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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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# CONVOYS COURAGEOUS

by Samuel  
Alexander  
White

Author of "The Call of the Crimson Star," "The Void Spaces," etc.

**T**HE yellow slip of paper was the last despatch in the bundle of despatches that had come by canoe courier to the Little Company's, otherwise known as Gregory and McLeod's, fur station of Huron Post, situated just where the deltas of the Wahnapitae and French Rivers mingled to pour together into the great reservoir of Lake Huron.

The despatch had come there direct from the headquarters of the firm in Montreal and Angus Murray the agent in charge took it up mechanically, glancing at it in the usual routine, expecting that he had to do with beaver returns, post supplies or some other matter of the inland fur trade.

But as he glimpsed its contents he stopped, bending over his counter in the store and reading it carefully, eagerly, triumphantly. His hand trembled as he held it, his eye gleamed and he drew breath with an audible exclamation. For it was a despatch to stir the blood of any fur trader as it ran:

You will proceed at once from Huron Post to the Falls of St. Mary to convoy, through the North West Fur Company's settlement of the Sault, our furs which are bound down from our Lake Superior station of Grande Portage to Montreal on our fur sloop *Beaver*. You will receive there from the *Beaver*; also a passenger Jacquemine Stewart daughter of James Stewart our agent at Grande Portage and bring both passenger and furs on to Montreal by canoe.

Times are so troublesome among the competing companies in the West and the North Westers are occupying Grande Portage in such force and threatening to close it as North West ground that he deems it safer to send his daughter out to Montreal. In this connection you may look for opposition from the North West Fur Company and also from the Hudson's Bay Company. We have learned that the North West Fur Company is sending in

Roland Du Vivier from here to intercept our furs en route.

Whether he knows of Stewart's plans we have not been able to ascertain, but the chances are that his agents have let him know and that he intends to intercept more than the furs. As you perhaps are aware, he has an inordinate interest in the girl and is a man who will go to any extremes. Also, we are informed on good authority that the Hudson's Bay Company has commissioned Fletcher Graydon their agent on the Wahnapitae to travel south to Lake Huron and west to the Sault on the same mission. Both of these men may make a good deal of trouble if you do not reach Sault Ste. Marie first to meet the fur sloop, so leave Huron Post the moment our Montreal brigades arrive. The brigades themselves will not be far behind this despatch.

Gregory & McLeod.  
THE LITTLE COMPANY.

It was a bold and risky mission to be entrusted to even the oldest of the Little Company's post keepers, and what thrilled Murray so much was the fact that out of all their tried agents he had been selected for the task. What was the reason, he wondered? Was it his proximity to the Sault, the energy he had shown always in conserving the fur, or his known interest in the *Beaver's* passenger Jacquemine Stewart?


Daughter of one of the partners of the Little Company, perhaps the most beautiful of the many beauties of Montreal, she was the idol of the servants of the corporation, and of all the Little Company men who would spring to her service at a call none was more ready to emperil his life for her than Murray himself. He had not half the years of some of the keepers in the Little Company, but the truth seemed plain that his record in the firm had told.

A clean, trim, eighteen-year old Highland lad, son of a clansman and second cousin of a

chief, he had sailed from Stornoway in the Isle of Lewis in 1783 to seek a greater opportunity in the new world than the old world promised to afford.

In Montreal he enrolled himself with the Little Company in preference to the North-West Company and served his apprenticeship so well for two years in the counting-house of Gregory and McLeod that he became one of the bourgeois or partners of the firm and entered into the proud possession of his allotted company shares.

More than that, he had been promoted to the inland trade and appointed to the station of Huron Post, and now he was going as supreme in command of the Little Company's brigades to champion their interests in the North West hive of the Sault.

 THE command was not to delay a moment, and even as Murray finished reading the despatch he commenced his preparations for departure, putting his papers away in order, giving his chief trader directions for the running of the post in his absence, selecting equipment and calling out additional canoeemen whom he proposed to take along with their craft.

Huron Post lay on the traveled canoe route to Montreal. The courier who carried the despatch had set out ahead that morning down the French River, and although he had paddled swiftly there were mighty paddlers behind. It could not be long before they would arrive, and Murray ordered his chief trader to make speed in all things.

"Hurry the packing," he urged. "Quick or they will be here before—listen! There is their canoe song now."

Faintly at first they caught the chanting of the Little Company brigades singing in unison among the island channels far up the mouth of the French. Then the chanting grew in volume, echoing from moss-wrapped rock to moss-wrapped rock, and the next moment the brigades burst en masse out of the channel.

Half a dozen of them Murray counted, thirty-six canoes carrying a total of over two hundred canoeemen, and his eye glistened as he glimpsed the brawn of the men he was chosen to command. The pick of the Ottawa voyageurs were they, trained *coureurs des bois*, driving great birch-bark craft piled with trade goods and supplies to be exchanged for the fur from the West at the assembly point of the Sault.

