GOD'S COUNTRY--- AND THE WOMAN

The Mystery Romance of a Man and a Maid in the Frozen North

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CHAPTER I.

PHILIP WEYMAN was on his way back to civilization from a four-year Arctic voyage, during which his partner, Radisson, had died from the Red Death.

He was paddling along the Dubawnt waterways, toward Fond-du-Lac, when he became aware of an almost unbearable loneliness. He murmured to himself a sentence he had long since heard from the lips of a Hudson Bay factor:

"No country is God's country without a woman."

He drew his canoe ashore at a strip of beach for his spare midday meal. Then he halted, stricken dumb with amazement. Kneeling at a pool just in front of him was a woman—a white woman—a beautiful white woman.

She looked up, caught sight of him and gave a little cry of surprise. He apologized for frightening her, telling her his name and how he chanced to be there. She answered him with no sign of embarrassment:

"This is my hiding place, and I thought"—— she broke off, then added:

"Why should I trust you?"

He answered simply that she could trust him in every way and that he would unreservedly place himself at her service.

"You would do a great deal for me?" she asked. "And then you would be willing to go away, to promise never to see me again? You would swear that?"

"If you wished it," he answered, "yes."

"Half an hour from now," she commanded as she left him, "come up the coulee to the turn in the rocks. You will find me there."

She was gone. He picked up a handkerchief she had dropped. At the half hour's end he joined her at the place she had designated. She was awaiting him.

"Forgive me if I do anything you don't understand," he begged. "For weeks past I have been wondering how I would act when I met white people again. Perhaps you can't understand. But eighteen months up there—eighteen months without the sound of a white woman's voice, without a glimpse of her face, with only dreams to live on—will make me queer for a time. Can you understand—a little?"

"Now I know," she said slowly.

"What?"

"That you have spoken the truth, that you have come from a long time in the North, and that I need not fear—what I did fear."

"And that fear? Tell me"——

She answered calmly, and in her eyes and the lines of her face came a look of despair which she had almost hidden from him until now.

"I was thinking during those thirty minutes you were away," she said. "And I realized what folly it was in me to tell you as much as I have. Back there, for just one insane moment, I thought that you might help me in a situation which is as terrible as any you may have faced in your months of Arctic night. But it is impossible. All that I can ask of you now—all that I can demand of you to prove that you are the man you said you were—is that you leave me, and never whisper a word into another ear of our meeting. Will you promise that?"

"To promise that would be lying," he said slowly, and his hand unclenched and lay listlessly on his knee. "If there is a reason—some good reason why I should leave you—then I will go."

"Then—you demand a reason?"

"To demand a reason would be"——

He hesitated, and she added:

"Unchivalrous."

"Yes—more than that," he replied softly. He bowed his head, and for a moment she saw the tinge of gray in his blond hair, the droop of his clean, strong shoulders, the something of hopelessness in his gesture. A new light flashed into her own face. She raised a hand, as if to reach out to him, and dropped it as he looked up.

"Will you let me help you?" he asked.

She was not looking at him, but beyond him. In her face he saw again the strange light of hope that had illumined it at the pool.

"If I could believe," she whispered, still looking beyond him. "If I could trust you, as I have read that the maidens of old trusted their knights. But it seems impossible. In those days, centuries and centuries ago, I guess womanhood was next to God. Men fought for it, and died for it, to keep it pure and holy. If you had come to me then you would have levelled your lance and fought for me without asking a question, without demanding a reward, without reasoning whether I was right or wrong—and all because I was a woman. Now it is different. You are a part of civilization, and if you should do all that I might ask of you it would be because you have a price in view. I know. I have looked into you. I understand. That price would be—me!"

She looked at him now, her breast throbbing, almost a sob in her quivering voice, defying him to deny the truth of her words.

