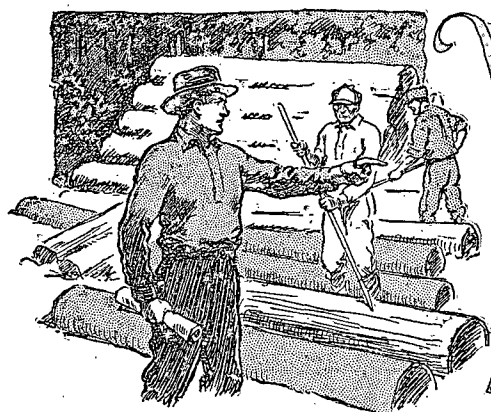


# THE ARGOSY

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## Wooden Spoil

by Victor Rousseau

Author of "Midsummer Madness," "The Sea Demons," etc.

### CHAPTER I.

#### STARTING SOMETHING.

LAMARTINE, of Quebec, was startled. The visit had followed the letter much too quickly to suit him.

"Tell M. Askew that I am busy with an important case," he said to the boy who had brought in the visitor's card. "Ask him to call to-morrow."

The boy came back.

"M. Askew says he's busy, too, and he'll wait," he said.

M. Lamartine frowned.

"Tell him that I have to leave immediately for the courts," he said. "And tell him I shall be here to-morrow at the same hour."

The boy came back again.

"He says he'll walk to the courts with you," he said.

The notary considered.

"Well, tell him I'll see him in a moment for a few minutes," he answered.

When the boy was gone he took down the telephone receiver and called up the Frontenac, asking for a certain room.

"Is that you, Brousseau?" he inquired. "M. Hilary Askew has turned up."

There was a sputtering at the other end of the line which caused the notary to smile.

"I can't say. I haven't seen him yet," he said in answer. "But if I can't send him home with a smile on his face and a check in his pocket, I shall try to keep him in Quebec until I've seen you. I'll call you as soon as he's gone. And you'd better try to get Morris by long-distance at once and prepare him. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver, rang for the boy again, and told him to admit Mr. Askew. He looked keenly at Hilary as he shook hands with him.

"Your visit has followed very close upon your letter, Mr. Askew," he said. "Perhaps you did not receive mine, advising you to wait before coming to Quebec?"

"No," said Hilary, "but I should have come anyway. I want to get this matter settled."

"The American haste," said the notary. "But the law is not to be taken by storm, least of all in Quebec. There are all sorts of preliminaries and formalities, Mr. Askew. It is less than a month since your uncle died. Perhaps it will be months more before we can legally convey the property to you. I understand," he added, "that you were not in close touch with Mr. Jonas Askew during his latter years?"

"I hadn't seen him more than twice since I was a boy. That was what made the legacy a surprising one. He had not shown any interest in me. I had a hard fight to get through my forestry course at college. It is a very restricted profession. So when I heard that I had become the owner of a tract of a hundred square miles it seemed like an intervention of Providence. That is like a little kingdom, sir."

The notary smiled.

"I suppose it must seem a large territory to you," he said, "although the Rosny seigniory was one of the smallest of the old feudal grants. It is almost the last on the north shore of the St. Lawrence that remains in the hands of the original family."

"Remains?" asked Hilary.

The notary raised his eyebrows.

"You are aware, Mr. Askew, that you do not possess the freehold?" he asked.

"On the contrary. I thought— But please tell me what my rights are, then?"

"You own the timber rights over the seigniory," replied the other. "You own the trees; M. Edmond Rosny owns the land. Your uncle paid four hundred thousand dollars for the timber. The land on which it stands could find no bidders at one-twentieth of that sum; nor would M. Rosny sell it."

"Your uncle," continued the notary, "made this investment against the advice of a good many people. He was at the time interested in the Adamson Paper Company, of Cornwall, which supplied paper to a chain of newspapers in the smaller cities under a long-term contract which was beginning to prove hard, owing to the rising cost of pulpwood. The Adamson people

were faced with a deficit that might end in bankruptcy before their contract expired.

"Your uncle thought that the acquisition of this tract would enable the firm to pull through with a substantial profit. Unfortunately, your uncle's judgment was as poor as his obstinacy was strong. The Rosny timber rights are practically valueless, because the wood is principally fir balsam instead of pine and spruce."

He was a little disconcerted because Hilary only watched him instead of answering, and he began to feel that he would not be disposed of as easily as he had anticipated.

"The property has never begun to pay its way," he went on. "The Adamson people were forced to carry out their contract at a ruinous loss, and the firm was subsequently forced into liquidation. Your uncle continued to pay out large sums to keep the mill in operation, disposing of his lumber at a loss, rather than confess to an error in judgment. And he only paid his territory two short visits in his life."

"But surely something could be done to produce a reasonable profit," urged Hilary.

"This is the situation," answered Lamartine. "The fir is too gummy to make any but the most inferior paper. Most of the other wood is second-growth birch, which has sprung up after fires, and is of use only for firewood. There is, of course, spruce and pine, but it is too small and scarce to make its cutting profitable."

"A company with a large capital might find it commercially profitable to develop your territory. That is to say that, with its own transportation, and by using the most improved methods, it could probably work the few districts that have any pulpwood worth the cutting, skim the cream for a few years, and then let the tract go. But no single individual could screw a penny out of it without an ample fortune and a thorough knowledge of lumbering conditions in this province."

"The company I have in mind would pay you forty-five thousand dollars cash," continued the notary. "That would enable you to realize your aspirations and would make you independent for life."

"What I want," said Hilary bluntly, "is the St. Boniface tract."

"The offer is too small? Of course, I could take up that point with the company—"

"I will discuss that after I have seen the limits."

The notary sighed.

"Well, at least, think the matter over for a day or two," he said. "Mr. Morris, the manager, is away on business. He should be in Quebec the day after to-morrow, and he could take you up with him when he returns."

"I am thinking of going sooner than that," said Hilary. "In fact, by to-morrow's boat."

M. Lamartine flung up his hands.

"Mr. Askew, I assure you your uncle was just as hasty in making decisions as yourself," he said. "You had better wait for Mr. Morris. He is a man of expert judgment. You cannot have a better adviser, and he has absolutely no personal interest one way or another. Canadian timber cannot be judged by the standards of the United States. There are so many things to consider; and then—you don't speak French, do you?"

"A little."

"It would not help you, anyway. The dialect up at St. Boniface is seventeenth century, and corrupt at that. They are a wild lot up there, a very bad set of people indeed; smugglers and poachers, Mr. Askew."

Though slow to suspicion, Hilary, who had sensed Lamartine's objection to his going to St. Boniface unaccompanied, now began to feel sure that the notary had some personal purpose behind his rather incoherent objections. It hardened his resolution.

"I shall leave on the boat to-morrow morning," he said. "I shall reply to your offer as soon as I have made up my mind. Will you let me have the papers, M. Lamartine, including the last half-yearly statement, and the map of the limits?"

"My dear sir, it will be three months at least before we can put you in possession of your land," protested the notary: "You do not realize—"

"I shall take possession, M. Lamartine. At least, nobody has a better claim."

"But it would be entirely irregular, Mr. Askew."

Hilary smiled, and Lamartine read his defeat in that smile. And he had only the comfort that Hilary had, at least, verified his prediction made as soon as he set eyes on him.

"Let me have the papers, please," said Hilary. "And you need have no qualms as to your responsibility for my success. You have done your duty in advising me."

"Of course, if that is your decision, there is nothing more for me to say," answered the notary. "You will find the statement here," he continued, handing Hilary an envelope containing some papers. "Mr. Morris has the books and the map at St. Boniface. I wish you a pleasant journey, sir. I am to continue to represent you?"

"For the present, yes. Good day."

When Hilary was gone M. Lamartine sat back in his chair and drummed his fingers for nearly a minute. Then he called up his friend Brousseau again.

"He's just gone," he said. "And he starts for St. Boniface on to-morrow's boat, in spite of all my representations."

He smiled at the outburst that came back to him.

"You had better wait for Morris and go up with him on the next boat," he said. "Take my advice, and don't go up to-morrow. You'll only injure yourself by being precipitate. Get Morris here the minute he arrives, and we'll talk the situation over. M. Askew won't learn much if he does get to St. Boniface ahead of you, unless your man Connell talks, and I understand he is reliable. I suggest that you get Connell on the telephone to-day and advise him of the situation and give him his instructions."

## CHAPTER II.

### LOOKING THINGS OVER.

IT was late in the afternoon when Hilary reached St. Boniface on the little mail-boat. He looked about him with approval when he stood upon the porch of the tiny

hotel at St. Boniface. He saw the gray waters of the St. Lawrence before him, the gulls dipping and soaring over them. The south shore was still invisible in the distance.

