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THE COURAGE OF MARGE O'DOONE

BY JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

He felt the quiver in her voice. She was quite excited, he knew. And yet not about the Indians, nor the strangeness of their presence. It was her triumph that made her tremble in the darkness, a wonderful anticipation of the greatest event that had ever happened in her life. She hoped that Hauck and Brokaw were in that room! She would confront them there, with him. That was it. She felt her bondage—her imprisonment—in this savage place was ended; and she was eager to find them, and let them know that she was no longer afraid, or alone—no longer need obey them. He felt the thrill of it in the hot, fierce little clasp of her hand. He saw it glowing in her eyes when they passed through the light of a window. Then they turned again, at the back of the building. They paused at a door. Not a ray of light broke the gloom here. The stars seemed to make the blackness deeper. Her fingers tightened.

"You must be careful," he said. "And—remember."

"I will," she whispered.

It was his last warning. The door opened slowly, with a creaking sound, and they entered into a long, gloomy hall, illuminated by a single oil lamp that guttered in a wicker basket on one of the walls. The hall gave him an idea of the immensity of the building. From the far end of it, through a partly open door, came a reek of tobacco smoke, and loud voices—a burst of coarse laughter, a sudden volley of curses that died away in a still louder roar of merriment. Some one closed the door from within. The girl was staring toward the end of the hall, and shuddering.

"That is the way it has been—growing worse and worse since Nisikooos died," she said. "In there the white men who come down from the north, drink and gamble and quarrel. They are always quarrelling. This room is ours—Nisikooos' and mine." She touched with her hand a door near which they were standing. Then she pointed to another. There were half a dozen doors up and down the hall. "And that is Hauck's."

table, his hands gripping the edge of it, his face distorted by passion. It was a terrible face to look into—a stand before, alone in that room—a face filled with menace and murder. So sudden had been the change in it that David was stunned for a moment. In that space of perhaps a quarter of a minute neither uttered a sound. Then Brokaw leaned more slowly forward, his great hands clenched, and demanded in a hissing voice:

"What did she mean when she called you that—Sakewawin? What did she mean?"

It was not now the voice of a drunken man, but the voice of a man ready to kill.

Chapter XXI
Sakewawin! What did she mean when she called you that?"

It was Brokaw's voice again, turning the words round but repeating the same thing. He made a step toward David, his hands clenched more tightly and his whole bulk growing tense. His eyes, blazing as if through a very thin film of water—water that seemed to cling there by some strange magic—were horrible, David thought. Sakewawin! A pretty name for himself, he had told the girl—and here it was raising the very devil with this drink-bloated colossus. He guessed quickly. It was decidedly a matter of guessing quickly and of making prompt and satisfactory explanation—or, a satisfactory explanation—his mind working like a race-horse. "Sakewawin" meant something that had enraged Brokaw. A jealous rage. A rage that had filled his aqueous eyes with a lurid glare. So David said, looking into them calmly, and with a little feigned surprise:

"Wasn't she speaking to you, Brokaw?"

It was a splendid shot. David scarcely knew why he made it, except that he was moved by a powerful impulse which just now he had not time to analyze. It was this same impulse that had kept him from revealing himself when Brokaw had mistaken him for someone else. Chance had thrown a course of action into his way and he had accepted it almost involuntarily. It had suddenly occurred to him that he would give much to be alone with this half-drunken man for a few hours—as McKenna. He might last long enough in that disguise to discover things.

But not with Hauck watching him, for Hauck was four fifths sober, and there was a depth to his cruel eyes which he did not like. He watched the effect of his words on Brokaw. The tenacious slowly, his heavy jaw relaxed—and David laughed softly. He felt that he was out of deep water now. This fellow, half filled with drink, was wonderfully credulous. And he was sure that his watery eyes could not see very well, though his ears had heard distinctly.

"She was looking at you, Brokaw—straight at you—when she said good-night," he added.

"You sure—sure she said it to me, Mac?"

David nodded, even as his blood ran a little cold.

A leering grin of joy spread over Brokaw's face.

"The little devil!" he said, gloatingly.

"What does it mean?" David asked. "Sakewawin—I had never heard it." He lied calmly, turning his head a bit out of the light.

Brokaw stared at him a moment before answering.

"When a girl says that—it means—she belongs to you," he said. "In Indian it means—possession! Don't be of course you're right! She said it to me. She's mine. She belongs to me. I own her. And I thought . . ."