Heavily laden as they were, they dashed up to Huron Post at racing speed, back-watering with foaming paddles and raising the blades in salute. From the foremost canoe the Ottawa brigade leader, Joseph Chartrain, stepped out and with a dramatic gesture whipped his bills of lading from the pocket of his red flannel shirt and handed them to Murray.

"*Mon Dieu*, but we be here at last an' now you be in charge instead of me," he cried in greeting, his white teeth showing as an ecstatic smile wreathed his brown face. "*Oui*, an' I'm ver' glad of dat for de Nor' Westaires heel us ver' close all de way from Montreal."

"Ah-hah, Chartrain!" exclaimed Murray. "So you had friction on the river-route, then?"

"Ba gar, *oui*," breathed Chartrain, "dere's bickerin' every day an' sometimes so bitter I'm be afraid she'll come to de open fight an' I'll be lose ma cargoes, 'fore I be get here."

"What strength have the North Westers?" Murray asked him.

"Seex brigades, same as ourselves, an' dey're keen for fight. All picked crews, *aussi*. *Mon Dieu*, dere—be look for yourself."

Chartrain whirled, his eagle-beaked, weather-wrinkled countenance alert, his huge corded hand, broad as a paddle blade, pointing suddenly from the shore over the heads of the canoeemen in his massed brigades, and Murray, staring up-river in the indicated direction, saw the North West Fur Company's brigades swing through the channel.

Hard in the wake of the Little Company men they came, plying their paddles with vigorous strokes that made their huge Rabiscaw canoes leap ahead like things alive. Timing their strokes to swift measure, they roared out their river songs at the top of their lungs, drawing up abruptly beside the Little Company brigades before Huron Post in a picturesque fleet.

A mighty horde, Montreal Pork Eaters, Ottawa river-men, Iroquois Indians, they greeted their late rivals on the river-way with a voluminous shout, and their leader, Roland Du Vivier, stood up in his craft to hail Murray on the landing. A dashing figure he made in his gold-laced uniform as one of the head officials of the North West Company, one of the powerful lords of Beaver Hall, and he carried the pride of his position on his insolent face.

Handsome he poised, his face with the piquant cast of a woman's, abnormally broad at the cheek-bones and abnormally narrow at the chin, so that when he smiled and twisted his black waxed mustache in two fine points he reminded Murray of some old courtier of France bearing the sword of an ancient empire.

"*Bon jour*, Monsieur Murray, *bon jour*," he greeted with easy ceremony, "a lusty lot of Little Company men you have here. Who has charge of them on to the Sault? That slave-driver Chartrain, I suppose?"

"No, I have charge of them myself, Du Vivier," Murray informed him bluntly, "so if you run foul of us you know with whom you are dealing."

Du Vivier's somber eyebrows, black and straight as if they had been painted on his skin with charcoal, lifted in suspicion at Murray's announcement. He knew that a canoe courier

in Chartrain's fleet had come on ahead to Huron Post bearing despatches, and he guessed that they would contain orders for the Huron Post keeper to add what canoe strength he could to the already strong Montreal brigades of the Little Company.

The settlement of Sault Ste. Marie was North West ground, and it would be but a natural precaution for the Little Company to travel in what force they could muster, but the presence of Murray with the fleet was quite another matter. Why should he leave the post to which he was appointed unless he had some information about the designs of his rivals?

Du Vivier wondered if it was possible that Murray knew his mission or had news that the first lady of the Little Company was traveling east. He wondered but wondered swiftly, versatile actor enough to conceal his thoughts and laugh unconcernedly at Murray's challenge.

"*Dieu*, yes, that is a good thing to know," he returned, ignoring the challenge. "And by all I hear, you are not the only one I may run foul of. What about the Hudson's Bay Company? Their actions concern us both, and the word flies in Montreal that they are going to take a hand this year at the Sault. Have their canoes come down the Wahnapiatae River yet?"

"They haven't passed Huron Post that I have seen," Murray told him. "Still for all that they may happen along any minute, for the June high water has just gone down and Fletcher Graydon always times his voyaging well on the run of the floods."

"*Diable*, but you never spoke a truer word than that," cried Du Vivier. "What did you say? He times it well indeed. For see yonder, they are coming down the Wahnapiatae delta now."

THIS time from the northward another fleet burst into view and the massed brigades of the Little Company and the North West Company saw over a score of canoes with blood-red stars upon their bows shoot out of the Wahnapiatae's main channel. In a blaze of color they flew, the paddlers all strikingly dressed in vivid leggings, fringed sashes, tasseled caps of brilliant hues, old country men enlisted from overseas, native Crees and Ojibways, recruited from the Hudson's Bay district, and their shouted hail, half greeting, half war-cry, to the brigades of the other companies rumbled like the roll of thunder.

