

THE BACKWOODSMAN

By Acton Seymour

father, and you'll know what that means when you see her."

Then Mr. Harriss smoked in silence for a while, letting that suggestion sink in.

III

George did not feel any consuming curiosity as to what this girl of the north country might be. He imagined he knew what the daughter of such a father must be. The idea of the riotous obsequies that Cornelius Corran had provided for in his will appealed did not look at him just then.

to his appreciation of the bizarre—youth has that appreciation. But Harry George came from good, old Pilgrimage stock, and jesting with death and its mysterious sanctity shocked him while it interested. Mr. Harriss had something still more shocking in reserve.

"You'll have a chance to get a good look at her, like every one else that's at the funeral. She's goin' to lead the parade. The will orders a parade instead of a funeral procession that's made up of just hacks and mourners. Cornelius didn't want any hacks and mourners. Ain't any hacks up our way, for that matter. Two bands, says he in his will, decorations, and the coffin set into a bateau on wheels, and all wrapped stem to stern in the Canadian and Irish flags. And she's goin' to lead! That's in the will. She'll lead, ridin' on horseback — on that big, black hoss of her'n."

That last detail was too much for the young man who had passed his life among the conventions.

"Mr. Harriss," he said reproachfully, "I believe you are one of these Canadian jokers who go around making up yarns to fool people. I don't believe there ever was any Cornelius Corran, or that there's going to be any funeral."

"You and me don't want trouble, but there'll be some between us if you undertake to call me a liar," stated Mr. Harriss, with dignity.

"But no girl would do such a thing at that, even if her father's will did order her to," cried the young man. "It's impossible. It's shameful!"

"Meanin' that Clare Corran would do anything that wasn't right and proper?" inquired Governor Harriss a baleful light in his eyes.

"Doing a think like that wouldn't be proper."

And then and there, Harry George received a lesson in what it meant in the north country to doubt Clare Corran of Corran-cache, her beauty, her wit, her knowledge of all matters in heaven or on earth, her right to reign as queen of hearts from St. Francis to St. Agathe.

Governor Harriss had been nursing his hat on his knees. He replaced it on his head. Thus, he crowned himself with his dignity, assumed his rightful position as official spokesman of the territory in which he ruled.

"In that dude-rid, henpecked, milk-and-water locality that you've come from," he snarled, "maybe it ain't thought proper to love a father, all through his life and obey him, and then love and obey him after he's dead and leaves you on your honor. Mebbe them wobble-necked women-geese down there, think they're mournin' when they load a lot of crape on the outside and sing 'Hail Columby' inside while the minister's prayin'. Tain't what is outside that mourns — it's what is inside. And Clare Corran mourns so for her father that she'd cut off her lily right hand rather than fall down on what he asked her to do."

He had raised his voice, till its shrillness cut through the gabble of the men in the car. The name of the girl caught their attention. By the way they began to listen, it was plain it was a magic name to them.

"She is the girl of her father!" squallied Governor Harriss, his voice breaking in his fresh passion. "The pal of her father — with grit enough to be his son, but with the love for him that only girls can feel. What's Clare Corran!"

"And who says she isn't?" roared a man halfway down the car. He came up the aisle, elbowing right and left other men who were rising from their seats. "Who says she ain't the queen doe of the Great Toban? He's got me and a thousand like me to fight!"

Governor Harriss was on his feet, now. He leaned over George, tapping emphases upon the shoulder of that disconcerted young man.

"And if she rides, dressed in her best, but with sorrow in her heart,

rides aimed to be the first at the bed where Cornelius Corran will sleep his last sleep — rides ahead because with his dying breath he asked her to, and put it into his will — ain't she as good, and as sweet, and as true, as any of your wad'in' city ducks that have to be toted on a cushion in a hack? If she ain't, say so! If she is, take word of it back to your dudes." It was plain that Mr. Harriss enjoyed being in the "notlight, and that he welcomed this opportunity.

The man who had made the first rush was at their seat, now. Others massed at his back, and Big Bill was climbing over seats in order to be where duty called at the outbreak of any hostilities. And George, with that gaunt finger tapping his shoulder, became the centre of all that disturbance so suddenly that he stared from face to face, bewildered.

