

WOODEN SPOIL

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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CHAPTER XVII—Continued

Father Lucien had just laid down his singletick when a boy brought him a letter in an unknown handwriting. A letter was an important event in the cure's day. He put on his spectacles, sat down, opened the envelope, and began to read.

It was from the priest at St. Joseph, and stated that Nanette Bonnat had given him the full story of the adventures upon the island, together with an account of the activities of Pierre and Simeon Duval.

Bad as Father Lucien had known conditions at Ste. Marie to be, he had never guessed at the revelations which Nanette had made to his confere. His indignation spilled over, and he paced his study in agitation for several minutes. At last, struck with an inspiration, he took up his singletick, put on his cap, fur coat, and snowshoes, and started off toward Ste. Marie.

It was about an hour later when the few loafers in Simeon's saloon looked up to see the cure standing in the doorway. Since the lumbermen had gone into camp for the winter the glories of the dance hall had faded and disappeared, but Simeon still did a thriving liquor business. He saw the cure and came waddling forward, his pale blue eyes blinking with mock humblity.

"Come on, father," he said slyly. "We don't often see you here. What will you have? A drop of gin? A little brandy, now? Or maybe you're looking for some of the girls to dance with?"

The men grinned and nudged each other. It is not often that one sees a cure baited.

"You're a sport, father," said Simeon. "What sort of stick do you call that, with a knob each end?"

"I shall come to that later," answered the cure. "Simeon, Simeon, how often have I spoken to you about the evil that you are doing here! It is a statutory offense to sell liquor without a license, but it is an offense against God to run this sort of place, Simeon, for the good of your soul, will you not close down this place and lead a different life?"

The mild words and humble attitude of the old priest were so comical that nobody could conceal his amusement any longer. A roar of laughter shook the shack. Simeon yawned.

"I'll think about my soul when I'm sick," he answered.

"You may be very sick at any moment, Simeon, without expecting it."

"I'll take the chances of that," answered Simeon.

"Simeon, I am growing tired of speaking to you. Do you know that your house is a plague-spot in this village? Simeon, for the last time, won't you close up for good and all?"

"Ah, father, you mean all right," said Simeon, "but that's your job. I bet you're just as much a sport as anybody here, if only you let yourself go. Come on now, and get into a game with us."

"Simeon," said Father Lucien, "you were asking me about this stick. I'll show you what it's for. Look!"

Smack! went the hazel knob on Simeon's head.

Simeon was so flabbergasted that he fell back against the plank table.



(Smack, Smack!) "Are You Going to Close Down?"

As for the cure, he seemed transfixed. Holding the singletick in the middle, he twirled it until it looked like a knobby streak of light, while he prouetted like a dervish.

In reality he was going through the important foot exercise marked combination 5; but nobody knew that.

"Come on, Simeon," said Father Lucien, flicking him across the nose, which instantly became ensanguined.

With a howl of wrath Simeon came forward, and the singletick descended on his head with a thud that was heard, neighbors said afterward, across the street. Another thud from the other end; and Simeon was blinking up at the cure from the floor.

"Get up, Simeon; I'm going to cure your soul," said the cure. "Are you going to close down?"

Simeon struggled to his knees. With an unwonted agility he dodged the singletick (movement 19 had always bothered the cure) and rushed forward with arms extended, like a bear. But Father Lucien had movement 17 pat, and movement 17 is especially designed for this. Placing the right toe against the left heel, he made a half turn. Smack! Simeon was reclining against the counter, his hands over his head, and blood streaming through his fingers.

"Simeon, Simeon," said the cure (smack, smack!) "are you going to close down?"

Simeon lifted up his voice in a long, melancholy howl. He struggled feebly to his feet, and instantly went down again under a terrific blow across the right ear (movement 22A).

"Is your soul better, Simeon?" asked Father Lucien.

Simeon blinked up into the ring of faces about him. It was an extraordinary thing, but, though everybody seemed very much interested in his predicament, nobody showed any signs of interfering to help him. Public opinion was very fickle in Ste. Marie.

"Now you may get up, Simeon," said the cure, and Simeon hastened to obey. His eyes traveled quickly in the direction of an empty brandy bottle upon the counter. If he could get it into his hand.

Smack! went the singletick, and Simeon was down again with a roar like a poleaxed bull.

