"Ellen Casts Her Lot"

By L. P. HOLMES

SIXTH INSTALLMENT

SYNOPSIS: Ellen Mackay, on her way from school at Winnepeg, to join her father at Fort Edson, misses the boat by which she was to travel. Hearing that another boat is 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 employee 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 confront him with her proof of his villainy. It develops that Benham is innocent, and the liquor is being supplied by Deteroux:

"It—it is wonderful," breathed Ellen ecstatically knowing what it would mean to Angus Mackay to have this big shipment of high grade furs come into his post. "And I pledge myself to see that the tribes are cared for. But how are you going to get the cargoes to the fort?"

"You'll see," chuckled Whitlow. He turned to the breed again. "Where is Deteroux now?"

The breed waved an arm upstream "M'sieu Deteroux, she's at dat Cree Camp on Mink Lake."

Whitlow shot a swift glance at Ellen, who distinctly paled at this information. "Was John Benham there also?" demanded Whitlow.

The breed shrugged and shook his head. "I no see him."

"Very well," nodded Whitlow curtly. He unearthed a notebook and pencil from his pack and wrote a swift message to Angus Mackay. This he tore out and folded. Then, starting with the breed, he went slowly over the entire crew of the boats. Each man he stopped in front of he stared at closely and scribbed swiftly in the notebook.

The men were uncomfortable, nervous, and they would not meet his eyes. When he had made a complete round Whitlow came back to the breed and handed to him the note he had written Angus MacKay.

"You will now head directly to Fort Edson," he ordered. "These furs you will turn over to Factor Mackay there, and also deliver this message I have given you. Then you will remain at the fort until I return. If one fur is missing or if any man in your crew it not there to report to me—let him beware."

And Whitlow tapped his notebook.

The breed nodded vehemently.—"She's been as you say, M'sieu."

"Good. Now start immediately."

The York boats were soon on the way, the oars flashing in the sun. Ellen watched them until they were around the bend and out of sight. Then she looked at Whitlow.

"Do you think they will really deliver the furs?" she asked doubtfully "What's to keep them from going straight on and never showing up again?"

Whitlow laughed.

"This. I've worked long among the tribes and with the ignorant rivermen, Miss Mackay. If there is anything they fear it is to see you apparently writing down something about them.

"Perhaps some of the more superstitious ones feel you are casting some spell over them. At any rate, they do not understand, and what they do not understand they fear. So they'll be there—every man jack of them, and the furs will be delivered quite safely. You can depend on that."

"But there still remains—" Ellen left the sentence unfinished.

"Deteroux" snapped Whitlow, "I'll tend to him now. Come Moosac, we must hurry."

Again the canoe shot upstream, Whitlow and Moosac driving it onward with smooth, powerful, sweeping strokes. The stout maple paddle blades creaked and hissed, and the crystal water of the river surged about the canoe in foaming whirls.

Ellen, crouching tensely in her place, thrilled with a subdued but powerful excitement. She exulted hugely in the knowledge that John Benham was now exonerated from all stigma, and she knew abysmal shame that she should ever have believed him capable of criminal operations. But she was eager to see Deteroux in the custody of the law.

Two miles above where the York boats had been met, the canoe shot thru the last tugging stretch of the river and glided out upon the emerald, flawless surface of Mink Lake. A mile away to the north-east a sloping, tree-clad point jutted. In the still air just beyond the point hovered a pale cloud of smoke.

Ellen pointed. "There is the camp," she stated.

The cadence of the paddle quickened. Ellen glanced over her shoulder at Moosac. The old Chippawayan had not noticed her survey. His eyes were fixed on that column of smoke, and a strange change had come over him.

Expression showed into his wrinkled, brown face. No longer did it seem flat and stupid. Instead, by some strange force of inner excitement, each feature seemed to have sharpened. There was a new cast to his head. Something of the cruel, rapacious look of an eagle was there.

The old man's lips were moving. He seemed to be chanting silently. Despite herself, Ellen shivered.

It seemed to Ellen that in no time at all their canoe was rounding the point. The hoarse, unrecognizable murmur of many voices reached her ears. Then the intervals of the tepees she caught sight of a surging group.

No one noticed them as they landed. All eyes were on two crouching men who paddled about one another on moccasined feet. These men were stripped to the waist, their faces were bloody, their gleaming torsos splotched and carmined, and they were drviing out terrific blows at one another with knotted fists.

