

A Man at Need

A Lumberjack Tale

By A. M. Chisolm

CHAPTER II. (Continued)

Leamy, who was more at home, if possible, in a rough house than in single combat, freed himself with a threshing wrench, put a knee in one man's abdomen, hit another on the jaw, more by accident than otherwise, so that he dropped limp; and drove his boot corks through leather into the small bones of the foot of a third, who yelled, and incontinently gave ground.

Into the opening plunged Quebec, and Leamy met him, without giving an inch. Foot to foot they slam-banged each other, terrific swings for the most part, which either took cheerfully in order to give a return, each confident in his strength and power to resist punishment.

Suddenly, Leamy, realizing that he was getting the worst of the interchange, ducked a swing, shot his right hand between his opponent's legs, clamped his left hand on Quebec's right wrist, wrenching the arm downward and across his left shoulder and behind his neck. At the same instant he set his right shoulder beneath the French-Canadian's ribs, his back bent like a bow, and thus transformed into a human lever, he ye-heaved up and away.

The whole trick, consisting of three distinct movements, was performed in the twinkling of an eye and found Quebec unprepared. Twisted about and torn from his footing by that deadly hold, he, though the stronger man, shot into the air as if he had been a child. Up and over he went, turning a complete somersault, but Leamy never relaxed his hold on the left wrist. Instead, he seized it with both hands, turned right about face, and yanked to him and down with all his force.

The net result should have been to throw Le Gros Quebec flat on the floor, with breathless body and a dislocated or broken arm. What actually happened was that, as he shot helplessly backward, his feet drove into the face of one Louis Laplante, rendering that individual temporarily hors du combat, and marking him for life; while Quebec, the force of his fall broken by the accidental collision did not suffer at all, save for a slightly wrenched arm.

Both Quebec and Leamy were foul fighters in the ordinary sense of the term. No sooner did the former touch the ground than he writhed upward and sunk his teeth in Leamy's hand. The latter promptly kicked him in the face, but lost his hold, whereupon Quebec rolled clear and to his feet in what seemed to be one motion.

Meanwhile Jimmy McPike had his hands full. Though he preferred fair fighting, he was a rough-house artist to his finger tips, quick as a cat on his feet, and possessed of tremendous hitting power. For a moment after he had struck Cousineau, his formidable reputation protected him. Then the fiery French temper got the better of prudence.

A dozen leaped for him at once, yelling like a pack baying a quarry. McPike fought without a sound, save the spat and thud of his toughened fists on face and body. He fought fair, as the phrase goes, because it was the easiest, quickest, and most effective way—as long as he could keep his arms free. And for a long minute, such was his activity and speed of blow, he held them off. Then they closed in.

Fair fighting went by the board. He became the centre of a mass of humanity that piled on him, defeating its own purpose by its very weight of numbers. From it a man shrieked as McPike's thumb nail seared his eyeball. Another, getting the knee, doubled up and rolled in agony.

The boss of the Bonnerchere was fighting almost for his life, for he knew that, once down and helpless there would be few whole bones in his body when he reached the hospital, if, indeed, he did not furnish a case for the coroner. The gang, mad with liquor, racial and sectional hatred, always smouldering, but now aflame, would have no mercy.

He has seen what was left of men who had been through that mill—had seen those hobbles who had once walked, had seen the women turn their backs on what had been a straight, strong, well-favored lad. The thought of it, instead of unnerving him, taunted every muscle in his splendid body. By fist, knee and foot, he fought himself loose, and for an instant stood free.

In that instant, his eye fell on a heavy wooden chair, overturned. With a bound, he caught it up and swung it around his head.

"Bill, Bill Leamy!" he shouted hoarsely. It was the very second when Le Gros Quebec had

reached his feet. Leamy heard, cast a swift glance backward, and sprang to him.

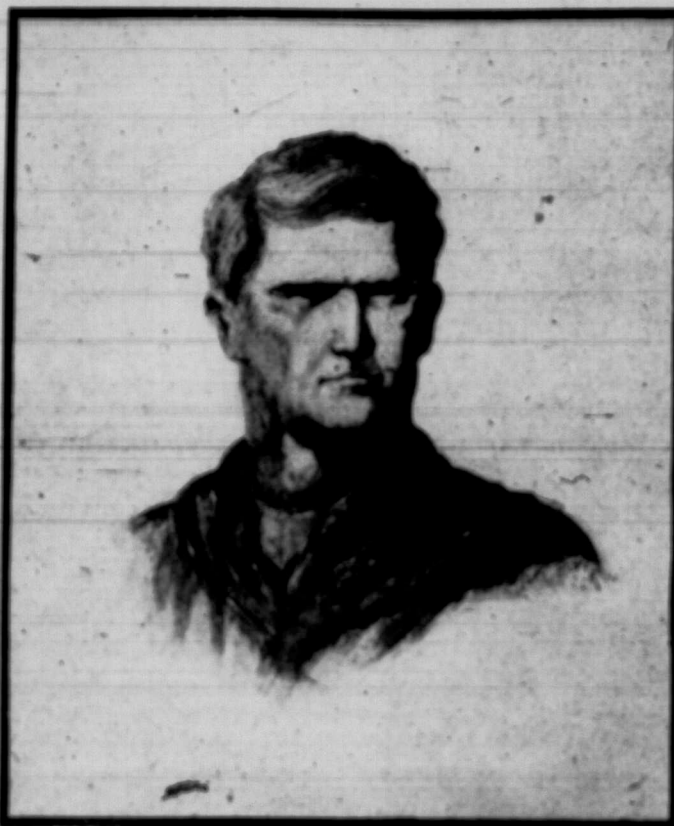
"Back to the corner, an' backs to the wall!" panted McPike. "Quick!"