"What did you do that for?" he whimpered.

"I'm helping you the best way I know, Simeon," answered the cure mildly. "Are you going to close down?"

"I'll have you arrested," Simeon yelled. "I'll write to the bishop about you."

Crash went the singletick. "Are you going to have me arrested?" inquired Father Lucien.

"No," muttered Simeon, covering his head with his hands.

Crash! Simeon's hands flew apart as if they were attached to springs.

"Are you going to write to the bishop?" asked the cure.

"No. For God's sake let me go, you d—bully!"

Simeon snatched at the knob on the end of the singletick nearest him, but movement 4 provides for that, and the crack of a broken finger was distinctly audible to the intensely interested spectators.

"When are you going to close down, Simeon?" demanded Father Lucien, standing over the prostrate liquor-seller.

"At once!" yelled Simeon, bursting into tears. "For God's sake don't hit me again!"

Simeon looked so abject that the cure had not the heart to continue his punishment. He looked about him. A singletick describes a circle having a radius of several feet. Exercise 2 cleared the counter in a jiffy, leaving a wreck of reeking spirits and broken glass.

When the cure turned upon the enthusiastic, shouting throng, the grins died off their faces.

"Get out of here, my children!" he shouted. And, twirling his singletick with indescribable velocity, he brought it down on one head after another, much as one might strike a row of fence posts. The terrible implement seemed to fly in all directions at the same time. Father Lucien cracked the last man across the shoulders and sent him flying into the street.

"For God's sake don't leave me alone in here with him!" moaned Simeon from the floor.

Father Lucien came back and stood over him, twirling his singletick meditatively. At last he laid it down upon the counter.

"It's all right, Simeon, my son," he said gently. "I think I've cured you now. I'm going to hear your confession. A man never knows when he's going to be sick, Simeon. Let me hear you say your Act of Contrition, if you haven't forgotten it."

"Wait a minute," pleaded Simeon. "Are you going to see my brother Louis afterward?"

"I've seen him," answered the cure. "And Jean Poullot, and Albert Drouin, and George Moisan, and—"

"I'm going to," replied the cure grimly. So Simeon, with a new expression of gratification, came back into the church.

When, fifteen minutes later, Father Lucien emerged from the shanty, Ste. Marie was an extraordinary sight. Every drink-shop had locked up, their owners had fled, and the streets were packed with crowds which, at the sight of the priest, set up a yell of delight. The women pressed about him, sobbing their gratitude. It was with difficulty that he could make his way through the feminine bodyguard that accompanied him along his way, and after he had persuaded them to go home the distant cheering still rang in his ears.

"I shall come back every week," said Father Lucien's last promise to Ste. Marie. "I shall break the head of every man who has brandy in his house."

"God bless you, father," came back from a hundred throats.

And, being at last satisfied that Ste. Marie was closed as tightly as it was ever likely to be, Father Lucien took the homeward road to St. Boniface again.

He went through the limits instead of along the shore, and was nearing the village when he encountered Lafe.

"Hello, Father Lucy! Where do you come from?" asked the latter.

"I've just been paying a pastoral visit to Ste. Marie," said the cure demurely.

Lafe stared at him. "What d'you call that?" he demanded.

"That is a singletick," said Father Lucien. "It is a good exerciser for old men like you and me, Lafe."

"Sort of light double club," said Lafe. "What's that hair on the end, father? Say, that looks like blood, don't it?"

"That is Simeon Duval's," the cure answered. "You see, Mr. Lafe—"

Lafe stopped short. "Father Lucy, d'you mean to tell me you've knocked out Simeon?"

"I'm afraid so, Mr. Lafe. I couldn't get into his soul in any other way. But I'm getting there. Next time I shall have learned some more exercises, and then—"

"You closed up Ste. Marie?"

"Well, for the present, yes," admitted the cure. "But next time—"

"Shake, father," said Lafe, stretching out his hand. "By George, you do get results after all when you start in. But why didn't you do that before?"

"It was your friend, Monsieur Askew, who put the thought into my head," said Father Lucien. "By the way, Mr. Lafe, I have a letter from a friend in St. Joseph."

