

THE BACKWOODSMAN

By Acton Seymour

"There is mischief abroad here, today, sir, I am afraid. Our little place is respectful toward a stranger. You will find it so, usually. Mr. Wiggins will see that your loss is made up to you."

"That will be out of the question, Miss Corran."

"My father would have done so, if he were alive. I represent my father, sir. He was proud of this village. A stranger was his guest. This accident would not have happened except for the strange conditions here to-day. Please see Mr. Wiggins." It was not the words, but the tone. She had addressed him as though he were a menial.

He was angry, now, as well as ashamed. With the instinct of race, he realized that this upcountry girl did not understand the finer graces of conventionality. Environment and training had made of her a woman of the ancient race of the Corrans; she was speaking to him as the chateleine, not as maiden whom chance had thrown in his company.

"Pardon me, Miss Corran, but my accident concerns me alone. I beg that you will not trouble yourself further in the affair."

He spoke stiffly, and she understood the rebuke. For the first time in her life, she realized the full force of the social code, borne in upon her by rebuke from a stranger and an equal. She had been too thoroughly isolated in her little sovereignty, and had forgotten. Shame, as vivid as his own, swept over her, and the flame in her cheeks revealed it.

"Harris," she cried, whirling on that terror-stricken vassal, "I shall hold you and every man in hearing of my voice to account for the actions of this day. If you shame my father's memory, or disgrace his daughter, you shall suffer."

She slashed the horse, and his calked hoofs rained splinters from the platform planks as he galloped away.

George started to make his way up the street in the dust that her horse left. He was in a state of mind that he, himself, recognized as distinctly savage. The tall man tagged him, swinging the shoes, and grinning amiably and significantly at all they met.

"Loadin' your own shells is interestin', but you can't always save money by doing it," volunteered the stranger, looking back with calm interest at the remnants of the trunk. What was left of it was burning.

Through the press of men who came to him, proffering objects that they had salvaged, squeezed the author of the mischief.

"It was me that done it!" he gasped. "It looked like powder, and it smelled like powder, and I lit a match to make sure. It was powder. But, I'm square, mister. I'll settle, if you'll fake an order on Jap Wiggins."

George felt that he couldn't trust himself to discuss the matter. He took from the outstretched hands such articles as they had rescued. They were a few little personal conveniences that the explosion had not injured, and he stuffed them into his pockets and turned to leave. It was plain that his wardrobe was not worth gathering up. When the importunate gentleman got in his way again with an offer to settle the damages, the young man pushed roughly past, and kept on. The man who had rescued the boots followed at his heels.

In the straggle of little buildings that made up the settlement, the tavern was distinguished by its size, for Corran-cache as a "jumping-off place" had many transients.

George found no one in the big, bare, general room except some sleepy-looking loafers. In a pen in one corner, a man who was apparently postmaster as well as landlord was busy with a mail bag.

The fellow with the shoes noted that the young man bent inquiring gaze on the loafers, none of whom seemed to respond as though they were interested in the new arrival.

"Lookin' for anybody in special?" asked the tall man.

"I'm going to meet Lynch Smart and Civilian Niles here!" said George. He rubbed his hands for his shoes, but the tall man made no move to surrender them.

"No, you ain't goin' to meet 'em, either," he advised promptly.

"I say I am. I have an appointment with them. They are explorers, and have—"

"You can't tell me who Lynch Smart and 'Fatty' Niles are. I knowed them two when that mountain over

there was only a hole in the ground. But I say you ain't goin' to meet 'em here, because they left this mornin'. Each one of 'em took plenty of tobacco and a pocket full of dried raisins for grub, so I reckon they're bound away for a long trip! Are you that forester feller that was due here last night?"

"I was delayed," stated the young man, his heart sinking. "You don't mean to tell me that those men have gone away into the woods in this fashion — weren't willing to wait one day?"

The tall man inspected his tobacco leisurely before biting into it.