"You have struck home," he said, and his voice sounded strange to himself. "And I am not sorry. I am glad that you have seen—and understood. It seems almost indecent for me to tell you this, when I have known you for such a short time. But I have known you for years—in my hopes and dreams. For you I would go to the end of the world. And I can do what other men have done, centuries ago. They called them knights. You may call me a man!

"I will be your knight, as you have read of the knights of old. I will urge no reward that is not freely given. Now will you let me help you?"

For a moment she allowed him to hold her hand. Then she gently withdrew it and stepped back from him.

"You must first understand before you offer yourself," she said. "I cannot tell you what my trouble is. You will never know. And when it is over, when you have helped me across the abyss, then will come the greatest trial of all for you. I believe—when I tell you that last thing which you must do—that you will regard me as a monster and draw back. But it is necessary. If you fight for me, it must be in the dark. You will not know why you are doing the things I ask you to do. You may guess, but you would not guess the truth if you lived a thousand years. Your one reward will be the knowledge that you have fought for a woman, and that you have saved her. Now, do you still want to help me?"

"I can't understand," he gasped. "But—yes—I would still accept the inevitable. I have promised you that I will do as you have dreamed that knights of old have done. To leave you now would be"—he turned his head with a gesture of hopelessness—"an empty world forever. I have told you now.

"But you could not understand and believe unless I did. I love you."

"In that is the danger," she said quickly. "But you have spoken the words as I would have had you speak them. It is this danger that must be buried—deep—deep. And you will bury it. You will urge no questions that I do not wish to answer. You will fight for me, blindly, knowing only that what I ask you to do is not sinful nor wrong. And in the end"——

"And in the end," she whispered, "your greatest reward can be only the knowledge that in living this knighthood for me you have won what I can never give to any man. The world can hold only one such man for a woman. For your faith must be immeasurable, your love as pure as the withered violets out there among the rocks, if you live up to the tests ahead of you. You will think me mad when I have finished. But I am sane. Off there, in the Snowbirdi Lake country, is my home. I am alone. No other white man or woman is with me. As my knight, the one hope of salvation that I cling to now, you will return with me to that place—as my husband. To all but ourselves we shall be man and wife. I will bear your name—or the one by which you must be known. And at the very end of all, in that hour of triumph when you know that you have borne me safely over that abyss at the brink of which I am hovering now, you will go off into the forest, and"——

She approached him and laid a hand on his arm.

"You will not come back," she finished, so gently that he scarcely heard her words. "You will die—for me—for all who have known me."

"Good God!" he breathed, and he stared over her head to where the red and gold billows of the forests seemed to melt way into the skies.

CHAPTER II.

THUS they stood for many seconds. Then——

"You want to go—now," she whispered. "I knew that you would."

"Yes, I want to go," he replied, and his two hands took hers and held them close to his breast, so that she felt the exciting throbbing of his heart. "I want to go—wherever you go. Perhaps in those years of centuries ago there lived women like you to fight and die for. I no longer wonder at men fighting for them as they have sung their stories in books. I have nothing down in that world which you have called civilization—nothing except the husks of murdered hopes, ambitions and things that were once joys. Here I have you to love, to fight for. For you cannot tell me that I must not love you, even though I swear to live up to your laws of chivalry. Unless I loved you as I do there would not be those laws."

"Then you will do all this for me—even to the end—when you must sacrifice all of that for which you have struggled, and which you have saved?"

"Yes."

"If that is so, then I trust you with my life and my honor. It is all in your keeping—all."

Her voice broke into a sob. She snatched her hands from him, and with that sob still quivering on her lips she turned and ran swiftly to a little tent pitched nearby.

Philip stood gazing dully after her. Then his puzzled eyes wandered out over the lake.

Suddenly he concentrated his gaze at a point on the lake three-quarters of a mile away. It was close to shore, and he was certain that he had seen some movement there—a flash of sunlight on a shifting object. What he had seen was the flash of a paddle. He made out a canoe, and then two. They were moving close in-shore, one following the other, and apparently taking advantage of the shadows of the forest. Philip's hand shifted to the butt of his automatic. After all, there might be fighting of the good old-fashioned kind. He looked back in the direction of the tent.