"St. Joseph? Why, that's where Nanette Bonnat—"

"Precisely. And she has told everything about the visit to the island, concerning which, as you are aware, Mademoiselle Rosny—"

Lafe shook his head. "It ain't any use, father," he said. "I been to see her and told her. She knows that yarn ain't true. But she's like all them Rosny's. She hates herself so much because she knows it ain't true that she hates him more. And he's going to leave Ste. Boniface."

"Tut, tut!" said the cure. "Mr. Lafe," he added seriously, "we must stop this. It is not for me to interfere, but at least the truth should be known. I am going to see the girl Marie Dupont."

"I'm going that way," said Lafe. "I'll go with you. I'm Hilary Askew's friend. And I'm uneasy about him. I've just been to the camp, and they tell me he's gone back to Ste. Boniface."

It was growing dark. The two set out with quickened pace, but it was quite dark before they saw the cottages of Ste. Boniface before them. As the wharf came into view Lafe uttered an exclamation.

"The schooner's gone!" he cried.

"Whose, Mr. Lafe?"

"The captain's. That other one's laid up for the season. I hope to God Hilary ain't done anything foolish and slipped the cable."

They almost ran to the captain's house. The interior was dark, save for the dull flicker from the stove. The cure flung the door open. They heard a sobbing within. Carefully Father Lucien struck a match and lit the lamp, disclosing Marie Dupont kneeling, her face in her hands, beside the embers. She looked up with an expression of utter despair.

"Where is thy father?"

"He has sailed, with Leblanc and Pierre, and Monsieur Askew is aboard, and Mademoiselle Rosny—"

"What!" shouted the cure, pulling her to her feet. "Thou art dreaming, child!"

"They planned to kill Monsieur Askew. I went to mademoiselle, and we drove to the wharf. She sprang aboard, and the ship sailed, half an hour ago. They will kill them."

Father Lucien went white and began to tremble. "Marie Dupont, swear to me—" he began.

"Ah, mon Dieu, it is true. I swear it!"

"Why didn't thou come to me?"

"I was afraid."

The cure translated to Lafe. "If she speaks the truth—" he began.

"It is true, I guess," said Lafe. "Quick, father, let's get the other schooner and go after them. It's our only chance. I'll go. Darn it, if they hurt a hair of Hilary's head, or—"

"But it is impossible!" cried the cure. "Who will sail her?"

"Come with me, father," answered Lafe, a flicker of whimsicality appearing on his face, as in such moments. "I guess I'm in charge now, see? Let's go to the store."

There were the usual loafers inside. Yes, it was true the schooner had sailed, and it had surprised everybody, because Captain Dupont had announced that he would not sail for some days. And he had left his crew behind. But then every one knew that he was going out of his mind.

Lafe cut the gossips short. "Ask them who can sail the schooner," he said to the cure.

Only one man could sail the schooner through the ice. All the rest were in the woods. Jean-Marie Baptiste understood the east and the currents.

"Where is he?"

The storekeeper shrugged his shoulders. "He was here half an hour ago to buy more traps, but he has gone into the woods again—"

At that instant Baptiste entered the store, saw Lafe, and scowled.

"This trap is broken—" he began, holding it up for the storekeeper to view it.

The cure pounced on him. "Baptiste, come with me. Thou dost not go into the woods tonight. Thou must take us aboard the schooner—"

Baptiste's jaw fell. "Mon pere, it is impossible," he stammered.

"Dupont has gone—"

"Gone?" cried Baptiste, running to the door.

The cure followed him. "Baptiste, thou must sail the schooner and find him. He is mad. He has left his crew behind him and taken Leblanc and Pierre. And Mademoiselle Rosny is in their hands—"

"What?" shouted Baptiste. "I go. At once I go—"

"And Monsieur Askew, whom they have sworn to murder—"

"I do not go," said Jean Baptiste, and stopped dead.

The cure caught him by the arm. "Listen to me, Jean. His life and that of Mademoiselle Rosny are perhaps at stake."

"I do not go!" cried Baptiste again, and snatched up his trap. He strode to the door and turned fiercely upon



"But When God Calls a Man to Duty, He Must Obey."

Father Lucien, who followed him. "Let him die!" he shouted. "You know, mon pere, you know what he has done to me and mine!"

Lafe, who understood hardly a word of this colloquy, caught a precise sense of what Baptiste was saying, partly by the gestures, but more by his faculty brought out through dialogues on many evenings with his friend Tremblay. He tugged at the cure's arm.