Together they reached it, and wheeled about grimly to meet the rush. Just for a moment there was a pause—the pause that invariably occurs when the unorganized face an unexpected situation. In that pause, there was a quick tramp of feet and the glint of blue cloth and brass buttons in the door.

As always, it was McPike who did the thinking. "The p'lice!" he cried. "Come along, Bill! Feet first, ye beefy devil!"

Crash! The heavy chair hit the window, carrying glass and sash with it. McPike followed in a running jump, throwing his body backward, and shielding his face with his arm from projecting fragments of glass. Leamy followed less artistically, vitreous particles tearing his flesh as he blundered through.

They hit the ground, running. An officer of aldermanic proportions commanded them to halt. They dodged him with the greatest of ease, and



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pulled up, winded but happy, in the friendly shelter of a lumber yard, where the intricate alleys between the fragrant piles of newly sawn boards guaranteed safety from pursuit.

"A nice mess ye got us into!" said McPike. "By the glory! I was never nearer havin' the boots in me face than ten minutes ago. An' all f'r the sake of some half-baked young devil that I hope has his ribs kicked loose from his backbone. I thought ye had more sense."

Leamy's scarred face assumed an injured expression.

"That's right—blame it on me," he protested. "Who was it would go into Savigny's be'case he smelt a row wid the whisky? An' who was it tried his level best to make Kebec scrap!—only he wouldn't!"

McPike examined his cut and bruised knuckles with satisfaction, and grinned. "It was th' bird iv a punch I handed that Cousineau," he observed comfortably. "I've been wantin' a birl out iv him this two years back. An' he th' feel iv me fists there's teeth missin' in Savigny's. As f'r Kebec, he'll fight next time. This is good cause. Did ye trim him, or didn't ye? I was too busy to see."

Leamy told him. McPike granted.

"He's a hard man," he commented. "Built from the ground up he is, and game. Who was th' crazy lad that punched him? I didn't get to see his face."

"Nor me," said Leamy. "I hope it's a lesson to him. In another minute, Kebec w'd have booted his face off. Here's a finger of me out. Catch hold."

The joint clicked back into place as McPike pulled. Leamy swore gently, and shook the hand. "Let it be a lesson to you," said McPike righteously. "If ye go shovin' yer ugly nose into other people's business, ye will get hurted some day. What call had ye to butt in to-night?"

"Ah, g'wan!" said Leamy. "Your'e worse nor me. Ye'd have done it if I hadn't. Anyways, ye punched Cousineau, an' that was th' first blow struck, bar th' fuss beechune Kebec an' th' lad."

"That's different. He needed it," said McPike. "Th' nerve of ye! I s'pose ye'll say ye done what ye done for the sake of humanity."

"F'r th' sake iv hell!" said Leamy scornfully. "If ye want to know, I liked the way the lad cursed the big pea jammer. I wight I'd seen his face, to know him ag'in."

CHAPTER III.

Foley's logging camp lay silent in the hush of the mid-winter snows. A little huddle of long, low log buildings, set down in a stump-sprinkled clearing, it was an outpost in the ceaseless war of man against the great American forest, a war in which, up to a few years ago, there was no mercy nor talk of truce. A tote road wound through the clearing and lost itself among the trees. Across the road, spanned by a pole bridge, a little stream gurgled softly, showing here and there a patch of black water against the pure white of the snow.

The snow was everywhere, and very deep. The stumps were piled with toppling, dome-crested columns. It lay banked against the log buildings and hung in combs from the eaves; it dragged down the tough, feathery limbs of fir and spruce with the load of its weight; and it absorbed noise, for every natural sounding board was muffled, and the voice projected itself in vain against the echoless silence.

The day was shading into dusk—that winter hour, matched only by one in the dawn, when the white wilderness throws off the mask of soft beauty which it wears by day, and stands, barefaced and grim, cold and hard, and dreary with the utter loneliness of a dead land. Fresh smoke rose in billowed feathery columns from the bunkhouse and the cooks' domain—token that the cookee was firing up against the return of the crew from the bush. A light glinted brightly from Foley's quarters, a small log cabin, a little removed from the rest, which he usually shared with his scaler.

From far down the road bounded the tinkle of bells, and a tote team came in sight, four horses plodding slowly before a huge sleigh, piled high with supplies of all kinds.

Perched on top of the load, a square, little French-Canadian driver, in gaudy toque, sash, and "bottes sauvages," cooed profanity in two languages at his team, threatening them with a formidable whip which he never allowed to touch their backs, for he owned the horses and loved them, and they knew it very well.

Four men trudged behind the sleigh. Three of them were lumberjacks. The fact was advertised by their mackinaw clothing, long stockings and larriganed feet, as well as by their peculiar swinging gait. The fourth, who was plainly fagged, was a small man, wearing garments reminiscent of town.

At the noise of the team's arrival Foley himself limped from his quarters, to which he had been confined for some days, greatly to his disgust, by an injured leg. At that time Foley, by dint of the hardest of hard work, was just beginning to find his financial feet and lay the foundations of what afterward became a big lumber business.

He was rough and tough, possessed of enormous strength, an absolutely venomous tongue, and phenomenal ability as a driver of men. He liked "hard" men, and to his camp drifted the most quarrelsome, reckless devils of lumberjacks that ever wore larrigans.

He kept them in some kind of order, rarely interfering in their fights, and so long as the combatants were fit to do a day's work afterward, he considered their bickerings none of his business. But woe betide an idler, or the man who injured

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