"*Pro Pelle Cutem!*" they yelled. "Skin for skin!"

"*Bon jour, mes camarades,*" welcomed Du Vivier, undisturbed by the Hudson's Bay men's noisy advent. "You have come out of a lonely wilderness stretch but you will not be

lonely now. There is plenty of company here. Eh, Monsieur Graydon?"

The Hudson's Bay Company leader, Graydon, stepped out on the landing of Huron Post, his tall aristocratic figure poising a full six feet in height. Son of an English gentleman, one of the black sheep whom the aristocracy were accustomed to ship across the seas for the Ancient and Honorable Company to mold into the semblance of staid men, he bore the marks of his breeding and his sinning.

On his patrician face, waxen-clear except over the cheek-bones where the crimson blotches of too much drink showed through, was stamped the hall-mark of independence, and from under the waves of his brown hair shone great steel-blue eyes born to command. He nodded easily with a graceful swing of his head and shoulders that embraced both Du Vivier and Angus Murray.

"So it seems," he observed calmly lighting his pipe and spraying the smoke about, his eyes all the while shooting here and there and everywhere in appraisal of the rival brigades.

"You are both bound for the Sault, I take it."

"*Oui,*" Du Vivier assured him, "I am en route from Montreal and I have paused here only to greet my friend Monsieur Murray whom I am delighted to learn is likewise bound for the Sault."

"And I," put in Murray, scorning hypocrisy, "have little time for greetings or anything else at present. I was just going to launch fresh canoes to go on with the Little Company's Montreal brigades when Du Vivier's fleet arrived. I hope neither of you will think me inhospitable if I proceed with my plans."

"Not at all," returned Graydon quickly. "I am somewhat in a hurry myself and I only pulled up here to let my crews breathe themselves and to see if you had any rum."

"I have none but the kegs in transit in those canoes," Murray informed him.

"Will you sell some?" Graydon demanded eagerly.

"They're not mine to sell," Murray pointed out. "They're bound from Montreal to the Little Company posts in the West and I can't take them out of the bills of lading."

A shadow of disappointment darkened Graydon's fine face, and Murray thought he saw the crimson cheek blotches burn a little brighter. The Hudson's Bay man turned to Du Vivier.

"What about you, Du Vivier?" he asked. "It's North West daily fare, isn't it?"

Du Vivier shrugged his shoulders and laughed lightly.

"With the regular river crews it is," he admitted, "but I am on a special mission and carry no cargo, you see. The freighting brigades have not come through from Montreal yet and I could not weight myself down with

the stuff. "I am sorry, Monsieur Graydon. I should like nothing better than to broach a keg with you, but I haven't a drop in the Rabiscaws."

Graydon nodded gloomily, his eyes straying to the big Little Company canoe which contained their supply for the West. In it were four dozen kegs, luring bait for any liquorless brigade, and, as if to ensure its safety, Graydon and Du Vivier noted Murray placing it in the center of the massed canoes as he arranged the departure.

"Take good care of it, Murray," cautioned Graydon with a mirthless laugh.

"*Oui*," urged Du Vivier with a hint of mockery, "go ahead and launch your canoes with all haste. *Dieu*, yes, and make the best use of your time for that is what I intend to do myself. You know, in the fur trade it is every man for himself and the devil take the lagards."

Du Vivier left his own craft, at the same time ordering all of his men ashore and telling off a dozen of them to gather wood, light a fire and boil over it a big copper kettle full of coffee. In a few minutes the kettle was steaming and, lying at full length on the rocks to stretch their cramped limbs under the warm June sunlight, the North West canoemen drank huge drafts of the fragrant liquid as they snatched their midday lunch. At Graydon's direction the Hudson's Bay men did likewise, kindling their fire some little distance from that of the North Westers and maintaining a sort of private bivouac upon the open lake shore.

Murray meanwhile had despatched the Little Company canoemen into Huron Post itself to sit down to the dinner the chief trader had ordered to be prepared for them. While they ate, Murray himself was busily engaged with the canoes, directing the post men in the unloading of what supplies were to remain here, apportioning the rest among the other craft, adding his own equipment and launching his own canoes.

To the Montreal fleet he added a seventh brigade manned by a band of fifty men made up from Huron Post. As the Montreal men poured out of the post after their hasty meal he had everything in readiness, and they launched off without delay in a compact fleet across the broad waters of Lake Huron.



NOR were the North Westers and Hudson's Bay Company men long behind him. They bolted the remains of their lunch and followed close in Murray's wake, driving hard between wild Manitoulin and the wilder North Shore for the settlement of the Sault. It was a three-cornered race, and there was little to choose between the fleets, but the advantage given by Murray's addition of the fresh men of Huron Post was never lost.

