

WOODEN SPOIL

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

ILLUSTRATIONS BY IRWIN MYERS

(Copyright, 1919, by George H. Doran Co.)

"MY FATHER WOULD NEVER CONSENT—NEVER, HILARY."

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. 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 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 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. He is stabbed and left to die. Father Lucien, Madeleine and Connell find him near death. Madeleine takes him to the chateau, where he recovers.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

She broke down. "What must you think of me?" she cried.

"I think—" began Hilary.

She sprang to her feet, facing him. "That I knew of the plan to cut your boom! Yes, I did know, but only a little while before it happened. And—listen!—I was on my way to you, to warn you, when the horse bolted. And the shock of the fall made me forget for a few moments afterward. But when it was too late!"

Her words flung a great burden from Hilary's mind. He had never been able to reconcile the thought of her guilt in the conspiracy with his knowledge of her, his conception which was almost knowledge.

"I was sure you could not have known—I tried, at least, to make myself believe you did not know, in spite of your words," he said. "Mademoiselle Rosny, I ask only one thing; it was not Baptiste?"

"Jean Baptiste? He is incapable of such a crime! Monsieur Askew, I do not know who it was, save that it was some man employed by—by him, probably from Ste. Marie. And because I had known—that was why I told you that it was too late for the good-will. That was why I was unhappy, and seemed in trouble, on the day when you met me riding, afterward." She raised her head and met his eyes at last. "And I went to you that night and asked you to leave St. Boniface because I knew that Edouard Brousseau—she hesitated at the name—meant to kill you. He had hinted as much to me."

"I presumed once," began Hilary quietly, though his heart had suddenly begun to hammer, "to ask you a question about Monsieur Brousseau which angered you. Whether he meant so much to you, I dare—he took her hand in his—"to ask it again."

"No," she said in a whisper, looking down. "He never meant so much—I know it now—and since that day when he let me see the evil in his heart he has meant less than nothing."

Her breath came and went quickly as she spoke; she was afraid; she tried to withdraw her hand, but he was standing beside her, holding it



"I Love You, Hilary," She Answered.

Just. She knew that if she looked up she would be unable to resist him; but already he had drawn her into his arms.

"I love you, Madeleine."

She did not try to disengage herself; she was trembling, and he could not see her face.

"Madeleine! Tell me—"

He was conscious of a stupendous fear; all the future hung upon that instant, and still she gave no sign.

"Won't you look at me, Madeleine? Won't you speak to me?"

At that she raised her head, and flung it back with a proud gesture, and looked into his eyes. "I love you, Hilary," she answered, with pride

that forbade denial or coquetry. And Hilary feared no longer. Everything was changed to joy that seemed to blaze about him, lighting up the day.

For a long time that morning they forgot everything except their happiness. It was not for an hour, perhaps, not until Hilary began to speak of his hopes for the future that she remembered what she had to say.

"I should have told you," she said. "The waiting must be so long. My father would never consent—never, Hilary."

"What has your father against me," he asked, "except my cutting down his trees? And, as for that, a man who sells his property, or rights over it, surely can never justify himself in bearing ill-will to those who purchase from him."

"It is not that, Hilary. It is because—well, first, because you are an American. He does not love the English, but he hates Americans. He thinks that they betrayed Canada in 1783. And because the people are satisfied under English rule, and loyal, he resents it and broods over it."

"But that is all ancient history," said Hilary, laughing at the absurdity of the idea. As a key to conduct, the Seigneur's antiquarian motives appeared impossible.

She smiled. "He is very good and very just," she said tenderly, "but he has let his dreams take hold of him too much. And they are bound up with his craze for the land. He wants the seignory to remain undivided for ever, he wants the feudal tenure back, with the serfs of his boyhood days; he loves his land far better than he loves me—at least, I believe he looks on me as an accessory of it."

She hesitated. "Hilary," she continued presently, "that is how it was arranged that I was to marry—him." Hilary noticed her unwillingness to pronounce Brousseau's name. "It was because he has a hold on the seignory, and if my father lost it the shock would kill him."