"A date is a date with them 'wo," he said calmly. "If a man doesn't show up when he says he will, it's his own fault when he's dealin' with Lynch Smart and Civ Niles. They was off and away at six o'clock this mornin'. Bein' as they're great fellers on the hoof, it wouldn't do you much good to holler after 'em, seein' that it's most dinner time, now."

"I've got to catch those men," declared George desperately.

He realized that he had been the one at fault. He had wasted twenty-four hours on the road on an impulse of the heart. That a couple of explorers would not wait that much time for a forester of the Great Trust Co. had not occurred to him — yes, he confessed it, now, in that moment of humiliation — to his sense of self-importance.

The loafers stared at him, mumbling certain praises regarding hustling qualities of Smart and Niles; the tall man, settling his tobacco in his cheek, looked down on him quizzically.

"Which way did they go?" demanded the forester. "I'll walk all night, if need be, but I've got to catch those men."

"If these here was some of those seven-league boots like they used to have in the old days, I'd advise you to start out." The man dangled the footgear before George's face. "But there are three trails leadin' north. They may have taken any one, or they may have struck right into the woods, spottin' timber. You can't reckon on them two any more'n you can reckon on a cross-eyed lucivee on glare ice."

The landlord had caught the drift of the conversation and came out of his pen.

"If your felt your ears burnin', last night, Mister Forester," he said, not without relish for the situation, "it was when Lynch and Civ were sayin' what they thought of college dudes. I don't mean no offense! I'm tellin' you what they said. If he listened to 'em hard, a man might get the general impression that they wasn't fussy about gettin' mixed into newfangled forestry. And then again they ain't no hands to wait other folks' motions."

"If you'd got along so as to go with 'em, they was intendin' to walk your legs off'm you," observed one of the loafers.

"What you want to do is to plaster yourself on to 'em now in spite of themselves," suggested the landlord, chuckling. "It will be a good joke on Lynch and Civ."

Although the loafers agreed to this with hilarity, the young man was unable to see anything to laugh at in the situation.

"Here's Romeo Bragg, here" — the landlord pointed to the tall man — "who is one of the best guides that ever sliced bacon. He'll help you catch 'em somewhere. Yes, sir, he'll help you catch 'em! He'll relish seein' 'em squirm when you're plastered on to 'em."

The guilelessness of the landlord's sense of humor was the climax of that day of ironical affront, but somehow George did not want to resent this jesting by angry retort. That, he reflected, would make worse his situation. Without regard to his feelings, the whole section seemed to be taking him as a joke. He realized, all of a sudden, what his new profession of forestry had to contend with in the face of the grim woods' heresy that put revenue first.

"You'll go with him, won't you, Romeo?" asked the landlord.

"He ain't asked me to," the guide grumbled.

George had no authority to hire a helper. But the need of a guide was pressing, and Mr. Bragg's eyes were honest, and his legs were long, and seemed adapted for travel through slash and blow-downs.

At the end of five minutes, negotiations were concluded.

"Where shall I set your baggage?" asked Mr. Bragg, joggling the shoes.

George took them. "I'm in a nice position to strike into the woods," he said disconsolately.

Mr. Bragg looked him over with-

out appearing to be impressed by this destitution.

"You've got a good suit of clothes, a hat, them boots, a gun, and your callipers. That's more'n most explorers

have. How was you intendin' to take that trunk — in your pocket, or have me wheel it on a wheelbarrow?"

"I didn't exactly know what the situation was, up here," confessed George. "I brought some things for comfort."

"The situation is," declared Bragg bluntly, "that dude hunters and that truck can go into the woods and loaf along with a whole grocery store at-taggin' 'em, if they're a mind to pay for havin' it toted. But a man that goes into the woods on explorin' business has got to eat wind and sleep standin' up if he expects to get anywhere and do what he's sent to do. A man that is so beholden to critter comforts that he has to cinch a lot of stuff on his back and give it a free ride, better paste on a pair of long ears to go with the rest, and get down on all fours and call himself a jackass and be done with it."