With a few miles to spare over his rivals he worked through the North Channel, into the mouth of St. Mary's River and on toward the ancient settlement that lined its banks. East and west of it for two hundred miles stretched the North Shore wilderness of Lake Superior and Lake Huron, unbroken save by few and far-spaced trading posts like Michipicoten, and through it flowed all the fur from the West on its way to Montreal.

Contested ground it had always been, site of the first French trader's battle for its possession with the Iroquois, site of Marquette's mission, goal of De Lussion's search for copper mines. The Iroquois had triumphed for a time in 1689, torn down the cross the French had erected and razed their posts to the rocks only to lose possession again in 1750 in the face of French fortifications that were built behind palisades on a grant of land six leagues square. Behind these new ramparts such famed figures as Cadeau and Alexander Henry had held sway, checking Hudson's Bay Company trade and endeavoring to smother such independent companies as the Gregory and McLeod corporation.

All the Little Company was able to maintain there was a single cabin, hardly dignified enough to merit the name of "post" which was nevertheless bestowed upon it, kept by Henry Garden and used chiefly in Summer as a way station for the brigades where they could store goods for freighting by sloop westward over Lake Superior.

It was Garden's business to meet the Montreal brigades and have his cabin open for use, and as Murray paddled in to land below the rambling log structure he saw Garden running down hotfoot toward him.

"We're here first, Henry," he greeted, "but there are North West and Hudson's Bay brigades not far behind. Give me the news quickly. Any word of our sloop *Beaver*?"

The Sault trader, a rangy woodsman smoketanned to the hue of leather with hair like an Indian's falling straight and black to his shoulders, removed his pipe and the words he spoke in his huge voice shot out like a bomb.

"The North Westers have captured her," he announced without a quiver of expression on his leathery countenance.

"Captured her?" exploded Murray. "Where? How? Who gave you that news?"

"It was just after she left Grande Portage for this place," Garden explained. "The North Westers despatched their furs in two sloops, *Otter* and *Lynx*, and the pair of them fell upon the *Beaver* and boarded her on Superior. A band of Mackinaw men bound down in canoes saw the fight and brought me the word."

"Condemn them!" Murray snarled. "And the *Beaver's* crew, her furs, her—passenger?"

"The North Westers set the crew ashore,"

the trader answered. "The furs and passenger they kept aboard, so that there are now three North Wester sloops instead of two. I sighted them at sunset becalmed five miles out in the lake."

Murray turned his eyes down-stream and in the distance, driving up from the St. Mary's mouth, he glimpsed the oncoming brigades of the North Westers and the Hudson's Bay Company.

"Well, Garden, there's the man who planned that stroke," he observed bitterly. "Du Vivier, yonder. But the game isn't played out yet, and by Heavens before morning there will be three Little Company sloops instead of one. Becalmed, you said? Then hurry and get this stuff unloaded before the night wind starts to rise."



**SWIFTLY** the Little Company men fell to work, all too eager to make ready for the clash with the North Westers at which Murray had hinted. They had all the trade goods unloaded and were down to the rum when Du Vivier's and Graydon's brigades drove up and beached together upon the river frontage that skirted the tumultuous rapids a quarter of a mile above Henry Garden's cabin.

"Ho, Graydon!" hailed Murray. "I think I can fix that matter of the rum now."

At his cry Graydon came running down the shore.

"What in the — name do you mean?" he spluttered suspiciously. "You told me at Huron Post you couldn't let me have any. Now you tell me you can."

"Things have changed a little since I left Huron Post," explained Murray, leaning over the kegs in the big birch-bark to hide a grin.

"This liquor was to have gone aboard the Little Company sloop for Grande Portage, but there isn't any Little Company sloop at present. The North Westers have captured her, Garden tells me."

"The — they have!" laughed Graydon, to whom this exploit was news indeed. "I thought I might have had a chance at her cargo myself."

"You're too late," lamented Murray. "The North Westers have beaten us both this time and interrupted my freighting. I'll have to leave my trade goods lower down the river. Garden can make a secret cache of them in the woods, but there's no use trying to cache rum around the Sault. You know that. With hundreds of thirsty Northmen about it, would be only an incentive to search and pillage. So you had better take what you want, Graydon, and I'll carry the rest of it back."

Graydon's eyes glittered at the unexpected opportunity.

"I'll take it all and save you the trouble of

freighting it back," he proffered. "Name your figure for it."

"The firm of Gregory & McLeod will do that," Murray told him. "We'll bill the Hudson's Bay Company from headquarters."

"If you do, they'll never pay," laughed Graydon.

"The risk is mine," declared Murray. "There are your kegs."

With a vim the Hudson's Bay men rolled the kegs away up the rocks to where Graydon's camp-ground touched on Du Vivier's, and as the dark descended they could note the kegs being broached across their fires and the North Westers coming across to hobnob with them.

