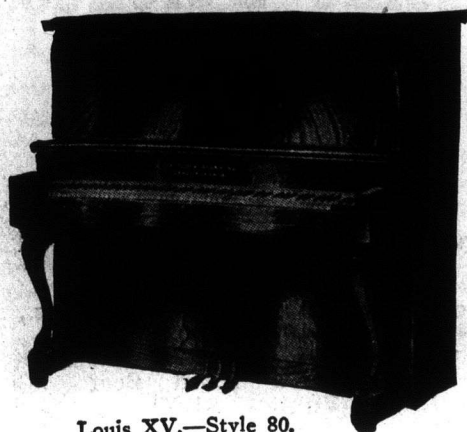


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## Da-Qui-Mona

Written for The Western Home Monthly

[The writer of this interesting story is unknown to the Editor of The Western Home Monthly. The publication of the article will make it possible for him to reveal his identity].

WE WERE seated after supper in the smoking room of an hotel in Edmonton, that gateway to the great fur country of Northern Alberta. There were several men there, of various occupations in the city, besides many who, like my partner and I, had but recently returned from fur business in the North.

We were all old friends, and, with pipes and cigarettes going, were talking on every conceivable subject, as men will do when they meet together after a long absence. The room was so full of tobacco smoke that we could scarcely see one another's faces, but that was no hindrance, and passing on from topic to topic we seemed to settle down to a discussion of marriages between white men and Indians. Most of the fellows naturally held such unions in horror, but many of us defended them on the plea that an Indian might be just as good as another man or woman, a Christian, and owing obedience to the same moral laws. It was here a voice broke in from the corner, which we recognised as Tom Cowan's. We had not thought of Tom, and he had evidently slipped into the room and taken his place under cover of the thick canopy of smoke.

"Some of you fellows speak quite fine about a white man marrying an Indian," he said in a sarcastic tone, "but you all know darned well that if any one of you did such a thing, the rest would have as little to do with him as possible."

It was quite true, and coming from Tom we could say nothing; we all knew about Tom. For many years he had been one of us, and a genial favourite on our trips, trapping, or trading for furs. He was well educated—a college man—but drink and other things had driven him West, and the wilds had got a grip on him. The previous winter he had gone off alone from Peace River Crossing, and in the spring he had returned with an Indian "squaw," as we called her, though she was unknown to us. He had settled down to farming and we just dropped him. Some of us had wives, but frankly we hadn't given him a show at all. Tom being always a quiet and reticent fellow waited for us to make the first advances, and they never came.

"What do you fellows know about the Indians anyhow?" he went on. "You form your opinion from the few straggling, tired-looking objects you find away from their reserve in the summer, cutting brush. Some of you say, condescendingly, that an Indian *might* be as good as another man. I say he is very often better."

Here he lit his pipe and puffed away in the darkness, but we could find nothing to say. Then almost abruptly he spoke again, and his tone was bitter.

"None of you know about my trip last winter—I went farther North than any of you—you know nothing of why I quit trapping and went to farming, which few old-timers can do, and yet you presume to judge. Not that I care a cent," he said, and I could imagine him straightening up, in the way he had, as he said it, "But it comes doubly hard on a woman to learn that she has ousted her husband from the companionship of his friends."

He said this last word in such a tone that I guess it struck home all right: it did with me anyway.

"Now, boys, as I've said, I don't care what anybody thinks about me; I've found my happiness, and I could wish no one better luck than mine. But because it might make you look more kindly upon other fellows in such situations, I'm going to tell you just what happened last winter, and how I happened to come back with an Indian wife."

We could see a blaze in the corner again as Tom relit his pipe, and we sat silently waiting for him. He always was a good talker, and he started off in that clear, mellow voice we knew so well.

"You know that we travelled to Peace River Crossing and there parted. Well, for about a month I travelled on, going farther north all the while, stopping at little Indian camps on the way for provisions. It was in such a place that I first met Da-qui-mona, and I thought she was

the most beautiful Indian girl I had ever seen. She was about nineteen or twenty, as we judge age, slim and of medium height, but wiry and muscular, so that it was a pleasure to see the grace with which she moved round. Her face was rather of Spanish than Indian type, and her particularly bright complexion had given her her name of Da-qui-mo-na, or 'Red Cloud of the Morning.' But it was her eyes that attracted one; large brown orbs that seemed to light her whole face; they could express anything, and seemed a complete index to all her ideas and wishes. She had been taught from her childhood by a missionary in that country, and could read and write well. We became good chums while I stayed there, and she called me 'Tommy' as I had taught her, whilst I shortened her name to 'Mona.' She would chat away to me about the animals and trees, for they were her closest friends and seemed like human beings to her. In the morning we would go on snow-shoes together to visit the traps, and to see her little figure bending to the measured step was a glad sight."

It was quite dark now, and the blackness of the room would be lit up, only for a few seconds occasionally, by a blaze which betokened a pipe refilled or a new cigarette rolled.

"Things couldn't go on like that forever," continued Tom, "though after all my business was through I was loath to leave. However, one morning I set out west from the camp, with provisions for about two months, as I thought. Mona, at the time, I know, thought no more of me than that I was a good companion, but she was sorry to see me go, and stood at the opening of the teepee as I set off, whilst I, as I swung along beside my dogs, turned often to glance back at her, until her slim little figure was lost to view."

"I travelled West for about two hundred miles, I guess, and trapped there for somewhat over a month, using an old log shanty in the vicinity for a stopping place. Then the provisions began to run short; the dogs' frozen fish gave out completely and I was forced to feed them from my own grub. I knew it was dangerous to feed them on low rations for there was a lot of the timber-wolf in that pack, but I wanted to put in another couple of days before I started back. I let things run too low altogether, I guess, for one evening when I came back from an inspection of the traps, I found the dogs lying lazily around inside the shack, and all my grub gone. For a few minutes I went clean mad, and went around with a club, never heeding the howling and whelping of the greedy brutes, until one by one they hurried outside. Then the full realisation of my situation came upon me; there was I, about two hundred miles from the nearest encampment, with nothing to eat for myself or the dogs. I tell you, I felt all in, but making my supper as best I could from the scraps that were left, I prepared for an early start next morning. I felt loath to leave the furs I had worked so hard to obtain, and so I packed them in, determining to make those dogs pull the sleigh every inch they could, until they or I dropped."

"The first day's travel I managed all right, but the dogs were by no means satisfied at the meagre meal they made from the scraps of food I had thrown in the sleigh in the morning whilst I could scarcely stand. I got through the night without mishap, but felt hardly able to travel next day. However, I moved slowly along by the pack, revolver in hand, for I was afraid of the brutes, who kept glancing sideways at me, their wolfish ancestry showing clearly in their crafty eyes."

"It was almost noon, I guess, when faint and almost prostrated, I was stumbling along, that I heard the pack sniffing aloud, and glancing down saw that they had turned from their track to follow a snow-shoe trail. I felt cheered, and instinctively lengthened my stride to keep up with the dogs, who began to travel faster. The tracks, I could see, were new; the shoes were small, as also were the steps, and after half an hour's steady running, we sighted the traveller."

"The sky was lowering and threatening; plainly a storm was brewing as I hurried

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