"Look here, my friend, I haven't any more time to waste on lectures. And I'm mighty tired of being played any longer as a tenderfoot. I've hired you to guide me. We'll start. I've got a pair of woods boots for outfit, anyway."

"After the funeral, I'm your man," said Mr. Bragg.

George was putting on his stout foot-gear. He stopped, and glared.

"And let those men get forty-eight hours' start? No, sir! We're out of here in half an hour."

"There are only two men in the north country that would leave this place and what's goin' on here," stated Bragg. "They're Lynch Smart and Civ Niles — and they seemed to have good reason for skippin'. As for me, I don't go till it's over."

"There are others," said the forester, lacing his shoes.

"I'd like to see you pick one up hereabouts," put in his landlord. "I reckon you don't realize what's goin' on, here."

The music of a band came to their ears. It was playing a decorous tune, this time.

"I'll go alone," shouted George, but he knew that this was the threat of a fool.

"Good-by," said Bragg calmly. "I'll pass word to the crews. They'll whittle toothpicks and follow you."

"Bragg," pleaded the young man, "this is serious business for me. No matter about details. But my job depends on getting in with those men. I can't even begin my work until I find them. They have the instructions. I've got to go."

"And you'll go — but this isn't runnin' after a street car. I'll take you — later. But you can't pull me nor any other man out of this village till Cornelius Corran's funeral is over, nor if you hitch four tote horses onto me or them. If you think you can, go try."

Mr. Bragg lighted his pipe, and went away to join the mob that was marching to band music. Only the landlord was left in the big, lonesome office.

"If you've got a room," said George, after meditating a little while, "I think I'll go to it. I need a little rest."

"I thought you'd come to your senses," said the boniface, and led the way.

V

The sound of music woke George. He had been dreaming of his wedding. He dreamed that he was walking down the aisle away from the altar with Mary. The strains of the wedding march followed them. Then, he opened his eyes, and the rapture faded out of his soul.

The dingy walls of the little bedroom of the tavern were about him. The church, the flowers, the happy faces, the trembling touch of his bride's hand on his arm — all the dream flickered out. It seemed very dark for a moment, though the sun was glaring pitilessly in at the uncurtained window, and he realized that it was mid-afternoon. He lay for a moment, and listened. The music of a band had awakened him. It was growing louder. It was approaching. Only half awake, he stumbled to the window.

It was the funeral cortège of Cornelius Corran — and the terms of his will had been carried out.

A wangan bateau had been slung upon wheels, and in it was the ornate coffin. There were no flowers. On head and foot of the casket were coils of snubbing warp. Six tote-team horses drew this outfit, and Governor Harris sat beside the driver, his rusty plug hat adding funeral dignity.



One of the bands marched close behind and droned the tune of "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground." George decided that Corran must have selected that tune when he made his other arrangements; it fitted the general scheme so perfectly.

But the spectacle of the girl interested him most of all. She was obeying. She was fulfilling that dreadful compact dutifully, resolutely. She sat erect on her big horse, her black velvet habit scarcely more ebony than his shining coat. The black of her robe and her hat made her face seem very pale. Harry George had never beheld a more striking picture. But what attracted him most was the courage of the girl. He had been entertaining his own opinion of a daughter who could obey such an outrageous command from a father. His own eyes pardoned her, now. He felt that he understood better.

She led the way, marshaling that unspeakable parade, and yet so wholly aloof from it in poise and demeanor that her dignity did not suffer. She was Clare Corran, carrying out the wishes of a father who had always found her loyal. And so she passed, and the young man at the window looked down on her with a new appreciation of what such loyalty meant.

She glanced up as she passed. She caught sight of him. It might have been something in his expression — some hint that he understood; it might have been memory of her patronizing treatment of this young stranger at the railroad station; but color came into her cheeks. And in that moment, as their glances met, she seemed to him not "Queen Clare," of the Great Toban, but a very forlorn little creature who ought to be cuddled in motherly arms, instead of being forced to play such a part in the pageant on that solemn day that left her an orphan.

