

# L. RON HUBBARD



## ARCTIC WINGS

GALAXY  
PRESENTS

## CHAPTER ONE

SPRING had come to White Bear Landing and for three days the Tokush River, which emptied into the lake and poured forth again, had clogged the waters with broken trees and brush.

But this was not the only flotsam which the Tokush brought out of the unmapped, white reaches of the Arctic. Spring brought back the game, and following the game came the carnivores, the wolves and Taggart.

The lake was blue as the sky, and the trees were green, and a crystal sweetness was in the air, and on the porch of the White Bear Post stood Nancy McClane watching the great Vs of geese going north overhead, watching the patterns the clouds made in the water and drinking of the crystal air.

Another winter had gone and though summer meant hard work, it was good to be alive just now. To be free and young and alive in the Far North. Work would begin within the week, but now there was rest and it was spring.



*Nancy*

Soon the planes would start winging south, winging north, sluggish in the air with cargoes of pitchblende and payrolls and machinery as the mining of radium went into full swing. And White Bear Landing was the halfway mark between the Arctic mines and civilization. Soon the lake would be struck and slashed by pontoon and slipstream and the thunder of mighty engines would become so monotonous that only its absence would be unusual.

Man was conquering the Arctic by air and White Bear Landing was only one of a hundred outposts, forgotten eight months of the year.

It was hard work but Nancy found a certain peace in it. This was her country and that of her father and now it was all she had—though she smiled to herself at the thought of possessing so vast a region.

Men grew harsh in their battle with snow and scowling forests, but few men had ever shown her discourtesy. If Taggart had not come down early that spring, she would never have had a passing doubt of her own safety here, though she was but a girl alone.

Taggart came. Three half-breeds in a long canoe, with Taggart hunched like the Russian Bear amidships, hungrily looking toward the landing and the post and store back of it. Log houses all, but they were something more than wilderness though something less than civilization.

Nancy did not know Taggart and she did not withdraw. She stood on the porch and watched the canoe ground in the sand.

Taggart got out. He was a tower of bone and sinew and his

checkered shirt was plastered tight to his muscular chest by sweat and spray. His beard had grown carelessly to mat over his coarse face and his eyes seemed to use the hair for cover.

Taggart had strength and he also had brains. But a lifetime of hard boom camps and the early discovery that brawn made law and brains made money had thrown Taggart into rough contact with the police too often for him not to have gained a reputation for badness.

He swaggered up the beach, looking at Nancy. He had not seen a woman for a year and a half, but even if this had not been the case, a sight of Nancy McClane made most men stop.

She was dressed in a calico shirt and a buckskin riding skirt and wore beaded moccasins made by the Crees. But she had been educated in a school most women name with awe and the stamp of it showed through this wilderness dress. There was a way her hair radiated the sunlight again, a way she looked and smiled and the proud carriage of her. She was beautiful even in the cities and in the north, men found it difficult to believe their eyes.

Taggart came to a stop below the porch. His coat was over his arm and a big Colt stuck out at an angle from his hip. Insolently he looked her up and down and then grinned happily.



*Taggart*

“Where’s Durant?” said Taggart.

She was uneasy before this man as the slightest glance would have told anyone that here was a bully of the camps, a man without principle and ready to break the code. But she looked at him frankly. “He’s gone up the lake to try the fishing. He’ll be back in an hour.”

“Yeah?” said Taggart. “I think you’re lying. Never mind, shove a couple quarts out to these breeds and give me something good. No trade liquor for mine. I’ve got pound notes aplenty.”

She went into the post, treading lightly over the bare boards and outwardly unconcerned. But she eyed the rifle rack with longing just the same.

She gave out the two quarts and then a bottle of Hudson’s Bay Scotch to Taggart.

He was making a show for her benefit. He cracked off the top by hitting it against the fireplace and then drank around the jagged glass. He drank loudly and with great pleasure and when he was done the bottle was dry. He threw it into the fireplace.

“Gimme another,” said Taggart. “I got pound notes enough to buy out the King, damn his soul. Huh, you ain’t shocked! Must be a Yank.”

She gave him another quart and took his pound notes and gave him change and then, very gently, she pointed to the sign above the blanket racks, “No drinking inside this post. Durant, Factor, White Bear Landing, Hudson’s Bay Company.”