"It's working," Murray nodded to Chartrain and Garden in their own camp below the rambling log cabin. "Pretty strong stuff, too, to guzzle as they're doing. They won't bother you now, Henry, if you go by alone. Slip over the portage and take canoe at the other end to keep watch on the sloops. If the wind rises to let them come in before midnight give us fair warning."

For an hour or two the Little Company men breathed themselves, lying at ease after their strenuous paddle and listening to the sound of the revel above them. Then when the tumult subsided Murray told off one hundred men of his two hundred and fifty-odd to shift the canoes to the head of the North West canal. The rest he took with him, leading off quietly along the scarred river frontage.

"Keep out of the glow of their camp-fires," he cautioned them, nodding toward the crimson flares that starred the portage winding past the roaring rapids of St. Mary's River. "And go slow, now, till we see if they're on the watch."

Slowly, silently the Little Company men crept up near the big camp below the palisaded post, but no North West sentinel challenged them from camp or post. In the fire glare they could see that the gates were open, the buildings and yard inside deserted for the *boisson* on the beach. Murray raised his head over the flat rocks that rimmed the camp-ground till his eyes were on a level with the fires, and his hand fell upon his brigade leader's arm.

"By Jove, Chartrain, look here!" he urged.

The brigade leader silently raised his head alongside Murray's and the two of them gazed on as strange a camp scene as they had ever witnessed. Round the score or more of fires that had burned themselves through unattended till they were blood-red conical heaps of coals, lay the whole band of Hudson's Bay men and North Westers just as they had sunk into fuddled sleep beside the rum barrels. Sprawled in grotesque shapes, they lay in the open under the stars, either unable to reach or careless of the shelter of their upturned Rabis-caw canoes upon the shore.

Among them Murray could pick out the patrician Graydon and the dashing Du Vivier lying side by side before one of the fires, their hands clasped on the rum glasses with which they had toasted their last toast.

"They're dead to the world for an hour or two anyway, Chartrain," concluded Murray, "so we'll just spirit away their Rabiscaw canoes while they sleep. If our plans work well at the Superior end, it will kill pursuit when we come back this way again."

Treading like cats in their noiseless moccasins, the Little Company men climbed over the rocks at Murray's direction and slipped the huge birch-barks of the North Westers upon their shoulders.

"Never mind running them through the North West canal," Murray whispered. "Carry them over the portage. It will leave the canal free for our own canoes to work quietly through."



MURRAY himself in the lead, they filed off along the footpath that skirted the rapids. Between the line of white foam on the one hand and the rampart of dark rocks on the other they forged silently ahead out of range of the North West camp, past the North West store and wharf, past their canal and primitive lock that they had built to circumvent the unnavigable part of the river.

On by the corner of the palisades they stole, through the muddle of tents and cabins of the sleeping settlement of the Sault. A voyageur settlement it was, with few in the tents and cabins except the sleeping women and children.

The freighting of the fur had drained the place dry of its male population, for the Sault men lived by the packstrap and the paddle and what white men and Saulteaux canoe men were not to be accounted for among Du Vivier's band on the beach would come down with the North West fur sloops from Grande Portage.

Thus there was no opposition to be met with from the settlement proper and no one aboard to sound an alarm that might rouse the drunken North Westers and Hudson's Bay men farther down the river. Like the ghosts of the first far-faring voyageurs the Little Company men stalked in the night and reached the other end of the portage without a mishap.

There as they let the Rabiscaws slide gently into the water that was the drainage of mighty Lake Superior, Henry Garden drifted up like a phantom from off the bosom of the lake:

"What's the word, Henry?" demanded Murray in a low voice. "Have the sloops caught the breeze yet? The night wind's rising, all right. I can feel it on my face."

"Aye, it's rising and the sloops are moving," Garden confided. "They've got their breeze at last, and they're making for the river entrance. You'll have to hurry to stop their landing."

"All right," nodded Murray grimly. "Step in; men. Keep the positions you had in your own canoes. Every one ready? Dip your blades."

Under the urge of new crews but gliding lightly, quivering, leaping alive with the same old qualities of the splendid river craft that they were the Rabiscaws made a few twists and turns and shot out of the head of the St. Mary into the vaster water of Superior.

The lake was intensely dark but under the peculiar luminosity of the stars Murray could discern three sloops making in. Slowly, very slowly, so weak was the breeze, they approached the entrance to the river.

"Which is the *Beaver*?" asked Murray of Garden.

"The one in the center," the Sault trader pointed out. "See her larger sail?"

"Then that's the one I'll board myself," Murray decided. "You take the *Otter*, Henry, and you, Chartrain, the *Lynx*. Rush their crews before they get a chance to recognize us."

Straight across the bows of the oncoming vessels the Little Company men drove the big Rabiscaws, and instantly a hail came from the center sloop *Beaver* which was leading by a length.

"Rabiscaws ho!" a great voice yelled. "What fleet is that?"

"North West brigades from Montreal," answered Murray.