Continued next week.

The Mutton and the Fan.

It is the custom in Paris for the cook to do all the marketing. This adds considerably to the cook's income; for every dealer allows her five centimes — one cent — on every franc — or twenty cents — she spends. So French cooks insist on their marketing prerogative, and the mistress who denies it to them is deemed a very mean, small, niggardly sort of a person. A person of this sort, an elderly woman, was in the habit of doing her own marketing in a long duster. The duster hid her purchases. It prevented her, while usurping her cook's rights, from being detected in the act. As the woman, one hot morning, was walking homeward in her duster from the Marche St. Honore, she stumbled in the Rue Hyacinthe, and a leg of mutton fell and rolled across the sidewalk. A passing stranger picked up the leg of mutton and returned it with a bow and smile. "Permit me, madam — your fan," he said.

IT WAS A SURPRISE

"We have the surprise beautifully planned," said young Mrs. Westerleigh to the guests, "and Frank doesn't suspect a thing. I think he has even forgotten that to-day's his birthday. He will get home from the office at about seven o'clock. Then he always goes upstairs to take off his coat and put on his smoking jacket for the evening. When he is upstairs I will call out suddenly, 'Oh, Frank, come downstairs — be quick! The gas is escaping.' Then he will rush down here and find the crowd of friends waiting for him."

It went exactly as planned. Westerleigh came home at the regular hour and went directly upstairs. The hidden guests held their breath while Mrs. Westerleigh called out excitedly, "Oh, Frank, come down quick. The gas is escaping in the parlor."

Every light had been turned out, and the parlor was in perfect darkness. There was a rapid rush of feet down the stairway, then a voice said, "I don't smell any gas."

"Better light the jet," Mrs. Westerleigh suggested tremulously. "Here's a match."

The match was struck, and suddenly the room was flooded with light. Everybody screamed. The hostess fainted. For there in the center of the room stood Westerleigh, attired only in a natty union suit, with a fresh pair of trousers carried over his arm.



STUNG

Wife:—"Wretch! Show me that letter."

Husband:—"What letter?"

Wife:—"That one in your hand. It's from a woman I can see by the writing, and you turned pale when you saw it."

Husband:—"Yes. Here it is. It's your dressmaker's bill."

HEAD OF THE HOUSE

"I want to see the head of the house," said the pedlar.

"I'm sorry," replied Mrs. Minns, "but the baby is asleep just now."

SIMPLY AWFUL

"I say, old man, whatever's the matter with your face?" asked Jones.

"Accident," said Brown.

"How did it happen?"

"Why, yesterday I was walking along the street when a workman carrying a pickaxe stumbled against me, hitting me in the mouth, and knocking out a tooth."

"Oh, I say, what a shame! That was quite a dental operation," said Jones, who will have his little joke.

"No. The chap said it was axed-dental."

"Ha! Ha! Oh, that's too thin!"

"No, it was tooth out!"



ON HER METTLE

Mistress:—"I have some friends coming to dinner to-day, Mary, so I want you to cook your very best."

Cook:—"You can depend on me, ma'am; I've got some friends of my own coming, too."

ONLY A WAITER

He told his sweetheart he was a rich bank clerk, but, alas, he deceived her, for he was only a waiter!

One evening they sat together on the same chair gazing dreamily at each other. He had had a very hard day, and he was not in the mood for talking.

"James," she whispered, "do you love me?"

"Love you?" said James. "Of course I do, dear."

"Are you sure you love me?"

"Yes, dear."

"How much?"

"How much?" said James dreamily. "Lemme see. Cut off joint, two veg., sixteen cents; plum duff, twenty cents, coffee twenty-five cents; bread, two cents. Twenty-six cents, please!"

Bears in Addington

Bears are reported to have been raiding stock in Addington, and several farmers are losers from their visits.

Big Muskrat Purchase

J. R. Kerr, of Newton, Ont., is said to have purchased 5,158 muskrat skins in one day. They came from various sections between Kingston and Ottawa.