

God's Country and the Woman

(Continued from page 12.)

With the break of day the wind fell, the sky cleared, and it grew colder. In silence John, Adare, Jean, and Philip broke the trail. In silence followed close behind them the missioner with his smooth-bore. In silence followed the French and half-breeds and Crees. Now and then the sharp click of steel as rifle barrel struck rifle barrel. Voices were low, monosyllabic; breaths were deep, the throbbing of hearts like that of engines. Here were friends who were meeting for the first time in months, yet they spoke no word of each other, of the fortunes of the "line," of wives or children. There was but one thought in their brains, pumping the blood through their veins, setting their dark faces in lines of iron, filling their eyes with the feverish fires of excitement. Yet this excitement, the tremendous passion that was working in them, found no vent in wild outcry.

It was like the deadly undertow of the maelstroms in the spring floods. It was there, unseen, silent as death. And his thought, blinding them to all else, insensating them to all emotions but that of vengeance, was thought of Josephine.

John Adare himself seemed possessed of a strange madness. He said no word to Jean or Philip. Hour after hour he strode ahead, until it seemed that tendons must snap and legs give way under the strain. Not once did he stop for rest until, hours later, they reached the summit of a ridge, and he pointed far off into the plain below. They could see the smoke rising up from the Devil's Nest. A breath like a great sigh swept through the band.

And now, silently, there slipped away behind a rock Kakisooin and his Indians. From under his blanket-coat the chief brought forth the thing that had bulged there, a tom-tom. Philip and the waiting men heard then the low Te-dum—Te-dum—Te-dum of it, as Kakisooin turned his face first to the east and then the west, north and then south, calling upon Iskoowanoos to come out of the valley of Silent Men and lead them to triumph. And the waiting men were silent—deadly silent—as they listened. For they knew that the low Te-dum was the call to death. Their hands gripped harder at the barrels of their guns, as when Kakisooin and his braves came from behind the rock they faced

the smoke above the Devil's Nest, wiped their eyes to see more clearly, and followed John Adare down into the plain.

And to other ears than their own the medicine drum had carried the Song of Death. Down in the thick spruce of the plain a man on the trail of a caribou had heard. He looked up, and on the cap of the North, and like a deer he turned and sped back unseen in the direction of the Devil's Nest. And as the avengers came down into the plain Kakisooin chanted in a low monotone:

Our fathers—come!
Come from out of the valley.
Guide us—for to-day we fight,
And the winds whisper of death!

And those who heard did not laugh. Father George crossed himself, and muttered something that might have been a prayer. For in this hour Kakisooin's God was very near.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE.

MANY years before Thoreau had named his acre stronghold in the Eagle's Nest. The brown-faced people of the trails had changed to the Devil's Nest. It was not built like the posts, on level ground and easy of access. Its northern wall rose sheer up with the wall of Eagle Chasm, with a torrent two hundred feet below that rumbled and roared like distant thunder when the spring floods came. John Adare knew that this chasm worked its purpose. Somewhere in it were the liquor caches which the police never found when they came that way on their occasional patrols. On the east and south sides of the Nest was an open, rough and rocky, filled with jagged outcrops of boulders and patches of bush; behind it the thick forest grew up to the very walls.

(To Be Continued.)

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