

WOODEN SPOIL

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By
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"I ASK YOU NOT TO GO."

Synopsis—Hilary 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. Lefe Connell, the mill foreman, tells him his uncle has been systematically robbed. Morris, the 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 saves 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 saw the boom?

CHAPTER VIII.

The Challenge.

"Yes, sir, it was Morris who pulled off that little affair at Ste. Marie," said Lefe, a few days later. "That's why he went to see the revenue people when he was in Quebec. And it's he who spread the report that you were at the back of it."

"And, like a fool, I played into his hands by being at Simeon's just when the raid came off," said Hilary.

"I guess that's the size of it, Mr. Askew. You know how people are. There ain't no surer way of queering a man anywhere, specially if he's a stranger, than to suspect him of setting the revenue people on to the 'blind tigers.' It queers him even with folks that don't touch liquor. It's human nature somehow. By the way," he added, "you heard that Simeon's back."

Hilary nodded. "And running wide open again."

"Well, I guess that hundred dollars fine didn't hurt him much. But he's mighty sore on you, Mr. Askew. I'd watch for mischief from that quarter."

Hilary agreed. He did not know, however, that Lefe had learned from Tremblay, the landlord—in some incomprehensible manner, since he had not acquired an additional word of French during the time which had elapsed since Hilary's arrival—that Simeon not only meant mischief but was believed to be planning it.

However, the schooner had already made one trip to Quebec, well loaded. Hilary had been in negotiation with the paper mills, and he hoped to improve his chances materially if the winter was not an early one, and if only the threatened strike did not materialize.

But there had been another trouble, incomprehensible to Hilary, and Lefe, though he understood its origin, had not enlightened him. It concerned Baptiste.

A few days later Hilary and he met face to face. Baptiste stopped dead and thrust out his chin aggressively.

"Well, what is this that they are saying about the boom?" he demanded. "I have heard nothing, Baptiste," said Hilary.

"You don't speak the truth. You think I saw the boom through, because Brousseau pay me, eh? All right! I am a man. I don't have to work for you."

"I have no accusation to make against you, Baptiste."

"You don't want to accuse. But you think, eh? P'raps you tell me now I didn't saw the boom through, eh?"

"I don't know whether you did or not," said Hilary, becoming exasperated. "If I had reason to believe you did, you'd know it."

"You think I stan' for talk like that?" shouted Baptiste. "I get better



"You Think I Stand for Talk Like That?" Shouted Baptiste.

money from Monsieur Brousseau than I get from you. All right. I leave Saturday."

"You can go right to the office and get your money till Saturday," said Hilary. "I'll be there in a few minutes."

He paid Baptiste, who took the money with a menacing muttering that

Hilary affected not to hear. But after Baptiste had gone he felt the incident keenly. He valued the little man, and he knew he had wronged him by refusing to affirm his faith in him. Baptiste's defection was not very much, but it showed that the wind of adversity was still blowing strongly.

Baptiste secured a job with Brousseau on the following day and shook the dust of St. Boniface from his heels.

Leaving Lefe at the mill, Hilary made his headquarters in one of the new camps, about five miles up the river. At five o'clock on the Saturday night he was surprised to see his hands trooping homeward along the road. Many of them did go home over Sunday, and some every night; but this was an exodus. Hilary called his gang foreman, who came up sullenly.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked.

"We strike. We want two dollar a day."

"Why don't the men come to me?" "I don't know. We strike, that's all. You see Leblanc."

"So you've chosen this time to strike, have you?" cried Hilary furiously. "All right! Get out! I'll bring men over from the south shore."

He went back to his shack and sat down, resting his head on his hands. It was clear that Brousseau had postponed his original plan till now to cripple him beyond hope. And Leblanc, who did not work for him, was in charge of the affair! He was thoroughly disheartened over this new development.

However, if the strike did not extend to the mill he could still get his shipment through.

Presently he heard the sound of wheels, and, going outside, saw Lefe driving rapidly along the road. He stopped the horse, jumped out of the buggy, and came up with a woeful expression on his face.

"I met your men going home, so I guess you know," he said. "They've struck."

"The mill hands, too?" "Lefe nodded. "It's that fellow Leblanc. He's telling them they can get two dollars and their grub. MacPherson tried to hold the mill hands, but he couldn't. You'll have to give what they're asking."