Taggart chuckled and cracked the head off the bottle and drank again.

Slowly Nancy moved up the counter to the place Durant kept his Webley, watching Taggart the while. But the gun was not there and she suddenly remembered that Durant had taken it when he had left to bring in a trapper who had sent word for help. Durant would not be back for two days.

“Gimme another,” said Taggart. “I’m dry. I ain’t wet my whistle for a year and a half and I could hold a keg.”

“Obviously,” said Nancy, “but I don’t think you had better try. Durant will be back any moment.”

“Bah,” said Taggart, “I got eyes. Your canoe house hasn’t been opened since the ice broke. Look, I ain’t a bad guy, sister . . .”

He edged slowly around the counter. “I’m tough but I ain’t bad. I’m Taggart. Ask anybody and they’ll tell you who Taggart is.”

Nancy backed away. The gun racks were five paces to her right and she moved slowly in that direction.

Taggart took two quick steps and was between her and the guns. “Look, sweetheart, who’s to know? I’m Taggart and I’m tough, but I ain’t bad. You’re the best lookin’—”

Suddenly she stopped and laughed at him. She tossed her brown hair back out of her eyes and her mirth was very real.

“That’s better,” said Taggart.

“Is it?” said Nancy. “Listen.”

There was a far-off drumming which was growing gradually in the still air. Nancy laughed again. “That’s a police plane, Mr. Taggart.”

But Taggart was not worried, just then, about police. He had done nothing recently. But her laughter forced him back

and he took another fifth of Scotch from the rack and broke it on the counter and then leaned toward her across the boards, drinking.

“We’ll see if the redcoat stops and if he don’t, the party goes on.”

She looked at him with contempt and walked toward the door. Taggart reached out and dragged her back.

“No signaling,” said Taggart.

She shook herself free from him and went on.

The single-engined ship equipped with pontoons came streaking down the sky, banked steeply and, with cut gun and wires whining, sailed to a settling halt on the placid lake. With abrupt, important snorts, the plane taxied toward the shore to finally ground on the sand.

Two men in khaki tunics, wearing the insignia of the pilots of the Royal Mounted, got down and walked up toward the post, neither speaking, and both watching carefully before them.

One was a slender youngster with a very sensitive face which he made as hard as possible. The other was older, about twenty-nine, and he looked as though he had a ramrod for a backbone.

Nancy knew the youngster casually. He was Streak Faulkner, a rather reckless and thoughtless fellow. But the other she had never seen before. He looked strong and unswerving.

They came into the post with little ceremony. The older one said, “This Taggart, Streak?”

“Yeah,” said Streak.



*Streak*

“Taggart, I’m Bob Dixon. Heard of me?”

Evidently Taggart had, as Nancy noticed him flinch. She looked with new respect at Constable Pilot Bob Dixon. Yes, there was steel in the man, and his face was as emotionless as though carved from iron. His gaze was level and penetrating. He had not glanced toward Nancy.

“We thought you’d be here,” said Dixon. “Would you like to tell what you know about the Hanlon killing or shall I knock it out of you?”

“It’s a lie,” said Taggart, bristling and stalking forward. “It’s a lie. I didn’t have nothin’ to do with Hanlon’s shooting.”

“I didn’t say he was shot. And it happened night before last up at his placer.” Dixon smiled without a hint of humor. “Keep on talking, Taggart. You’ll hang sooner or later and this might as well be the time.”

“Hang, will I?” said Taggart. “To hell with you, Mountie. I said I didn’t know. . . .”



*Dixon*

Suddenly Bob Dixon's big fist balled up and crashed into Taggart's jaw. Taggart went down to his knees, shaking his head. Dixon yanked him to his feet and struck again but this time Taggart rushed. Dixon ducked and threw his weight sideways and sent the bigger man hurtling against the wall.

Deliberately, the Mountie advanced, jerked the man to his feet, plucked out the Colt and slammed Taggart down into a chair. Dixon did not appear to be ruffled. There was no anger in him, only thoroughness.

"Maybe he didn't do it," said Streak Faulkner, staring at Taggart's bloodied face.

"All rats are the same," snapped Dixon. "Even if he didn't, he's given more beatings than he's taken."

"Yeah," said Streak in a melancholy way, "but I think you go too far with this stuff sometimes, Bob."