"When—he—was a boy, working for my father here, he had ambitious dreams, like so many young Canadians. My father became interested in him, gave him an education, and helped him. He repaid it by scheming to get hold of the Rosny inheritance. He set to work, won my father's confidence, and got him to put his money in worthless companies. Then he became his creditor. I knew nothing of all this, because I was at school in Paris. But when I came home, after my mother's death, my father was in his power."

"He tried to free himself by selling your uncle the timber rights. He could only bring himself to do this because he knew that some day the trees would be cut down, and the mill would go, and we should have our ancient solitude again. But he needed more money to help a relative in Quebec who had lost his fortune through taking his advice to invest in one of the companies. My father felt obligated to him. So—he got the mortgage, and it expires in December, and—that's all, Hilary, dear, except to say that, although it was expected I was to marry him, I never in my heart expected to. And I wouldn't let him—kiss me. Only my cheek—once or twice. It used to make him so angry. He hates you so much, Hilary, and once he was jealous—he seemed to divine—and he accused me of caring for you. That was what made me angry with you. I tried to hate you more, and all the time I used to think about you, dear—I was ashamed—I am still ashamed."

"I think we must both have known that we were meant to love each other, as soon as we met," Hilary said.

"I think I did know," she answered softly.

"Does he know your decision?" asked Hilary.

She nodded. "I told him when he gave me to understand his wicked design against you that I could never be anything to him. I had not gauged him before—or, rather, I had been hypnotized by my sense of duty toward my father. But Hilary, remember this—her cheeks glowed and she looked very earnestly at him—"if your love is as

true as mine, and as unswerving as mine, you can remain happy in the knowledge that we love each other. And as long as your love is unswerving you can know that I love you. Nothing can alter my love except the knowledge that yours is not true. And although the waiting may be long I shall never become his wife to save my father's lands—never, Hilary."

She was crying softly, her cheek against his shoulder. Hilary took her in his arms. "Dear, I am going to tell your father," he said.

She started out of his arms. "Hilary! You must not. It would kill him to know."

"But he must know, Madeleine. Don't you see, nothing is to be gained by delay. It is right that he should know."

"He will be your enemy, Hilary. He will fight you to the bitter end."

"But I shall not be his. What harm can he do me?"

"Listen, first," she said, as they began walking slowly back toward the chateau. "The other day, as soon as your recovery was assured, father went down to the mill and talked with your hands. He gave them a terrible scolding. He told them that they owed as much duty toward their employer as toward him. It was not because he loved you, Hilary, but because of his sense of duty. He thinks it is my duty to sacrifice myself for the seignory. There will be no more trouble with your workmen, now that they know you are our friend. But, Hilary, I can't bear to have the old, bad feeling back again. Give me up, dear!"

He laughed and put his arm about her. "I can't believe he will hate me forevermore, just because I want to take you away from him. No, dear, I shall tell him, but not today perhaps. You see, with less than three months before us, we can't drift any longer."

She sighed. "I suppose you are right, Hilary," she said. "But then—what will happen to us?"

"Is the interest very much?"

"It is not the interest, Hilary. It is the principal. Hilary, it is a hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

Hilary looked grim. There was no chance of raising that amount anywhere. And it was his turn to despair.

"Are you sure," he asked, "that the sacrifice is worth your while? I feel like a thief, to rob your father and you, unless you are sure—"

And it was her turn to be hopeful. "I am sure that I love you, dear," she answered, "and that the sacrifice my father expects of me is an unjust one."

So they resolved to speak no more about it, to tell Rosny as soon as an opportunity occurred, and to wait, though the waiting for something to eventuate which would resolve the difficulty seemed useless. Only a miracle could save the seignory from Brousseau's grasping hands.

There was one thing that had puzzled Hilary for a long time, and now it stayed in his thoughts and would not leave him. Why was Brousseau willing to spend unlimited money to oust him from his timber rights? Why did he not balk at murder?

He broached this subject with Madeleine, who looked at him in wonder.

"I never thought of it in that way," she answered slowly. "I thought it was just—just because he sensed that we were going to care for each other, and so wanted you away."

"It may be so," mused Hilary. "But somehow I fancy there must be a deeper reason."

As he concluded Madeleine stopped suddenly and clutched his arm in agitation. They had reached the side of the chateau. From where they stood the front of the building was visible. A buggy was at the door, and Hilary recognized the horse as Brousseau's.

