

Ellen gets Her Man



SYNOPSIS: Ellen Mackay, on her way from school at Winnipeg, to join her father at Fort Edson, misses 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 McClatchney, 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.

During the voyage Ellen begins to be strongly attracted by John. But when she reaches Fort Edson she finds her father broken, ill and disgraced, and learns that his troubles are due to one man—John Benham.

Instantly Ellen resolves that she will fight for her father. She will reinstate him with the Hudson Bay Company, his employers, and will show up John Benham for what he really is.

From Bernard Deteroux, an employe of the company, who professes friendship for her father, Ellen hears that Benham supplies whiskey to the Indians. She sets out on a long and tedious journey to obtain proof of this, returns thinking she has got it, and gives information to the authorities.

Trooper Whitlow, of the Mounted police, asks her to go with him to find Benham and confronts him with the proof of his villainy. It develops that Benham is innocent and the liquor is being supplied by Deteroux.

A desperate battle between Benham and Deteroux ends with the latter's defeat and capture by Trooper Whitlow. Deteroux escapes.

NINTH INSTALMENT

Her gaze was drawn again to the terrible drama before her. Unconsciously she started forward. Whitlow's hand locked on her arm and dragged her back. "Wait!" he rasped. "Wait!"

Benham's hands, locked about Deteroux's wrists until the backs of them were bloodless and rigid like steel, seemed to be dragging some of that awful pressure from his tortured eyes. He seemed to be gathering himself for super-human effort.

Abruptly one knee drove upwards into Deteroux's body. He cringed slightly, and Benham tore himself free.

Benham's eyes were swollen, almost shut. For a split second both men seemed to pause and gather themselves. Then Deteroux charged again, like a wolf to the kill.

With one lithe, twisting movement Benham bent sharply at the waist and hurled himself forward, his right arm shooting out, a hard driven muscle-ridge piston.

Just below the arch of Deteroux's lower ribs the blow landed, and the "thock" of it was awesome. A hoarse, blubbery cry of pain erupted from Deteroux, his knees wobbled, and his head dropped forward. He reached violently, and blood-stained saliva seeped through his lips.

"He's got him—the boy's got him now," was Whitlow's jubilant cry.

Swiftly alive of his advantage, Benham tore at his opponent, a merciless, implacable machine. Setting himself, he ripped sledge-hammer blows into Deteroux's sagging chin. Slowly, ponderously, the big man seemed to crumple. His eyes were rolling and glassy, his mouth open and his lips peeled back in a grimace of fading consciousness.

Like an executioner before the block, Benham cut Deteroux down. Bit by bit he beat him lower until Deteroux's body was bent in a crouch and his nerveless arms swung helpless at his sides.

There was something almost magnificent in the manner that Deteroux called upon his great strength and vitality to stave off defeat. Out on his feet he refused to fall, his muscles subconsciously holding his body from

utter collapse.

Abruptly Benham stopped his attack. His bloody, tight-locked fists fell to his sides. With a shrugging gesture he turned away, and without a look to right or left pushed through the crowd and was gone. And in that moment of magnanimity John Benham was almost unconsciously magnificent.

By all rules of conflict he was entitled to go on with his triumph until human resistance could no longer exist, and Deteroux should lie supine at his feet. But he, too, could appreciate sheer, dogged courage, even in a man like Deteroux, who had not hesitated to take unfair advantage.

Ellen saw Whitlow step forward, grip Deteroux by the arm and force him to the ground. The milling crowd of Indians closed about them and Ellen found herself alone.

Drawn by what seemed a resistless force, she moved in the direction John Benham had gone. She peered into tepees as she went, but nowhere did she see him. Unconsciously she hurried her pace. And then, below the camp at the edge of the lake, she found him.

He was crouched low, and beside him was the same ancient squaw, gently sponging his battered face and body with the icy water.

Timidly Ellen approached the pair. The old squaw looked at her in frank hostility. Then she turned again to her ministrations, crooning with pagan gentleness. Finally Benham looked up. His eyes were terribly bloodshot and swollen. Ellen gasped with pity, and her hands fluttered to her throat. It was Benham who spoke. "Yes," he queried, his voice slightly thick. He was still panting from his exertions.

Many words trembled on Ellen's lips, strange, hot, thrilling words—but somehow she could not utter them.

Yearning swayed her, yearning to crouch at his side, to take his battered head in her arms and spread the healing balm of love on every bruise and cut. But there was a certain hardness in Benham's expression which fended her off.

Now he laughed harshly. "You may have him," he muttered. "He's paid to me, the dog."

"I may have him?" stammered Ellen. "I don't know what you mean."

"You should," was Benham's curt reply. "When the fight was coming my way you cried for me to stop. I did, and it gave him a chance to get the upper hand for a time." He pointed to his eyes. "He did his best to blind me—and nearly succeeded. But I beat him—with these," and he lifted his two hard fists. "It was a satisfaction long over-due, but it was worth the waiting. Yes—I'm through with him. And he's yours."

Ellen's thoughts were chaotic. What madness was this? True, she had cried out when Benham was winning, but she had not meant it to save Deteroux from punishment. It was just the eternal woman in her voicing an overwhelming repugnance to the utter brutality of it all. And—and Benham thought she had cried out to have Deteroux.