He caught up the bottle and turned out half a glass of liquor, swaying unsteadily.

"Drink, Mac!"

David shook his head.

"Not now. Let's go to your shack if you've got one. Lots to talk about—old times—Kicking Horse, you know. And this girl? I can't believe it! If it's true, you're a lucky dog."

He was not thinking of consequences—of to-morrow. To-night was all he asked for—alone with Brokaw. That mountain of flesh, stupefied with liquor, was no match for him now. To-morrow he might hold the whip hand, if Hauck did not return too soon.

"Lucky dog! Lucky dog!" He kept repeating that. It was like music in Brokaw's ears. And such a girl! An angel! He couldn't believe it! Brokaw's face was like a red fire in his exultation, his lustful joy, his great triumph. He drank the liquor he had proffered David, and drank a second time, rumbling in his thick chest like some kind of animal. Of course she was an angel! Hadn't he and Hauck, and that woman who had died, made her grow into an angel—just for him? She belonged to him. Always had belonged to him, and he would have a long time. If she had ever called any other man that name—Sakewawin—he would have killed him. Certain. Killed him dead. This was the first time she had ever called him that. Lucky dog? You bet he was. They'd go to his shack—and talk. He drank a third time. He rolled heavily as they entered the hall, David praying that they would not meet Hauck. He had his victim. (To Be Continued.)




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He threw off his pack, placed it on the floor, with his rifle across it. When he straightened, the girl was listening at the door of Hauck's room. Beckoning to him, she knocked on it lightly, and the door opened. She entered close behind her. It was a rather large room—his own impression as he crossed the threshold. In the centre of it was a table, and over the table hung an oil lamp with a tin reflector. In the light of this lamp sat two men. In his first glance he made up his mind that the man on the left and which was Brokaw. It was Brokaw, he thought, who was facing them as they entered—a man he could hate even if he had never heard of him before. Big. Loose-shouldered. A carnivorous-looking giant with a mottled, red face and beary eyes that had an amazed and watery stare in them. Apparently the girl's knock had not been heard, for it was a moment before the other man swung slowly about in his chair so that he could see them. That was Hauck. David knew it. He was almost a half smaller than the other, with round, bullish shoulders, a thick neck, and eyes wherein might lurk an incredible cruelty. He popped half out of his seat when he saw the girl, and a stranger. His jaws seemed to tighten with a snap. A snap that could be almost heard. But it was Brokaw's face that held David's eyes. He was two thirds drunk. There was no doubt about it, if he was any sort of judge of that kind of imbecility. One of his thick, huge hands gripped a bottle. Hauck had evidently been reading him something out of a ledger, a Post ledger, which he held now in one hand. David was surprised at the quiet way in which the girl began speaking. She said that she had wandered over into the other valley and was lost when this stranger found her. He had been good to her, and was on his way to the settlement on the coast. His name was . . .

She got no further than that. Brokaw had taken his devouring gaze from her and was staring at David. He lurched suddenly to his feet and leaned over the table, a new sort of surprise in his heavy countenance. He stretched out a hand. His voice was a howl.

"McKenna!"

He was speaking directly at David—calling him by name. There was as little doubt of that as of his drunkenness. There was also an unmistakable note of fellowship in his voice. McKenna! David opened his mouth to correct him when a second thought occurred to him in a mildly inspirational way. Why not McKenna? The girl was looking at him, a bit surprised, questioning him in the directness of her gaze. He nodded, and smiled at Brokaw. The giant came around the table, still holding out his big, red hand.

"Mac! God! You don't mean to say you've forgotten . . ."

David took the hand.

"Brokaw!" he chanced.

The other's hand was as cold as a piece of beef. But it possessed a crushing strength. Hauck was staring from one to the other, and suddenly Brokaw turned to him, still pumping David's hand.

"McKenna—that young devil of Kicking Horse, Hauck! You've heard me speak of him, McKenna . . ."

The girl had backed to the door. She was pale. Her eyes were shining, and she was looking straight at David when Brokaw released his hand.

"Good-night, Sakewawin!" she said.

It was very distinct, that word—Sakewawin! David had never heard it come quite so clearly from her lips. There was something of defiance and pride in her utterance of it—and intentional and decisive emphasis to it. She smiled at him as she went through the door, and in that same breath Hauck had followed her. They disappeared. When David turned he found Brokaw backed against the

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