"Suppose I pay the mill hands two dollars, will they stay in?" asked Hilary.

Lefe shook his head. "I offered it 'em," he said. "I took the responsibility of that. Maybe I was wrong—but anyway, it won't go. They say it's to be two dollars all round, mill hands and lumbermen."

"I'll not be beaten by Brousseau," said Hilary furiously.

Lefe scratched his jaw. "It appears to me that you're going in just the way he wants you to," he answered. "Make it two dollars till we get this shipment through the mill."

Hilary shook his head. "Not a cent," he answered. "I'm not going to have Brousseau dictate the price of my labor."

"That's all right, I suppose, so far as you're concerned," said Lefe indignantly, "but what about me? I guess I've got the right to have some word in the matter, with that eight thousand of Clarice—my wife—invested. Seems to me you're putting your front on my money as well as yours," he blurted out.

"I'll write you a check for it."

"Oh, shucks!" said Lefe; and, turning upon his heel abruptly, he went back to the buggy without another word. He entered it, whisked the reins, and drove slowly away. But when he had gone a hundred paces he turned the horse and came back.

"You'd better know the worst," he said. "Louis Duval's in St. Boniface, and he's going to open up tonight. Now I'm through with it—all of it."

He whipped the horse and drove away furiously, leaving Hilary alone in the deserted camp.

Hilary sat there for a long time. It began to grow dark, but, absorbed in his bitter reflections, he took no note of anything. Everything sank into insignificance beside the fact that Louis Duval, in open defiance of him and his warning, was selling liquor upon the St. Boniface property. It was a deliberate and direct challenge; and he must accept it or be for ever discredited among his men. More: He must ac-

cept it or abandon his plans and return home.

"I'll stop that, anyhow," he muttered, and, rising, took a revolver from his suitcase, loaded the six chambers, and thrust it into his coat pocket. Then he clapped on his hat and went out.

It was still light, and he calculated to reach St. Boniface soon after Duval opened. But he had not gone a dozen paces when he heard the sound of a trotting horse, and presently, from among the trees, he perceived Madeleine Rosny upon the chestnut which had bolted with her on the day of the dynamite blast.

She put her horse to the gallop as she neared him, and reined up so suddenly that she almost threw the beast back upon his haunches. Hilary saw that she had a new and powerful bit, which gave her perfect control. Her pluck was splendid in this riding of the same animal along the same road.

He raised his hat and waited. She leaned over the horse's shoulder, and he saw that her face was expressive of great concern.

"You are not to go to St. Boniface tonight," she said.

"May I ask why?"

"It is my wish, monsieur—and my warning also."

The memory of their past meetings rushed through Hilary's mind, already unbalanced by the events of the afternoon, and he became conscious of a great rush of anger that seemed to sweep through him like some impersonal force and hold him against his will.

"Do you think, Mademoiselle Rosny, that you are entitled to express your wishes and your warnings to me, in the light of our acquaintance?" he demanded.

"You are pleased to be insolent to me again," she answered in a low voice. "It does not matter. If you go to St. Boniface you go at your peril."

"Mademoiselle—"

"I ask you not to go. I implore you, then."

"By what right?" cried Hilary angrily. "Have you worked for me or against me, Mademoiselle Rosny, since I came here, expecting to find only a welcome among my neighbors? Have you shown any reason why I should heed your advice, or put faith in your disinterestedness?"

She was not looking at him. "No," she answered, very quietly. "But you must not go. Monsieur Askew, I have come here to beg of you. I—"

"You have come here to get me not to attend to my interests," cried Hilary, losing all his self-control. "Are you not actively allied with my worst enemy, who seeks to ruin me and drive me out of St. Boniface. I lost nearly a winter's cut of lumber when my boom was treacherously destroyed. You knew, Mademoiselle Rosny, and yet you ask me to heed advice from one who is not my friend."

She started as if he had lashed her across the face. She tried to answer him, but could only stammer incoherently; and her eyes, which had blazed with wrath as he spoke of the boom, were filled with tears which she checked valiantly.

