

WOODEN SPOIL

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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CHAPTER XVI.

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Dupont Remembers.

Brousseau was seated in the library of the gaudy house when a tall old man came to the door. He recognized, recognized Captain Dupont, and admitted him.

Since the exposure Brousseau had hardly left his room. He sat there, haggard, crushed, planning, scheming to get back that which seemed slipping inexorably from his grasp. Consumed with furious hate of Hilary, he seemed inhibited from action by the very vengeance of his will.

"He's sailing for Quebec tomorrow evening," said the captain. "I am to take him with a schooner load of lumber."

"Askew?" queried Brousseau sharply. "Yes, monsieur. He came to me late this afternoon. His horse was all in a sweat. He must have driven like the devil. He told me to sail tomorrow night, whether the hold's full or empty."

Brousseau was staggered. If Hilary was going to Quebec immediately, it must be to lay those papers, which he had sought vainly in his desk, before the police. He saw the prison walls closing about him. And to the great hate he bore Hilary was added the lust for liberty.

He must have the papers. Lefe Donnell knew besides, but Lefe could be laughed at, once the papers were his own. His plan began to take shape. If Hilary were out of the way and the documents destroyed he could yet win Madeleine, achieve his dream of becoming Seigneur, his life ambition.

"Dupont," he said, "you and I have not always been on good terms. You refused to break your contract with the St. Boniface company. But I guess you see differently now."

Dupont clenched his fists. "I've sworn to kill him," he whispered. "I've held my peace. I talked with him face to face tonight, and he never knew the devil that was sitting in my throat, telling me to make an end."

"Can you keep that devil of yours silent till you have him on board?" asked Brousseau.

Dupont pulled at his tangled beard and nodded. Brousseau, watching him, knew that the madness which held him would carry him to the end. "Who are your crew?" he asked.

"Drouin, Lachance and Georges Martin."

"Two men are enough. I have two good men for you in place of them. Listen carefully, Dupont."

Marie, sleeping overhead, heard her father drive up in a sleigh that night, and there was whispering at the door. That frightened her. Another thing that alarmed her was his way of entering. Usually he would stamp into the house, as if on board; but now he came in furtively, and she could hardly hear his stealthy movements below. She wondered what was portending. Of late he had watched her more keenly than ever, and had been more silent.

She slept by starts, and awakened at dawn to hear a stealthy step outside her door. In the dim light she saw her father bending over her bed. She sat up, stretching out her arms as if to ward off something. In her confused condition between sleep and waking she had fancied for a moment that he held something in his hand—a knife or a revolver.

But she saw that he held nothing.



He Was Staring Into Her Eyes as if to Read Her Secret Thoughts.

He was staring into her eyes, as if to read her secret thoughts.

"Tonight I go to Quebec," said Dupont. "I shall be aboard all day. I may not return."

He had said the same thing before his last voyage, and she had listened, unbelieving, but indifferent if it were true. Now the words terrified her no less than his demeanor, and for the first time she wondered whether he knew of her journey with Pierre.

He would never believe her story. It would have aroused all the old madness in him, if he had known. But he could not know.

"You will come back," she stam-

mered. "You will be back before the river closes. Then we shall be together here through the winter. We shall be happier than in the past. And we—"

"The name!" he cried, seizing her by the shoulders. "Tell me now! I wait no longer!"

The old obstinate look came on her face. Her remorse and pity instantly died. She compressed her lips and was silent.

"The name! Thou shalt tell me! I should have beaten thee when thou wast a child. But I shall not beat thee now, for I can compel thee to tell me. The name! The name!"

She remained silent and utterly quiescent. So strong had the inhibition grown that she could not have told, had she been willing to do so, save under the impulse of some overpowering mental shock. And, armed by the years, she grew calm as he grew violent, and her mind passed under the domination of the old habit.

He let her go and stood beside her, pulling at his gray beard and smiling. Marie had never seen her father smile at such a time before. And there came into her mind an idea which had never seemed possible, that some day she might yield up her secret. The mental inhibition of a lifetime was breaking under the stress.

Dupont strode toward the door, stopped there, and looked back.

"I go now to the schooner," he said. "I shall be aboard till we sail this evening. If thou come to me before I sail and tell me the name, I give thee his life, one life for another."