Suddenly Nancy knew the Mountie. She had heard of him time after time. They called him "Lawbook" Dixon, but she had not known that he had been ordered to the Tokush River country.

Dixon slapped Taggart away with his gauntlets. Taggart lunged to get out of the chair but a hard blow smashed him back.

Nancy felt a little sick. She went out on the porch and looked at the lake but the day was no longer so crystal bright. In the room she heard an occasional blow and once a chair went over. And in a blood-chilling monotone, Dixon kept asking over and over about the killing. Taggart's voice was

getting weak and once Streak interposed. He was a good kid, Streak. A little reckless and without too many brains, but men liked him.

At last they dragged Taggart out on the porch. The bully was a bully no more. His face was swollen and thick and his beard was dyed red in spots. Terror had its grip on him. His bedeviler had not even showed signs of weariness.

“If you didn’t do it,” said Dixon, relentlessly, “then how is it you have so many pound notes? Hanlon had a cache, they tell me, and it’s empty. There were pound notes in that cache.”

“I didn’t get them from Hanlon!” cried Taggart, beaten down.

“Then where did they come from?” said Dixon.

“I’ll tell you,” whimpered Taggart. But he didn’t. He sagged between them as though he was going to pass out.

Nancy watched because she couldn’t look away. Taggart was tough and this was the first time Taggart had ever been whipped, that was plain. But he had been whipped and this chunk of granite in khaki, this Mountie without a heart, had done it without half trying. She did not recognize the cunning of intelligent training there.

They started to let Taggart down to the puncheon boards but he had only been shamming. With a wild back sweep of his arms, he sent both Mounties reeling and leaped off the porch to sprint for his canoe.

Dixon got up on one knee. “Stop, in the King’s name!”

Taggart was too frightened to stop. He made the gunwale. The explosion of powder was like a physical blow to Nancy.

She saw Taggart stiffen, half in and half out of the craft. Gradually he sank sideways into the water and streamers of red fanned out from him.

Dixon walked down to him and pulled him to the shore. Taggart's hip was shattered by the big Webley slug and he slowly came around, moaning in pain.

"Damn you," whispered Taggart, "I was straight for once. Straight! The Crees been selling furs and I've been selling them bullets and traps and they had pound notes. I didn't know nothing about the Hanlon killing."

Streak patched him up with a first-aid kit and the two Mounties loaded him into the police ship.

"Take him down to Fort Ledeau," said Dixon. "I'll wait here."

"Okay," said Streak. "But I kinda wish you hadn't shot, Bob."

"All rats are the same," said Dixon.

Streak turned and taxied out into the lake and headed into the wind. He took off with a steep, climbing turn to give vent to his feelings.

Bob Dixon walked slowly back to the porch. "Sorry, Miss . . ."

"Nancy McClane."

He took off his helmet. "They're all the same, those fellows. They're yellow at heart and they terrorize every weaker person they meet. Say, that must have been nasty, having that fellow drunk on your hands. I'm glad we happened in."

"I was in no danger," said Nancy. "You are not the only one that knows tricks."



*She saw Taggart stiffen, half in and half out of the craft.  
Gradually he sank sideways into the water and  
streamers of red fanned out from him.*

He looked at her admiringly. “One wouldn’t connect wrestling tricks with such a pretty girl—if you’ll pardon me, Miss McClane. Say, you talk like a Yank.”

“Yes.”

“That’s swell,” said Dixon, but gravely. “My mother was a Yank. Are you up here with your father?”

“My father is dead.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. Was he from this country?”

“From Virginia,” said Nancy.

That struck a chord in Dixon. He frowned a little, searching his police file brain and then, eyes wide open in astonishment, he looked at Nancy and his calm was gone.

“Why . . . why that must have been Thomas McClane who was—” He stopped, embarrassed and now more than a little uneasy.

“Go ahead,” said Nancy, coolly. “I see now why they call you ‘Lawbook’ Dixon. Go ahead. Certainly I’m the daughter of a criminal and criminals are all rats. Certainly. They arrested Thomas McClane for selling fraudulent stocks on a loaded mine and they put him in prison and he got tuberculosis and died. He was a gentleman, not a rat.”

Uncomfortable, on more than one count, Dixon turned and went down to sit on the edge of the wharf and watch for Streak’s return.