



There is nothing in life so important as to think before you act.

## God's Country and the Woman

(Continued from last week.)

### CHAPTER TWENTY.

IN the course of nearly every life there comes an hour which stands out above all others as long as memory lasts. Such was the one in which Philip crouched in the dog pit, his hand at Captain's collar, waiting for the sound of cry or shot. So long as he lived he knew this scene could not be wiped out of his brain. As he listened, he stared about him and the drama of it burned into his soul. Some intuitive spirit seemed to have whispered to the dogs that these tense moments were heavy with tragic possibilities for them as well as the man. Out of the surrounding darkness they stared at him without a movement or a sound, every head turned toward him, forty pairs of eyes upon him like green and awful fires. They, too, were waiting and listening. They knew there was some meaning in the attitude of this man crouching at Captain's side. Their heads were up. Their ears were alert. Philip could hear their breathing. And he could feel that the muscles of Captain's splendid body were tense and rigid. Minutes passed. The owl hooted nearer; the owl howled again, farther away. Slowly the tremendous strain passed and Philip began to breathe easier. He figured that Josephine and the half-breed had reached last night's meeting-place. He had given them a margin of at least five minutes—and nothing had happened. His knees were cramped, and he rose to his feet, still holding Captain's chain. The tension was broken among the beasts. They moved; whimpering sounds came to him; eyes shifted uneasily in the gloom. Fully half an hour had passed when there was a sudden movement among them. The points of green and awful fire were turned from Philip, and to his ears came the clink of chains, the movement of bodies, a subdued and menacing rumble from a score of throats. Captain growled. Philip stared out into the darkness and listened.

And then a voice came, quite near: "Ho, M'sieur Philip!"

"It was Jean! Philip's hand relaxed its clutch at Captain's collar, and almost a groan of relief fell from his lips. Not until Jean's voice came to him, quiet and unexcited, did he realize under what a strain he had been.

"I am here," he said, moving slowly out of the pit.

On the edge of it, where the light shone down through an opening in the spruce tops, he found Jean. Josephine was not with him. Eagerly Philip caught the other's arm, and looked beyond him.

"Where is she?"

"Safe," replied Jean. "I left her at Adare House, and came to you that came quickly, for I was afraid that some one might shoot in the night, or fire shot. Our business was done quickly to-night, M'sieur!"

He was looking straight into

Philip's eyes, a cold, steady look that told Philip what he meant before he had spoken the words.

"Our business was done quickly!" he repeated. "And it is coming!"

"The fight?"

"Yes."

"And Josephine knows? She understands?"

"No, M'sieur. Only you and I know. Listen: To-night I knelt down in darkness in my room, and prayed that the soul of my Iowa might come to me. I felt her near, M'sieur! It is strange—you may not believe—but some day you may understand. And we were there together for an hour,



A neat lawn fence adds much to the appearance of the farm home. Note the attractive one shown herewith on the farm of Mr. Clarence Smith, Grant Co., Ont.

and I pleaded for her forgiveness, for the time had come when I must break my oath to save our Josephine. And I could hear her speak to me, M'sieur, as plainly as you hear that breath of wind in the tree-tops yonder. Praise the Holy Father, I heard her! And so we are going to fight the great fight, M'sieur!" he asked.

Philip waited. After a moment Jean said, as quietly as if he were asking the time of day:

"Do you know whom we went out to see last night—and met again to-night?" he asked.

"I have guessed," replied Philip. His face was white and hard. Jean nodded.

"I think you have guessed correctly, M'sieur. It was the baby's father!"

And then, in amazement, he stared at Philip. For the other had flung off his arm, and his eyes were blazing in the twilight.

"And you have had all this trouble, all this mystery, all this fear because of him?" he demanded. His voice rang out in a harsh laugh. "You met him last night, and again to-night, and let him go? You, Jean Croisset? The

one man in the whole world I would give my life to meet—and you afraid of him? My God, if that is all—"

Jean interrupted him, laying a firm, quiet hand on his arm.