The girl had reappeared, and was looking at him. She waved a hand, and he ran down to meet her. She had been crying. The dampness of tears still clung to her lashes; but the smile on her lips was sweet and welcoming, and now, so frankly that his face burned with pleasure, she held out a hand to him.

"I was rude to run away from you in that way," she apologized. "But I couldn't cry before you. And I wanted to cry."

"Because you were glad or sorry?" he asked.

"A little of both," she replied. "But mostly glad. A few hours ago it didn't seem possible that there was any hope for me. Now"——

"There is hope," he urged.

"Yes, there is hope."

For an instant he felt the warm thrill of her fingers as they clung tighter to his. Then she withdrew her hand gently, smiling at him with sweet confidence. Her eyes were like pure, soft violets. He wanted to kneel at her feet and cry out his thanks to God for sending him to her. Instead of betraying his emotion, he spoke of the canoes.

"There are two canoes coming along the shore of the lake," he said. "Are you expecting some one?"

The smile left her lips. He was startled by the suddenness with which the color ebbed from her face and the old fear leapt back into her eyes.

"Two? You are sure there are two?" Her fingers clutched his arm almost fiercely. "And they are coming this way?"

"We can see them from the top of the rock ridge," he said. "I am sure there are two. Will you look for yourself?"

She did not speak as they hurried to the bald cap of the ridge. From the top Philip pointed down the lake. The two canoes were in plain view now. Whether they contained three or four people they could not quite make out. At sight of them the last vestige of color had left the girl's cheeks. But now, as she stood there breathing quickly in her excitement, there came a change in her. She threw back her head. Her lips parted. Her blue eyes flashed a fire in which Philip in his amazement no longer saw fear, but defiance. Her hands were clenched. She seemed taller. Back into her cheeks there burned swiftly two points of flame. All at once she put out a hand and drew him back, so that the cap of the ridge concealed them from the lake.

"An hour ago those canoes would have made me run off into the forest—and hide," she said. "But now I am not afraid! Do you understand?"

"Then you trust me?"

"Absolutely."

"But—surely—there is something that you should tell me: Who they are, what your danger is, what I am to do."

"I am hoping that I am mistaken," she replied. "They may not be those whom I am dreading—and expecting. All I can tell you is this: You are Paul Darcambal. I am Josephine, your wife. Protect me as a wife. I will be constantly at your side. Were I alone I would know what to expect. But—with you—they may not offer me harm. If they do not, show no suspicion. But be watchful. Don't let them get behind you. And be ready always—always—to use that—if a thing so terrible must be done!" As she spoke she laid a hand on his pistol. "And remember, I am your wife!"

"To live that belief, even in a dream, will be a joy as unforgetable as life itself," he whispered so low that in turning her head she made as if she had not heard him.

"Come," she said. "Let us follow the coulee down to the lake. We can watch them from among the rocks."

She gave him her hand as they began to traverse the boulder strewn bed of the creek. Suddenly he said:

"You will not suspect me of cowardice if I suggest that there is not one chance in a hundred of them discovering us?"

"No," she replied, with a glance so filled with her confidence and faith that involuntarily he held her hand closer in his own. "But I want them to find us—if they are whom I fear. We will show ourselves on the shore."

He looked at her in amazement before the significance of her words had dawned upon him. Then he laughed.

"That is the greatest proof of your faith you have given me," he said. "With me you are anxious to face your enemies. And I am as anxious to meet them."

"Don't misunderstand me," she corrected quickly. "I am praying that they are not the ones I suspect. But if they are—why, yes, I want to face them—with you."

They had almost reached the lake when he said:

"And now I may call you Josephine?"

"Yes, that is necessary."

"And you will call me"——

"Paul, of course—for you are Paul Darcambal."

"Is that quite necessary?" he asked. "Is it not possible that you might allow me to retain at least a part of my name, and call me Philip? Philip Darcambal?"

