

THE BACKWOODSMAN

By Acton Seymour

"You're mad," confessed the boss. "Why don't you cuss? I give you lief. I'd like to pick up a line of fresh city cussin'. My line of talk has gone stale with my crews. I need a new stock."

But the forester maintained wrathful silence. He would have gone back to the other car, but he realized that this retreat would have flattered Mr. Kyle.

"This Blinn Wiggin that you'll be gettin' up against when you make your play for Queen Clare, is a good-looker, too. But I'll tell you, son," he added critically, "it'll be a fair race between you, handicaps about even. He's known her, boy and man — kid and queen, all his life. And she knows him — but she may know too much about him. Just one quiet hellion with girls — and, on the other hand, women fall for just that sort. And yet she may be the kind that would rather come up the home stretch with something in the shafts that the crowd didn't have quite so much of a line on. On the other —"

"I don't want to have any trouble with you, Mr. Kyle," advised the forester balefully.

"You're with the majority, there — not many people do! On the other hand, I say, Jepson Wiggin has been manager for Cornelius for a good many years, and Cornelius has left him sole trustee of the estate. And you've got to admit, son, that he's a bad man in the judge's stand, where outside ringers are concerned. I'd have to think twice on this before I'd place my money. I reckon I'll watch you for a few days. I can tell something from the way you score down under the wire at Corran-cache."

George, as angry as a well-bred young man can well be, muttered something about punching out the eye that dared to get busy with his business.

Mr. Kyle chuckled appreciatively. "Never had this ride up shortened any more by innocent and profitable talk in my life — and I've been luggin' in men for twenty years! You'll have to excuse me, now. I've got these Fijis to unload. All off at the next station!"

He went through the car, shouting, cuffing, and shaking.

It had been a long ride, and night had come on. Most of the convivial crew had long before fallen asleep. Those who were so far gone in stupor that a shake did not stir them. Mr. Kyle lugged down the aisle to the door to be unloaded when the train stopped. He handled them as a stevedore would handle bags of grain. When the station was reached, he tossed them off into the arms of the other men, and kicked their duffel bags out after them.

The little hamlet was Skitcock, so they told George. It was the junction where the logging railroad to Corran-cache tapped the country's main railroad artery. The logging railroad operated only in the daytime. Incoming crews were lodged free at the Great Trust Co.'s boarding house, Kyle informed the forester. He followed the boss there, swarms of hungry mosquitoes chasing him.

"Forty goats for the ram pasture!" Kyle notified the keeper of the boarding house. He was shoving men before him in at the door. "Me'n a calper chap for a room."

George got a look into "the ram pasture" when he passed down the corridor. It was a bare room, with field beds on the floor. Some of the men were lugged there and thrown upon the beds to sleep it off. Most of them were sufficiently awake to eat supper in the dining room, with its tin dishes, its bare benches and tables covered with oil-cloth. George managed to eat there, too. And he was careful to get a seat as far away from Bill Kyle as possible. That gentleman was getting on to his nerves. That Mr. Kyle went promptly to sleep when they retired together in the one room available in the house, and snored continuously and kept him awake did not seriously trouble George. Mr. Kyle's coffee-grinder noises were preferable to his line of conversation.

In the morning, they were away early over the rough road, in a rough train, and with their rough crew.

There was one battered car for passengers. It had benches without backs. It played "snap-the-whip" at the end of a train made up of log carriers — skeleton cars, loosely huddled.

George had hard work to edge himself into the car. It was packed to the doors. There had been important new arrivals on the train that passed through Skitcock in the early hours of the morning. These were the two bands of music that Governor Harriss had ordered. Their gay uniforms contrasted strangely with the rough clothes of the woodsmen. Governor Harriss marshaled them pompously, and lavished much attention on a gentleman whom he introduced as "Squire Thurlow, orator of this solemn occasion, gents." Lastly, the master of ceremonies had careful eye out for

a huge box that was set across one end of the car. He consented finally to allow men to sit on it, but impressed on all that Cornelius Corran's thousand-dollar coffin was inside that box and must be respected accordingly.

Toward a trunk that had been loaded on board the car, Governor Harriss did not display as much respect. He ordered it to be taken off.