"What life? What other?" cried the girl wildly.

He glared into her eyes, and the look in his own was that of a man devil-haunted.

"Dost thou think I do not know," he cried, "of Monsieur Askew and thee, or that Madeleine has broken her betrothal with him because of thee?"

He turned toward her with a menacing gesture. "The name!" he thundered.

She covered under his words, and the name now trembled upon her lips. But before she spoke it Dupont was gone.

He was gone, and she was alone in the gray of the morning, watching the gray sea heave under a brightening sky, as she had watched it all her life. And her father's appearance in her room seemed unreal as a dream.

All day she watched him from the cottage, busy about his ship, piling the logs on deck. All day she waited, stunned, and incapable of action, repeating over and over in her mind her father's words, whose meaning was unintelligible to her. Yet St. Boniface remained unchanged in that ruin that had come upon her. Men laughed noisily as they strolled from their work at noon, children shouted at play; the hum of the mill was a soft undertone accompanying the horror in her heart. It seemed incredible that St. Boniface could know nothing, when the whole universe was crying out against her.

It was late in the afternoon when she saw two figures slouch toward the vessel. She recognized Pierre and Leblanc. And in a moment she understood the meaning of their appearance. Murder was being planned, against Hilary, who had saved her. She watched them go on board, paralyzed with fear.

Then the power of action, returning, shattered the paralysis of will that held her. She ran bareheaded from the cottage, through the streets of St. Boniface, toward the Chateau. She must get help there; her thoughts turned instinctively thither, as St. Boniface had always turned for aid toward his Seigneur.

Madeleine, seated in her room, with her memories of her dead, heard the door bell jangle. She went down, to see Marie in the hall. At the sight of the girl a feeling of repulsion, wild and unreasonable, stiffened her, but when she looked into her face, she spoke gently.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Mademoiselle," stammered the girl, "they are planning to kill him."

"Whom?"

"Monsieur Askew, who saved me from Pierre that day. Mademoiselle, I have only now learned what they say—of him and me. It is not true. And they are going to murder him. I came to you to save him."

"Where is he?"

"He is going on board tonight. Perhaps he is there now. Pierre and Leblanc are waiting for him there."

"Wait here!" cried Madeleine.

She ran back into the Chateau, put on her coat and hat, and took a revolver which had lain for many years unused in a drawer of a cabinet. She hurried to the stable, harnessed the horse, and brought the sleigh to the door. She motioned to Marie to enter, leaped in, and took the reins, and the two girls started along the road through the forest.

It was a difficult journey through the deep snow. Often the horse floundered knee-deep in the drifts, and the way seemed endless; but near the village the snow was tramped hard, and the sleigh went like the wind. Neither of the girls spoke, but before the eyes of each was the same dreadful picture.

At last they emerged from the forest and crossed the bridge. The hum of the mill had ceased, and had been succeeded by another sound, well known to dwellers along the St. Lawrence shores when winter arrives: The stirring of the ice floes as the impending storm drives them together to their long winter anchorage.

The sleigh went madly along the wharf, which groaned and creaked as the ice battered it on either side. Madeleine sprang from the sleigh and ran on board the schooner, which was already moving.

As Marie descended to follow her she saw that it was too late. There was an increasing space between the wharf and the deck. She hesitated, and then it was impossible to follow. For a moment she thought she saw Madeleine threading the narrow passage between the piles of lumber; then the darkness closed about her.

The pulleys creaked. The mainsail, and foresail swung upward and belled in the wind. The two gafftopsails gleamed like white birds against the night.

Then only the sails remained. They turned and shifted, disappearing and



And Hilary Opened His Eyes to Discover That the Vision Was Reality.

appearing again elusively, until they blended with the fog and the darkness and vanished finally.

The horse, left uncontrolled, swung round and galloped homeward, trailing the empty sleigh behind him. Marie stood shuddering at the end of the wharf. For a while she stared out in terror toward the invisible schooner, lost in the distance. She could see nothing, but she could still hear the roar of the wind in the rigging and the flapping of the great sails.

Presently, with a low cry, she turned and began running homeward. She staggered into the cottage and sank down before the stove, crouching there.

When Hilary reached the wharf it was already dark. He had been recognized by no one on the way. He went straight aboard the schooner, and found Dupont on deck.