"There really is no objection to that," she hesitated. "If you wish I will call you Philip. But you must also be Paul—your middle name, perhaps."

"In the event of certain exigencies," he guessed.

"Yes."

He had still assisted her over the rocks by holding to her hand, and suddenly her fingers clutched his convulsively. She pointed to a stretch of the open lake. The canoes were plainly visible not more than a quarter of a mile away. Even as he felt her trembling slightly he laughed.

"Only three!" he exclaimed. "Surely it is not going to demand a great amount of courage to face that number, Josephine?"

"It is going to take all the courage in the world to face one of them," she replied in a low, strained voice. "Can you make them out? Are they white men or Indians?"

"The light is not right—I can't decide," he said, after a moment's scrutiny. "If they are Indians"——

"They are friends," she interrupted. "Jean—my Jean Croisset—left me hiding here five days ago. He is part French and part Indian. But he could not be returning so soon. If they are white"——

"We will expose ourselves on the beach," he finished significantly.

She nodded. He saw that in spite of her struggle to remain calm she was seized again by the terror of what might be in the approaching canoes. He was straining his eyes to make out their occupants when a low cry drew his gaze to her.

"It is Jean" she gasped, and he thought that he could hear her heart beating. "It is Jean—and the others are Indians! Oh, my God, how thankful I am"——

She turned to him.

"You will go back to the camp—please. Wait for us there; I must see Jean alone. It is best that you should do this."

To obey without questioning her or expostulating against his sudden dismissal, he knew was in the code of his promise to her. And he knew by what he saw in her face that Jean's return had set the world trembling under her feet, that for her it was charged with possibilities as tremendous as if the two canoes had contained those whom she had at first feared.

"Go," she whispered. "Please go."

Without a word he returned in the direction of the camp.

CHAPTER III.

CLOSE to the tent Philip sat down, smoked his pipe, and waited. Not only had the developments of the last few minutes been disappointing to him, but they had added still more to his bewilderment.

He waited impatiently. It seemed a long time before he heard voices and the sound of footsteps over the edge of the coulee. He rose to his feet, and a moment later Josephine and her companion appeared not more than a dozen paces from him. His first glance was at the man. In that same instant Jean Croisset stopped in his tracks and looked at Philip.

Steadily, and apparently oblivious of Josephine's presence, they measured each other, the half-breed bent a little forward, the lithe alertness of a cat in his posture, his eyes burning darkly. He was a man whose age Philip could not guess. It might have been forty. Probably it was close to that. He was bareheaded, and his long coarse hair, black as an Indian's, was shot with gray. At first it would have been difficult to name the blood that ran strongest in his veins. His hair, the thinness of his face and body, his eyes, and the tense position in which he had paused, were all Indian. Then, above these things, Philip saw the French. Swiftly it became the dominant part of the man before him, and he was not surprised when Jean advanced with outstretched hand, and said:

"M'sieur Philip, I am Jean—Jean Jacques Croisset—and I am glad you have come."

The words were spoken for Philip alone, and where she stood Josephine did not catch the strange flash of fire in the half-breed's eyes, nor did she hear his still more swiftly spoken words: "I am glad it is you that chance has sent to us, M'sieur Weyman!"

The two men gripped hands. There was something about Jean that inspired Philip's confidence, and as he returned the half-breed's greeting his eyes looked for a moment over the other's shoulder and rested on Josephine. He was astonished at the change in her. Evidently Jean had not brought her bad news. She held the pages of an open letter in her hand, and as she caught Philip's look she smiled at him with a gladness which he had not seen in her face before. She came forward quickly, and placed a hand on his arm.

"Jean's coming was a surprise," she exclaimed. "I did not expect him for a number of days, and I dreaded what he might have to tell me. But this letter has brought me fresh cause for thankfulness, though it may enslave you a little longer to your vows of knighthood. We start for home this afternoon. Are you ready?"