"Under whose command?"

"Du Vivier's," Murray shouted. "Shoot up into the wind and stand by. I'm coming aboard to see your passenger."

There was a rumble of laughter aboard the *Beaver* as the sloop obeyed, hanging in the wind with the *Otter* and the *Lynx* imitating her maneuver, while the fleet of Rabiscaws swarmed in about them. Murray laid his hands on the *Beaver's* low rail and vaulted over, one swift glance revealing Jacqueline Stewart among a half-dozen North Westers who crewed the sloop. She was half-standing, half-crouching aft amid the piled-up fur bales, and as Murray took a step toward her a long pistol flashed out in her hand.

"Don't lay a finger on me, Du Vivier," she cried sharply. "Stand just where you are."

Like some wild fairy creature of the forest she stood at bay, her gray eyes like pearls in the starshine, her tossed hair showing misty as spun gold under the woolen scarf that wrapped her head. Partly to give his own men plenty of time to board, partly to prevent the North Westers having any suspicion as to their identity he dodged low and sprang in under her guard.

He seized her bodily with his right arm, his left hand closing on her wrist and deflecting the pistol. It went off with a roar through the

sloop's canvas, and for an instant they were locked thus, her breath warm upon his face, her hair brushing his cheeks, every muscle of her tense body straining in his grip. Then as the starlight fell on Murray's face she saw that he was not Du Vivier but a man of her own company.

"Angus—Angus Murray of Huron Post," she breathed half-incredulously.

"Aye," he whispered in the ear that his lips almost touched, "you are in better hands than you thought, Miss Jacquemine. All the boarders are Little Company men. I wanted to get close enough to you to tell you this, you see."

"My goodness," she cried under her breath, "that was very gallant of you, but don't you know you took the risk of being shot?"

"I'm a good judge of distance," laughed Murray softly, "and just to hold you like this for a moment is worth the risk. But put away the pistol. You won't need it now."

He released the wrist he had pinioned and the girl slipped the weapon under her blanket cloth coat which she wore against the coolness of the Superior night.



THE North Wester who had first hailed the canoes, who seemed to Murray to be master of the sloop, had followed aft on his heels, and he laughed aloud as the pistol slipped out of sight after its futile shot.

"Ha, ha, a fiery maid, Du Vivier, *oui*, and a good mate for a bold North Wester," he grinned. "But I see you have her tamed nevertheless."

"Perhaps she's not so well tamed as you think, friend," growled Murray, wheeling on him suddenly.

He gripped as he wheeled, smothering the North Wester by sheer weight under the sudden attack, and even as they rocked and staggered back and forth in the sloop the North Westers abruptly sensed their enemies.

"*Mon Dieu*," the cry went up, "treachery, *camarades*. Little Company men aboard!"

But they cried too late. The men from Murray's section of the canoe fleet were all aboard, blackly overrunning the sloop from end to end, while Garden's and Chartrain's crews were equally swift in swarming over the *Otter* and the *Lynx*. Bitterly the North Westers fought, but they were swamped by numbers, and not even the flash of a knife, the bellow of a pistol here and there availed to clear the vessels.

"Overside with them," yelled Murray, "overside with them all."

Raging, resisting to the last, the crews of the three sloops were dumped overside into the Rabiscaws and shoved adrift without paddles. Murray, holding the master of the *Beaver* in a

wise-like grip, dropped him over last of all and sprang back to the side of Jacquemine.

"Now we'll have to make a quick run for it," he declared. "That noise will wake the settlement and the North West camp as well. Du Vivier's down yonder in person, you know, and the Hudson's Bay crowd under Fletcher Graydon besides."

"My Heavens, be quick, then," urged Jacquemine, "or we shall never get through. How is it they had no watch set for the sloops and how in the world did you steal the North Westers' Rabiscaw canoes?"

"Too much rum answers both those questions," laughed Murray. "I made them a present of a whole canoeful, and I guess there's hardly a drop left. But they're roused now, and we haven't a minute to waste."

He wheeled and hailed the *Otter* and the *Lynx* off on the starboard bow.

"Pilot the way in, Garden," he ordered. "You next with the *Lynx*, Chartrain. I'll come last with the *Beaver*."

Immediately the *Otter* and the *Lynx* came back on their course and pointed in. Murray seized the tiller of the *Beaver* and called on two good boatmen of his crew to handle the sheets. Gaining momentum with the ever increasing wind, the three sloops drifted off the lake bosom into the faster flowing river water, heeling and plunging till they crowded all together up to the landing above the St. Mary's falls.

Down came the sails with a rattle of blocks, out writhed the lashing lines and overside flew the fur bales. Like madmen the Little Company crews worked as they hurled the cargoes of the three vessels ashore, timing their vigorous heaving to the spaced roars of the cataract. Loud in the night boomed the plunging waters, but above the bellowing of the foam-crested waves rose another sound as they toiled.

