

THE BACKWOODSMAN

By Acton Seymour

"Mr. George," she said, "you see I'm in sore trouble, just now. I have plenty of friends in this north country, but they do not understand business. I need your assistance. I'm not appealing to you as woman to man. I don't want any chivalry. I'm talking straight business. I want you to take charge of my affairs, for you are in a position to understand them better than any one else at this time. I want you to engage suitable lawyers, and manage my business until this is straightened out. It will not take long, I hope. And then you can go on about your own affairs."

"If that skunk stays in this section any hours more, he'll get his, with the pepper pot emptied on it," roared the old man truculently.

Her proposition had taken George's breath away. Wiggin's threat jumped him into acceptance. He was no coward. He would have seemed so, had he refused at that moment.

"I'll accept the position," he said bluntly.

"This gentleman is my new manager, Wiggin." Round spots on her cheeks were very red. "You'll have to deal with him from now on."

"I'd like to see him manage," stated the old man. "I've got the law behind me."

Harry allowed himself a bit of a boast—he was young and very angry. "I'll put some more law behind you, Wiggin. It will be the kind of law that will push hard."

Wiggin hurried away.

Harry remained for a time in consultation with his new employer. At the end, both of them realized that they needed legal advice to regulate their future acts. Once assured that he was right, the young man was certain that he would be a match for the schemers — such is the optimism of youth. And, looking at the girl, he felt that a man would be craven, indeed, who allowed the interests of such a one to suffer.

He proposed to her that he should start at once for the nearest city, in order to procure advice and set in motion the necessary legal action to protect her property. She gave him a copy of the will and such other papers as she possessed.

"It will not do for you to go by the company's railroad to the junction," she warned him. "The men are only tools, and I shall fear for your safety. You may take my horse — I'll trust you both to win out. Reach the railroad below the junction — I'll give you the maps of the trail. Then, they will not know where you are, or suspect why you have gone away."

He prepared to ride out of Corran-cache under cover of the darkness that evening. He ate his supper with her at the Corran house.

"Tell me, Mr. George," she said, "just why you decided so quickly to take charge of my affairs. It's an impertinent question, but I'd like to know."

He looked at her a moment. The eternal feminine shone in her eyes. But he, with the fatuousness of youth and in order to quiet the conscience that whispered the name of Mary Laroche to him, said: "I have a very dear girl waiting for me in the world outside. I have my way in life to make. And the thought of her gives me courage to befriend another who may need what poor assistance I can render. There are two strong reasons why I'm doing this, Miss Corran."

For one fleeting instant, her eyes clouded. No woman listens unmoved to a declaration that puts another woman above her. Even entire lack of personal interest in the man hardly serves to console. She recovered from her surprise instantly. She smiled at him.

"I am glad to hear that," she said. "I am relieved. Men have been fools enough to annoy me with their attentions. You and I can get along on a strictly business basis. I have nothing to worry about."

He went away, feeling that matters were exactly right between them, and yet her evident relief, when he had confessed, piqued him.

IX

It was a bone-wearing trip. The black horse knew the way, and brought him safely to the railroad. The railroad took him to the city and the lawyer. The grave man of justice could not console his impetuosity. He could set the necessary legal machinery at work to dispossess the false Wiggin, he assured Harry, and, no doubt, in the end would save the girl's interests. But this could not be done in a moment.

In the meantime, Clare Corran

needed an able and fearless manager on her properties, for law had a rather unsteady grip on the outposts of the north country, so the lawyer explained. He told Harry how he could proceed so that he could protect himself and justify his acts in the final settlement, and ordered him back, advising him to fight the foe with their own weapons until the law could arrive, traveling slow but sure. Months might elapse before right could supplant might, the lawyer said; and offered some information as to the ability of the Great Trust Co. to trig legal wheels — provided the Great Trust continued to be interested in the affairs of Clare Corran.

It was a rather dubious outlook that Harry faced.

He thought that the voice of Mary Laroche might console him and send him back, heartened for his task. After discouraging waits, he secured telephonic communications with Toronto, amazing "central" in the little northern city by his persistency in seeking some one in far-off Ontario. Her father answered. Mary was away with the young folks at a picnic. Oh, yes, she was well. She would be sorry that she was not at home. He hung up the telephone receiver, feeling rather cross and jealous.