On either side extended the great hills, crested with evergreens, among which were the white trunks of the birches, whose leaves were already beginning to be touched with the red and gold of late August. The narrow beach, along which straggled raspberry briars, was coated with chips from the pulp-mill borne out to sea from the flume and carried back, to be strewn in successive layers by the incoming tides.

A mile or so to the west Hilary saw, in a curving bay, the end of the flume, an elevated structure supported on high wooden posts that ran into the water beside the wharf. Here lay a large schooner. In the middle of the gulf was a long, narrow island, densely wooded.

Nobody else had got off the boat at St. Boniface, and evidently the landlord expected nobody. After an ineffective attempt to enter into conversation with him, in which hardly a word was mutually intelligible, Hilary gave up the effort and started up the hill road which led, he surmised, toward the lumber mill.

He saw the mill from the top of the cliff. Behind was the church; in front, beyond a dip in the road, where a foaming torrent was spanned by a rattletrap bridge, was the long flume, with the store and mill offices beside it, and a cluster of workmen's cottages of unpainted boards and logs.

The entire settlement of the mill workers was gathered about the curving shores of a little bay. Beyond it were the mountains, on either side of the forest-clad slopes, broken by the deep cleft of a river, whose mouth, closed by a boom above the torrent, was a congestion of short logs.

Between the end of the wharf and the incurving shore was visible the funnel of a steam-tug, sunk in the water.

Hilary crossed the bridge and went toward the mill. Two or three men, lounging outside the store, looked at him without displaying any sign of interest. A mongrel dog, lying in the sun, raised its head, yelped once, and went to sleep again.

Everything was very peaceful; the only sounds were the subdued hum of the mill machinery, and a quick rattling, almost like Maxim fire, which Hilary adjudged correctly to be caused by the logs from the flume falling into the hold of the lumber-schooner at the wharf.

Between the dam and the store, upon a terrain heaped with tin cans and other débris, were piles of wood in four-foot lengths, each consisting of about two hundred cords.

Kneeling at the end of one of these was a little man, the whiteness of whose upper lip, in striking contrast with a sun-blackened face, indicated that a mustache had grown there until recently. He was scaling, or measuring, the pile, and muttering as he jotted down his figures. Hilary walked up and stood beside him watching interestedly.

"How many cords are there in one of these piles?" he asked.

The little man shook his head without looking up, and continued his figuring. Hilary waited till he had finished, but the little man showed no indications of answering him.

The lumber was mostly black spruce, with some white spruce and red pine. The mass in the river, if it was of the same quality, hardly substantiated Lamartine's statements.

"You seem to have some good wood on the seignior," said Hilary.

The little man leaped to his feet, waving his arms excitedly.

"What you want here?" he demanded. "Strangers are not allowed on the property. You take the road!"

"That's an unusual order," said Hilary, looking at the other in amusement. "Why?"

"It's Mr. Morris's orders."

"I'm going to change that," said Hilary. "In future you'll let anybody come and see anything he wants to."

The little man opened his mouth in astonishment.

"Maybe you're the boss, eh?" he inquired with sarcasm.

"I am. I'm Mr. Askew," answered Hilary.

The little man did not know what to make of this. He stared and gaped again.

"But Mr. Morris ain't here," he said at length, as if the solution of this problem was beyond him.

"Well, he ought to be here," said Hilary. "That's what I'm paying him for. What's your name?"

"Jean-Marie Baptiste. You ain't lying, are you?"

"No, I'm not lying. Perhaps you didn't expect me, M. Baptiste?"

"Holy Name, no! I heard you sold out to the company."

"What company?" demanded Hilary sharply.

"The Ste. Marie Company. The company of M. Brousseau."

Hilary took the little man by the arm.

"See here, Baptiste," he said, "let us begin by understanding each other. I know nothing about any company except myself. I own the cutting rights on this property, the mill, and the business. Have you got that?"

Baptiste gaped again and disengaged himself diplomatically.

"I guess you want to see Mr. Connell, the foreman," he said. "It ain't my job. Mr. Morris hires me. If you pay me my wages maybe you can hire me, too. You'll find Mr. Connell in the office, or maybe in the store," he added.

"Bring him here," said Hilary. "Tell him I'm waiting for him. And, Baptiste—"

"*Monsieur?*"

"I don't like waiting. Hurry!" said Hilary.

The little man departed at a trot, quite evidently startled, casting back comical looks over his shoulder as he ran.

His remarks in the store must have created a good deal of a sensation, for presently two clerks, as well as the two loungers, who had sauntered inside during Hilary's conversation with Baptiste, came to the door and stared. Disengaging himself from among these came the foreman, a tall, lanky, lean New Englander, whose typical bearing and deliberate slouch warmed Hilary's heart instantly.

"I'm Lafe Connell, at your service, Mr.

Askew," said the foreman, coming up respectfully.

"I suppose I should have let you people know that I was coming," said Hilary.

He wondered why Lafe Connell whistled; he knew nothing, of course, of Brousseau's telephonic message.

"I guess you'll find things upset a little," said Connell. "Mr. Morris has been away for a couple of weeks. But I guess you can go into the office and make yourself at home there, Mr. Askew," he continued, a flash of humor irradiating his face as he jerked his thumb toward the tin-roofed shanty. "It's about knocking-off time, though," he added, pulling out a large silver watch and looking at it.

Hilary noted his embarrassment.

"To-morrow will be soon enough for me to start in," he said. "I'm pleased to have met you, Mr. Connell."

"Wait a minute," said the foreman. "If you don't mind having me, I'll get my coat and go up to the hotel with you. I'm bunking there for a few days till my landlady gets her house fixed up." He looked toward the shanties and smiled at his words. "She had a fire. And maybe there'll be a few things that you'll want to ask me."

"All right," said Hilary.

Lafe Connell hurried back to the store. The storekeeper, his clerk, and the two loungers broke into excited chattering. Lafe, who did not speak a word of French, in spite of his position, but controlled the men through the medium of Baptiste, left the little man to answer the questions that were addressed to him, put on his coat, and went out. Jean Baptiste accompanied him a short distance from the door.

"I guess you find out why he come here, like M. Brousseau telephone you," he volunteered.

"Oh, shucks! What's the use?" responded Lafe wearily. "Either he's come to sell, in which case there ain't nothing to find out, or else he's come to stay, and he finds how we've been running things and fires the whole outfit. I tell you, Baptiste, it's times like this that makes me wish I was back in Shoeburyport."

"Oh, it ain't so bad, Lafe," answered the little Frenchman optimistically.



He left him, and Lafe Connell joined Hilary. They went together in silence across the shaking bridge and ascended the hill, each quietly taking stock of the other. At the summit, where a branch road ran off at right angles to that which crested the cliff, a figure on horseback appeared in the distance. The two men stopped to take breath for a few moments and to give the rider freeway.

It was a girl, riding side-saddle. As the horse drew near she pulled in to take the turn slowly without scattering dust, passing within a few feet of Hilary.

He saw that she was about twenty years of age, or a little more, slight, very straight upon the saddle, with gray-blue eyes and brown hair blown by the wind about her flushed cheeks.

Her profile as she turned was charming; but the whole picture of the girl upon the horse was charming, even more than beautiful. There was a combination of dignity and simplicity about her, both in her demeanor and in the way she rode, and in her acknowledgment of Connell's greeting.

Hilary watched her canter up the road until she had disappeared among the trees. Then he realized that he had not taken his eyes off her since he had seen her first.

"That," said Lafe, "is Mlle. Hermine Rosny. Her father's what they call the seigneur."

"The owner of the seigniory?" asked Hilary, although he knew this perfectly.

"Yes, Mr. Askew. I guess she wouldn't have smiled so pleasant if she had known who you was."

"Why, Mr. Connell?"

Lafe jerked his thumb vaguely about the horizon.

"Proud old boy," he explained. "Family's be'n here nigh on a thousand years, I guess—leastways, since them Frenchmen first come to this continent. Hated like thunder to let your uncle have the timber rights. But he'd had trouble with Brouseau, and he wouldn't sell to him, and Mlle. Hermine must have cost a mint of money finishing up in the convent at Paris, France. I guess he's land poor, like the rest of the big folks round here. But the old man, he don't care, and Mlle. Hermine's thinking

of other things than living here all her days, I guess."

Hilary was wondering what Rosny had done with his uncle's four hundred thousand. He could hardly have spent a tithe of that upon his daughter's education, even in Paris.

In the hotel the landlord's wife was already preparing supper. They ate an omelet, washed down with strong tea and followed by raspberries and cream. Then they went out on the porch and lit their pipes.

"You are the foreman, I understand?" asked Hilary.

"Yes, Mr. Askew. I took the job soon after your uncle bought the timber rights: I'd be'n up here for a Boston newspaper which was looking round for a pulp supply. Mr. Morris offered me the job, although I didn't speak the language, because I've be'n in the business all my life. So I took it. And I've be'n sorry ever since."

"Why?"

"It's a hell of a country," answered Lafe. "I never guessed such folks existed in a civilized land before."