"Listen, Angus," begged Jacquemine. "What's that sound?"

"Du Vivier's and Graydon's camps are awake, as I feared," interpreted Murray, turning an ear as he threw the last fur bale out on the landing.

"Quick, men, we can't let them get up and block the canal on us. We'll have to run it with this weight of fur, and we must reach it first. Everybody shoulder the bales."

The three sloops had brought down from Grande Portage two tons of fur apiece, twelve thousand pounds in all, baled in the regulation eighty-pound bales, and, each shouldering a bale, Murray's one hundred and fifty men dashed from the landing for the North West canal where their own canoes had been directed to wait.

The battle of the boarding on Superior, the shouting and the shots had wakened the settlement from sleep. Where darkness reigned



when the Little Company men first passed was now a glow of lights from tents and cabins, and amid the clamor of crying voices and slamming doors they could hear the patter of women's and children's feet as the more timid fled for the shelter of the palisaded post.

Through the clamor and the panic that prevailed on both sides of the trail, that sounded to high heaven in front of them and redoubled in their rear as they went by Murray's men came in sight of the canal, to find the canoe men who had remained by the craft flinging madly to meet them.

"Come on," they yelled. "The North Westers and Hudson's Bay men are astir. They're coming up like wolves let loose."

"All right, float your first canoe," shouted Murray, pulling Jacquemine along by the arm as he ran at top speed. "Line up the rest behind. Now, you canoe men, take the bales as they come and drop them aboard."

The whole channel, called a canal, which the North Westers used as a waterway to avoid the rapids, ran over half a mile in length and at its upper end the Little Company canoes were lined up as Murray directed. At his word they are hastily flung afloat and the canoe men stood by to receive the bales of fur from the packers.

Packer after packer came forward at a swift lope, all straining like racers under a mighty handicap, twisted their heads from the packstraps in mid-stride and let the bales fall into the hands of those waiting in the canoes to receive them. Nor did they pause as the loads were released but raced on the faster at Murray's exhortations to possess and hold the primitive lock which was the key point of the canal.

The lock itself was only six fathoms in length and no broader than a man could leap, and Murray, hastily placing Jacquemine aboard the last canoe in the line, plunged on with the packers to direct their rush.

"The first canoes will take the brunt," he called back to her over his shoulder. "You'll be safer in the rear, and I'll join you at the lock if we can break a way through."

"Ah, but be careful of yourself, Angus," breathed Jacquemine anxiously. "Please Heaven, we'll go through."

Murray waved a giant hand to reassure her and forged on with his men.

"Take both sides of the lock," he ordered them; "half of you on one side, half on the other. Chartrain, you lead the men on the south bank. I'll take the north myself."



IN THE middle distance he could see the North Westers coming, and among them he marked the men of the Hudson's Bay. These had drunk with their rivals throughout the evening, and in their muddled

minds they could see no reason why they should not fight with them when so rudely aroused from their sleep.

Fletcher Graydon was with them, running shoulder to shoulder with the lurching Du Vivier in the van, and Murray realized that the forces of both companies, albeit many of them were none too sure on their legs, were following their leaders to a man. "By Heavens, Chartrain, we're going to have our hands full, drunk as they are," he called across the water to his brigade leader on the south bank.

"The Hudson's Bay men have turned in to fight with the North Westers. See them coming yonder?"

"Ba gar, let dem come den," cried Chartrain, glorying in the approaching conflict. "We'll be smash dem bot' at once an' dat'll be save us de double fight."

Truly, every man of the Little Company forces realized that the decisive moment had arrived. There could be no drawn battle here, no compromise of any sort. Murray himself knew he must win the passage triumphantly against the combination of his rivals or else go down to bitter defeat.

And defeat meant more to him than the mere punishment of being worsted in personal encounter. It meant the loss of the Little Company fur they had recovered, the loss of the North West furs they had captured by the bold stroke, the loss of the prestige that victory would bring his company. Also, above all these, it meant the loss of Jacquemine Stewart, first lady of the Little Company and the idol of his Stornoway family.

What he had gained for her by his strategy in intercepting the fur sloops on Lake Superior would be gone in a flash if he allowed her to fall into the reckless, disreputable hands of Du Vivier. He glanced back to see how she was faring with the canoe fleet and glimpsed her kneeling in the rearmost craft steered by Henry Garden. Propped among the tumbled fur bales as the fleet flew forward, she smiled and waved her scarf.

"Success to the Little Company," she cried. Murray shook his clenched fist in air. "Aye, and down with the North Westers," he supplemented. "Down with the H. B. C."