One was John Benham—the other Bernard Deteroux!

Ellen Mackay never knew how she reached the inner edge of that crowding circle about the two fighters. But she was there, and then it seemed that utter physical paralysis gripped her.

Only her eyes were free, and she stared unwinking. She saw Benham whip in a slashing punch which made a gory wreck of Deteroux's lips, and when Benham leaped in to follow up his advantage she saw Deteroux drive him reeling back with a wicked blow over the heart.

For a moment they seemed to rest, circling each other constantly, their eyes blazing with utter hatred; their mashed lips peeled back in animal snarls.

Then they closed again with a tatoo of smashing fists. Body to body they stood locked, motionless except for the knotting and crawling muscles of their shoulders, and their short, deep panting for hard-won breath.

They were magnificent brutes. Like his face, Deteroux's torso was bronzed and coppery. Against it Benham's skin was startlingly white, gleaming like marble. Something caught in Ellen's throat, and her eyes misted as she saw the great livid bruises Deteroux's iron fists had wrought on that white skin.

If anything, Deteroux held the advantage of height and bulk. The dimensions of his shoulders were terrifying, and the knotted muscles across the back of them made him seem almost hunched.

On the other hand, Benham's muscles were long and smooth, and even to Ellen's tutored eye there was a lithe speed in his movements that his opponent lacked.

The fighters ripped apart as tho by mutual consent, then stood toe to toe, slugging with a wild, ferocious abandon. The spat of fists on hard flesh seemed as sharp and clear as the blows of an axe.

The flurry slackened, and it was John Benham who gave back. Deteroux, his feet wide apart and leaning slightly forward, seemed as immovable as a giant rock.

As his opponent slipped away from him, Deteroux gave vent to a rasping snarl and leaped forward. Benham, poised and ready, drove him back with another crushing blow to the mouth.

Again they seemed to rest a moment, then both sprang anew to the conflict, and again they stood with locked arms and writhing muscles.

Time edged on. The fighters seemed tireless. Their blows were still terrible, club-like. Ellen managed to tear her eyes away for a moment, and her swift, searching glance saw Whitlow standing at her side, his eyes cold and gleaming with intent on the fighters. At last Ellen managed to shake off the paralysis which had frozen her body. She gripped Whitlow's arm.

"Stop them," she cried. "Oh—stop them!"

Whitlow did not even hear her.

With a little cry of despair, Ellen shrank away, and her eyes went back to the conflict like steel drawn to a magnet. She was just in time to see Deteroux explode into a mad cataclysm of ferocious movement. His arms whirled, and he flung Benham from him like a child.

Then he charged in with flailing fists. They crashed into Benham's face and jaw with crushing force. Benham toppled back, his head rolling.

A sigh went thru the watching circle, a circle of savage faces gleaming with the stark madness of combat. It seemed as tho Benham could not elude or recover from that berserk charge. He was bent back helplessly, and his knees were sagging.

Abruptly he caught himself, ducked into a crouch and sidestepped. Deteroux, unable to halt his charge, lunged past. And Benham smashed him under the ear with a blow which whirled the bigger man half off his feet.

Now it was Benham's turn to charge, and this time Deteroux gave way, lunging blindly from side to side in a futile attempt to avoid the rapier blows that were cutting his face into a bloody mask.

Revulsion gripped Ellen. She felt nauseated sick. The stark brutishness of it all cast a dreadful spell over her. The hoarse, gasping, snarling breathing of the fighters, their bloody, swollen features, their grim, hate-filled, blood-rimmed eyes—it was a nightmare picture to the sensitive girl.

"Stop them," she cried again, her voice shrill and hysterical. "Oh—won't somebody stop them!"

One person in all the group heard her. And that person was John Benham. In the midst of his advantage he stiffened, and his hands dropped at his sides. His head swung on his shoulders and his bloodshot eyes rested full on Ellen's white face.

For just a moment the madness of conflict seemed to fall from him. He relaxed. And in that moment Deteroux was upon him like a pouncing panther.