"What's the trouble?" asked Hilary, perceiving that Connell was laboring under some repressed excitement.

"They paint their houses yellow and green," said Lafe, "when they paint 'em at all. Not yellow or green, but yellow and green, and maybe blue, and a splash of red for variety. I never saw a green house with a yellow porch in my life before I came up here."

"Just a difference of taste, Mr. Connell."

"Maybe," said Lafe sourly. "Maybe it's all right not to have sense enough to plaster their houses, so as to freeze to death in winter time. Maybe it's all right to run to Father Lucy when there's a forest fire, instead of getting busy and putting it out. Maybe he can pray it out for 'em faster."

"Maybe it's all right for them schooners to have the front mast higher than the back, and for it to rain six weeks without stopping, when it starts to rain, because it's got set, like these folks, and hasn't sense to stop. I got nothing else against the place, except that my wife Clarice and

the kids are in Shoeburyport, and I'd rather rot here alone than bring 'em up. But what's the use? I'm here, and I've got to stay here," he ended, shrugging his shoulders. "That is, of course, unless you discharge me."

"You're under contract?"

"By the year. I told Mr. Morris I'd get out on the first of the year, but I said that last year, and the year before, and I guess he don't take much stock of that now. I'm here for another year, unless I'm put out, till I get my home in Shoeburyport paid for."

"Well, Mr. Connell, I mean to take hold, and I mean to make the business pay," said Hilary. "It hasn't paid very well, I understand?"

Lafe floundered.

"Of course, I don't know nothing about the financial end," he said. "I've heard it don't pay as well as it ought."

"Too much fir?" suggested Hilary.

"Why, there is some fir," conceded Lafe. "But there's some good spruce along Rocky River," he added, with innate truthfulness and pride.

"I saw a good pile in the river."

"Why, that ain't our cutting," answered Lafe. "Most of that comes from the Ste. Marie limits. They got some mighty good wood there, Mr. Askew."

"Where and what is Ste. Marie?"

"Ste. Marie's two miles along the shore, beyond St. Boniface," said Lafe. "Most of the hands come from there. There's quite a town, of a sort, sprung up since the company started. It's a tough place, Mr. Askew. I seen some tough towns in the West, but this has got 'em all beat, with the smuggling and drinking, and fights every Saturday night—there was a man knifed there last week; and not a policeman within a hundred miles, and nobody except Father Lucy, and he can't hold 'em."

"What I want to know," said Hilary, "is, what this company is that you speak about, and how they came to use Rocky River for their logs."

Lafe hesitated, but only for a moment. Then he mentally cast Brousseau to the winds as an intolerable burden.

"It's this way, Mr. Askew," he answered. "Mr. Brousseau and Mr. Morris have a company of their own. Their limits touch ours on the west, and run alongside of ours ten miles or so back into the woods. They got the right to float their logs down the river."

"Where is their mill?"

"They lease ours by the year."

Hilary was staggered. Morris, as his uncle's manager, leasing the mill to himself, as a partner in Brousseau's company, seemed a queer rôle. But Lafe could not see his face in the darkness, and, puffing at his pipe, he fell into a ruminative silence covering who knows what dreams of Shoeburyport?

"Who is this Mr. Brousseau?" asked Hilary presently.

"The boss," answered Lafe. "At least, the nearest thing to a boss that they got up here, and I guess he ain't far short of one. He tells the folks how to vote, and gets 'em out of trouble, and they send his friends into Parliament at Quebec. He's got a fine house over on the hill, between St. Boniface and Ste. Marie. That was his father, old Jacques, the trapper, at the bridge as we passed."

"I didn't notice him."

"Old Jacques was Mr. Rosny's father's slave, or whatever they used to be in those days. Mr. Brousseau was brought up as a boy on the seigniorship. Mr. Rosny got interested in him and educated him, and I guess he's sorry now. Mr. Brousseau's done well for himself, and he's going to do better."

Lafe tapped the ashes out of his pipe and put it in his pocket.

"He's got old Rosny like that," he said, lifting the pocket-flap. "He's got him bound and mortgaged after leading him to throw your uncle's money away in crazy investments. When Brousseau was a kid, growing up among the house servants at the *château*, he wanted to be a big man, for which I don't blame him."

"He got what he wanted, but that wasn't enough. He wanted the seigniorship and the seigneur's place, because he found that the folks up here thought more of old Mr. Rosny, with his broken-down property

and his debts, than they did of him with all his money. So he set to work and got Mr. Rosny in his power.

"The old man hates and despises him, and he's been fighting against it for a long time, but he knows what's coming, and I guess he's made up his mind he'll have to stomach it.

"Brousseau's playing old Mr. Rosny's family pride against his love, and he knows which is stronger. So he's won Ma'm'selle Hermine as the price of leaving Rosny the property. That's what they're saying, anyhow."

He rose.

"That 'll be all for to-night, Mr. Askew?" he asked.

Hilary got up too.

"Thanks, yes, Connell," he said. "In the morning I shall ask you to show me around."

He did not follow Lafe inside the hotel, but sat upon the porch, musing and listening to the crescendo of the breakers as the tide swept up along the river.

Lafe did not go to bed immediately. Incapable of speaking any French, he had the gift of many unlettered men of entering into communication with one entirely ignorant of his own language. He sat in the kitchen, chatting with M. Tremblay, the landlord, and the two men understood each other very well.

"Yep, he's the owner of the St. Boniface timber rights," he said. "The boss, you know, Tremblay. Comprenny? Mr. Askew—boss—come up to run the show. And he says he's going to stay. I guess he'll change his tune when he's seen some of these pink and green verandas round here like yours. It beats me what in the world got into your head to make you put a pink veranda on a yellow house, Tremblay.

"If I thought he'd make good on what he said I'd loosen up a bit. That fellow Brousseau gets on my nerves and leaves 'em raw, Tremblay. Raw—you understand me. And he had the nerve to tell me to do a dirty job for him—him that never hired me, nor couldn't, if he was to go down on his knees and beg me. Knees—these things, Tremblay. But what's the use?

Mr. Askew 'll be hiking back to the States to-morrow week, and then I'd be up against it."

### CHAPTER III.

#### HILARY TAKES ADVICE.

**A**FTER breakfast the next morning Lafe and Hilary set off in the landlord's buggy, with the intention of covering a part of the limits and seeing the nature of the timber.

Though it was not yet September, the jobbers were already in the woods with nucleus gangs, staking out their tracts for the ensuing year, dating from the first of October, and superintending the removal of old camps or the construction of new ones.

The swamper were cutting new paths and repairing the log bridges across the rivulets and marshy stretches. Here and there Hilary perceived these signs of activity as the carriage passed on its way beneath the overhanging branches of tall conifers, while Rocky River roared through the gorge beneath them.

Lafe indicated a tall old man, with a face the color of tanned leather, who sat in the doorway of a solitary cabin, mending a pair of moccasins.

"That's Jacques Brousseau," he said. "He's getting ready for winter now. He sits there and dreams all summer, till trapping is at hand, and then he makes for the woods."

At increasing intervals along the roadside were cabins, with little patches of cultivated ground about them. Hill after hill was surmounted, and others always appeared beyond.

"This road runs along the boundary?" asked Hilary.

"Yep, Mr. Askew. The Ste. Marie territory is on the right. The two runs neck and neck back into them mountains."

"There's plenty of good spruce here," said Hilary.

But he spoke mainly to himself, and Lafe did not answer. A dip in the road carried them across a little bridge spanning a creek that united here with Rocky River.



They were now traveling inside the limits of the seigniori, with the creek on their right hand and Rocky River beyond it. Hilary noted the first growth spruce along the banks.

"Why don't we cut here, if the rest is mainly fir?" he asked, looking keenly at Lafe. "There's enough lumber here to fill our dam, instead of the Ste. Marie Company's logs."

Lafe answered volubly, but did not meet Hilary's eyes.

"You see, Mr. Askew, it's this way," he began to explain. "There's a good deal of fir on our property, and what pine and spruce there is is smallish. There was a big fire over this district fifteen years or so ago. Now, Mr. Morris calculates that if we go slow for a while and give the trees a chance to grow, they'll be worth twice as much in a few years. We're developing the property slowly, Mr. Askew—"

Hilary's hand fell on Lafe's shoulder.

"Connell," said Hilary, "I brought you up here with me to learn the truth from you. You're going to sign on again, and you're going to sign with me, not with Mr. Morris. And now I want to know the truth about all this."

Lafe stammered and hung his head like a schoolboy caught in wrong-doing. But Hilary's hand was gripping his shoulder, and at last Lafe raised his head.

"If I thought you'd stick here," he said, "I guess I'd back you to the limit. But you'll never stand for St. Boniface, Mr. Askew. There's a pink house with a blue veranda just beyond the mill—"

"That won't trouble me, Connell."