"I have a little packing to do," he said, looking after Jean, who was moving toward the tent.

"Is it not necessary that you make room in your canoe for me?" she asked.

Philip's face flushed with pleasure. "Of course it is," he cried. "Everything has seemed so wonderfully unreal to me that for a moment I forgot that you were my—my wife. But how about Jean? He called me M'sieur Weyman."

"He is the one other person in the world who knows what you and I know," she explained. "That, too, was necessary. You will go and arrange your canoe now? Jean will bring down my things and exchange them for some of your dunnage." She left him to run into the tent, reappearing quickly with a thick rabbit-skin blanket and two canoe pillows.

"These make my nest—when I'm not working," she said, thrusting them into Philip's arms. "I have a paddle too. Jean says that I am as good as an Indian woman with it."

"Better, M'sieur," exclaimed Jean, who had come out of the tent. "It makes you work harder to see her. She is—what you call it—gwan-auch-ewin—so splendid! Out of the Cree you cannot speak it."

A tender glow filled Josephine's eyes as Jean began pulling up the pegs of the tent.

"A little later I will tell you about Jean," she whispered. "But now, go to your canoe. We will follow you in a few minutes."

He found himself whistling as he refolded his blankets and straightened out his tent. When he had finished this last task he turned to find Jean standing close behind him, his dark eyes watching him closely. As he greeted the half-breed, Philip looked for Josephine.

"I am alone, M'sieur," said Jean, coming close to Philip. "I tricked her into staying behind until I could see you for a moment as we are alone, man to man. Why is it that our Josephine has come to trust you as she does?"

His voice was low—it was almost soft as a woman's, but deep in his eyes Philip saw the glow of a strange slumbering fire.

"Why is it?" he persisted.

"God only knows," exclaimed Philip, the significance of the question bursting upon him for the first time. "I hadn't thought of it, Jean. Everything has happened so quickly, so strangely, that there are many things I haven't thought of. It must be because—she thinks, I'm a man!"

"That is it, M'sieur," replied Jean, as quietly as before. "That, and because you have come from two years in the North. I have been there. I know that it breeds men. And our Josephine knows. I could swear that there is not one man in a million she would trust as she has put faith in you. Into your hands she has given herself, and what you do means for her life or death. And for you"——

The fires in his eyes were nearer the surface now.

"What?" asked Philip tensely.

"Death—unless you play your part as a man," answered Jean. There was neither threat nor excitement in his voice, but in his eyes was the thing that Philip understood. Silently he reached out and gripped the half-breed's hand. For an instant they stood, their faces close, looking into each other's eyes. And as men see men where the fires of the earth burn low, so they read each other's souls, and their fingers tightened in a clasp of understanding.

"What that part is to be I cannot guess," said Philip, then. "But I will play it, and it is not fear that will hold me to my promise to her. If I fail, why—kill me!"

"That is the North," breathed Jean, and in his voice was the thankfulness of prayer.

Without another word he stooped and picked up the tent and blankets. Philip was about to stop him, to speak further with him, when he saw Josephine climbing over the bulwark of rocks between them and the trail. He hurried to meet her. Her arms were full, and she allowed him to take a part of her load. With what Jean had brought this was all that was to go in Philip's canoe, and the half-breed remained to help them off.

"You will go straight across the lake," he said to Philip. "If you paddle slowly, I will catch up with you."

Philip seated himself near the stern, facing Josephine, and Jean gave the canoe a shove that sent it skimming like a swallow on the smooth surface of the lake.

"And I am just beginning to feel my selfishness," said the girl, presently. "You have thought only of me. You are making a wonderful sacrifice for me. You have nothing to gain, nothing to expect but the things that make me shudder. And I have thought of myself alone, selfishly, unreasonably. It is not fair, and yet this is the only way that it can be."

"I am satisfied," he said. "I have nothing much to sacrifice, except myself."

She leaned forward, with her chin in the cup of her hands, and looked at him steadily.

