

ELLEN GETS HER MAN [PAS]



SYNOPSIS: Ellen Mackay, on her proximating its old-time volume, he Ellen saw old Moosac bend a look way from school at Winnipeg, to join his father at Fort Edson, missed the boat by which she was to travel. Hearing that another boat was to start north in the morning, Ellen goes to the owner, John Benham, and begs him to give her a passage. To her surprise he flatly refuses.

Angry and puzzled, Ellen tells Pat McCleachney, a kindly old storekeeper of her difficulty, and Pat with the help of one of Benham's crew, succeeds in getting Ellen on board as a stowaway.

When the vessel is well under way Ellen emerges from her hiding place and faces John Benham, who now cannot help taking her with him.

Twice had her father called him "squaw's whelp"—a "half-breed," and somehow this thought was like a dagger thrust in Ellen's heart. It seemed beyond all reason that such a thing could be so, for John Benham's eyes were blue and clear and his hair was richly brown. Yet . . .

She thought of her father, broken and discouraged, and by his own words brought to such a state by the evil machinations of this—this "half-breed." And now Ellen had taken her stand by her father's side. His battle was to be her battle; his hate was her hate.

It was long before she finally slept and when she did so there was the moistness of tears upon her cheeks.

In the week that followed, Ellen

Mackay learned the reason for her father's despair and broken pride.

Long hours she spent over the books of the post. A hundred lengthy tallies she drew up, studied and destroyed. Her thoughts were driven to an inevitable conclusion. The fur trade at Fort Edson was no longer paying. Where the trade had once been thousands of lynx, bear, beaver, otter, marten and other skins, the present return was but a few scanty hundreds.

The shelves of the storehouse were piled high with trade goods that had not been moved for over three years. It was simple to see the season when the decline had started. Three years ago it was.

Ellen probed further. Three years before had been the peak of the seven-year cycle of the rabbits, and all old records showed that when the rabbit tide was at its height, that was the rich year in returns on lynx. Yet the lynx tally three years ago was far below normal.

Ellen went to the fur store room. Ruthlessly she ripped open several bales, and from old experience graded the furs disclosed. They were all far below par, not a prime skin in the whole lot.

Her lips trembled and tears came again to her eyes. How deep the shame of it must cut her father, for in the past Fort Edson had been the boast of the company. From there had come the richest returns, the finest furs. Rich in the pride of achievement, Angus Mackay had gloriéd in the reputation of his post. And now he must drink the bitterest dregs.

Ellen went to the door of the trade room and looked out upon the open ground which surrounded the post buildings. A few Indians were there a very few. And she could remember, at this time of the year, there would be hundreds. And what were camped there were of the poor. This gesture, slight as it was, brought a warm glow to Ellen, and when the face reached the cabin Ellen's eyes were bright and she was smiling.

Ragged and filthy; their families



"This is Bernard Deteroux, lass," said the factor.

brought a catch to Ellen's throat and Deteroux's suggestion with uncon-

scious eagerness.

FIFTH INSTALMENT

"I have thought of little else, since earning about it," she said wearily. "I refuse to give up without a battle, but it seems almost beyond hope to think of averting it."

Deteroux's cold eyes gleamed in open admiration. "You are very courageous, mam'selle. And Bernard Deteroux will be most happy to help you in any way possible. Now, because I have been much through this country and you have but lately come back to it, it may be that I could give you information of many kinds should you desire it. Ask me what you will. I promise that your confidence will not be abused."

Ellen looked at him seriously for a moment. She sensed breeding behind Deteroux somewhere. The man did not talk like the usual run of river-men. His brain was plainly alert, his tongue fluent.

"Very well," said Ellen presently. "In a case of this sort it is well to know one's enemies in their true light. My father feels that John Benham, the free trader, is to blame for all his woes. Is it possible that one man can come into this district and in three years upset the reputation of an old, established post like Fort Edson?"