"Maybe not," admitted Lafe. "But it's the—the everything together, sir. And they're crooked. You'd never stand for the lumber business up here, because you're straight—I saw that the minute I set eyes on you. And a man's got to pull with the crowd if he wants to succeed."

"I thought, when I heard you was coming, you'd either be like Mr. Morris or else you'd swallow anything that was told you. But I was wrong. You ain't a fool, and you ain't crooked. Here business is crooked all through. You'll be selling out to Brousseau in a month's time, and that 'll be my

finish, and my house in Shoenburyport ain't paid for yet."

"You're dead wrong, Connell," answered Hilary. "I like the looks of this country, and I'm here to stay. And the more trouble I find, the more fun I'm going to have. Now, Connell, suppose you forget about Mr. Brousseau for a while and consider yourself to be what you are, my paid employee. And you can count on me."

He held his hand out. For a moment Connell's keen, gray eyes met his in searching inquiry; then he stopped the horse deliberately, took Hilary's hand, and wrung it hard.

"I believe you mean what you say, Mr. Askew," he answered. "And you can count on me to the limit."

"I suppose that tale about the seigniori being overgrown with fir is a lie, Connell?" asked Hilary.

"Mostly," said Lafe. "There is plenty of fir, but there's as much spruce and pine as anywhere. Look at that!" he added, indicating a magnificent growth of red pine beside the road.

"So Morris has been playing double?"

Lafe nodded.

"You see, Mr. Askew, it's this way," he said. "When Morris came up here I believe he meant to run straight. He'd been a lumber man in a small way up in Ontario, and he wasn't wise to the game as it's played here. Here it's graft, and it's never been nothing else."

"I ain't saying that there ain't honest lumber companies. I know there are. But it's the biggest money-maker of the day, and there's a whole lot of sharks in it. So when Morris realized that your uncle didn't know nothing about the business, and didn't mind paying out what he was asked year after year, and left everything to him, he naturally fell for Brousseau's game."

"Brousseau had had his eye on the Rosny seigniori for a long time, but Rosny was sore and closed the deal with your uncle instead. Your uncle got the timber rights, but Brousseau already had the mortgage on the land, which ain't worth a damn, except that it puts Mr. Rosny in his power."

"Five years ago the Rosny seigniori was the only piece of freehold up this way. All

round it was government land. Brosseau grabbed it by bringing in settlers and getting their titles of fifty cents an acre as soon as they'd registered. Then he started in to squeeze your uncle out. And Morris went with him.

"He played double, as you were saying, Mr. Askew. He went into partnership with Brosseau in the Ste. Marie Company, and they arranged to let our territory go to the devil, and gave out that story about the fir. There's a crooked lawyer down in Quebec who's in with them—I don't know his name—but the object of Brosseau's game, was to freeze your uncle out and get the seigniori timber rights for his company for a song. The two companies together will make one of the finest properties in this country."

"I see," said Hilary thoughtfully.

"It's a big game, and there's money enough in it for all. And I guess Morris and Brosseau have been clearing up the St. Boniface territory and putting down the wood to the credit of the Ste. Marie, and swindling your uncle out of a good many dollars. They made me bookkeeper once. I got wise to the game and went back to my foreman's job. I guess Morris is a little afraid of me, and that's why he wants to keep me here—and here I am, Mr. Askew."

The rig turned off through the forest along a new road, through splendid timber. In the distance the ringing of axes began to be audible.

"This is Leblanc's new territory," Lafe explained.

"Who's he?" asked Hilary.

"Your chief jobber. He's logging this part on contract."

They reached a clearing, in which three log buildings were under construction. Superintending the work was a tall, rather fair man of about forty years, with a cast in one eye; and with him a short, thickset man of great muscular strength.

The two looked up furtively as the rig approached, and the short man, seeing Lafe, scowled. He had a heavy thatch of black hair, which hung over his forehead and gave him a gipsy aspect.

"Hello, Leblanc!" called Lafe. "I want you to know Mr. Askew, the new owner."

Leblanc nodded indifferently.

"Mr. Leblanc is clearing a camp for the next year's lease," continued Lafe.

"Is the lease signed?" asked Hilary.

"I have arranged with Mr. Morris," answered Leblanc shortly.

"You'll make your arrangements with me in future," said Hilary.

Leblanc stared insolently with one eye, the other fixing a tree trunk in the distance.

"I work for Mr. Morris. I make arrange with him," he answered.

"See here, Leblanc, you didn't catch who this gentleman is," said Lafe. "This is Mr. Askew, the nephew of the late Mr. Askew. He's boss now. You get me, Leblanc, don't you?"

Leblanc shrugged his shoulders and, turning, walked back without a word toward the lumbermen at work upon the camp buildings, accompanied by the short man.

Hilary flushed and was about to get out of the buggy, but Lafe's fingers closed about his wrist like a vise.

"Steady, Mr. Askew," he said. "Don't let those fellows get the best of you."

"Yes, you're right, Connell," said Hilary, sitting back, and Lafe turned the horse.

"Those fellows don't know no better," he said, as they drove back. "I guess they've run Brosseau's and Morris's game for them so long that they've lost their heads. They think they can do just what they want to. It ain't no use to get mad until you're fighting mad."

"But Brosseau has nothing to do with the St. Boniface property," exclaimed Hilary in exasperation.

Lafe shrugged his shoulders, and presently Hilary cooled down again.

"Who was the little man?" he asked.

"Black Pierre. He's Brosseau's principal crook. He's a troublesome man, Mr. Askew. It don't do to get into a fight with him till you're ready for the knockout, because his word goes in Ste. Marie and St. Boniface too largely."

"We'll fire him first thing," said Hilary.

"Why, he don't work for us," answered Lafe.

"Then, what in thunder is he doing on my concession, helping my chief jobber?"

"Well, there ain't no law against it if

a man wants to give his help free," said Lafe. "I guess them two thieves are pretty thick together.

"You see, Mr. Askew, it's this way," he went on, seeing that Hilary was growing incensed again. "If you're going to clear up this mess, and I'm to help you—and remember, I'm staking my house in Shoeburyport that ain't paid for yet—you've got to lie low until you've got a grasp on the situation. And it ain't a bit of good going for the little fellows. They're the tail that Brousseau wags. You've got to go for him, Mr. Askew, and it's going to be the toughest fight you ever had, and I guess we're up against it hard.

"It ain't his crookedness that makes me sore on Brousseau. It's the means he uses to hold the people down. Now that fellow Pierre—he runs cargoes of liquor ashore from the south coast, and sells to the saloons in Ste. Marie. But that ain't the worst thing about him.

"There's a dozen homes along the gulf where his life wouldn't be worth a minute's purchase if he showed his face there. Brousseau's used Pierre to make Ste. Marie what it is, with its drinking-dens and saloons, and them other hell-dives. And that's what I've got most against Brousseau.

"He knows conditions there, and he uses them to keep the whip-hand over the place and send his man to Parliament, and get the contracts and the pickings. Say, I'll take you through Ste. Marie on the way back to the mill!"

They had reached the main road again; went on a little farther and then turned westward over a rough track through a burned-over district, densely covered with fireweed and white, starved asters. Soon another rig appeared approaching them, topping the hill. Lafe pulled in as it approached.

"*Bonjour*, Father Lucy!" he called to the elderly priest, attired in closely-fitting *soutane*, who sat inside. "Been over to Ste. Marie?"

"Good morning, Mr. Lafe," responded the other, reining in also. "Yes, Mr. Lafe."

"Father Lucy, this gentleman is Mr. Askew, the new owner of the Rosny rights. He's old Mr. Askew's nephew."

The curé looked Hilary over; then he leaned forward and extended his hand, which Hilary grasped.

"I am please to meet you, Mr. Askew," he said. "I 'ope we shall become frien's, like Mr. Lafe, here, an' not quarrel so much."

"Ah, Father Lucy, you're all right, but you make me tired sometimes," said Lafe. "Why didn't you get busy and pray out this fire here, instead of letting it blaze?"

"Mr. Lafe, there is many things you do not yet understand," said the curé, patting the Yankee on the back benevolently. "Mr. Lafe is fine fellow," he added to Hilary, "but he want to go too quick all the time."

"Well, say! I wouldn't have to go at more than a crawl to leave St. Boniface behind," answered Lafe. "The trouble with you folks is, you're too slow and set."

It was evident to Hilary that the two men were firm friends. Father Lucien raised his hat, clucked to his pony, and resumed his journey.

"Father Lucy's a good sort," admitted Lafe, "but he makes me tired a good deal. You can't move him, Mr. Askew. Slow as the devil. He knows what Ste. Marie is, and I've seen them saloon-keepers jeering at him in the streets and defying him, and that's a sight you couldn't see anywhere else in this province. And he goes there just the same. Say, it makes my blood boil! I told him I'd do anything to help him clean up the place, but I guess he ain't equal to the job, Mr. Askew.