He went back to Corran-cache with the discouraged thought that he was very much alone in the world. He also felt very inefficient. Somehow, some of the zest of the matter seemed to have departed. Clare Corran had very frankly warned him that he was only a hired man. Of course, he did not expect or desire to be anything else. But the knowledge that he was abandoning his profession for a time in order to carry on a fight — a mere single-handed tussle against odds — was a depressing thought.

When, at last, he was back and had reported to her what he had been able to accomplish, she studied him with some curiosity. He seemed to have lost his zeal in her behalf.

"I'm afraid I've got you into trouble," she confessed. "I have had my men out since you left here. They have watched and listened. It seems to have been left to Blinn Wiggin and some rogues that he has collected to get you out of the way. He has personal spite, and, of course, he is being paid well. I have no right to ask you to engage in this affair. It's dangerous. At the most, I can only lose some of my property. You may lose your life."

He said nothing, and she went on: "I think you'd better give up the position, Mr. George."

"You have some one else in mind, I suppose — some one better fitted to do the work?"

"I assure you I have not." The color came into her cheeks.

"Then, it is plain to you that I'm not the man for the place — that I haven't the ability to protect your interests?"

"I think nothing of the kind. I've been much impressed by your courage — and I understand you must know the management of timberlands. I believe in you and your honesty and ability thoroughly, Mr. George. But this is not an ordinary job that I'm asking you to do. You are threatened. You will probably meet violence. I feel that I have no right to hold you."

He stood up before her, straight and full of determination. He had felt reproach in her tone. He realized that he had brought a discouraging demeanor before her. "I am not afraid of them," he said. "So long as you have confidence in me, I'll go on and do the best I can. I ask your pardon for my appearance, just now. I fear I was — it's a boyish confession — just a bit homesick."

"I understand," she smiled. "But it will all be made up to you when I tell her what a good, brave knight is hers."

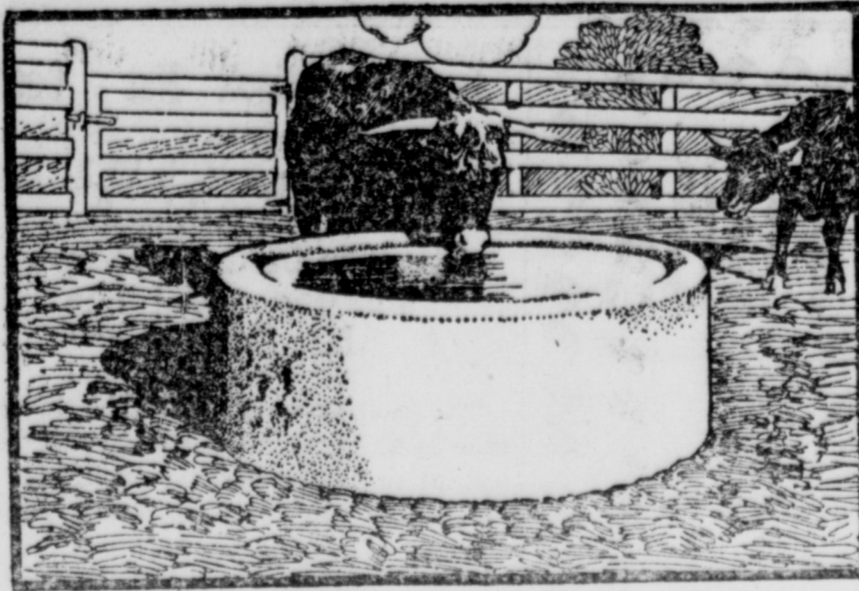
He bowed. He did not reply. Then he took up his task.

If violence were meditated, it did not appear.

Harry made his home at the hotel. Quietly, as the days passed, he attached men to him, following her suggestions as to who were loyal.

He did not see Blinn Wiggin in his usual haunts. The landlord informed him that the young man seemed to be dodging the old Indian who still roamed about the village, standing like a statue for long hours, gaunt, haggard, and waiting.

"It's some hitch about the White Lily, I reckon," stated the landlord. "If he's fooled her like he has some of the rest of the girls on this border, he's up against a tough old customer in that Injun out there, even if he is over a hundred."



