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Thoughts, sweet and bitter, held her in bondage. Her soul was swept away on the flood tide of them. The presence of the man who had just left her seemed still to fill the room. She saw him everywhere, and heard his voice; the vibrant careless voice that rang the changes on each tone and made even common words and current phrases of golden value, to be treasured against the colourless and soundless days when perchance they would be heard no more. With small reason, she had always looked forward to the future as full of vivid possibilities—as a joyous kaleidoscopic time that would turn each day into a new delight. She shuddered as she realized that all in a moment her outlook upon the coming years had changed. She feared them, feared the long grey procession of them, for she knew that they would be blank, empty, silent as the seas beyond the last land, if Richard Wynn went away. Richard Wynn—the man she had only known since yesterday morning; a sojourner, a passer-by; one who would without the faintest doubt return to the place whence he came.

Though he made light of it, he was of a different world from her own. There were many it might be, in Oxford, in London or in the American University town he had named, who waited eagerly for news of him and wearied at his long absence. Here in the North she had seen no man like him. Here the men grew silent as the silent places they knew. They were taciturn, and often rough on the surface. Sometimes they were kindly, sometimes cruel, but not one of them who had come her way had this man's gentle freedom of speech, or his open delight in the beauty of the North. Not one had his buoyant indifference to the day's hardships, or possessed his unflinching courtesy.

Her father, she remembered, had been such a one as Wynn, and other men she had met in those dim days of her childhood spent amongst Shakespearean players and in the atmosphere of the theatres, now crossed her mind as vague, indistinct figures, yet of the same gracious bearing.

Her grandfather was different. He had no outward graces. At times he talked, but he was often unreadable, and given to long silences. His temper was quick and uncontrolled, and he was a dangerous man to cross or deceive, as different Indians had found to their cost. Yet he could be a faithful friend, and was strong and good also—apart from his trapping of the beasts.

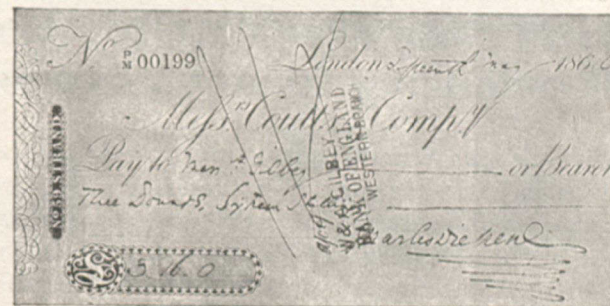
She wished now passionately that she had inherited his strength of will and self-sufficiency, and had been less easy to charm, less quick to give her friendship.

There in the dark her face burned as she realized that she had asked for—no, insisted upon Wynn's recital of his story. Had he not laughingly admitted that he would not have given her such confidences if they had met in England! How would he have talked to those conventional English girls, she wondered. In what way was she unlike them? Perhaps he was only starved for sympathy. One listener might have answered as well as another. Perhaps the silence of Lone Lake made him eager to hear his own voice and hers. That they had drifted into personal matters was natural enough. It was the tendency when people were cut off from outside interests. The settlers, hunters and trappers were nearly always introspective. No, it was not strange that he had told her. But there should be no more questions. Desperately she resolved to keep close guard upon herself. Yet—Oh! how dear the long paddle up the river had been! How for ever unforgettable the hours in the fire-lit room!

She pressed her head a little closer against the big helpless hand on the bear-skin, for Wanota's candle on the chair fluttered and went out. The room grew dark, save where the embers glowed; grew darker and darker, then grew grey, for the Eastern sky turned rose and silver, and Nance kept vigil by the old man till he awoke at sunrise.

(To be continued.)

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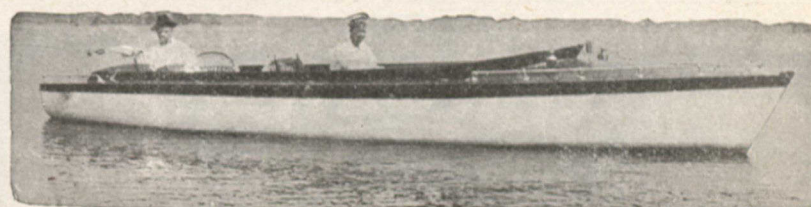


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