"You have people?"

"None who cares for me. My mother was the last. She died before I came North."

"And you have no sisters—or brothers?"

"None living."

For a moment she was silent. Then she said gently, looking into his eyes:

"I wish I had known—that I had guessed—before I let you come this far. I am sorry now—sorry that I didn't send you away. You are different from other men I have known—and you have had your suffering. And now—I must hurt you again. It wouldn't be so bad if you didn't care for me. I don't want to hurt you—because—I believe in you."

"And is that all—because you believe me?"

She did not answer. Her hands clasped at her breast. She looked beyond him to the shore they were leaving.

"You must leave me," she said then, and her voice was as lifeless as his had been. "I am beginning to see now. It all happened so suddenly that I could not think. But if you love me you must not go on. It is impossible. I would rather suffer my own fate than have you do that. When we reach the other shore you must leave me."

She was struggling to keep back her emotion, fighting to hold it within her own breast.

"You must go back," she repeated, staring into his set face. "If you don't, you will be hurt terribly, terribly!"

And then, suddenly, she slipped lower among the cushions he had placed for her, and buried her face in one of them with a moaning grief that cut to his soul. She was sobbing now, like a child. In this moment Philip forgot all restraint. He leaned forward and put a hand on her shining head, and bent his face close down to hers. His free hand touched one of her hands, and he held it tightly.

"Listen, my Josephine," he whispered. "I am not going to turn back; I am going on with you. That is our pact. At the end I know what to expect. You have told me; and I, too, believe. But whatever happens, in spite of all that may happen, I will still have received more than all else in the world could give me. For I will have known you, and you will be my salvation. I am going on."

For an instant he felt the fluttering pressure of her fingers on his. It was an answer a thousand times more precious to him than words, and he knew that he had won. Still lower he bent his head, until for an instant his lips touched the soft, living warmth of her hair. And then he leaned back, freeing her hand, and into his face had leaped soul and life and fighting strength; and under his breath he gave new thanks to God, and to the sun, and the blue sky above, while from behind them came skimming over the water the slim birchbark canoe of Jean Jacques Croisset.

CHAPTER IV.

AT the touch of Weyman's lips to her hair Josephine lay very still, and Philip wondered if she had felt that swift, stolen caress.

Behind them Jean had been coming up swiftly, and now they heard him break for an instant into the chorus of one of the wild halfbreed songs, and Philip listened to the words of the chant, which is as old in the Northland as the ancient brass cannon and the crumbling fortress rocks at York Factory:

"O, ze beeg black bear, he go to court,
He go to court a mate;
He court to ze Sout',
He court to ze Nort',
He court to ze shores of ze Indian Lake."

And then in the moment's silence that followed Philip threw back his head, and in a voice almost as wild and untrained as Jean Croisset's he shouted back:

"Oh the fur fleets sing on Temiskaming,
As the ashen paddles bend,
And the crews carouse at Rupert's House,
At the sullen winter's end.
But our days are done where the lean wolves run,
And I ripple no more the path
Where the gray geese race across the red moon's face
From the white wind's Arctic wrath."

The suspense was broken. The two men's voices, rising in their crude strength, sending forth into the still wilderness both triumph and defiance, brought the quick flush of living back into Josephine's face. She guessed why Jean had started his chant—to give her courage. She knew why Philip had responded. And now Jean swept up beside them, a smile on his thin, dark face.

"The good Virgin preserve us, M'sieur, but our voices are like those of two beasts," he cried.

"Great, true, fighting beasts," whispered Josephine under her breath. "How I would hate almost"——

She had suddenly flushed to the roots of her hair.

"What?" asked Philip.

"To hear men sing like women," she finished.

As swiftly as he had come up Jean and his canoe had sped on ahead of them.

"We go deep into that forest," she said. "We enter a creek just beyond where Jean is waiting for us, and Adare House is 100 miles to the south and east." She faced him with a quick smile. "My name is Adare," she explained, "Josephine Adare."