"I'm running this occasion, and we need all the room," he said. "And who in the name of the wall-eyed Horace is it that's carryin' a trunk into the woods, anyway? Trunks don't belong in the woods."

"That's my trunk," stated George. "And I want it taken along to-day." He was thinking of the precipitate Niles and Smart, and realized that if he managed to catch up with them at Corran-cache they would not be inclined to wait another day for the trunk that contained his woods' equipment. He had a wordy battle with the governor, and prevailed only because the men who sat on the trunk had anchored it, and did not want to give up their seats.

When the train started away, scores of men were straddling the spreaders of the log cars at the risk of their necks. Another score clung to the roof of the passenger car.

There seemed to be a general hankering for music in the crowd, and men pleaded with the bands until they were hoarse. But the men with the instruments could not lift their elbows. Then, the little group on Cornelius Corran's coffin decided to try their voices in old Dobeery's "Come All Ye." It was familiar enough, so that all joined the third time it was sung, and it furnished melody for most of the trip, except for the intervals when the choristers refreshed themselves from their bottles.

George had those words dinned into his ears so many times that he could never forget them:

Oh-h-, come all ye bean-fed larrigan lads

And listen unto me.

I'll sing a song to the tune we played

With a cross-cut on a tree.

When we whooped along, a hundred strong,

With a hotfoot down the middle;

A-dancin' wide and a-kickin' high

To the tune o' the gashin' fiddle.

Silvers, and sawdust, and swagon stew,

Rip-fa-duddy, we're Corran's crew!

"You see, son," growled Kyle, in George's ear, "they ain't forgettin' old Cornelius in this country. I can see that you're a pretty good pussy-foot, and know how to keep your mouth shut as well, but you've got to play smoother than the big bosses up Montreal way realize, if you're goin' to get away with any of the plunder that Cornelius left behind."

It was a persistency in an insulting belief that stirred George, sick with sleeplessness, and harried by the din of voices in that stifling pen, to curse him soulfully.

"You'll do for what they want of you, I reckon," indorsed Mr. Kyle cordially, after listening. "I can see that you're hidin' quite a lot of brimstone under a pretty smooth shell."

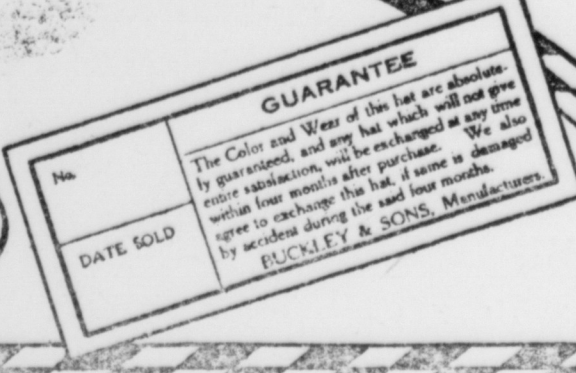
The forester plunged into the press, and forced his way apart from his tormentor; and the men whose feet he trod upon, swore behind his stalwart back.

It was respite after agony when that sluggish serpent of a train wormed its way out of the woods and jangled down into the broad, river valley where Corran-cache huddled in its clearing. He burst out of the car among the early ones, struggling as one struggles to come to the surface of the water.

He narrowly missed being flattened by his own trunk. First of the baggage, as though it contaminated the car, it came out of the side door like a projectile. It was plain that the man who threw it had the full strength of his convictions that trunks did not belong in the woods. It struck on one corner, and its seams started with protesting squeal.

"Got a school ma'am on board?"

The Hat



and the Guarantee

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demanding the station agent of the crowd that came flocking out of the car door, each man with his stuffed mealsack on his shoulder. The agent was patting the trunk. In his sudden little panic of embarrassment, the forester hurried up the platform toward the station. It was relief to get away from those grinning faces. He would claim his despised trunk when they had scattered. The agent up ended it, jounced it along on its corners in a few emphatic revolutions, and then started to drag it. A sprinkling trail of some black substance that issued from a broken corner marked its course.

One citizen who had early noticed that trunk to scoff at it was among the last to leave the car, his legs not being of the surest, that day. He espied the trunk departing. Then, his eyes followed back along that black trail that ended at his feet. He picked up a pinch, eyed it, smelled at it. Being still in doubt, but mumbling

certain suspicions, he scratched a match and dropped it upon a considerable deposit of the black stuff that the trunk had shed at its impact on the platform.

