

THE GOVERNOR'S DAUGHTER

A Strong Romance Story of Canadian Outpost Life in the Fur-Brigade Days

By HERMAN WHITAKER

CONCLUDED FROM LAST WEEK.

WE were to have stayed in Devil's Drum another day, but Mr. Temple called at once for the ponies, and the next hour saw us speeding rapidly down a hard-packed trail. We had, as we thought, taken every precaution, but while the governor was hauling wood for our fire that night, June startled me with a sudden question:

"Did you kill him?"

"Who—why—?" I began, but stopped, blushing, under her look of scornful knowledge.

"To lie like a mission priest was a saying of his," she said. "You hid his toboggan, ran horses over his dog-tracks, and—forgot to muzzle the dogs. I could pick Beteche's howl from a thousand. Did you kill him?"

"Why—daughter?" I paltered.

"Tell me," she demanded, and because of the indefinable threat, danger that loomed in her somber eyes, I told—merely that he had come and was to be well used.

"Ah!" she breathed, and without another word fell into a happy reverie.

Nor did she mention him again—not all the way to Garry, nor on the long journey to Montreal, for she went forward at once under my charge. But the assurance at her heart warmed her look; a never dying hope. Paddling on the great lakes, Superior, Huron, Ontario, drifting on the Rainy River or other of the hundred linked streams that formed our highway, I saw her start, again and again, as at the dip of a distant paddle. And when, of nights, our camp-fire flickered, solitary red star in the vast spread of the northern woods, she would often straighten suddenly to listen.

But three weeks is a long start, and the pick of the Company's voyageurs drove our canoe. They were to receive a pound sterling apiece and ten pounds of tobacco for each week cut from the record to Montreal; so they paddled night and day by watches, rested only on the long portages from river to river, lake to lake, and so put us there in two months and a half.

We did not, however, stay there.

"Montreal can never keep him from her," the governor had paid his mettle this compliment in many anxious councils.

We drove on down the St. Lawrence in pursuance with my instructions, and doubt first troubled her face when she saw the grey city with its crowning spires draw down to a blot on our wake.

"We go to Quebec," I answered her anxious question, and having a most vivid memory of the struggle in the black night of that northern camp, I parried further questions; kept the truth under my tongue until, a week later, she awoke one morning to find—as she herself put it—that the "funny house" in which we had lodged by the waterside had "grown wings" and was flying down the river.

Current and breeze both favouring, the brig had raised Anticosti in a single night. Evening saw the wide seas slapping her bows, and how shall I describe the distress of that beautiful savage as she looked back over the grey waste of waters and learned that she was to have her schooling in England?

She made no outcry; only stood then and every succeeding day of a five weeks' voyage gazing pitifully across the widening waters. Better could she have cried, for her Indian stoicism aggravated the misery it would not let forth. But she suffered, how she suffered!

In his blind vanity civilised man has always deemed the alien savage in his midst a subject for patronising congratulation. We of the far frontier know better. Let us reverse her case; tear—say the Lady June, the governor's sister, from friends and husband and isolate her six thousand miles overseas among strangers and stranger customs? She had surely died—as her namesake nearly did—and the man who convoyed her would have been glad as I was to turn his back upon her misery.

From the first I had had my doubts, and beautiful as was the girl's new home, an old stone convent that centred amid nodding trees, sweet fields, with a caw of rook always going about its mossy walls; sympathetic as were her tutors, the gentle sisters; I could not but think of her as some poor bird, clipped and confined in a cage.

Returning, the hollow plunge of the sea under the ship's counter simulated the deep sob that fetched up through her stoicism when I left her; the wind sighed, mourned for her through the rigging. Then I knew—knew it for a crime, and I doubt not that it is so counted in the reckoning.

At that time, however, it did seem as though an inscrutable Providence either slept or was siding with the governor. Five weeks crossing the water, a fortnight in England, a month to return, with two and a half coming down from Garry, made almost a half year of steady travel, yet almost the first man I met in Montreal was poor June's breed.

I HAD been to high mass in the cathedral and positively ran into him at the corner that led down to my lodging in the little street behind the cathedral; and I was so astonished that I gaped like a fool till he spoke.

"This is a long way from Devil's Drum, father."

"Surely," I answered, adding as I recovered my wits: "When it has taken you a half-year to make it."

"You judge that I came in by the bateau last night?" He spread his hands in deprecation. "No fault of mine, but that of



The Hudson Bay Governor travelled in state.

Black Jack who chose to read the governor's orders in months instead of weeks. You will admit that I have lost little time since?"

The deep lines around his eyes testified to that just as those about his mouth spoke eloquently of inward trouble.

Swelling with sudden pity, I cried out: "To what purpose, my good man, to what purpose?"