"What would you do, M'sieur?"

"Kill him," breathed Philip. "Kill him by inches, slowly, torturingly. And to-night, Jean. He is near. I will follow him, and do what you have been afraid to do."

"Yes, that is it. I have been afraid to kill him," replied Jean. Philip saw the starlight on the half-breed's face. And he knew, as he looked, that he had called Jean Jacques Croisset the one thing in the world that he could not be: a coward.

"I am wrong," he apologized quickly. "Jean, it is not that. I am excited, and I take back my words. It is not so. It is something else. Why have you not killed him?"

"M'sieur, do you believe in an oath that you make to your God?"

"Yes. But not when it means the crushing of human souls. Then it is a crime."

"Ah!" Jean was facing him now, his eyes aflame. "I am a Catholic, M'sieur—one of those of the far North, who are different from the Catholics of the south, of Montreal and Quebec. Listen! To-night I have broken a part of my oath: I am breaking a part of it in telling you what I am about to say. But I am not a coward—unless it is a coward who lives too much in fear of the Great God. What is my soul compared to that in the gentle breast of our Josephine? I would sacrifice it to

—and you were there. You understand this half, M'sieur!"

"Yes. Go on."

"The friend I had sent brought a letter for Josephine," resumed Jean. "A runner on his way north gave it to him. It was from Le M'sieur Adare, and said they were not starting north. But they did start when after the letter, and this same friend brought me the news that the master had passed along the westward way a few days behind the man I had planned to kill. Then we returned to Adare House, and you came with us. And after that—the face at the window, and the shot!"

Philip felt the half-breed's arm quiver.

"I must tell you about him or you will not understand," he went on, and there was effort in his voice now. "The man whose face you saw was my brother. Ah, you start! You understand now why I was glad you failed to kill him. He was bad, all that could be bad, M'sieur, but blood is thicker than water, and up here one does not forget who one's father is. Childhood knows no sin. And my brother came up from the south as canoe-man for the man I wanted to kill! A few hours before you saw his face at the window I told him in the forest. He promised to leave. Then came the shot—and I understood. The man I was going to kill had sent him to assassinate the master of Adare. That is why I followed him that night. I knew that I would find the man I wanted not far away."

"And you found him?"

"Yes. I came upon my brother first. And I lied. I told him he had made a mistake, and killed you, that his life was not worth the quill from a porcupine's back if he remained in the country. I made him believe I was another who fought him in the forest. He fled. I am glad of that. He will never come back. Then I followed over the trail he had made to Adare House, and far back in the swamp I came upon them, waiting for him. I passed myself off as my brother, and tricked the man I was after. We went a distance from the camp—alone—and I was choking the life from him, when the two others that were with him came upon us. He was dying, M'sieur! He was black in the face, and his tongue was out. Another second—two or three at the most—and I would have brought ruin upon every soul at Adare House. For he was dying. And if I had killed him all would have been lost!"

"That is irresistible!" gasped Philip, as the half-breed paused. "If you had killed him—"

"All would have been lost," repeated Jean, in a strange, hard voice.

"Listen, M'sieur. The two others leaped upon me. I fought. And he came to my senses I was in the light of the campfire, and the man I had come to kill was dead. The other man, the Pre-Trader, he had told me I was, it was useless to lie. I told the truth—that I had come to kill him, and was dying. And then—in the light of that campfire, M'sieur, he proved to me what I would have meant if I had succeeded. Thoreau carried the paper. He was in an envelope addressed to the master of Adare. They tore it open, that I might read. And in that paper written by the man I had come to kill, was the whole terrible story, every detail—and it made me cold and sick. Perhaps you begin to understand. Perhaps you begin to see more clearly when I tell you—"

"Yes, yes," urged Philip.

"—that this man, the father of the baby, is the Lang who owns Thoreau's house, the Thoreau's hell, who owns the string of them from here to the Athabasca, and who lives in Montreal!"

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