Again Benham looked at her. "Was there anything else?" he asked curtly. "Despite your scorn and pride you have not hesitated to accept favors from a—half-breed. Remember that all your life, will you? That even a half-breed can be generous."

"You—you don't know what you are saying," Ellen sobbed. "I ought to." He laughed grimly. "I'm giving you back your own words."

He stood erect now, his splendid chest and shoulders gleaming wetly. "Come, mother," he said to the old squaw. And the two of them walked away.

When Ellen Mackay finally went back to the scene of the fight she was again weary and apathetic. Her face was pale, and her eyes were lack-lustre, and subdued. She moved slowly.

Deteroux was sitting with his back to a tree. His hands were clasped between his knees, and Ellen could see the gleam of polished metal encircling his wrists.

He flashed a quick glance at

her, and then his gaze bent to the ground again. His face was sullen and defiant. Old Moosac was crouched near him, his beady eyes inscrutable.

Ellen looked around for Whitlow, and discovered the trooper in animated conversation with several sullen, frightened Indians. His pencil and notebook were at work again.

Whitlow, spied her, put his notebook away, and came hurrying up. His face was glowing with satisfaction. "My lucky day," he announced triumphantly. "I've got Deteroux where I want him now, and no mistake. Where is Benham?"

"In one of the tepees, I imagine," she answered dispiritedly. "When can we leave for Edson?"

"In an hour or two. I want to get Benham's evidence also to make my case against Deteroux unshakable."

Whitlow went away on his search and Ellen moved down to the canoe and crouched down in it, her back to the camp, her brooding eyes sweeping across the shimmering waters of the lake.

A great bitterness gnawed at her—a tremendous disappointment. She was not angry at John Benham. She knew no shame over the fact that he had virtually dismissed her.

She had gone to him in all honesty, intending to apologize fully for the wrong she had done him, and he, in equal honesty, had repulsed her. The blame was hers. She knew it, and admitted it fully.

In some ways triumph also was hers. Her father's future and reputation were assured. The facts were clear in that respect. She had the satisfaction of knowing that her efforts had indirectly moved to this culmination.

That those same efforts had moved to render her the possessor of unrequited love, merely proved the irony of life. And there lay the great hurt.

Ellen went back in memory to her first meeting with Benham. How arrogant and sure of herself she had been in approaching the free-trader with her request to be taken along on the trip north. And how hurt and humiliated she felt when Benham curtly refused. It was hurt pride as much as anything that had caused her to seek old Pat McClatchney's help in stowing away on the Benham boats. Ellen, for whose favor men had vied with one another in jumping to her bidding, now had to plead for the favor of this man and was compelled to force herself upon his care when the favor was refused.

She remembered her tremulous fear when they had passed the cascades and she had brazenly revealed herself, certain in the knowledge that Benham could not return her to Athabasca Landing without serious delay and loss to himself.

Benham had been very kind and a gentleman when he discovered how she had thwarted him through the help of Pat McClatchney and Pierre Buschard. He had said no words of blame and had not scolded or raged at her as many others would have done. She had offered to pay for her transportation and he had abruptly refused. She remembered now that a certain glint of triumph that shone in his eyes as he told her, "My payment is assured. I'll exact my pound of flesh."

Ellen had not understood then, but she did now. Benham's pound of flesh had been paid by the flare of anger and the deep humiliation of her father when the old factor learned of his indebtedness to the man he hated most in all the world—John Benham, the free trader. That had been the payment Benham expected, his revenge for her impertinence in stowing away on his boats, but the payment had been far heavier than that since she had discovered in her heart the deep regard she held for him. It was love—love almost at first sight, she now realized.

Continued Next Issue

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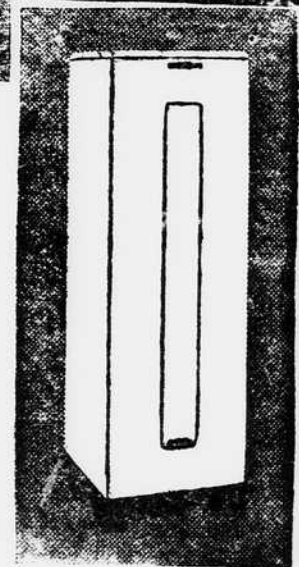
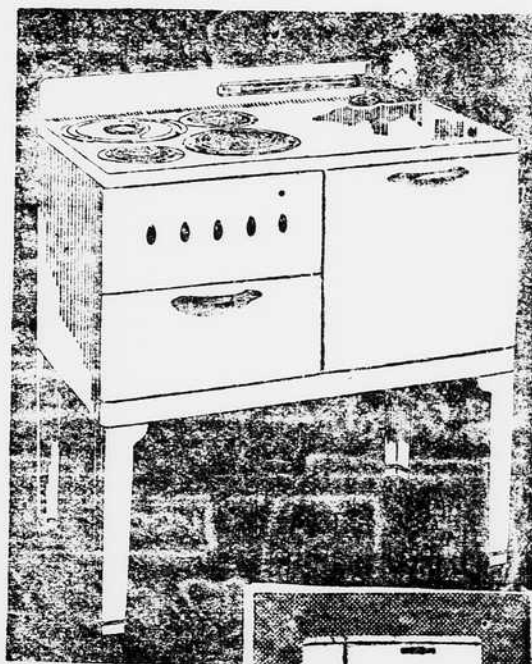
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