"And yet, now I think of it, Father Lucy does get results in his own ways," he acknowledged a little later.

Another hour's drive brought them within sight of the village, a long street of frame houses, flanked by a swelling hill, beyond which the gulf was visible again.

Ste. Marie was much like St. Boniface on a larger scale, with the same shacks clustered about the offices of the company; but many of the houses were closed, and the tattered, lace-edged shades drawn, and fewer children played with the big mongrel sleigh-dogs that lay in the dust and blinked up at the sun.

They followed the road along the shore.

A little distance from the village was Brousseau's new house, painted flamboyantly in white and green, with ornamental pillars and a criss-cross porch railing. Then as St. Boniface came into sight Hilary said:

"I think I'll go into the office."

"I guess you'll have to break it open, then," said Lafe. "Mr. Morris took the keys with him."

"When's he coming back?"

Lafe looked at him thoughtfully.

"Does he know you're here?" he inquired. "Well, if he does, I guess he'll be back to-morrow."

"I'll wait till to-morrow, then," said Hilary, after a moment of consideration. "Your advice was good, Connell—the advice you gave me in the woods."

Hilary left Lafe at the mill and drove slowly across the bridge, thinking hard.

As the rig topped the hill beyond the bridge, he became aware of Hermine Rosny upon her horse, at the end of the branch road, waiting for him to pass.

He felt awkward and uncertain, and wondered whether he should raise his hat to her. A glance at her face showed him that she knew who he was. It displayed a firm chin, a mouth resolutely set, two angry blue eyes, and flushed cheeks, whose color did not come from hard riding.

He was about to bow when the girl, averting her face, rode past him at the edge of the road and disappeared from sight beneath the crest.

Hilary jerked the reins angrily, and the horse set off at a gallop toward its stable. Before he had reached the hotel, however, Hilary was laughing. The girl's hostility seemed to add a zest to the game.

"I don't know that I'll be so very diplomatic with Brousseau after all," said Hilary, as he drew rein at the stable entrance.

## CHAPTER IV.

### FIRING AND HIRING.

NEXT morning Lafe telephoned Hilary at the hotel.

"Say, Mr. Askew," he said, "I'm phoning you from my old boarding-place. Brousseau and Morris got in early this morning

by carriage from St. Joseph. They've been cross-questioning me and Baptiste all the morning. Brousseau's just left, and Morris has ordered the storekeeper's rig to drive over to the hotel in an hour's time."

"Thanks, Connell," said Hilary. "I'm much obliged. I'm coming right over."

He reached the office just in time to see Morris come out and make his way toward a rig at the door. Morris looked plainly disconcerted; it was evident that he knew who Hilary was at once.

He was an older man than Hilary had expected to meet; seemed well on the shady side of fifty. He was well-dressed, with an expansive collar and plenty of glazed cuff, and a white waistcoat that covered a pronounced obesity. He had elusive gray eyes, a prominent, but ill-defined nose, and a heavy, thready mustache. It was a type Hilary knew intimately, which hardly varies; the crooked business go-between.

Hilary got out and fastened the horse to the hitching-post in front of the office before addressing the other. He knew the psychological advantage of deliberation; read the success of his act in Morris's rather disturbed appearance.

"Mr. Askew, I am sure," said the manager, with affected joviality, holding out his hand, which Hilary took with no great relish. "I heard you were here, and I was just coming over to see you," he continued. "Somebody must have told you I had arrived?"

"I shall be glad to talk things over," answered Hilary, ignoring Morris's question.

Morris, recognizing the situation, accepted it, and, turning back, pulled a key out of his pocket and opened the office door. It was a well-furnished little room, with two desks and a revolving-chair, a set of drawers, and a small leather sofa.

Hilary sat down at the desk nearer the window, from which he could see the endless line of logs ascending the cogged chain that drew them into the mill flume.

Morris took a box of cigars from a drawer of his desk and offered it to Hilary, who declined. Morris selected one, bit off the end, and lit it. Hilary could see that his hand was shaking. Morris was breathing rather noisily.

"Well, sir," he said, seating himself, "it was a great surprise to me to learn that you had arrived in St. Boniface. Mr. Lamartine told me you had been to Quebec and were thinking of coming on here, but I didn't expect you to come so soon."

"Mr. Lamartine tried to dissuade me," answered Hilary, "but I wanted to see the property."

"If you had let me know," said Morris, "I could have made arrangements. You have come in the slackest month of the year. There is very little to show you just now. But I shall arrange for you to enjoy your little visit. I suppose you will be staying long enough to do some fishing, Mr. Askew? There are some fine trout lakes in the neighborhood. We might make a day's trip of it."

"I have come here to assume charge, Mr. Morris," said Hilary curtly. "Please let me have the books and the map."

Morris plunged his hand into a drawer and took out a handkerchief, with which he wiped his forehead.

"That's—that's a sudden determination, Mr. Askew," he said, trying to smile.

"My decisions are usually sudden," said Hilary quietly. "I think over them first."

Morris laid one finger upon the edge of the desk.

"Of course, I know nothing of the reasons for this decision of yours, Mr. Askew," he said, in an aggrieved tone, "but if you intend to take charge immediately, in this impulsive way, it means that I must step out."

"The concession is not a paying proposition, as you are no doubt aware, but your uncle was satisfied with my management. I advised him to sell, although this meant the termination of my contract, but he declined to do so. I have kept expenses down to the lowest level."

"I have expressed no dissatisfaction with your management yet," answered Hilary. "Please let me see—"

"My suggestion," interposed the manager, "is merely that you withhold your decision until we can go over the books together. Frankly, if I were you, I should try to sell. There must be purchasers somewhere, and we could get a reasonable

price if we worked the best tracts this winter and made a showing on the books. We might even show a small profit, and this was my advice to your uncle, but he was a little obstinate about confessing to an error in judgment."

"Before I see the books," said Hilary, as if the argument had made no impression on him, "I have a question to ask you. Are you not associated with the Ste. Marie Company?"

Morris wiped his forehead again.

"I—I certainly am," he answered, "but—"

"Another question. How do you reconcile that with your duties as manager here?"

"Now, my dear sir," protested Morris, "if that is your grievance I am glad to know it, and I assure you it is an unjustifiable one. There is nothing in my duties here that is incompatible with my having other interests. I am not a desk man, Mr. Askew, and I have never claimed to devote all my time to a single concern."

"I think you will find that I have not neglected my obligations toward your late uncle. As for the Ste. Marie Company, the fact that it is adjacent makes it easy for me to devote a little time to it, so far as I can spare it from my duties here. The two concerns are not in conflict, Mr. Askew. Quite the contrary."

"It is politic and necessary that we should pull together, especially in view of the race feeling which would otherwise be prejudicial to an American-owned concern. And it's good business, too. What helps one, helps the other."

"Quite so. I don't dispute your right to have other interests until I have seen your contract. But how about their use of our mill?"

"At a sum, Mr. Askew, which makes quite a little showing on the credit side of our ledgers. We can't afford to throw money away, and our cuttings are not large enough to monopolize the mill—not by any means."

"You mean the timber is poor?"

"Damn poor. Gummy fir, Mr. Askew. What we call north coast fir—all gum and pith. What little spruce there is I've been



holding to make a show in case we decide to sell."

"That sounds plausible," said Hilary. "Why does the Ste. Marie Company wish to purchase this gummy fir of ours?"

Morris rose up, trembling with anger. He had not suspected that Hilary was in possession of this piece of knowledge.

"I see you have suspicions of my good faith, Mr. Askew," he said indignantly. "That is the only possible interpretation that I can put upon your question."

"If you will answer it, we can interpret it together afterward."

"I am not prepared to answer it offhand. Many companies might consider purchasing our property at a low rate. The Ste. Marie Company may or may not have that intention. I should no more think of disclosing the Ste. Marie's plans to you than I should think of disclosing your plans to the Ste. Marie. I keep my interests distinct and confidential, Mr. Askew."

"May I have the books and the map of the seigniory limits, showing the jobbers' districts, Mr. Morris?" asked Hilary patiently.

Morris found a key in his waistcoat pocket, inserted it after two failures, and threw up the top, revealing the books heaped together, as if they had just been under examination.

"Go through them by all means, if you think you've been swindled!" he cried, and flung a larger key upon the desk. "This is the office key," he continued. "The other desk contains my private papers."

"The map, Mr. Morris?"

"The seigniority is bounded on the west by the Rocky River. It is a straight concession of seventy-five thousand, five hundred *arpents*, or thereabouts, with the opposite sides equal. If you want a map you'll have to go to the government."

"There must be a map," persisted Hilary.

"It isn't drawn to scale. I'm not going to give you an unscaled map when you're so mighty particular that you'll be likely to jump on me for errors. You'll find a rough plan of the leases among those papers. If a jobber wants to cut outside his lease, we let him. What's the harm?

We don't go round with a twelve-inch ruler. That's all I have to say."