The experimenter's suspicions were confirmed.

The black stuff "flashed" with a vicious hiss, and fire ran along the trail.

"Powder!" yelled the man who had convinced himself.

The station agent saw the chasing serpent of the blaze just in time to throw himself over the edge of the platform and duck his head. There was a breathless instant, every eye in Kyle's crew on the trunk; and then the fateful piece of baggage exploded. "Erupted" might be the better word. Never were the passenger's secrets of property so instantly opened to the world.

Following the muffled "boof!" of the explosion, the air was alive with belongings. Blazing shirts took sudden flight, and looped themselves over the telegraph wires. Clothing alighted on the log cars and smoked and smoldered. Men dodged mysterious missiles that whizzed past, and ran and recovered them, finding them to be brushes and razors and toilet articles, of whose nature the simple habits of the woods had not informed

the finders.

They came bringing these back to George, who stood staring at this wreck in a state of mind that combined astonishment and ferocity.

A certain tall man made the most notable capture. He had been lounging against the side of the station when the train came in. He saw a pair of hunting boots coming his way. They were tied together by the lacings, and revolved about each other in their flight. The tall man stuck up one gaunt arm and picked them out of the air by the lacings. The owner was standing beside him, but the captor made no move to return the shoes.

"Sort of what the newspaper advertisements would call an openin' of gents' furnishin's," he remarked cheerily. "Spontaneous come-bust-up, scientifically speakin'. Was that your trunk?"

"It's my trunk — and it's my powder for my shells — and — and a fool with fire!" cried the young man angrily.

The rest of the mob ceased to take interest in the incident, for one of the bands had listened to entreaties, and now began to play the tune most eagerly besought: "A Hot Time in the Old Town To-night." Tramping men kicked the remains of the smoking trunk right and left; garments still hung their torches on the wires.

In the uproar, George had not heard the horse coming. He was staring up regretfully at a hunting coat just dropping into shreds. The man with the boots yanked him out of the way, and the girl went past, and almost over him as he stumbled. She did not look at George. The big black that she rode crouched back when the music blared under his frothing muzzle. But she lashed him down the platform, scattering musicians and listeners. The music stopped.

"Three cheers for Queen Clare, the daughter of —" began a man, raising his hat. But she struck down his swinging hand with her crop, and her indignant cry stilled them.

"It's just as I thought, and that is why I'm here. You haven't the sense and decency even to bring my father's coffin to the house without a riot. You are drunk already. You are destroying property." Her keen eye

had noted the flaming garments on the wires.

But Governor Harriss had been marshaling the unloading of the huge box. He rushed to her through the press, his ancient hat in the crook of his elbow, bowing to her as to a divinity.

"I am in charge, Miss Clare, and it shall be done right and proper. I know how."

But the divinity was not calmed.

"Stop this drunken noise, then. I'll have you to understand, men, that I'm carrying out the wishes of my dear father, because I'm the one he depended on to carry them out. But I'll not have his memory insulted here, to-day — and you were doing it, just now." She addressed them as men would address men. She used the language and the tone that Bill Kyle might have used.

"It's the girl of Cornelius Corran that's talkin' there, ah right," mumbled the tall man at George's side. "It's many a lesson he's given her in talkin' to men."

"I see your'e lookin' at them things," explained the governor, justifying himself and his friends. Her indignant eyes were flashing from embers of trunk to smoldering apparel on the wires. "Them ain't antics, Miss Clare. It was accident. The dude's trunk got blowed up."

He pointed to the forester, who stood apart with certain poor salvage in his hands. He did not make a heroic spectacle, thus; but her woman's eyes recognized the badge of breeding in his stalwart manhood. His eyes met hers, her big, gray Irish eyes that sparkled against the flush of her cheeks. He stepped forward, for these eyes summoned him. The spirit of command was in them. There was something regal about her, sitting there among those cringing men on her pawing horse. He instinctively recognized that quality as regal by waiting for her to speak to him — waiting just a fraction of time, and hardly realizing that he did so — but he waited.

Continued next week.

Without a Doubt

"Do you think women would vote for the best man?" "Certainly! The bridegroom wouldn't be noticed at all."