"You think I came here tonight," she began, and paused, her voice choking. "You think I came here—to you—to engage in some plot of Monsieur Brousseau's? It is insufferable! You are not so important an enemy as that." She put out her hands swiftly. "Ah, do not go to St. Boniface," she pleaded.

Hilary looked at her stubbornly. He would not let himself be moved.

"I have come to you, and you have humiliated me," she whispered. "Go, then!" she cried suddenly jerking the reins. "Go, Monsieur Askew! Go to St. Boniface!"

She spurred her horse and galloped wildly away, while Hilary watched. He saw her pass out of sight; he waited till the last reverberations of the flying hoofs had ceased. He was ashamed; and yet he was sustained by a grimmer determination than any that he had ever known. He would not let himself believe in her. His wrath, which made him doubt every one, which had suffered him to let Lefe depart, kindled him to fighting heat.

He meant to fight, and he grew hotter as he tramped steadily along the river road, reeling off the miles behind him, a lonely figure, his heart rancorous against the injustice meted out to him; bitter against Lefe, bitter against Madeleine, but furious in his resolution to show St. Boniface what manner of man he was.

At last the lights of the settlement began to twinkle through the trees. He walked a little faster, fingering the revolver in his coat pocket. But when he reached the gate above the dam he stopped for a while and considered.

His instinct was for physical assault, such violence as alone could appease his rage. He listened to the distant hubbub about Duval's shanty; and then he did the wisest, or else the most foolish thing that he could have done. He broke his revolver, took out the cartridges, and threw them away. He put the weapon back in his pocket, opened the gate, and went on.

And this was wise, because Canadian

law does not readily exonerate the man who kills; yet foolish, had he known that three men at least in St. Boniface expected him and were prepared for his coming.

He strode past the dam and approached the outlying houses of the settlement, feeling an implacable resolve harden him as he heard the shouts and the tumult that came from Baptiste's old house. He turned into the little street on which it stood and saw it in front of him, with the higher bulk of the mill beyond.

The shades of Baptiste's cabin were drawn, and the lamplight from within threw the shadows of the lumbermen upon them in grotesque attitudes. Hilary could see through the open door that the place was packed to suffocation. There was no room to dance; but there was to be no dance that night.

A group of men, chattering upon the porch, ceased their conversation as Hilary ascended the three steps, and nudged one another. One of them broke into loud, drunken laughter. Hilary hardly heard them. He strode into the saloon and stood within the doorway.

CHAPTER IX.

The Trap.

The first man whom he saw was Louis Duval, uncorking a bottle of gin. Their eyes met across the heads of the lumbermen before Hilary's presence was known.

He stood still for a moment, taking in the scene. He was faintly conscious that the door at the far end of the room had closed, but this perception made no impression on him. He felt, alone though he was, that he was absolute master of the situation.

He strode up to Louis, pushing the lumbermen who were in his way aside, seized the bottle from his hand, and



"I Have Come to You, and You Have Humiliated Me," She Whispered. "Go, Then!"

dashed it to the floor. His movement and the ensuing action were so swift that it was only after their completion that all the company awakened to his presence.

He turned toward the plank table which had been nailed across a recess for a bar counter. On this were a number of bottles, all of brandy or gin illicitly distilled and smuggled up the river. On the floor were two hogsheads. A quantity of glasses newly bought, and still containing fragments of the straw in which they had been packed, stood on a packing case near by.

Hilary swept his arm along the plank, knocking off the bottles, which crashed to the floor, strewn it with broken glass. A score of streams began to filter between the edges of the boards, uniting in the depressions. The stench of the spirits rose into the air.

He kicked the hogsheads over, and they added their contents to the pool. With another sweep he struck down the glasses. Then the lumbermen rushed at him, cursing, infuriated. The foremost hesitated as they came within reach of his arm, however, remembering Pierre's disfigurement. The momentary delay was fatal to them. Hilary struck out with all his force, felling them, or sending them staggering backward against those behind, and clearing a passage in a twinkling toward Louis, with whom alone he had business at that moment.

Louis was a coward, unlike his brother and Pierre, perhaps pardonably, on account of his physical weakness. As Hilary grasped him by the shoulders the liquor seller, who made up in adroitness for what he lacked in strength, twisted like an eel, dived under the arms of those about him, and rushed toward the rear entrance, shouting something as he ran.

