

THE BELLE OF ATHABASCA

ATHABASCA BELLE did not burst upon Smith the Silent all at once, like a rainbow or a sunrise in the desert. He would never say she had been thrust upon him. She was acquired, he said, in an unguarded moment.

The trouble began when Smith was pathfinding on the upper Athabasca for the new transcontinental. Among his other assets Smith had two camp kettles. One was marked with the three initials of the new line, which, at that time, existed only on writing material, empty pots, and equally empty parliamentary perorations. The other was not marked at all. It was the personal property of Jaquis, who cooked for Smith and his outfit. The Belle was a fine looking Cree — tall, strong, *magnifique*. Jaquis warmed to her from the start, but the Belle was not for Jaquis, himself a Siwash three to one. She scarcely looked at him, and answered him only