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The brisk stranger had gone from Corran-cache. Only Jepson Wiggin was left. The old man trailed Harry as much as he dared, casting malevolent gaze on him. Gradually, George got insight into the affairs of the Corran estate. He met the stumpage buyers, dickered with them in full understanding of the forestry question, and when the trades were completed, went with them to Wiggin and compelled the old man to ratify the trades. Wiggin was not ready to declare open war. He was plainly obeying secret orders.

It was a waiting game. The big folks understood that George was forewarned as to what their campaign might be in regard to claimants and forged documents. Wiggin, in his folly and haste, had exposed that part of the plot.

In his daily conferences with Clare Corran, Harry was careful to keep on the plane of the employed. Once in a while, by a little flash of imperiousness, the girl emphasized the position she had assumed toward him.

Harry was not happy during those weeks. He could not analyze just what his emotions were. It was a kind of general dissatisfaction with everything. The scouts that he sent into the woods brought back disquieting rumors of officious strangers who were running lines and blazing trees. The line of attack, if attack it was, was all very vague. He chafed because he did not know where to pitch in and try conclusions. He realized that he was particularly unhappy after reading each letter that came from Mary Laroche in reply to his own.

The letters were not as frequent as they were at first. They were affectionate, after her own ingenuous fashion, but they did not express that lonely longing that he felt ought to mark the letters of a sweetheart deprived of the presence of one dear to her. When he chided, she replied that he was hardhearted if he expected or desired her to be unhappy all through the days of youth because they were not together. She argued that love ought to be happy and hopeful — and said that she did not write to tell him how lonely and unhappy she really was, for fear that she would make him discontented. He decided that his isolation in the woods was making prett' much of a fool of him.

One afternoon, he was at the Corran house, going over with Clare some papers that she had received from the lawyer in the city. The legal aspect of the case was looking better. Already some of the powers of Jepson Wiggin had been taken away. Further action was in preparation.

Suddenly, a man arrived, beating the horse he rode. He was Romeo Bragg, one of the staunchest adherents of Clare Corran, and hired by Harry to patrol the properties of a far township that Corran's estate owned.

"They're at it," gasped Bragg excit-

edly. "I've rid a day and a night to tell you. They're in on old Number 'Leven, whal'n' down black growth at the rate of a hundred dollars a minute — with one of them steam log haulers yanking out the stuff over the line"

"Who's doing it?" demanded Harry. "The only folks I know of that's got money to buy steam engines to haul off stolen logs is the Great Trust Co.," said Bragg. "I didn't take any census of the crowd, and I don't know as that was needed. It's enough, ain't it, that they're stealin' Miss Clare's good timber?"

George knew what the lot was—the maps of the Corran explorers testified to its richness. The rape of it in that fashion was bold enough to be almost desperate. But law had not yet put its heavy and protecting hand on the Corran properties. Quibbles and disputes might, in the end, relieve the thieves of responsibility. It had been done — it could be done again. And Harry guessed that this attempt was perhaps a test case prefacing more thievery. His advices had warned him that this plan might be adopted. He was dealing with men who were both sharp and determined.

He did not hesitate. For such an emergency he had slowly assembled his little army of the faithful. He leaped off the porch. He was on his way to mobilize that army.

Continued next week.

Icelanders Were the Discoverers of America

London, Nov. 7.—Dr. Nansen, in a lecture to the Royal Geographical Society last night, said it was well known

that the Norse Icelanders in Greenland, had founded two settlements on its western coast at the end of the tenth century. It must also be regarded as certain, he said, that they discovered the continent of North America besides Greenland, about five hundred years before Cabot and Columbus.

Head of Mormon Church is Dead

Salt Lake City, Utah, Nov. 7.—John Smith, for thirty years the presiding patriarch of the Mormon Church, and nephew of its founder and first president, Joseph Smith, is dead here after a three days' illness of pneumonia. He was 79 years old.

Salvation Army to Bring Settlers to Maritime Provinces

Halifax, Nov. 8.—Plans for the transportation of a large number of British immigrants, under the direction of the Salvation Army, have been perfected. Staff-Captain Jennings, in charge of the army immigration work in the maritime provinces, will leave next week for England, where he will remain three months selecting farmers for the maritime provinces. The best class of settlers obtainable will be brought to Nova Scotia.

Captain Jennings expects to return to Halifax with the first party of settlers early in February. The army proposes to bring out more settlers for the dominion this season than they did last. Ten thousand settlers were brought out under their direction last year.

The Telegraph.

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