Deteroux shrugged. "It would seem so, mam'selle. I know of no other free trader in your territory but John Benham."

"But how can he do it?" persisted Ellen. "He cannot afford to offer more in trade than can the Hudson Bay Company."

"True," nodded Deteroux. "Yet, perhaps, it is not how much he offers for his furs, but what he offers."

Ellen stared at him for a moment. "I do not understand," she said slowly.

"I forget, mam'selle," went on Deteroux swiftly. "I forgot that when you left this post four years ago, the old order still existed. But change, as you know. In many ways our Indian is a child. He has ideals that are strange, mam'selle, and which we cannot grasp. Also he has weaknesses upon which the unscrupulous may trade. An Indian values many things, mam'selle, but most of all he values . . . whiskey."

Ellen's eyes widened. At last she saw. "Whiskey," she murmured. "John Benham trades whiskey for furs? But that is against the law. Then he turned back. "The blankets will be at your storeroom in five minutes, mam'selle."

A moment later Ellen left the room to assist Gitchie in preparation of the midday meal. She found the get, mam'selle. You forgot that old Chippewyan squaw working in though they are a great organization. The kitchen in a strangely silent, the red-coats are after all, but mood, and despite Ellen's curious men. They are few and the north questioning, Gitchie would utter no country is measured in millions of brow. Distinctly she sensed some question. And later, when the meal was square miles. They cannot be in all ominous undercurrent of stark conversation with she went out to the store-places at once. And if Benham is fit and hate swirled about her. It was inexplicable, but it was there.

do much that the law cannot prove. And the law must have proof."

Deteroux sat down. "We went to another of his express drunks. What can we do with the law? And then also—what can we prove? We know, but we cannot prove yet. Perhaps, later, this weapon may lie in our hands. And then—there is another thing."

"What is that?"

The more she tried to draw strange ends together and make some true picture of it, the more confusing it all was.

Finally she sighed and drew her thoughts back into more direct channels. Here at least she had a clear, damning trace to follow. The secret of John Benham's exploitation of the Fort Edson territory was plain. Her mode of attack was simple and direct.

For herself, Ellen found it hard to define just how Deteroux affected her.

There was an undeniable magnetism

about the man. His very size, his

swiftness of his movements and the lithe, easy

strength of his white teeth were attractive.

And he was not unattractive.

She would fight back, fight whenever Ellen felt them upon her,

to the last ounce of strength and which was disconcertingly often, she

will she possessed. And if anyone

was hard put to it to keep from

shivering openly. The man was at

once attractive and repulsive.

When the blankets had been prop-

erly checked in and received for,

Deteroux and Angus Mackay left

again, but Ellen stayed at the trad-

ing room, once more immersed in

the study of her father's predicament,

and trying to plan a course of action

that might avert the threatened cal-

amity of the following spring.

Here, an hour later, Bernard Dete-

roux came to her alone.

"You will pardon me, mam'selle,"

he began swiftly. "But I have a

great affection for your father, and

it would be well perhaps, if you

and I should talk of a certain injustice

which the future portends."

Ellen knew immediately what De-

teroux meant. Somewhat, doubtless

through the channels of gossip, or be-

cause Angus Mackay had confided

in him, this gigantic riverman knew

to one of them, a big burly figure

of the threat which hung over the

scene below. Several scows and

a York boat or two were grounded

on the shingle. A crowd of Indians

and rivermen were grouped on the

shore. Ellen saw her father talking

in him, the Indians through the medium of giant pigmies.

Presently these two advanced up the task of rehabilitation she had

the slope towards the post. Angus

set himself loomed as well nigh im-

Mackay with a toiling effort that possible. Therefore she seized upon

her fled, somehow.

She put away the books and re-

cords, locked the storerooms and

strode off to the home cabin. As

she went she became aware of shouts

down upon the beach. From the

doorway of the cabin she surveyed

the scene below.

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