He moved toward the door, laid his hand on it, cleared his throat, and stopped.

"I have only to add that my annual contract expires on October first," he said with dignity. "If you wish to renew it or to terminate it, I require a month's notice."

Hilary looked up from the books, on which he was already engaged.

"You may regard it as terminating on October the first," he answered. "If I wish to make you a further proposition I shall do so after I have examined the financial record."

This time Morris's anger was quite unfeigned.

"You can accept my resignation now!" he shouted. "Do you think I am the sort of man to accept dismissal at the hands of a young American greenhorn like you? Why, I've thrown away thousands of my own money in the time I've spent trying to develop this rotten proposition of your uncle's, out of friendship for him."

"And what do you think you're going to make out of it? You'll be selling out for a song by spring, if you can find anybody to take the tract off your hands. That's all I have to say except that I'm resigning and not discharged; and if you say I'm discharged I'll sue you for libel in the Quebec courts."

Hilary looked up as he ended his diatribe and stood in the doorway.

"One moment, Mr. Morris," he said.

Morris looked at him uncertainly. He thought Hilary wanted to extend the olive branch.

"Of course, I didn't exactly mean—" he began.

"Take your cigars," said Hilary.

Mr. Morris turned purple, snorted, then snatched up the box and made his exit.

Hilary turned his attention to the books. Outside he heard the sound of many voices, but these died away presently, and he was soon absorbed in scrutinizing the statements and records before him.

He realized that a prolonged examination would be necessary before he could arrive at any reasonably exact estimate of the affairs of the concern. As for Morris,

he was confident that the manager had been swindling him, both from Lafe's statements and from his own estimate of the man. There was a half-yearly deficit of several thousand dollars, and the dam should have been full of the St. Boniface lumber.

He closed the desk after a while and looked about the office. A door led into an extension of the two-story building, consisting of a comfortable little living-room with a huge stove, and a little kitchen at the back. A stairway evidently led up to the bedrooms. Hilary decided to make his headquarters there.

Morris was not greatly disturbed about the loss of his position; rather, he had been prepared for the worst since his interview with Lamartine. Brousseau, who had advised moderation and diplomacy, was waiting for him in his house at Ste. Marie, and Morris departed thither in the store rig.

Hilary had just returned into the office when there came a tap at the door. The anxious face of Jean Baptiste looked in.

"Monsieur Morris has gone away," he announced.

"Well?"

"He has raised hell," said the scaler.

"How's that?"

"Everybody is discharge. The men are very angry. They say they could have got jobs on the south shore, maybe, for the winter, but now it's too late."

"Baptiste, can't you get it through your head that I give the orders here?" asked Hilary. "Go and tell the men that the only person who has been discharged is Mr. Morris."

"Ah, yes, *monsieur*. But, you see, Mr. Morris he pay the men their wages."

Hilary took Baptiste by the arm and led him out of the office. A group of men with sullen looks were eagerly discussing the situation.

"Call them here," said Hilary.

"Now tell them what I have told you," he continued, as the lumbermen began to draw about him.

For a few minutes the air was full of a babel of excited voices. The little scaler began a dozen explanations, and finally turned to Hilary.

"You know, *monsieur*, you own the property all right," he said, "but M. Brousseau, he hires the mill hands. These are the mill workers. That is why it is hard for them; they ain't lumbermen unless they got to be."

"Explain to them that it is my mill. Tell them that the mill hands will be hired by me, and that they can go back to their jobs."

Another chattering followed.

"The men say, if that's so, why is Lafe Connell discharge?" announced the scaler.

"What?" cried Hilary.

"He go right away for to catch the boat home before she leave," said Jean Baptiste. "See, M. Askew!"

Hilary looked up. On the crest of the hill behind the cascade of Rocky River was a solitary figure, striding swiftly, bag in hand.

The down boat for Quebec was almost due. Looking seaward, Hilary saw the white hull rounding the point, and the black smoke from her funnels; an inverted cone against the heavens. Evidently Lafe was homeward bound; but what had happened Hilary could not imagine.

He jumped into the buggy and urged the horse through the still disputing crowd. But then he remembered that he had forgotten to lock the office door, and he had to go back, toss Baptiste the key, and wait for it to be returned to him. When he started again the boat was appreciably nearer.

He had to take the shaky bridge slowly, and then there was the hill, which could only be surmounted at a walk. The horse was tired, too. Arriving at the summit, Hilary heard the hoot of the vessel, and saw it near by, turning to take the wharf with the tide. Lafe was nowhere to be seen along the expanse of the cliff road, visible as far as the descent to the hotel.

Hilary whipped the horse, something he hated to do; but now it was imperative. Without Lafe he felt that his chances of success were almost hopeless.

He drove madly along the cliff and down the slope. As he reached the stable he saw the mooring ropes cast out and made secure.

M. Tremblay was standing at the stable door, smoking his pipe and gazing ruminatingly at the pig that he was fattening for the Christmas killing. Hilary flung him the reins, sprang out, and ran down to the wharf.

A few passengers were gathered about the little baggage office, and others were standing before the gangway, waiting to embark. Among them was Lafe with a great carpet-bag in his hand. Hilary flung himself upon him just as he set foot upon the planks.

Lafe spun around and looked angrily at him. Hilary held his arm.

"What's the matter, Lafe?" he asked.

"Oh, shucks!" said Lafe. "Just let go of me, will you, Mr. Askew?"

"What are you deserting for?"

"What that you say?" demanded Lafe ferociously. "Deserting who? I guess I don't have to stay here after I've been fired, do I, even if my contract has a little time to run? Just let go of my arm!"

The passengers had embarked; the sailors stood waiting for Lafe before pulling back the gangway.

"Come back to your senses, Lafe," said Hilary. "I haven't fired you, and I want notice before you go off like that."

"*Dépêchez-vous donc, monsieur!*" called the captain.

"Last call for dinner," said Lafe grimly.

"Will you leave go of me, Mr. Askew?"

"No!" shouted Hilary. "It's all right, captain. He isn't coming."

The sailors pulled in the gangway. The ropes were cast off. The water was churned into froth as the ship backed away. Lafe, who had made no serious effort to resist, flung his bag angrily upon the planks.

"Now suppose you tell me what the trouble is," said Hilary.

"What right you got to stop me?" demanded Lafe. "Now I got to wait in this God-forsaken place until Saturday, alongside of Mr. Tremblay's pink veranda. Say, if it hadn't been I knew you meant well, I don't know what I mightn't have done to you."

"What's happened, Lafe?"

"What's happened? Didn't you tell me

you were going to hold fast? And didn't you tell Morris every word I'd said to you about him and Brousseau?"

"Not one word, Lafe."

"Then how'd he know?"

"Suspected it. Pumped you. And then fired you, I suppose."

"You got it. I thought you was going to fire Morris, and he fires me and orders me off the concession. That's a grand way to start standing by your word, Mr. Askew!"

"I have discharged Mr. Morris."

"What?" yelled Lafe, spinning round.

"After we'd had a talk, Lafe. And I guess he threw that bluff to get you out of the way quickly, because you know too much. It nearly worked, too! Lafe, tell me, what made you make that crazy dash for the boat?"

"Because I thought you'd weakened, and I'm sick to death of this darned country," answered Lafe. "Because I can't stand the people, or the climate, or the verandas, or them out-of-shape schooners, or Father Lucy praying out fires. I'm sick of it, Mr. Askew, and Clarice—my wife—and the kids are in Shoeburyport. That's why. I guess," he said, looking at Hilary plaintively, "I guess my feelings kind of got the better of me when I thought you'd given way."

Hilary thumped him on the shoulder. "That's all right, Lafe," he said; "but you're going to sign on with me for a year—just one year more; and as soon as things get straightened out, you shall go home for a two-months' vacation on salary. And you're going to sign on as manager, in Morris's place."

Lafe looked at him as if it was all a dream. Lafe had been working for forty dollars a week since his arrival at St. Boniface.

"Mr. Askew," he said, when he could keep his voice steady, "I guess I've been ungrateful. But when Morris told me I was discharged, I naturally took him at his word. It didn't seem reasonable to me that you really meant to stay, though I did believe you when you spoke yesterday. I couldn't see how you could stand for St. Boniface, with your education, and your

chances in your own country. But I'll stay, Mr. Askew, and I'll do all I can to help clean up this mess and put things on a paying foundation."

Hilary held out his hand. "We'll shake on that," he said. "You accept the post, Lafe, and you won't make a break for home again?"

"Never again, so long as we're on the job together," answered Lafe.

## CHAPTER V.

### A NEIGHBORLY ERRAND.

WITHIN the next few days Hilary had got hold of the outlines of the business. He spent many hours with Connell in the office, going over the books. It soon became clear to them that, while Morris had been bleeding the St. Boniface tract to death for the benefit of the Ste. Marie Company, it was very difficult to detect any evidence of actual fraud.