Before he could draw breath for another word the opposing forces were upon his with upraised paddles and half-burned brands snatched from their dying camp-fires. They had divided like the Little Company men at the lower end of the lock; the Hudson's Bay forces under Graydon leaping across to the south bank, the North Westers themselves coming straight on at the heels of Du Vivier. Reckless as a brigand, drunk as a hilarious Caughnawaga canoe man, he lurched forward in a frenzy of rage, urging his retainers on with savage ferocity.

"Down with the Little Company dogs," he

shrilled, brandishing a great knotted stick with a charred end as big as a man's head. "Drive them into the canal and seize the furs and the girl. *Par Dieu*, if you let them get by I'll flog the lot of you."

Nor were the North Westers slow to obey his command under threat. Their *boisson* with the Hudson's Bay men on the beach had put them in an ugly mood, and they charged like an avalanche into the Little Company men.

It was a mighty conflict, hundreds of men struggling on both banks, and Murray on the north bank, holding back a whole quartette of North Westers with his tremendous strength, shot a glance across to see how Chartrain was faring on the opposite side.

He saw the brigade leader in the center of a horde of Hudson's Bay men, a dozen followers at his back, hewing his way with a paddle blade to the foot of the chute while the rest of his band stubbornly held the thirty-six feet of lock against assault.

Chartrain's aim was to spread the fight, to carry Graydon's strength over a longer river front and to dissipate it so as to give Murray on the north bank a better chance to rush the canoes past. Graydon, more inebriated perhaps than Du Vivier his ally of the moment but steady as a rock on his feet, anticipated Chartrain's move and tried to head it off, but he was no match for the vigorous brigade leader either in wits or in strength.

Murray saw the brigade leader meet the Hudson's Bay agent as he sprang to knit up the cleavage in his ranks, saw Chartrain's paddle blade descend on Graydon's head sending him reeling senseless on the rocks. Then he saw him no more as the gap between the whirling bodies of men closed and the fight went on afresh. Even as Graydon went down in the maze a shout arose on Murray's side.

"The canoes," was the cry. "The canoes are here."

"Hold the line, then," roared Murray. "Hold for your lives."



WITH a desperate effort the Little Company men shoved the unwieldy weight of the North Westers back from the wall of the lock. The next moment a furladen canoe shot into it, flashed past with the speed of a meteor and in the space of a paddle slip leaped out into the water of the canal.

Another and another followed, shooting by with their crews yelling wildly as they won through and back watered to a halt below to take on the men who fought for them. They were all through, all but one, the canoe, steered by Henry Garden, with Jacquemine.

Pandemonium reigned on both banks. Chartrain had beaten the Hudson's Bay men back on the south side and possessed the foot of the lock with his men, making a sort of

human gateway through which the Little Company craft locked down, but Murray on the north side, however, found himself more closely pressed. The North Westers were more numerous, and they fought with fierce intensity.

Amid all their ferocity, their pagan savagery, Du Vivier raged as chief, the baffling of his men, the sight of the Little Company canoes shooting through unobstructed sending him into a paroxysm. He cursed and struck blindly at friend and foe, tearing his way by sheer madness to the edge of the lock before the last canoe containing Jacquemine might get by. He bore down three men who tried to block him and leaned out to seize the bow of the craft.

"*Dieu*, but you do not get away after all, my little Jacquemine," he snarled.

Yet even as Du Vivier clutched the birch-bark his grip was torn away and the next instant he found himself grappling with Murray and rolling over and over on the wall of the lock. Over and down they rolled straight into the waters of the lock, and the keel of Garden's canoe rode them under as it shot in.

"My God, back water!" Jacquemine cried as the big birch-bark trembled at the shock.

She stared overside, fear in her eyes, till Murray's head broke surface.

"Angus, Angus," she breathed, putting out her hands to help draw him aboard, "it was a miracle you were not killed."

"It was my close grip on Du Vivier saved me," confessed Murray. "I could feel the bow graze my head and smite him from my arms. And, look, he doesn't rise! The St. Mary has him, God rest his reckless soul."

The abrupt fall and disappearance of their leader was a sudden check on the North Westers' fighting ardor. They fell back and scattered so that the Little Company men broke through, merged forces with Chartrain's voyageurs at the foot of the lock and rushed all together for the waiting canoes in the canal below.

Pell-mell they piled themselves in, and the craft containing Jacquemine and Murray shot down into their midst as they flashed out of the canal into the navigable section of the St. Mary's River.

"*Mon Dieu*, but dis taim de brigades of de Leetle Company win," gloated Chartrain.

"Dey win de fight, de furs, an'," his keen eyes glowing lambent in the dark as they smiled on Jacquemine and Murray, "dey win de bride."

"By Jove, Chartrain," cautioned Murray, as his hand searched for Jacquemine's in the dark, "aren't you taking quite a bit for granted? All we're certain of yet is that the Little Company has won."

"Yes, through the hearts of its brave men," lauded Jacquemine sweetly.

"No, through the hearts of its beautiful women, you mean," murmured Murray, finding the hand that did not repulse.