"When do you start?" he asked.

"Immediately, monsieur," replied the captain quietly.

The schooner contained a tiny cabin in the fore-castle. Between this and the poop, in the open bottom, was piled the lumber, secured with chains, and stacked high above the sides.

"I'm going below," said Hilary, turning away. He did not want to look upon St. Boniface again.

He put his foot upon the top rung of the ladder that led down to the fore-castle. As he did so he felt a stunning blow upon the back of the head. He staggered, slipped, and fell down the ladder into the little open space before the cabin.

Half dazed, he was barely conscious of seeing the grinning faces of Pierre and Leblanc stare into his. His overcoat was torn from his back, his pockets emptied. He waited for the knife thrust, but only kicks followed. He was lifted and thrown into the cabin.

The outlaws ran back to assist Dupont in getting up the sails. It was not Brousseau's plan to dispatch him within hearing of the shore.

He heard the sails being hoisted, and felt the schooner moving from the wharf. Then he heard a low cry and saw Madeleine upon her knees before him.

She bent her face to his, whispering that she loved him, pleading for forgiveness, and beseeching him to rise. And Hilary opened his eyes to discover that the vision was reality.

He staggered to his feet and stood swaying in the middle of the cabin, while she kept her arms about him. He began to remember. He knew where he was now. Madeleine thrust the revolver into his hand.

"They have planned to murder you!" she cried. "I learned of it and brought this. You must not die, Hilary, now that we love each other."

He broke the revolver. It was empty, and the bore so eaten away with rust that to have fired it would have been more dangerous to the

shooter than to his object of aim. He saw the horror on the girl's face as she made the discovery.

"I did not think about the cartridges," she cried. "I heard you were in danger and I seized it and came to you. What shall we do? I am going to die with you."

"We are not going to die," he answered. But he felt a trickle of blood in his eyes. He pulled himself together to face the situation, thinking with all the concentration of which his mind was capable.

He heard the sails being run up, and the creak of the cordage in the wind. Then the schooner, grinding her course through the drift ice, began to roll and pitch as the force of the gulf current struck her. And through the portholes Hilary saw the lights of St. Boniface reel into the enveloping fog and vanish.

With Madeleine's arm about him he thought with desperate concentration. Doubtless the ruffians had gone to assist Dupont in taking the schooner out into midstream, confident that their victim was at their mercy. Once the vessel had passed the dangerous ice and deadly sunken rocks Dupont alone could keep her on her course. And Dupont had planned his death. He remembered the hate on the old man's face; but he could not imagine the cause of it, for he did not connect it with the story about Marie.

They would return, they would discover that the revolver was useless; his life was worth about ten minutes' purchase, and of Madeleine's fate he dared not think. He must fight for her and live for her. He got his shaking limbs under control.

"I'm all right," he whispered. "I've got my plan now. Keep behind me and be ready to help. The door's locked, I suppose?"

A quick attempt to open it showed him that it was. But he had a chance, if he could break down the door, for the sound might pass unheard in the gale, with the crashing of the ice against the sides of the schooner, enabling him to pass into the hold unseen in the darkness.

He hurled himself against the cabin door, fists, shoulders, body, with every muscle set tense. It broke upon its hinges, and Hilary fell, sprawling into the passage between the piles of stacked lumber, which rose to a height of twenty feet on either side of him, running to within a few feet of the cabin and the deck ladder.

He crouched there for a few seconds, hearing Madeleine behind him, and looked upward. The wind was roaring through the rigging with a noise far louder than that made by the falling door. No one had heard the crash. Above him swung the great mainsail, obscuring the gibbous moon that scoured like a pale ghost among the drifting clouds, haloed in the fog. Hilary could just discern the hazy figures of three men, hard at work to gain the middle channel, and the lantern that hung from the mast above, faintly illuminating them.

He had seen, but had not consciously observed, till the remembrance came to him then, that a pile of lumber, placed in the ship but not yet secured, lay about the center of the open space in front of the cabin. It could not shift with the rolling of the schooner, so as to destroy her equilibrium, on account of the stacks on either side. It consisted of the last load of logs, which had been dropped there from the end of the flume. Hilary raised two in his arms and carried them in front of the broken door. It was impossible to make his voice heard, for the ship was staggering through the crashing ice floes with a noise like that of artillery, but Madeleine saw his purpose, and in an instant was at work helping him. They began swiftly building a barricade; and, as Madeleine deposited her logs by the side of Hilary's, Hilary wedged the ends against the chained stacks on either side, so that the whole would form an immovable barrier. He toiled furiously, for their scanty time was precious beyond value. Soon Madeleine was behind the barricade, adjusting the logs that Hilary brought, and it stood the height of his waist.