"I'm an old man," quavered Governor Harriss. "If I was as full of ginger as I was once, I'd put a rosette over your eye."

"If there's decoratin' needs to be done here, you needn't worry about artists volunteerin'," said the first recruit. "Give me the pattern. What did this son of a boewax say about Clare Corran?"

Big Bill made the last stage of his journey by jumping two woodsmen down into a seat and climbing across them on his hands and knees.

"I'm in this," he panted. "You'll do your fightin' out where the Great Trust Co. don't have to pay for car damages."

"This ain't fight, boss, it's a lynchin'," yelled the woodsman. "The dude has pased a skunk word about Clare Corran."

"That's different," said Kyle. "Don't worry about the seats if that's so."

Now, they hemmed George, back, front, and sides. Harriss's finger still played tattoo on one shoulder. The clutch of the leader of the mob was on the other. It was all so unreasonable, so unjust, so preposterous, this drunken onslaught, that his own anger now blazed as hotly as theirs. He surged to his feet, breasting them from him.

"Hold on, right here," he shouted. "What do you mean by pitching into a man in this way? I have not insulted any young lady. I don't know this one you are talking about." He clutched Governor Harriss, lifted him out of the seat, and thrust him among the men in the ear aisle.

It was a magnificent display of muscle and quickness, and it held back the crowd better than words would have done, whether the words had been threat or appeal. George backed to the window, and stood at bay.

"I'm a stranger in this section. I don't know your people. If I've said anything that's been misunderstood, I'm sorry. If there's any one wants to fight me, after that, he's 'mply looking for fight without excuse for it — and there's no man-fashion about that business, forty to one."

"That's fair talk, son," declared Kyle, and he straddled a seat back and stood down beside George. "Now, Harriss, what have you got to say?"

Governor Harriss was between the hostile lines, a precarious place for a non-combatant. If he gave the signal for combat, it meant damage to himself and his precious plug hat. He temporized.

"I might have been mistook," he admitted. "Come to think of it, it don't stand to reason that a man meant to insult Clare Corran."

"If he's right, let him prove it," said the man who had led the charge. "Take off your hat and say you love her — our Queen Clare, of the Great Toban."


With hot wrath and revolt in his cheeks, the young man was about to refuse, but Big Bill growled in his ear: "Do it. It won't hurt you, and I don't want this car mused up."

It seemed like treachery to another — but they couldn't understand. And his disgust urged him to get rid of them. A hush fell on them, broken only by the clatter of the train. He lifted his hat. His smile was ironical, but they took only of his words:

"I love your Queen Clare, whoever she may be."

Woodsmen, are like children. As ingenious, as fickle, as precipitate in forgiveness. They cheered him with laughter. They had only dimly understood what the quarrel was all about. Even the angry knight who had first thrown down the gauntlet grinned.

"Get back into your seats," commanded Kyle. "I'll set with you," he informed the young man. "I never knew old Harriss to get on that plug hat but trouble chased after him, like a storm after a sundog. You go away from here, governor."



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"You grinned when you said it about her," muttered Mr. Harriss, leaning close to George. "But you'll tell her that some day, and you won't feel like grinnin', then. You'll waller at her feet. But she'll never marry a dude."

He swayed away, ominous prophet, sooty as a crow, in his fuzzy hat and rusty black.

"It'll be like livin' through a tornado in tophet, the next two days in Corran-cache," said Kyle, refilling his pipe. "But I'm startin' a day ahead with this bunch so's to be there," he admitted. "The governor gave you the gist of Cornelius' will, did he? I reckon it sounds like a nightmare to a city chap like you."

"So much so that I got into trouble by talking about it," said George sourly. "I'd like to talk a little about my own business, Mr. Kyle. Now, about Smart and Lunch. Do you—"

"I'm thinkin' that the death of Cornelius Corran and even this funeral celebration will have some bearin' on your business, more'n what you realize," said Kyle, with a shrewd wink.

He did not wait for the young man to comment.