He was standing in the living-room when they went in, facing the Seigneur across the table. His rage, which he made little effort to hide, was patent. It was pitifully clear that he was the dominating force there, and that Rosny had been endeavoring to placate him without avail.

"Come in, Madeleine," said the Seigneur, turning to her. "You will excuse us, I am sure, Monsieur Askew," he added to Hilary.

"No!" shouted Brousseau. "It will be just as well that your friend the American shall understand the situation. I am a plain man, and I speak without concealment to any one who cares to listen. So you have been implicating me in your troubles with your men, eh, Monsieur Askew? Because one of the workmen whom you have assaulted at various times draws a knife on you and cuts you slightly, while half unconscious from your blows, you allege a plot on my part to murder you?"

Without answering him, Hilary turned to the Seigneur. "If Monsieur Brousseau's business is with me, no doubt you and Mademoiselle Rosny will excuse us," he said.

"It ain't with you," retorted Brousseau, scowling. "I was just telling you my opinion of you, the same as I'd tell any man, no matter who he was. It's with you, Rosny," he continued, addressing the Seigneur again. "And

it ain't private. Private? Diab!e, it's too public! It's made me the laughing-stock of St. Boniface, and Ste. Marie too. Every one's seen Mademoiselle Rosny riding and driving with me. Now she says she won't have any more to do with me. Why? Have I changed? Ain't I the man I always was? When I make a bargain I stick to it."

"Monsieur Brousseau," protested the Seigneur, "we Rosnys do not break our pledges. Whatever my daughter has contracted to do will be done. But this is hardly the occasion, or the manner—"

"I know it ain't," said Brousseau, subsiding; and Hilary felt Madeleine's hand, which had gripped his arm tightly to restrain him, relax its tension. "Maybe I forgot myself. I don't want to be anything but a gentleman in the presence of ladies, but it's hard, Monsieur Rosny, when everything's as good as settled, to have it put back in the melting-pot. Menning you, Monsieur Askew!" he continued, sneering into Hilary's face. "That's where you come into this business. When people in St. Boniface began to talk about Mademoiselle here having thrown me over for him"—he was addressing the Seigneur again—"it's more than flesh and blood can stand."

The Seigneur looked pitifully distressed. His face, flushed with resentment at Brousseau's insolence, was molded into impotence by conflicting impulses. He stepped forward.

"I am sure, gentlemen, that there exists no cause for disagreement," he said. "Monsieur Askew is entirely guiltless of what you suggest. Please

remember, Monsieur Brousseau, that he is my guest, Madeleine, my dear. I suggest that you and Edouard have a quiet talk together. I know that you hold your word as sacred as we Rosnys have always held our word."

Madeleine was as pale as death, but she stood forward bravely. "I never pledged my word to you, Monsieur Brousseau," she said in a low tone. "You know it. You asked me to be your wife and I refused. You took a good deal for granted. You took me for granted. You made a mistake. When you treacherously conspired to cut Monsieur Askew's boom, when you planned his death, you lost whatever chance you had ever had. I shall never marry you."

Brousseau staggered backward, came up against the table, and stood staring at her in incredulity, in fear, in fury, his own face whiter than hers. The Seigneur sat down in his chair heavily, seeming to collapse there.

Then Brousseau flung his fear aside and laughed, and it was the most evil laugh that Hilary had ever heard. He addressed Rosny; and as he spoke he continued to advance toward him, until he was shaking his fist in the old Seigneur's face.

"I understand now," he sneered. "This fine American has been at work in this matter. It is he who has been spreading these lying stories about me. I don't blame your daughter, Rosny. A woman is easily influenced by a new face. So's a man, for that matter."

"I don't blame her. I expect my wife to be true to me after we're married—no more and no less. I'll take care of the love. I ain't a hard man. I can make allowances for human nature. I expect to mold her and to keep watch over her. Maybe she'd do the same with me."

"But this is different, Rosny," he shouted furiously. "He's been telling her lies about me. He came up here and started in to crush me. He wants to drive me out of Ste. Marie. I'm not the man to allow that, Rosny! You know what I mean. I'll deal with him when the times comes. I'll speak to him again presently. I'm speaking to you now. Is she going to marry me or ain't she? You know what it's going to cost you if she goes back on her word."