It was improbable that either Dupont, Pierre or Leblanc carried a revolver; but, even if they did, the barricade was bullet-proof. Hilary forgot his aching head, the retching nausea. The barrier was shoulder-high. He clambered behind it and took his station there just as the grinding of the floes ceased, and the schooner caught the clear water.

A ray of moonlight, straggling through the fog, disclosed old Dupont at the wheel above the poop, and the great mainsail sweeping over it—and two forms that crept along the passage between the lumber piles. They started back in sudden consternation at the sight of the unexpected barricade, and Hilary's club, aimed at Pierre's head, descended upon the outlaw's arm, which dropped limp at his side.

With a yell Pierre started back, but Leblanc leaped forward, knife in hand. So sudden was the attack that it drove within an inch of Hilary's throat. Madeleine screamed, rushed forward, and pulled Hilary back. As Leblanc caught sight of her he uttered

an exclamation and followed Pierre back into the darkness of the lumber piles.

Silence followed. That wait was tense and nerve-grIPPING. Hilary tried to get Madeleine to return into the cabin, but she kept her place at his side. Then, to Hilary's utter surprise, he heard Brousseau's voice, and discerned him moving out of the darkness of the lumber.

"Monsieur Askew, I want to speak to you!" he called. "I am coming to you. I can trust you."

Hilary returned no answer, but Brousseau, apparently confident of Hilary's honor, pushed forward and came up to the barricade.

"Ah, mademoiselle, you have done a foolish thing!" he said quietly to Madeleine. "No harm was meant to Monsieur Askew. I want those papers—that's all. I heard he was coming aboard and adopted this ruse to get them. They are lies, written by a discharged employee, and I can't afford to be lied about. I want to clear my honor in your eyes, mademoiselle."

But as neither answered him he dropped his pose of blandness and addressed Hilary.

"I've got more at stake than the seignior and the asbestos mine," he cried. "That's only a drop in the bucket. I admit it's been a fair fight between us and you've won. I didn't want the seignior. I wanted the fight. I'm willing to drop it now and give you best. But I want those papers."

"They ain't yours, Monsieur Askew. Morris forged them, but you kept them, and that's why I trapped you here. It was me stopped Dupont from killing you, because of his daughter."

Madeline laughed contemptuously at the lie, and Brousseau snorted like a lashed horse.

"I want those papers," he went on doggedly. "They ain't in your clothes, and they ain't in your bag. Give them to me and we'll cry quits, and I'll put you and Madeleine ashore at Ste. Anne. I can trust you and you can trust me. Are you going to agree?"

"No!" shouted Hilary.

He had had the sense that Brousseau meditated some treachery, but he was not prepared for that followed. Madeleine cried to him and pulled him back, just as Pierre and Leblanc leaped down from the fore-castle roof, to which they had climbed during Brousseau's fictitious parleying. Each had his knife ready, and they were upon Hilary together.

There was no room for maneuvering, and Hilary never knew afterward how he escaped. But he thrust his club into Leblanc's face, and then, as the man stumbled back, brought it down with full force upon Pierre's skull.

All the strength of his arms went into the blow. Pierre never spoke into the blow. Pierre never spoke



All the Strength of His Arms Went Into the Blow. Pierre Never Spoke Again.

again. He went reeling across the deck like an inanimate thing, struck the bulwark, and, as the schooner lurched, toppled into the sea. He was probably dead before he disappeared beneath the waves.

Leblanc rushed frantically toward the barricade. Hilary was upon him when he saw Brousseau whip out a revolver and take deliberate aim at him. He felt the bullet clip his cheek. Twice more Brousseau fired. At the second shot Hilary stumbled and fell flat in the cabin entrance. At the third, Leblanc, shot through the brain, whirled round twice and collapsed in front of the barrier.

