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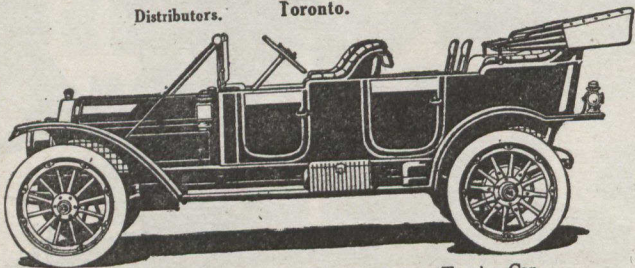
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care of you. But," he leaned down his face distorted by sudden anger, "But—yo not sen him away,—By the priests' God! . . . Me! . . . Francois! I shall tak your money, an the silver-fox pelt hid in dis cabin, an your girl, an tak them where you will not fin them, though you sen that man from Lone Lac to seek! I not wait for you to die!" With a quick swing of his body and left arm he unwound the little coil of rope, a looped length flew out lightly, and settled over the girl's slender body.

IN a flash Francois had tightened the noose and her arms were pinioned to her body. She gave a cry and struggled like a bird caught in a net. Suddenly she was still and smiled reassuringly into the old trapper's face that was convulsed with impotent rage. The Eskimo dog sprang from beneath the couch, his hair raising along his back.

"I'm really not frightened, Grand-dad," she said. "I suppose this is a trick of Francois'. He is only fooling, of course. It is absurd to think Francois would harm me; and besides," she glanced over at the squaw, "there is Wanota—Wanota who has always been kind."

The half-breed stepped a little closer to her and coiled the rope about her again, three times, four times. "My gun, Nance! my gun," McCullough cried hoarsely, his eyes blood-shot and wild. "By Heaven! he is not fooling!"

"No," said the half-breed with a shrug. "Franco's no fool—this tam. He can do well with one arm, as mos with two. But I not hurt your girl, old man. That not my game—No! Me—I will marry her. Where I tak her, by and by, she will say she will marry Francois. Then it shall be by priest an ring—your way, ole man! Wrap her up warm," he turned and threw the last words sharply at Wanota.

The squaw took from her arm the beaver coat she had long been making, and fastened it around Nance, the arms hanging empty.

The old trapper babbled threats of violence that broke and ended in inarticulate sounds.

"Grand-dad," Nance said gently, as Wanota pulled a scarlet toque over her yellow hair. "Grand-dad—Dick Wynn will be back in a little while, and he will make everything right. Francois could not take me where he would not find me. There is no danger in this at all—except,"—she tossed an indifferent smile over at the half-breed—"except for Francois."

He beckoned to Wanota. "Bring the fox-skin," he said briefly, "an the bag of money hid in the fir bed." The squaw obeyed quickly. The half-breed slipped the tiny bag in his belt, then lifted Nance with his left arm as though he felt no weight. They filed out as they had come in, and he placed the girl on the toboggan. Wanota bound over her the buck-skin side straps, then gathered up the babiche drawing strings, and they started across the snow, Francois leading. The girl clinched her bound hands and set her white teeth together lest she give some sharp cry that would still further hurt the old man within the house.

McCullough rose inch by inch till he rested on his right elbow. So much he had not done since he was stricken. He strained forward, listening, listening, and his face was as the face of the dead.

He heard the trailing away of the toboggan over the crackling snow-crust. The sound of the snow-shoes. When all was still he turned his eyes to the small yellow and grey dog, whose rough hair still bristled along his back, while he whined questioningly, being uncertain whether to hold his post, or leave it.

"Follow her, lad!" the old man said sharply—commandingly. "Follow her! Follow her!" Joris sprang forward and out through the half-open door.

The old man's voice trailed into silence; he fell back heavily, and lay very still.

(To be continued.)

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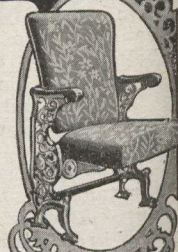
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