"Tell him that story ain't true, father," he said. "That's what's worrying him."

But Father Lucien resumed, as if he had not heard:

"Even so, Jean, Mademoiselle Rosny's life, perhaps, is in danger. And even if that were not so, thou must return good for evil. Else his blood is upon thee."

"Let it be there! I would have killed him, only they pulled me away."

"It is thy duty, my son," said the cure quietly. "It is a hard test, Jean, but when God calls a man to duty, he must obey."

Baptiste began to break down. "Ah, mon pere, you ask me the hardest thing in my life," he groaned. "In the forests I have seen his face before me. I have dreamed that I had him by the throat, and started up with joy. I have struggled, and I have contrived to fight down my desire to slay him. And now you tell me I must save him. No, no, mon pere. Save the girl—yes. But let some one else sail the schooner."

"Say, Father Lucy, why don't you explain to him that that yarn's a lie?" persisted Lafe.

But again the cure ignored him. "We shall sail as soon as possible, Jean," he said. "Go back to the store and instruct the storekeeper to telephone to the crew—Drouin is one, and the others I do not know. And then return to me."

Jean-Baptiste stood like a statue. He hung his head, muttering. Then, slowly, he raised it and smiled into the cure's face.

"Enough, then. I go," he said gravely.

"Well, I'm darned!" exclaimed Lafe. "Say, father, why didn't you tell him it wasn't true, that story?"

The cure smiled whimsically and laid his hand on Lafe's shoulder.

"Ab, Mr. Lafe," he answered, "when exercise will cure a paralyzed limb, we do not use the crutch."

Lafe stared at him. And slowly he began to understand. Father Lucien's

ways were often inscrutable, but somehow he got there in the end.

"By Jing, you're a brick, father!" he cried, striking the priest between the shoulders. "And, say! I take it all back—everything! Go on and bless the cabbages. Go on praying out fress. Go on, go on! You've got the knack somehow—only I'm—I'm jinged if I see how you do it till it's all over!"

Baptiste, who had been telephoning inside the store, came out. "Drouin and Lachance will be at the wharf in fifteen minutes, Monsieur Tessier," he said.

The cure nodded and took Baptiste by the arm. The three began to stroll toward the wharf. When they arrived at the wharf-head, however, instead of proceeding toward the schooner the cure led the way, still holding Baptiste, toward Dupont's cottage. Baptiste stopped near the door.

"Where are you taking me, Father Lucien?" he asked. "I do not go there."

And, as the cure seemed bent on proceeding inside, he wrested himself away.

"No, mon pere," he said firmly. "I have obeyed thee once tonight, but now thou askest what is beyond thy right or power. I do not enter there."

"My son," answered the priest, "since thou hast chosen rightly tonight, I tell thee now that that story was not true. It was Pierre and Leblanc who took Marie Dupont to the island, and Monsieur Askew and Monsieur Connell here found her and saved her from them, and brought her home. In my pocket I have a letter. Tomorrow thou shalt read it and understand."

"Mon pere!" stammered Baptiste, and began to tremble.

"Learn it from her lips."

"Mon pere, I do not go inside that house. If it is true, I am not worthy. Besides, she hates me, and—"

Still holding his arm the cure opened the door. "Marie Dupont!" he called.

The girl stumbled toward the door, saw Baptiste at the cure's side, and uttered a frightened cry.

Father Lucien took Jean Baptiste by the arm and led him into the house. He closed the door gently, but not before Lafe had seen Marie in Jean's arms. Lafe swore softly.

"What's the matter, Mr. Lafe?" asked Father Lucien.

"Nothing," answered Lafe shortly. "I was just thinking of Shoeburyport, Mass., that's all. You wouldn't understand. At least—"

He looked at the cure, and then it occurred to him that he was viewing him from an entirely different angle. For the first time in their acquaintance it occurred to him that Father Lucien was really a man underneath his long soutane.

When, a few minutes later, the priest opened the door, Marie and Jean came forward with linked arms, and their expressions were transformed. Jean grasped Lafe by the hand and looked at him earnestly, but did not say a word.

"Come now," said the cure. "The men are waiting on the wharf for us, Bon soir, Marie."

"I go with Jean," said the girl.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Rescue.