Madeline dragged Hilary within the cabin. Blood was gushing from a wound in his breast. Frantically she began to tear away the upper part of his clothing and to endeavor to staunch the wound. Suddenly she perceived the little rusted revolver upon the floor. She snatched it up and ran to see Brousseau in the act of crossing the barricade. She pushed it into his face.

Brousseau cursed and dropped on the far side; Madeleine heard him running into the darkness. She had brought a temporary respite. She ran back to Hilary. But it was almost dark in the cabin, and there was hardly anything she could do. He was conscious, but

he seemed bleeding to death, and she could only try to staunch the blood that never stopped flowing.

Suddenly there came a terrific lurch of the vessel, which began to spin crazily in the trough of the sea. And above the roaring of the wind came the wild cries of Dupont and the expostulations of Brousseau. The captain's reason had deserted him; he had abandoned the wheel to fight out his quarrel with Hilary. The schooner, uncontrolled, ran sidewise before the wind, and Brousseau, willing as he was to let Dupont go on his errand of murder, was unable to steer her. He had handled ships before, but the swift cross-currents at the juncture of river and gulf made the task impossible for one who did not know intimately that uncharted track, far from the main channel, now impassable with ice. The schooner was rolling heavily, huge seas were sweeping overboard, and she turned successively half round the compass; the wind, catching her swinging sails, began to whirl her round and round; and steadily she drifted toward the pack ice along the shore of the island.

Madeline, working over Hilary frantically in the cabin, saw Dupont and Brousseau struggling on the poop deck. Dupont was trying to force his way between the lumber piles, while Brousseau urged him back to the wheel. Her mind worked rapidly. Was there any way of controlling the situation? She could see none. The moon had risen high, and the mists were clearing away. Not far distant was the nearest point of the island, and the open Gulf lay beyond. Toward the ice field the ship was hurrying with frightful speed.

Madeline saw the ice fast on every side. The narrow passage behind, filled with black, foam-flecked water, was closing in. She did not hesitate, but caught at Hilary and urged him to his feet. He managed to rise, with her support, and staggered at her side toward the bulwarks.

She stopped, picked the fur coat from the shoulders of the dead outlaw, and placed it about him. She pointed toward the ice field. Brousseau was still struggling with Dupont near the wheel and Dupont was thrashing his arms and howling his wild paeon. With the last exercise of his strength Hilary managed to drop to the ice.

He lay there. Madeleine crouched over him under the bow of the vessel, and her last hope went out.

CHAPTER XVII.

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Father Lucien Arrives.

Father Lucien had grown very fond of Hilary. He did not know what to do. Hilary was in the woods now, and almost inaccessible. The cure had not even time to wrangle with. His days passed in dejection. Moreover, the matter of Ste. Marie bothered him. Father Lucien had been jeered out of the village, and he knew that if the bishop heard of it he would be transferred to another parish. Father Lucien loved St. Boniface, where he had spent all his life.

He had sent to Quebec for a book on single-stick exercises, which he had seen advertised in an old magazine. He had become interested, and had fashioned a fine singlestick from a plant hazel bough. Father Lucien followed the instructions given in the book with patient care, and with the best results. He was very thorough in all that he did. His muscles began to grow, his physical health became excellent. Soon he became quite expert. It was a sight to see the cure practicing lunges in the seclusion of his study, among the theological volumes; but nobody had seen him except his old housekeeper, and it took several minutes to convince the old lady that her revered charge had not gone suddenly insane.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Nell Gwynn.

Unlike many of the favorites of kings, Nell Gwynn was not thrown out of balance by the attention of royalty. Even though her illiteracy was of a pronounced character in those days, when many of a higher rank were unlettered, Nell, the orange seller of the Theater Royal, was received in the best London society, for her animation, humor and kindly nature seemed to have more than overbalanced her defects, and her many acts of charity gained her the lasting esteem and affection of the people. According to Burnet and Evelyn, the last words of Charles II were for her: "Let not poor Nell starve," was the dying sentence of the monarch of England.

Earth Gives Light to Moon.

Everything reflects light more or less. Sun's light shining on earth is reflected to moon, exactly as sun's light shining on moon is reflected to earth to produce moonshine. This "earth shine" can be observed on the darker part of moon when conditions are favorable.

Won't Sweeten Coffee.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity," but we have no use for it.—Boston Transcript.