

Chapter One

explorer, Sir George Simpson, dispensing crude fare in gracious manner, listening silently to the conversation, finally withdrawing at the last with a sweeping courtesy to play soft, melancholy, and world-forgotten airs on the old piano, brought over years before by the *Lady Head*, while the guests made merry with the mellow port and ripe Manila cigars which the Company supplied its servants. Then coffee, still with her natural Old World charm of the *grande dame*. Such guests were not many, nor came often. There was McTavish of Rupert's House, a three days' journey to the northeast; Rand of Fort Albany, a week's travel to the northwest; Mault of Fort George, ten days beyond either, all grizzled in the Company's service. With them came their clerks, mostly English and Scotch younger sons, with a vast respect