Out of the darkness a little light began to glow. It shone and sparkled, and suddenly raced skyward, disclosing the outlines of the schooner stranded upon the edge of the ice field.

Baptiste drove his vessel straight toward it, running upon the gale. The little group upon the deck watched in terror as the flames spread, until it could be seen that they enveloped the entire fore part of Dupont's schooner.

Dupont, in his madness, evading Brousseau, had set fire to the lumber with the aid of the petroleum kegs which he carried in the hold. And Brousseau, at the wheel, was striving desperately to run the burning vessel back into open water and cast her upon the ice-free shore of the south passage, beyond the point. In his fear he had forgotten Madeleine and Hilary.

As Madeleine crouched on the ice, still frantically endeavoring to recall Hilary to consciousness, the thinning mists rolled back. Looming up out of the darkness, and approaching rapidly, was the second schooner. They had been seen.

Brousseau, upon the poop, yelled in answer. And he began to run to and fro in his excitement, possessed only by the fear of death by fire.

The flames spread. The cabin was now involved, and a great column of smoke was shooting skyward, carrying with a fiery spark cloud.

Dupont came out of the smoke, his face alight with fanatic madness. He caught him by the arm.

"See the fine fire!" he shouted. "He won't get out of that in a hurry. I told her that I would give her his life for the name, but I have not got the name! The name! What is it? The name!"

His voice rang out across the heaving water, and, as he called, Baptiste swung down the wheel, and the second ship glided alongside and passed.

It drove off into the distance, driven

by the whipping wind, but not before Dupont's words had been heard.

From the group upon Baptiste's ship a figure disengaged herself and stepped forward. It was Marie Dupont. She poised herself upon the deck, and her voice rang out above the gale and the sea.

"I give you the name," she cried. "It is Edouard Brousseau. It is he, and I give you my secret which I have borne all my life. Take it!"

She fell back into Baptiste's arms. And it seemed as if, with the breaking of the inhibition, her past life, with its fears and terrors, was melted into the life of happiness that was to be.

Dupont had heard her. For a moment they could see the tall figure of the old man, with his wind-tossed hair and beard, standing as if petrified upon his blazing deck. Then he cried out like a screaming sea-bird, and his arms closed about the man at his side.

As Baptiste turned and tacked it could be seen that the old man was holding Brousseau with one arm, as easily as if he held a child, while his free hand controlled the wheel again. What reservoir of strength he drew upon, what miracle of seamanship, could never be known. But, as if nature were aiding him, a veering gust caught the sails, and with a backward movement the schooner began to glide through the entrance of the ice field into open water.

The fire was all about them. Screams came from the doomed ship, but they came from Brousseau, struggling in Dupont's arms. Not a sound came from the captain's lips.

The vessel gained her freedom, she turned and began to drive eastward, toward the Gulf and its open water. Faster and faster she went as the wind compelled her. The horrified watchers upon the deck of Baptiste's schooner saw the blazing vessel glide into the distance, a blazing comet, and Dupont, black against the heart of the fire, and Brousseau in his arms.

Little was afterward remembered concerning the rescue. But from that night legends began to spread along both shores: Of Baptiste's seamanship, and of Hilary, who, single-handed, saved the heiress of the seignory from Brousseau and the two outlaws.

But none of the principals in these events care overmuch to dwell upon them, even in memory. And, though memories live long in silence, gossip soon dies. All this is becoming a local legend, such as mothers tell to their babies.

But the St. Boniface mill now hums from dawn till dark, and the asbestos mine has brought in its workers and made St. Boniface quite a flourishing village in the north country.

Twice a month, when he pays his pastoral visit, you may see Father Lucien, still hale and strong, patrolling Ste. Marie with a curious hazel stick, fashioned with a knob at each end; and it is said that Ste. Marie is one of the best parishes on the north shore.

On Sundays, seated in the parish church, may be seen Simeon Duval, nodding his head approvingly as, point by point, the cure takes up his denunciation of liquor selling. For Father Lucien really reached Simeon's soul with his hazel stick.

Marie has the best house in the village, for Baptiste does a thriving trade carrying the St. Boniface lumber.

Here is Clarice, who looks, somehow, just as one might have expected from Lafe's descriptions.

"He wouldn't come home," she says to Hilary, "so I had to come after him. But he's coming home next October, to see his children and the new house."