The mill-charges, upkeep, wages, teams, and stabling were the principal items in the expenditure. Then there was the question of freight. The Ste. Marie Company owned two steam-tugs, which towed the barges laden with lumber down to Quebec. The St. Boniface Company had been dependent upon a couple of schooners owned by an old river captain named Dupont.

The timber was cut in the simplest and most primitive method. Want of capital compelled contracting for tracts with the jobbers, consisting of Leblanc and four assistants, who were paid a royalty of two dollars a cord. There was a contract for driving the wood down Rocky River, which ate further into the receipts.

Hilary evolved a method by which he calculated that he might just manage to carry through the winter, if he could get out a large shipment of lumber before navigation closed early in December.

But this involved the satisfactory renewal of the jobbers' contracts. He was confident that Leblanc, who, with his assistants, leased two thousand acres, could cut ten cords to the acre, and that the average of four cords shown on the books meant

in some way that a large quantity of lumber had found its way into the possession of the Ste. Marie Company.

As the Ste. Marie Company was sitting tight and doing very little cutting, it was morally certain that Leblanc had simply transferred the St. Boniface timber to Brousseau, who had floated it down the river and put it through the mill. The show of activity in that part of the Ste. Marie limits opposite Leblanc's camp confirmed this view.

"It's as sure as anything can be," said Lafe. "But what's the use? Morris kept my nose to the grindstone, and if I had gone into the woods, I couldn't get any one to understand me, and I'd have been fired if I'd tried to find out what was doing."

"I'll send for Leblanc and have a talk with him," said Hilary. "He must be getting anxious about his renewal, anyway."

Lafe agreed that this might be advisable.

Leblanc came into the office later that day with his truculent air, fixing Hilary with one eye and the wall with the other. He sat down, decided to take off his hat, and deposited it on the floor between his feet.

"You wanted to see me, and I was coming, anyway," he announced.

"I want to know why you only cut four cords to the acre last year," said Hilary.

Leblanc let his eyes wander crookedly about the office.

"You're fixed pretty comfortably here," he said. "I guess it's true you fired Mr. Morris, eh? All right; I'll sign on with you."

"You'd better answer my question, Leblanc."

Leblanc picked up his hat and twirled it on his knee, smiling sourly.

"You see here, young fellow," he answered; "you don't know the lumber game. You fire Mr. Morris, who knew his business, an' now you want to pick a quarrel with me. How the hell you suppose I'm going to pay my hands an' make profit if I cut three-inch trees, eh?"

"You could cut ten cords to the acre without going below the government limit," said Hilary. "I haven't seen your old

contract territory, but I guess you didn't pick worthless land to cut over."

Leblanc threw back his head and laughed heartily, probably at his memories.

"You sure don't know much of this business," he chuckled. "You t'ink you cut ten cords to the acre up this way? You t'ink you can pick quarrel with me like that? You get another jobber. I can go work for M. Brousseau."

"Very good," said Hilary. "Good afternoon."

Leblanc got up, nonplused. He moved uncertainly toward the door and stopped.

"You don't want me?" he demanded. "Why, I got my camp ready and gangs all ready to start work next month. Mr. Morris agree to sign new contrac' wit' me."

"Go to Brousseau."

"You see here, I got to have that contrac'," shouted Leblanc. "Mr. Morris he promise it to me, an' I got my gangs."

"You seem to want it pretty badly, after all, Leblanc," said Hilary quietly. "Well, if you feel that way, I don't want to go back on Morris's promise. But you'll agree to cut three thousand cords a month from November first and deliver them at the skidways beside the creek and Rocky River."

Leblanc scowled and thought swiftly.

"I take it," he muttered sullenly, after a moment or two.

A new contract was made out and signed, one clause containing the provision that the agreement should become void in the event of Leblanc failing to deliver the stipulated three thousand cords monthly from November first, except in the case of open weather, which would make hauling impossible.

Hilary was jubilant. He was assured of three thousand cords from the jobbers, apart from his own cutting, by November 30, and with reasonable weather he could get this down to the mill and ship it before navigation closed.

But Leblanc was jubilant also. He had secured a good tract, with a long panhandle running in toward St. Boniface, which he had demanded on the ground that there was a fine growth of black spruce along the bottoms there.

As it was to Hilary's advantage to facilitate Leblanc's operations, no objection had been raised to this, and the two men parted on tolerable terms.

Hilary was now assured of nearly one-half of the required income on a monthly average until the summer, when the operations in the woods would, of course, come to an end.

He ought never to have agreed to Leblanc's panhandle. In that he came to see Brousseau's first move—a little one, but significant of what was to be expected. Returning to the office a few days later, after a journey into the concession, he found Baptiste and half a dozen of the men outside the door in a state of excitement.

"The seigneur have been here, *mon-sieur!*" exclaimed the little scaler. "He raises hell wit' everyt'ing."

Lafe came out, looking a little flushed, and Hilary turned to him for an explanation.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"It's about Leblanc's new territory," said Lafe. "You've given him a wedge of land running down almost to the village."

"Yes. What of it?"

"Why that map in the office doesn't show the château. We've got cutting rights over the entire seigniory, but of course it was understood that there'd be no cutting on the strip of land running round the château, and Leblanc's lease goes into Mr. Rosny's back garden.

"Leblanc has started cutting there, within sight of the château windows. The old gentleman wanted to know if you weren't gentleman enough to cut the rest of the territory first, anyway. Lord, Mr. Askew, you ought to have seen the hands cringe when he cussed 'em out! I guess this feudal game is still running pretty strong in St. Boniface."

Hilary felt very serious about this situation. He saw at once that Brousseau had set this trap for him in order to embroil him with the seigneur, already ill-disposed, and the most potent influence in St. Boniface. He determined to lose no time in making his apologies and in getting Leblanc out.

He took the rig and drove over the



bridge, up the hill, and along the branch road until he saw the château before him. Blazed trees along the roadway indicated that Leblanc had already set his boundary there unmistakably.

The great trees, which had evidently once formed an avenue, but now raised their heads above a dense undergrowth of birch and fir, ended a thousand feet in front of the long, rambling, wooden structure, which, unpainted for years, seemed to be crumbling into decay.

Over the approach where the garden had been, the former terraces, still faintly indicated by undulations, an army of little pines, thrust out from the forest like an advance guard, was winning its way.

The grass was thick between the ruts of the track where the wide, winding road had been.

Hilary stopped in front of a flight of crumbling stone steps, tied the horse, ascended, and rapped.

A very old man, wearing a faded butler's uniform, came to the door. As he opened it a shaft of sunlight fell on the passage wall, revealing a line of portraits that looked out from their tarnished frames.

"M. Rosny?" asked Hilary.

The old man mumbled and led the way toward the rear of the corridor. A door at the end opened, and the seigneur came into the passage.

He was a tall and very strong old man, with white peaked beard and apple-red cheeks, still fresh as a boy's. M. Rosny wore a brown swallowtail coat, tight trousers strapped under well-polished boots, and a spreading collar such as has not been seen in a generation. Yet the man suited his ancient costume as the old house suited him.

Hilary went up to him.

"I am Mr. Askew," he said "I heard that you had been to the mill, and I called to offer my explanations."

"Will you kindly come in?" inquired the seigneur.

He ushered Hilary into the room at the end of the corridor. It was a combination of breakfast-room and library, and comfortably furnished in modern fashion. A pair of little white gloves that lay upon the table arrested Hilary's attention instantly.

The seigneur walked toward the window. "Have the goodness to listen, sir," he said.

Hilary could hear the sound of the distant ax-strokes.

"Those are your men," said M. Rosny with extreme bitterness. "They are cutting down the trees which my grandfather planted—not the wild trees of the forest, but those that he set out around his home. What is there to explain, sir?"

"I am sorry for it," said Hilary placatingly. "I leased a tract to my head jobber, but I did not know that it extended to your home."

"A plague on your jobber, sir!" cried Rosny. "I know nothing of jobs or jobbers, but when I sold my timber rights to your uncle, I did not even stipulate for a reservation about my home. I took his courtesy for granted. Mr. Morris respected the custom. But you, sir—"

"Made a mistake in ignorance—"

"Not ignorance, sir, but heedlessness, M. Askew!" stormed the old man. "You are not satisfied to come here and ruin my land, but you must bring your infernal business within sight and sound of me!"

"I shall do my best to end the nuisance, M. Rosny, and I believe I shall succeed," replied Hilary, restraining his growing resentment. "It was my hope to establish neighborly relations, but—"

The door opened and Hermine Rosny came in. She wore a white waist and riding skirt, and her brown hair was tumbling about her shoulders. She carried a little riding-whip in her hand.

"Allow me to present to you M. Askew, the new owner of the timber upon our land," said the seigneur grimly.