What it was Hilary did not know. He perceived dimly that the mob fell back, except for a few who, unable to restrain themselves, surged about him like a pack of wolves, snarling, and trying to thrust at him with the knives which they had drawn from their leather belt sheaths. Hilary, fighting

like a madman, sent them smashing to the floor, cleared his way again, and made for Louis, who was just opening the back door. He grasped at him, but Louis was just a second too quick. He darted through, and the door, thrown back violently, struck Hilary upon the forehead. The next instant Hilary passed through the doorway in pursuit.

The shanty which Baptiste had once occupied had formerly been a part of a large structure used by the mill for storing machinery. At the back, and contiguous with it, had been the old mill stables. The door connecting the two places had been nailed up, but Duval had opened it that morning in the course of his preparations for Hilary's advent.

As Hilary entered the stable the door closed behind him, and he heard the bolt shot. The yells of the lumbermen grew faint. It was only then Hilary realized that he had run into a trap.

The stable contained Louis, who had posted himself within the stall immediately opposite the entrance, and grinned at Hilary defiantly. Between the two stood Simeon Duval, a grotesque grin upon his scholarlike features. The man who had bolted the door was Leblanc, and Black Pierre stood beside him.

The four, executing a flanking movement simultaneously, advanced and took up their position between Hilary and the door. Nobody spoke, but Simeon Duval took off his spectacles quite methodically, folded them in their case, and placed it back in his pocket. Standing with his back close enough to the wall of one of the horse-boxes to be able to prevent an attack from behind, Hilary watched the four contemptuously. They had got him there to fight and there was nothing he wanted more, even against the lot of them. He half regretted having drawn his cartridges, but he was conscious of no sense of fear whatever. He kept his right hand lightly against the pocket in which the revolver lay; it might be useful for intimidation, or even for self-defense.

"Well, we got you, Meestair Askew," sneered Simeon. "Now you listen here. We're peaceful men an' we hate trouble. We don't want to hurt you if you go away from St. Boniface. Go back where you come from. Else we kill you tonight. What you say? You are alone here, no police, and every one hate you. If we kill you every one swear you try to kill Black Pierre, an' my brudder, an' me. Now what you say?"

"I haven't come here to say, but to give your brother a thrashing," answered Hilary scornfully. "The thrashing that I promised him that night at Ste. Marie."

"You spy on me in Ste. Marie an' bring revenue officers. It cost me a hundred dollar, you damn police spy. You go now, eh? What you say?"

Hilary wheeled upon Leblanc and Pierre. "And these men—what are they doing here? You want three men to help you kill me, eh, Simeon?"

He did not want to parley, but in spite of his eagerness his judgment told him that he was in a perilous situation. He must taunt them till they lost their heads; that would give him an advantage.

"You, Leblanc, want your lease again, I suppose, you thief," he said. "You, Pierre, didn't get enough of a hiding that day I caught you cutting down my trees. There's another coming to you in a minute or two, Simeon, if I'd been you I'd have picked some men who could help me fight if I was afraid, instead—"

He got no further, for at that moment, taking the initiative, he sprang. His fists dashed full into Simeon's face, right and left, almost together. Simeon toppled backward; his head struck the edge of the stall behind him, and he dropped moaning to the floor and lay there.

Passing him, Hilary leaped for Louis, but the agile little man eluded him and darted down the middle of the stable. Before he could quite recover himself Leblanc and Pierre sprang from behind. As Hilary swung sideways he saw the knife in Pierre's hand. He thrust his arm up, and the blow, diverted, glanced, the knife ripping his sleeve open. Leblanc, also with a knife, was springing from the other side. Hilary sized up the situation with judgment for which he could never afterward account. Dashing his fists upward, he caught Pierre under the chin, forcing his head back; at the same time he grasped the wrist which held the knife and swung so as to interpose the outlaw's body between himself and Leblanc's blow. As Leblanc struck again Hilary turned, sheltering himself behind Pierre, one hand under his chin, the other holding back the wrist, so that Leblanc's short, stabbing strokes always fell short, being aimed around Pierre's body.