Rosny groped her way to his feet. The old duelist, who in his younger days would fight at the drop of the hat, had been brought pitifully low, but not so low as Brousseau thought. His face was aflame. He opened his mouth, stuttered, and pointed toward the door.

"You can go. You can go, Monsieur Brousseau," he stammered. "Custom—custom and courtesy forbid—insult a guest—go before I forget myself."

"I'll go, then," shouted Brousseau, and moved toward the door. "You've had your chance. Once more, is she willing to be reasonable? I keep my word, in friendship or enmity. Will

she keep hers? If so I'll forget. I'll call it a whim. I—"

"No, I shall never be your wife," said Madeleine quietly.

Brousseau swung upon Hilary. "Some day I'll get you, you lying dog!" he swore, and raised his hand threateningly.

Madeleine darted between them. "You coward!" she cried. "You coward, to threaten a wounded man, whom you do dare not look in the face in anger when he is well!"

Brousseau shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the door. The malignant smile upon his face seemed frozen there, giving him the aspect of a satyr's mask. Hilary came forward and tried to draw Madeleine aside, but she still confronted Brousseau with blazing eyes. But it was the Seigneur's look of agony and shame that was the most vivid part of the picture.

Rosny stood like a statue beside the door, watching Brousseau make his way along the corridor toward the entrance. Hilary put his arms about Madeleine, supporting her. Her courage was gone, and she was weeping uncontrollably.

The front door slammed and Rosny turned back into the room. He burst out in passionate words.

"It is all gone!" he cried. "Everything—home, lands, inheritance. And it is well gone. The Rosny seignory is nearly everything to me, but you are more, Madeleine. Our name means little enough now, but it shall never become allied with that of the scoundrel who has robbed me of everything else."

He raised his clenched fist and shook it in the air with a passionately dramatic gesture, as if to register his vow. His face was strangely mottled with red and white, and he seemed to have aged ten years within ten minutes.

"I offer you my humblest regrets for what has occurred this morning, monsieur," he said to Hilary. "There was a time when I should have exacted personal retribution. Now, alas, I cannot! I can only bear the blame. But as for you, monsieur, you who came here in an evil day to cut my trees, you who are my guest, what have you to say who have brought this ruin upon me?"

Madeleine started forward as if to protest, but she silenced her with a gesture of his open hand.

"I ask you what you have to say, monsieur," he repeated. "I ask you how you justify yourself, you who are a guest in my home and have presumed upon that fact to turn my daughter from me?"

"I love her," answered Hilary simply.

The words seemed to sting Rosny to the quick. "You are presumptuous, monsieur!" he cried. "Perhaps you, too, thought that the heiress went with the trees?"

Madeleine cried out and laid her hands appealingly upon her father's arm; he did not repulse her, but continued speaking as if he were not conscious of her presence.

"She shall never be your wife. You have done harm enough here, monsieur. When you are well my caleche is at your disposition, to take you back to your mill. And henceforward, unless you claim the last inch of your legal rights to cut about the chateau—which I do not think you will!—be added with reluctant justice—"let us see you no more."

"You are unjust!" cried Madeleine. "We love each other. There exists no reason why we should not love. Monsieur Askew is as good as any man."

"An American!" cried Rosny hotly. "This is not his country, and our ways are not his. He is not one of us."

"Yet you were not too proud to pledge me to that other man, who is not one of us either, except by remote race. Against my will. Without my knowledge."

"Enough!" cried Rosny. "It is all past!"

"The memory is not past. Yes, you pledged me to him and placed the first links of the chain about my neck, hoping that the understanding, to which I was no party, would gradually enmesh me, capture me, that I should become his wife and save your land for you."

The Seigneur turned on her a look in which humiliation struggled with anger. He seemed stupefied by her outburst. Hilary interposed.

"Monsieur Rosny, I love Madeleine, and I intend to marry her," he said calmly. "But I realize your feelings, and I understand how great a shock this has been. You invited me to depart when I am well. I am well enough to depart now. But I shall return, to see her and to plead our cause frankly with you. There exists now no reason, no valid reason—"

"You shall never come here!" thundered the Seigneur, losing all self-control. "The day when I sold your uncle the timber rights over my land was the most evil day of my life. Go—if you are well, go! My caleche is ready for you. Go, monsieur, in God's name, and trouble me no longer!"

