

The man struck a match, but his pipe was troublesome, and took long to light—when it glowed red he smiled to her and swung off over the snow. The girl watched him for a moment then went in.

Wynn took the river-way, his shoes making scarcely any markings on the snow crust. The bleak beauty of the far-off hills gave him a feeling of depression. A steel-grey sky cast a shade of grey over the unbroken white below.

Pity stirred in him for the wild things that might find nothing to stay their hunger but the bitter winter buds of the trees.

The great white owl would fare well on many a starveling, yet even he, for "all his feathers, was a-cold."

He pushed on rapidly through the silver solitudes, for to-day he had no desire to be alone.

Wanota, watching from the tiny window in her son's shanty, saw the man go by.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later—long enough for Wynn to have passed safely beyond sight and hearing of them—that she and Francois came out together.

They crossed to the old man's house, Wanota pulling a bark toboggan by its babiche strings, and Francois swinging a light coil of rope from his left hand. His right arm was in a sling, a hunting knife dangled from a thong on his blue belt, and an old flint-lock rifle was slung over his shoulder.

Both he and the woman wore snow-shoes, and were dressed as for a long tramp.

They stopped at the log-house, and leaving the toboggan, entered without removing their snow-shoes, the half-breed first, Wanota following the red shawl pulled about her head.

The old man roused at the sound of their coming.

"Ah, Francois!" he said haltingly, "how is the wrist?"

Nance from her low chair glanced at them mildly curious. There was something odd in their entrance together at this hour. Given as they were to silence, now they were even more forbiddingly silent than usual. On the half-breed's immobile face she read a certain insolence. In his eyes smouldered an ominous light. Wanota hung back strangely, and her face was half-hidden by the red shawl. She had always been free in her coming and going as one above being questioned. To-day she seemed cowed and miserable.

Nance felt a growing sense of uneasiness as she looked at them, and rose and went over to her grandfather. Stooping, she lifted his helpless hand and patted it softly.

Francois ignored the old man's kindly question. He stood motionless and as though choosing words to say what he had come to say.

Presently he spoke.

"I come," he said coolly, "to make terms." McCullough's eyes flashed. He did not like the tone, or the words.

"We have made terms. Fair ones I will abide by them," he answered.

"Me," returned the other. "I will not."

"What's on your mind?" questioned the old man sharply, with an echo of his past vigor, "Out with it."

"Dat man from Lone Lac—will you tell him to go from here?" demanded the half-breed.

"Whether he goes or stays, what affair of yours is that?" said the old trapper, his blurred voice trembling. Francois smiled. "I mak it mine. Will you tell him to go?"

"What mad motion possesses you?" said the old man querulously. "I am sick. Do not weary me with annoying questions." He shut his eyes as dismissing the subject.

The Indian moved to the couch indolently.

"I come," he reiterated, "to make terms. Dat man from Lone Lac—he want your money. He want also your girl. He stay for her. Ver well. Wen you be dead—and you be dead pretty quick now—he tak both. You sen him away, I be content. I tak

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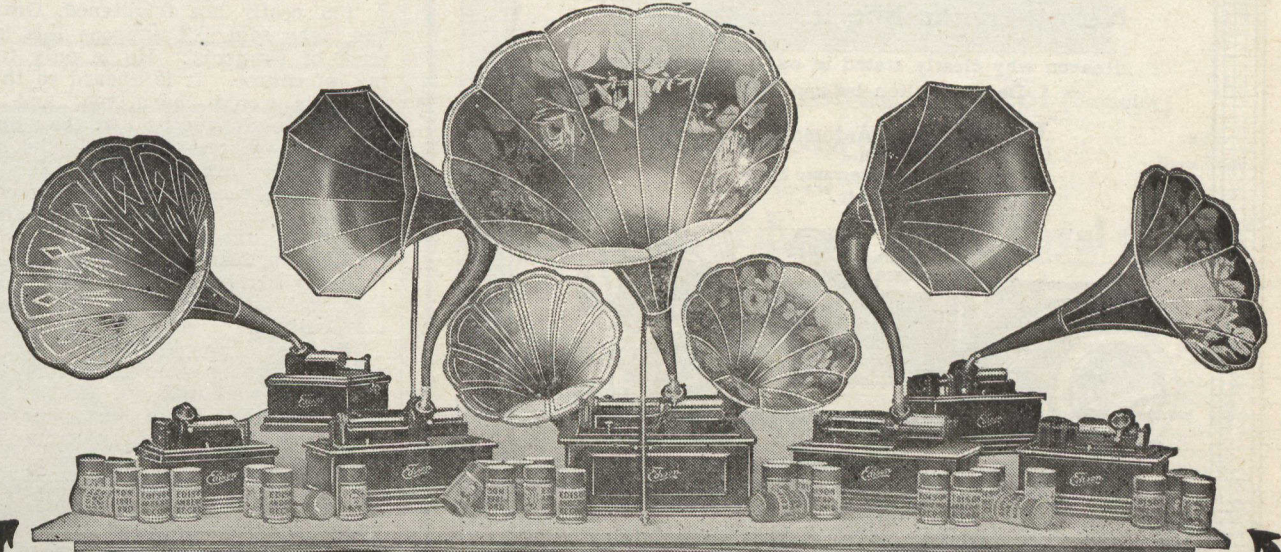
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