Backing into the stall adjacent to the one in which Simeon had fallen, Hilary in this manner continued to ward off Leblanc's attack. The stall was narrow, and the jobber was unable to get past Pierre, struggling in Hilary's grasp, in order to strike a blow from the side or rear. So long

as Hilary could retain his hold on Pierre and keep him in this position he was comparatively safe. But he had no more than about fifteen seconds in which to think out his next move. It was all a question of muscular endurance. He could not hope to retain his clutch on Pierre's throat with one hand for many seconds, against the force behind the outlaw's shoulders, and his strong, thick-set body. Suddenly he made up his mind. He released Pierre, flinging him backward with all his might. Pierre fell against Leblanc, sending him staggering; the two claved at each other and fell to the floor.

As Hilary released Pierre he caught sight of Louis' face peering across Pierre's shoulder. The fall of the two men left Louis Hilary's only immediate opponent. Hilary hesitated; in spite of his threat, spoken to Simeon, he hesitated to attack a man much his inferior in size and strength. But at that moment he saw Louis' right arm drawn back, and the gleam of the knife he held. Before the upward thrust came he stepped back, pulled the revolver from his pocket, and brought the butt crashing down on Louis' head.

"That's what I promised you!" he shouted.

The little man, instantly drenched with blood from the jagged scalp wound, staggered, let the knife fall, screamed, and fled, stumbling from side to side, with hands upraised above his head, toward the door. Louis had had enough; he had been meant to be the bait of the trap, and now he had been caught in it. Blinded by the blood that poured over his face, he blundered into one of the window embrasures, and his upraised hands brought down the lamp, which fell crashing upon the wooden floor, and fortunately went out.

Still screaming, Louis found the door and tried to push back the bolt. But before he could do so Hilary was on the spot. He pushed it back himself and, taking Louis by the shoulders, he pushed him with all his strength into Baptiste's shanty.

The room was empty. The word had evidently been passed about that it would be advisable for one to make oneself scarce in view of what was going on in the stable. But a group of men were gathered about the door at the entrance, peering in; and the sudden apparition of Louis, covered with blood, and Hilary behind him, proved too strong for their discretion. They came running forward, yelling.

Hilary could have broken through them and gained the safety of his rooms, a short distance away. Even the hazard in such a course was less than what he had faced in the stable. But the idea never occurred to him. He was fighting mad; he had come to St. Boniface to fight, and he meant to fight his quarrel out. He turned.

He heard Leblanc and Pierre running across the stable floor. All his calculations, which were subconscious, were made in fractional seconds that night. So, now, he calculated that the pair would reach the door a half-second before the men in the shanty. They would emerge confident, imagining him to be in flight. He waited. Louis' blundering flight, which took him into the midst of the lumbermen, stopped them in their attack, just as Hilary had calculated it would; at the same moment Leblanc's head and shoulders became visible around the door. Hilary, waiting for that, jabbed upward viciously with his right. Leblanc howled and fell backward, knocking Pierre off his balance in turn; and before they had recovered from the surprise Hilary had stepped back into the stable and bolted the door behind him.

He saw their wonder and the dawning fear in Leblanc's face, covered with blood, and Pierre's infuriated scowl; but they came on at him again, craftily now, crouching, their knives drawn back for the stab. A revolver, even when loaded, is of little use against a knife, wielded by an expert at close quarters. The men were attacking from opposite sides, too. They were watching each movement that Hilary made. He estimated that they would spring after a very brief delay. He hazarded a second and, stooping, picked up a fragment of rotten harness which had fallen to the floor beside one of the horse-boxes. He wheeled toward Leblanc, who twisted his body to meet him; and then, as Pierre rushed in from behind, wheeled again and brought down the harness strap upon his head.

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A knife stab—and what comes of it.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Proposed Research Work.
A proposed British national institution of industrial biology would have for its prime object research connected with industries dependent on micro-organisms or enzymes; and these, setting aside brewing and distilling, include the making of cheese, bread and pressed yeast, lactic acid, wine and vinegar, besides tanning, the treatment of sewage, and all agriculture. Other aims would be to give specialized instruction to teachers and technical workers and to provide a collection of microscopic culture from which scientific workers and others could draw material.

The Finish.

Patience—"Have you ever noticed in a circus parade that they always have the calloped wagon at the end of the parade?" Patrice—"Oh, yes; that is to let everybody know that the worst is yet to come."