"Is—or was?" he asked.

"Is," she said; then, seeing the correcting challenge in his eyes, she added quickly: "But only to you. To all others I am Mme. Paul Darcambal."

"Paul?"

"Pardon me, I mean Philip."

They were close to shore, and, fearing that Jean might become suspicious of his tardiness, Philip bent to his paddle and was soon in the half-breed's wake. Where he had thought there was only the thick forest he saw a narrow opening toward which Jean was speeding in his canoe. Five minutes later they passed under a thick mass of overhanging spruce boughs into a narrow stream so still that it looked like oil.

There was something a little awesome in the suddenness and completeness with which they were swallowed up. Over their heads the spruce and cedar tops met and shut out the sunlight. On both sides of them the forest was thick and black. The trail of the stream itself was like a tunnel, silent, dark, mysterious. The paddles dipped noiselessly and the two canoes travelled side by side.

"There are few who know of this break into the forest," said Jean in a low voice. "Listen, M'sieur!"

From out of the gloom ahead of them there came a faint, oily splashing.

"Otter," whispered Jean. "The stream is like this for many miles, and it is full of life that you can never see because of the darkness."

Something in the stillness and the gloom held them silent. The canoes slipped along like shadows, and sometimes they bent their heads to escape the low hanging boughs.

For more than an hour they had driven their canoes steadily on, when, as suddenly as they had entered it, they slipped out from that cavernous gloom into the sunlight again.

Josephine drew a deep breath as the sunlight flooded her face and hair.

"I have my own name for that place," she said. "I call it the Valley of Silent Things. It is a great swamp and they say that the moss grows in it so deep that caribou and deer walk over it without breaking through."

The stream was swelling out into a narrow, finger-like lake that stretched for a mile or more ahead of them, and she turned to nod her head at the spruce and cedar shores with their colorings of red and gold, where birch and popular, and ash splashed vividly against the darker background.

"From now on it is all like that," she said. "Lake after lake, most of them as narrow as this, clear to the doors of Adare House. It is a wonderful lake country, and one may easily lose one's self—hundreds of lakes, I guess, running through the forests like Venetian canals."

"I would not be surprised if you told me you had been in Venice," he replied. "I think you told me today is your birthday—your twentieth. Have you lived all those years here?"

"I understand why you ask that," she said, "and it is no more than fair that I should tell you. Of course you are wondering a great deal about me. You have just asked yourself how I could ever hear of such a place as Venice away up here among the Indians. Yes, I've lived almost all of those twenty years up here—among the forests. They sent me to the Mission school at Fort Churchill, over on Hudson's Bay, for three years; and after that, until I was seventeen, I had a little white-haired English governess at Adare House. If she had lived"—Her hands clenched the sides of the canoe, and she looked straight away from Philip. She seemed to force the words that came from her lips then: "When I was eighteen I went to Montreal—and lived there a year. That is all—that one year—away from—my forests"——

Fifteen minutes later Philip ran his canoe ashore close to Jean Croisset's on a beach of white sand. He could not help seeing that, from the moment she had answered his question out on the lake, a change had come over Josephine. For a short time that afternoon she had risen from out of the thing that oppressed her, and once or twice there had been almost happiness in her smile and laughter. Now she seemed to have sunk again under its smothering grip. It was as if the chill and dismal gloom of approaching night had robbed her cheeks of color, and had given a tired droop to her shoulders as she sat silently, and waited for them to make her tent comfortable.

When it was up, and the blankets spread, she went in and left them alone, and the last glimpse that he had of her face left with Philip a camelike impression of hopelessness that made him want to call out her name, yet held him speechless. He looked closely at Jean as they put up their own tent, and for the first time he saw that the mask had fallen from the half-breed's face, and that it was filled with that same mysterious hopelessness and despair. Almost roughly he caught him by the shoulder.

(To Be Continued.)

The Day of Rest

By Maurice Ketten

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