She opened her lips, but no sound came from them. Perhaps the evident anger in her eyes made speech momentarily impossible. Hilary saw that they were not blue at all, but of an unfathomable grayness, like the gray St. Lawrence, yet curiously rimmed with blue, which sometimes seemed the dominant tone and sometimes the merest edging to their depths. She tapped her boot quickly with the whip-stock.

"M. Askew has come to offer his explanations," he added.

The girl turned to Hilary and spoke in tones of repressed indignation.

"So it was not enough, *monsieur*, that you should have to cut down our forests, but you must needs also take our own few trees about the château!" she said. "Is it for the few dollars more that they will bring? Perhaps my father will buy them back from you."

"Mlle. Rosny, that is unjust," said Hilary vehemently. "It was an error, and it was to excuse myself I came here."

"We do not wish to hear your excuses, *monsieur*," she answered. "Have you Americans no country of your own that you must swarm across our borders and ravage ours? Cut, then; hurry your work and go, and leave us our solitude, at least."

"M. Rosny!" protested Hilary, bewildered by her anger.

"My daughter is right, *monsieur*!" thundered the old man. "I should have sold my timber to one of our own people. Your excuses are not accepted. Have the goodness to end them."

"I shall not attempt to repeat them," said Hilary. "There remains only this to say: I am on my way to rectify the mistake."

"Ah, do not listen to him, father," cried Hermine. "At least his rights stop upon the threshold of our home."

"Very true, *mademoiselle*," said Hilary, turning toward the door. "M. Rosny, I came here on a neighborly errand, and you have chosen to misjudge me. I came to offer reparation for an unintended offense, and you have converted it into a studied action dictated by greed. I shall offer no further explanations. Good day, *monsieur*; and you, *mademoiselle*!"

He turned upon his heel, pushed the door open, and went out. As he passed Hermine Rosny he saw that she clutched at the table-edge with fingers white to the knuckles; she was looking at him as if he were a serf, and yet he could see that her own humiliation, created by her injustice, stung her most deeply. The seigneur's anger had evaporated. He took two steps forward and seemed about to speak, perhaps to offer reparation.

But Hilary was striding through the hall.

As he entered the buggy he saw the old butler at the door, waiting for his departure.

He heard the door close as he drove down the weed-grown avenue.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

THE horse galloped as if it feared its driver's anger. Soon the château was out of sight in the distance. Half-way down the road Hilary drew rein. Anxious as he was to get beyond the private grounds, Hilary did not wish to return immediately to St. Boniface.

On his journey he had seen a track that cut out of the branch road in the direction of Rocky River. He resolved to take this, which he imagined led to the mill, in order to examine the timber along this route.

He noticed with approval the splendid growth of red pine. It was a great timber country; Hilary had already come to that conclusion, and to this—that, properly managed, the St. Boniface tract had in it the possibility of excellent profits. In spite of frequent fires, much of the growth was of considerable size, and much of the second growth would come to maturity before the territory had been cut over.

After driving for nearly half an hour he emerged from the trees into a burned-over district from which he could see for a considerable distance in every direction. He stopped the horse and looked about to get his bearings.

Far away was the gulf, and, farther than he had supposed, the black cabins of the village, with the streaky line of the mill flume, running down to the wharf. Immediately before him was the range of hills through which ran the Rocky River.

Hilary decided that the road must run down to the gorge, where it joined the main thoroughfare that led into the heart of the concession.

He rode on. The track had evidently been disused that season, and was overgrown with raspberry briars, which made progress difficult. In swampy places, which mired the horse to the fetlocks, a

jungle of ferns had grown up since the summer rains.

The ground grew swampier, descending into a tangle of azalea-bushes, rising to the horse's shoulders. Then, just as Hilary was considering the advisability of giving up his attempt to reach the main road by this route, he saw the bridge that spanned the creek tributary to the river, a hundred yards in front of him.

Now he knew where he was. He had emerged at the place where Connell and he had turned off on their drive into the limits.

It was not far from Leblanc's new camp, and Hilary decided to have his quarrel out with the man immediately instead of waiting. Presently he began to hear the sound of axes again. Evidently Leblanc made this his headquarters, while the work round the château was purely malicious in character. Hilary felt a renewal of his anger at the thought.

When he came into the clearing he found a dozen men hard at work completing the log buildings. At his appearance there was an immediate display of interest. At that moment Hilary had a clear impression of impending trouble.

He was ready for it. He got down from the rig and tied his horse to a tree; he approached the little group that had drawn together, and he did not recognize any man from St. Boniface among the lumbermen.

"Where's Leblanc?" he demanded.

The man shrugged his shoulders and glanced toward the largest of the log-houses. Hilary followed his glance and saw Black Pierre emerging. He went toward him, and the two men met face to face and stopped.

Still without reason to believe in any hostile intention on Pierre's part, Hilary suddenly became aware that they were ringed by a narrowing circle of lumbermen.

"Morning," said Hilary, nodding. "Where's Leblanc?"

"I don't know," answered the other, scowling. "Look for him if you want him. He's your man, ain't he?"

"He is, but you are not. What are you doing here? And these men; I haven't hired them."

"What you mean?" demanded Pierre. "I work here for M. Brousseau, with his men."

Hilary saw out of the corner of his eye that the ring was rapidly contracting. It struck him that Pierre and he were posted in the attitude of prize-fighters. He tried to remember Lafe's counsel and to keep his temper. Pierre thought he was afraid; he sneered at him.

Hilary disregarded his truculent attitude.

"Last time I came here," he said, "Leblanc had taken over this territory. Now I want to know how you come to be in Leblanc's place. I haven't hired you."

"I don't know what you mean," snorted Pierre, "an' I got no time to waste in damn foolishness. This here is Ste. Marie land. M. Brousseau an' M. Morris run the Ste. Marie limits."

"The Ste. Marie limits are on the other side of the Rivière Rocheuse," said Hilary.

"Holy Name, ain't I the other side of Rivière Rocheuse? Didn't you cross the bridge?"

"That creek is not Rivière Rocheuse, as you know very well, Pierre."

Pierre thrust his face forward into Hilary's.

"Say, I got no time to waste with you," he snarled. "If you come here to fight, you say so."

"I'll give you one minute to get off this territory," said Hilary in a quiet voice that deceived, and was meant to deceive, Pierre as to his fortitude.

"You wan' to fight, eh? All right," growled the other, stripping off his jacket.

Hilary had just time to fasten the top button of his coat when Pierre, bellowing, was charging him, head down, his arms working like flails. He made short, vicious jabs at him; he was muscle-bound and could not extend the arm with much force; but any of those short strokes, delivered from a leg-of-mutton shoulder, would have gone home with terrible momentum.

Hilary stepped aside and gave Pierre a short uppercut with his left. Pierre went reeling past him, tripped over a projecting root, and fell sprawling upon the ground.

He was up again in a moment, rushing at Hilary. Despite the blows that were driven

home in quick succession and at once covered his face with blood, he managed to get in two body deliveries that knocked the wind out of Hilary and forced him backward.

Hilary had boxed occasionally at college; that was several years before, but the instinct came back to him.

"It's footwork that wins," his teacher had told him.

And that was especially needed here.

Quicker than the *habitant*, but fighting in a ring which gave and drew in before the contestants, but was never more than a few feet in diameter, Hilary was unable to hold off the clinch except by the utmost agility.

He stepped from side to side, guarding himself dexterously against Pierre's furious rushes, and evading them, until the opportunity for a telling cross-counter with the right arrived. Hilary put all his weight into the blow, and Pierre went down a second time.

He rose, spitting the blood out of his mouth, and came at Hilary again. This time Pierre took his punishment grimly, and succeeded in locking his arms about

him in spite of an uppercut before the grip closed.

Pierre reeled, but did not let go. He grasped Hilary like a bear, hugging him till the breath was nearly out of his body, and forcing the point of his chin in under the clavicle till the pain was intense.

The woodsmen, who had anticipated a swift victory for their leader, jostled the pair as they wrestled to and fro.

There are no rules in lumber-camp fighting. Pierre was looking for a foul chance, and Hilary was preparing for it, knowing that it would be used.

He gradually shifted his grasp upward, first pinioning Hilary's arm, then gripping his shoulder. Of a sudden he had him by the throat with both his hands.

Hilary saw the faces of the lumbermen swim about him. He saw the triumph, the mockery, and the hate on each; there was no pity for the American; many an old land trouble, many a racial conflict had become incarnate again in that fight under the pines.

Hilary saw that he was no longer fighting for the timber tract, but for his life.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



# Beware of Imitations

By Annie Cameron

**A**BALONE BEACH was crowded in August, but now it was November, and the white sands stretched for miles without a footprint, past the shuttered cottages of the summer people that faced the ocean. Over a block or two, where land was cheaper, were the humbler

abodes of the year-round people; the men who ran the launches, the storekeeper, the small concessionaires, a few fishermen, and Ellen Wilkins and her mother, who kept boarders in summer and vegetated in winter.

Ellen was one of those matronly middle-