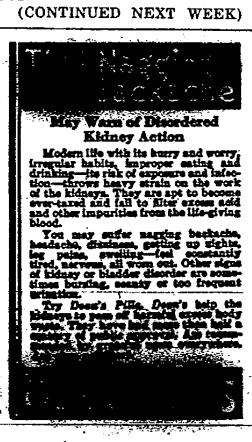
Dimly Ellen heard Whitlow's sharp cry of warning. Then she saw Deteroux's great paws wrap about John Benham's head, and saw Deteroux's steely thumbs dig into his opponent's eyes.

A gasp of sheer agony broke from Benham's lips. A shudder rippled thru his body, and he gave way slowly, tearing frantically at Deteroux's wrists. Someone was shouting in Ellen's ear. It was Whitlow, and his face was white and accusing.

"You little fool!" he raged. "Now Deteroux will blind the boy—he'll blind him! And it's your fault."

Ellen's world reeled. John Benham's eyes, those clear, flawless eyes—helpless now before Deteroux's ferocious gouging. And her cry had made Benham drop his guard. She began to sob, little breathless sobs. "God!" she whispered. "Please—God!"

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)



TELL ME AN INDIAN STORY

Dr. E. A. Bates, Cornell

CAN CROWS COUNT?

The old crows were angry because they could no longer find corn in the cleared field beyond the village. After a diligent search, one crow reported that the corn was now hanging in long braids outside the bark cabins of the village.

The next morning at sunrise the crows gathered in the village and awoke everybody with their loud caws of joy as they started to eat the corn.

So the Indians decided to punish the thieves and built a house of boughs in the center of the village, and secreted in it three hunters, ready for the crows' visit at next sunrise.

But the wise old crows saw the bough house and kept flying high above it. To fool the birds, one hunter left for home; but still the crows stayed high, for they knew there were two more in the house. Then the second hunter left, and finally the third. The crows then swooped down and started to have a feast but the whole village gathered and chased the crows away with sticks and stones.

Hard pressed for a solution, the oldest hunter was asked how the villagers could trap the crows and he instructed them to secret four hunters in the house of boughs. Morning came and first one hunter, than a second, and finally the third left the bough house. At that the crows darted for the corn but the fourth hunter shot two crows and they never bothered the village again.

When asked why his plan worked, the oldest hunter replied that crows can count up to three, but not more than three, and many Indians believe this is still true today.

Tomatoes home-canned either by the cold or hot-packed method lose little or no vitamin C, recent studies show.

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DISH FOR THIS WEEK

Three different kinds of foods—fresh tomatoes, lima beans and lamb—combine well into this casserole dish suggested by the New York State College of Home Economics:

Lamb, Lima Bean, Tomato Casserole

1½ pounds of lamb or mutton.
¼ cup of flour.
3 tablespoons of drippings, or bacon fat.
1 cup of boiling water.
1 teaspoon of salt.
⅛ teaspoon of pepper.
2 cups of stewed tomatoes.
2 cups of fresh lima beans.

Use uncooked meat from the neck or breast or left-over meat from any part; cut it in one-inch cubes, roll these in flour and saute them in drippings until they are browned; then add the water and seasonings, and simmer about two hours, or until the meat is tender. Less time will be required if left-over meat is used.

Add the tomatoes and beans, bring the mixture to a boil and turn it into a casserole. Bake it, covered, in a moderate oven (about 350 degrees F.) for about one-half hour, or until the beans are soft. Approximate yield: six portions.

A suggested supper menu is: lamb, lima bean, tomato casserole, fresh vegetable salad, whole wheat bread and butter, fresh fruit, milk for the children, and coffee, tea or milk for the adults.

Customer: "Why, the sleeves of this coat are a mile too long."

Tailor: "How much shall I take off, sir?"

Customer: "Oh, about half an inch."

Agrigraphs

Uncle Ab says don't be afraid of being scared, but never show it.

Forty ministers and their wives attended the recent summer school at Cornell for town and country ministers.

Growers in Eastern U. S. are making an effort to standardize the dimensions and content of apple boxes.

Holstein cows outnumber all other breeds combined in New York State, but their importance is decreasing as cows with higher-testing milk have increased, a Cornell study reveals.

Research, followed by extension teaching, has placed poultry keeping second only to dairying in New York State. The average production to the bird is 118 eggs, and flock averages of 200 eggs are not uncommon.

Elsie's Beau (to her young brother): "Is Elsie your oldest sister?"

Young Brother: "Yep."

Elsie's Beau: "And who comes after her?"

Young Brother: "You and two other guys."

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