when the opportunity arose. He meant to rid the community of them and Simeon; but he had a strong man's reluctance to call upon the law to avenge a physical assault. In the end the cure went away with the understanding that Louis was forgiven, and with no decision taken as to further action.

"But what strength! What power, monsieur!" he said admiringly, clenching his hand over the muscles of Hilary's arm. "Do you know, monsieur," he continued thoughtfully, "I have often thought that a priest in such a district as this needs the muscularity almost as much as the goodness! Ah, Monsieur Askew, if I were your age, and of your strength, what would I not do!"

To Hilary his convalescence was a foretaste of paradise. Edmond Rosny came in only for formal visits now, twice or three times a day; but it was wonderful to see Madeleine, whom he knew that he loved with all his heart, about his bedside all day long, and then about his chair, waiting on him, anticipating his wishes, until he felt ashamed to be so helpless, her pride gone, her scorn gone, her enmity as well. When Hilary learned of the part that she had played in his rescue, and thanked her gratefully, she could not meet his eyes.

Then came the first day on which he was permitted to leave his room. Leaning on Madeleine's arm, he had gone out to feel the wonder of the sunshine and the crisp autumn air. The garden had originally been laid out, more than a century before, in imitation of the formal gardens of France of the period, with terraces and statuary. Everything was in ruin; and yet Hilary had the sudden, inexplicable sense of having come home.

"Mademoiselle Rosny," he said, "we are going to be good friends in future, aren't we? The good-will goes with your kindness, even if it does not go with the trees."

It's hard to keep a good man down.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Going Too Far.

Tom—When shall we get married?
Helen—Oh, Tom, why do you take our engagement so seriously?