"To recover my wife," he replied, with sombre gravity.

"But she is not here," I blurted incautiously, but thereby blinded him the more completely.

"Follow the coyote and you will find the rabbit."

Quoting this northern proverb, he walked away, returning only a shrug when I called after him: "Be advised. Do not waste your life straining after the impossible."

Yes, he passed on, but only to the next corner. I saw him watching as I turned into my quarters, nor could I move thereafter without him following, a dark sinister shadow. So closely, indeed, did he dog me, that I was unfeignedly glad when the departure of a bateau gave me passage back to Garry.

TO the young, Time drags, holding back the promise of to-morrow; to the old it races away from the bitters and sweets of yesterday; busy men, such as I, take no note of its coming or going. The greens of two springs merged in the yellows of summer, then flashed into the sudden white of as many winters, while I was making the round of my missions; during which time nothing worthy of record had happened regarding June.

It had been a season of quiet prosperity throughout the north. The trade had thriven in Mr. Temple's able hands and coming into Garry one day from a long journey, I found him bubbling over his private news from England. While June would never make a scholar, her instructors wrote, she had learned to read and speak with fluency and was presenting fine surfaces for polish.

"And you would have had me marry her to a half-breed?" Mr. Temple could not refrain from one small thrust. "By the way, I wonder what became of him?"

In silly romances it is the fashion for things to happen in the nick of time. But while such coincidences are carried beyond the limits of absurdity they spring from some such occurrence as now came to pass. I had barely replied that he had probably taken some service out of Montreal, before Francois, the governor's body-servant, brought in a man whose hollow eyes, thin face, told of hard travel.

"You, Andre?" Mr. Temple sprang up. "I did not expect you for another week. Your furs—"

"Gone!" The man's hands flew up, a gesture eloquent of despair. "Gone, not only our pack, but also the trains from the Great Slave that joined us at the new post in the country of the Swampy Sioux. A hundred bales, mink, winter beaver, cross-fox—all gone!"

Mr. Temple sprang up with an oath. "The Swampy Sioux? I had not credited the spunkless creatures with sufficient spirit to—"

"No." The man shook his head. "It was the Nor'westers, led by a man tall, dark, of a French appearance, who fought like seven devils. He it was that killed Big Despard. The others he impressed to carry the furs into La France, leaving only me to bring the news to you. 'My compliments to M'sieu Temple,' he said as he thrust me out of the camp, 'and tell him that I am back from Montreal.'"

Sitting down again, the governor stared blankly at me, I at him. But his was a spirit resilient under any blow and presently he smiled.

"Strange that we should have been speaking of him. A hundred bales? Not so bad. If he could keep that up I might send in my commissions. Hauled them into La France, too, safe as Fort William itself. And the Nor'westers will sell the cream of my catch on the London market. Hum! They must be taught better. Let me see—La France, Belle Isle, La Trappe, Big Moose—" Musingly he ran over a half-dozen Nor'west forts, while I sat in silent dismay at the war of reprisals that the list portended. "Muskegon, Ellice—ah! Andre, how long before you can be ready to carry letters to Fraser and Cameron of Pelly? But no! You are tired, I'll send a fresh

man."

Out of the events that came out of that message—the sack of Ellice to its last pelt by Fraser; the killing of Red Dominique by Cameron of Pelly, the reprisals one upon another—one might easily fill a volume. But though none could write it better, this is the story of June, and I pass on to the evening that, coming into Garry one night a year later, a messenger bade me in haste to Mr. Temple's house.

A Red River frame, very large and roomy, with an outlook upon trail and river, he had the finest lodging in Garry. Of the twenty or more governors that had used it, each had added something to its solid magnificence in oak, leather, rare trophies of the chase. Their portraits, in oils, adorned the panelled dining-room, exhibiting every fashion from the ruffles and knee-breeches of Prince Rupert's time to the more sober costume of my day. Bluff old fellows, they seemed to be smiling down—when I entered—upon the girl who sat with the governor at the head of the table; just as they would have done in the days of their flesh, if one might judge by their eyes.

As, the last we met, Mr. Temple had confided to me his intention of giving June another year's schooling, you may imagine my astonishment when she herself came forward to welcome me. I have already dwelt on the essentials of her appearance. But as a tasteful frame enhances a fair picture, so the soft rose tints of a modish gown now set off her natural beauty. Education, too, had done its work, softening, refining, moulding her upon a finer pattern. Leaving us a rough-handed squaw, she had returned bearing in soft palms the hundred delicacies with which civilisation has dowered woman. The handiwork of the gentle sisters showed in the modulations of her greeting.

"And father told you I was to stay away another year? How wicked of him!"

The ease with which the parental title fell from her lips was undoubtedly the result of careful tutelage, but it was wonderful to see Mr. Temple