"Cornelius Corran was quite a grand-stand player, son, but it wasn't all grand stand with him. Let me tell you something — when he was alive, he held the reins over a terrible slat of timberland. He didn't get all of it by plinkin' down tollars on every acre. There's more than one way of gobblin' timberland up this way. When tax titles, squatter claims, fake lines, and all the rest are guaranteed by grit and cheek and plenty of friends at your back, you don't need quite so much help from the courts and the registry of deeds.

"Dennis Kavanaugh had the friends when he was alive; he tended right to it, keepin' an army ready for call. He never needed it — not in real action. It was enough for the other fellers to know that he had it — bought and owned by the rum, 'rub, and good-fellows-ship that he spread with hands and tongue. Why, son, if he had ever called on, even, the Great Trust Co., crews would have quit the big fellows and joined this bunch and ridden the president of our cor-

poration, whoever he is, on a rail across the line.

"It's fashionable to steal lands up here, but the other thieves had to let Thief Cornelius alone so long as he lived and had his clutch on things. There's more to this funeral than a hurrah. He left five thousand dollars to spike down the memory of Cornelius Corran as the king of all the good fellers that ever stole land up this way. And his girl is the heiress of his lands and his memory. See? He reckoned that when an ice cake like the Great Trust got up against that memory of his, it would melt so quick that it couldn't put many dents in his estate. I reckon he left the girl pretty well barricaded."

"Do you mean that our company would go in on a land-grabbing scheme?" asked George.

Mr. Kyle laughed so uproariously that tears ran down his cheeks.

"Oh, you city sharps do know how to wear the velvet glove!" he complimented, after getting his breath. "You spoke out, then, just as innocent as that civil engineer that they sent down here last year to steal ten thousand acres — and he got away with it on fake lines that he run."

Mr. Kyle took him in with sidelong glance, in which humor mingled with shrewd understanding.

"You've got me sized up wrong — and the company that you work for, too, I think," objected George.

"Keep up the bluff, that's what you're hired for," gighed the rude skeptic. "We understrappers of the Great Trust don't expect to be let into headquarters secrets. We only grab in and clean off the lands after they've been stolen. But you'd better not show your hand in the game you're on now till after this section gets over the funeral — and that funeral may last quite a while, just as Cornelius planned. I'd rather have my job than yours."

The new forester of the Great Trust Co. decided that convincing this collaborer was profitless work. But he had found a text for some rather lively ponderings. And especially did he wonder of what sort was this forest queen, whose father had left to her a heritage of protecting loyalty bought with such questionable means.

The journey became tiresome as night drew on. Big Bill gossiped about the affairs of the north country, but he was rather prosy, except when he threw in further malicious hints as to what George's real business was in the woods. He seemed to find the young man's indignant protests a means of whiling away the time. He grew more impertinent in his baiting.

"You're a mighty good-looker," was one of his impish thrusts, "and, perhaps, they've sent you up here to catch Queen Clare and marry the Corran lands right into the Great Trust Co.'s clutch."

George's retort was violent enough to suit even Kyle's taste for the gamy in repartee.

"And, furthermore, you've got spirit to go with your size and looks, and girls like that most of all. She knows what spirit is. She's all tuned up herself like a fiddle in the front parlor. But if you marry her, you'll have to beat Blinn Wiggin to the sortin' boom. Ever hear of Blinn and his father, Jep?"

"Of course, I have never heard of them — and, in addition to that, Mr. Kyle, I don't care to hear about them. Why don't you tell me where I can find Niles and Smart; if you've got to talk?"

"Cause I can't keep you mad that way, and you're more interestin' when

Continued next week.

Satisfaction

Once while stopping at a country inn, Stephen Inledon, an eminent English tenor of other days, quarreled during the evening with an army officer. He imagined he had closed the controversy by going off to bed, but the officer, left downstairs to brood over his wrongs, thought otherwise. Making his way to Inledon's bedroom, he found the singer fast asleep. Waking him, the officer demanded satisfaction. "Satisfaction?" murmured Inledon, sleepily. "Well, you shall have it." Whereupon he sat up in bed and sang "Black-Eyed Susan" in his best style. "There," he said, lying down again, "my singing of that song has given satisfaction to thousands, and it will have to satisfy you!" And he turned over and went to sleep again.

Man Is Safe Nowhere.

A girl married the man she met in a graveyard.