He raised his voice and shouted, "Robitaille! Robitaille!"

They cumbered the stage of life, lingering there when their exits were long overdue. They were unreal as phantom figures glimpsed in a wild dream. Pity for the two futile old men choked Hilary's throat. He could feel nothing but that as he watched Robitaille come to the door, hobbling and shuffling, with stiffened joints that made him more like a marionette.

But he felt, too, the urgency of taking Madeleine away, into a world of reality, before the same dream infected her.

She came up to Hilary softly and placed her fingers on his arm, looking into his face wistfully.

"You must go, dear, and not try to convince him now," she said. "It has been a terrible blow to him. He looks so ill. I am afraid for him. I shall come to you tomorrow and tell you—"

"Robitaille," said the Seigneur. "Monsieur Askew has decided, much to my grief, to leave this afternoon. You will have the goodness to pack his things and to prepare the caleche for him. You will drive him to the mill."

The old man muttered acquiescence and shuffled away. Hilary turned toward Rosny. Frankly he held out his hand. The action might have been ill-timed, but it responded to his deepened feeling. But Rosny did not seem to see the gesture. He stood staring across the room, one hand clutching his spreading collar, and his face, which had been white and red, was purple.

Hilary turned away. He had reached the door when he heard a sound as if Rosny was clearing his throat. Then Madeleine cried out in fear. Hilary turned, to see Rosny sit heavily down in his chair. His eyes closed, his arms drooped over the sides; his head fell on his breast.

Hilary ran to him. He was unconscious, and breathing heavily. Hilary tried to raise him, to carry him to the sofa, but the man seemed made of iron as he lay, a dead weight, in Hilary's arms.

At Madeleine's cry old Robitaille had turned, too, and he came shuffling back. As he perceived his master lying in the chair he began to utter wild, whimpering cries.

"His father went that way," he mumbled. "I always knew he'd go like that. Forty-five years I've served him. Forty-five years. I always knew—"

"Help me to get him into the next room, to bed," said Hilary.

Robitaille did not understand, but he aided Hilary to raise his master, and together they half dragged and half carried him into the drawing room and laid him on Hilary's bed.

Madeleine knelt beside him in despair, her hands clasped, her eyes strained on his face. Hilary was loosening his collar and the upper part of his clothing. Robitaille had shuffled out.

"I have killed him!" cried the girl, in pathetic grief. "I have killed him!" Hilary could do nothing. She seemed distraught, and the Seigneur lay like a fallen tree. His rattling breaths blended with the girl's sobs; and there was no other sound in the room.

But soon Robitaille came shuffling back. In one hand he carried a basin, in the other a little rusty knife. A towel was on his arm. He muttered something to Madeleine, who rose from her knees and looked at Hilary with a brave effort at self-composure. "He wants to bleed him," she said. "He says that when he was a young man they used to bleed such cases and they got well. He says it is the only chance."

Hilary, feeling helpless, took the lancet from the old servant's fingers and looked at the rusty edge.

"I've heard of bleeding in such cases," he said. "Well—perhaps it won't hurt him. But we must boil the instrument. Can you get some hot water?"

The girl hurried to obey. She left the room and came back with a little alcohol stove and a pan of water. Hilary, having scraped the rust from the blade, watched her in admiration at her self-possession as she went to and fro, intent upon her task. While the water was boiling the two men managed to get Rosny to bed.

When the water was boiled Hilary sterilized the lancet. Robitaille looking on without comprehension. But his shaking fingers grew firm as he performed the little operation. When it was over and the arm bandaged a slight improvement in Rosny's condition seemed already manifest.

They sat beside him all through the day, while the heavy breathing gradually grew lighter, and the stupor seemed to be passing into sleep. Toward evening Rosny opened his eyes for a moment and looked about him.

"I should like to stay, if I can be of help," said Hilary.

"I think you had better go, dear, if you are strong enough," said Madeleine. "You will be very careful of yourself, and make your friend, Mr. Connell, take care of you? And not go to work in the woods till you are strong?"

She put her arms about his neck. "And I love you with all my heart," she whispered, as she kissed him.

"The course of true love never runs smooth."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Debt World Is Apt to Forget.

The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.—George Eliot.