

Strange Obsession

Augustine J. Campbell, '40

The gathering dusk, settling down over the woods, brought a strange stillness to the wilderness that only a few moments before had been alive with the ringing of axes and the voices of men. The setting sun and the passing day paused, and seemed to bid each other a last farewell.

Groups of men and horses could be seen making their way to the camps. The men were talking earnestly and their faces showed annoyance. Their voices lowered as they neared the clearing and the discussion obviously shifted when they eyed the tall young man just coming into the clearing.

"You are a little later than usual Larsen," said Mac-Leod.

"Yes. I lodged a tree this afternoon and had quite a bit of trouble with it," replied Serge Larsen in a slow voice that showed a foreign accent.

Larsen was a tall, well proportioned young man. The rough clothes of a lumberjack failed to conceal his tender features. A weatherbeaten hat was pressed neatly over a heavy crop of blond hair and he grasped the axe with hands which were perfectly groomed.

The other men stopped at the main camp, while Larsen continued on up to a smaller cabin that he occupied alone. It had been used formerly by two Indians.

That evening after supper when some of the men were lounging about on their bunks and others playing checkers, Bill Dobson teed off the evening's conversation.

"Look-a-here, what do you fellows think of this young Swede? He gets on my nerves with his infernal music at night and his day-dreaming at work."

Dobson set off a discussion that had long been brewing, and all eagerly joined in it.

"Don't be too hard on the young chap," began Mac-Leod, one of the older men. "More than likely he is homesick. He left his home in Sweden, that was near and dear to him. Perhaps in his lonesome hours he has become addicted to music; it may even have become an *obsession*. As soon as there is a vacancy, he will come in here where there is more company."

"Obsession or no obsession," thundered Dobson, "this noise in the middle of the night has to stop. If I ever lay my hands on that fiddle"

"A fat chance you have of doing that, Bill," interrupted a stout young man. "I hunted the shack high and low the other day and couldn't find as much as a mirage of the instrument."

In the nearby cabin, Serge Larsen sat perched on the side of his bunk, pensively blowing smoke rings. He lowered himself to the floor, and sauntered over to the corner to a shelf on which stood a large oak chest.

Larsen lowered the chest to the table and drew out a package of papers. He handled the articles tenderly, one by one—letters, photographs, newspaper cuttings and souvenirs of all kinds. He straightened up as he came to a large paper clipping and unfolded it. It contained a large photograph of a young boy seated on a stage with a violin in his hands; inset was a picture of a thin elderly man. Serge gazed into space as he folded the paper and let it rest in his hands.

He went back in memory to his native Sweden, back to the crowded auditorium where he and his uncle thrilled audiences and held them spellbound with their violin selections. Then came the death of his uncle and Serge, alone, could no longer please the crowd. He immigrated to Canada.

Serge stooped, unlocked the lower drawer of the chest and drew out a violin.

"I often wonder why I didn't drop this in the Atlantic when I was coming across to this country or why I don't bury it right here. It only makes me ten times more lonesome and miserable than I am. But I can't afford to be a sentimental fool, I *must* destroy it if I want to be happy. I haven't played since I came here, and none of them know that I have a violin or even that I love music. Well, tomorrow—perhaps," and Serge replaced the violin.

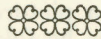
The other camp was quiet and not even the flooding moonlight could disturb the peaceful sleep of the lumberjacks. Yet one of them, the same elderly man who had defended the young Swede earlier in the evening, had not gone to sleep. He was raised on one elbow—listening. He heard the soft notes of a violin rise and fall intermittently. As yet none of the others had heard it. He tip-toed to the door and stepped out into the clear moonlight.

Once outside, it was plainly evident to him that the music was coming from Larsen's camp. What puzzled MacLeod, as he walked slowly toward the cabin, was that there was no light in it.

The moon lighted it up so that he could plainly see inside the cabin. What MacLeod saw left him motionless for some time. Larsen sat by the table, playing the violin. His head was bowed slightly forward and his hands and fingers were flashing in the moonlight.

MacLeod's legs shook as he stepped around and opened the door softly. Serge Larsen stopped playing with a startled expression and the violin dropped from his hands. He said to MacLeod, "What are you doing here, what am I doing with this violin, was I——?"

"Yes," replied MacLeod softly, "You were playing—marvellously, sweetly, all in your sleep."



No man can be brave, who thinks pain the greatest evil; nor temperate, who considers pleasure the highest good.—*Cicero*.

Talent develops itself in solitude; character in the stream of life.—*Goethe*.

