

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

THE

BADGER RIOT



J. A. RICKETTS

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J. A. RICKETTS

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*For the people of Badger
and the loggers of Newfoundland*

“We was only loggers.”
Unknown

Characters

JENNIE SULLIVAN

Eldest daughter of Ned Sullivan, river driver, and his wife Bridey.

VERN CRAWFORD

Taxi operator. Wife Millie, and their only child, Melanie.

RALPH DRUM

Mi'kmaq, logger and union coordinator.

TOM HILLIER

*Woodsman. Son of Albert Hillier, Badger station master,
and his wife Suze.*

ANNIE DRUM

Ralph Drum's mother. Healer and midwife.

PETER DRUM

Ralph Drum's grandfather. Patriarch of the Mi'kmaq community.

ROD ANDERSON

Woods contractor. Wife Ruth, and daughter Audrey.

ALF ELLIOTT

Telegraph operator. Wife Mary, children Amanda, David and Thomas.

PASTOR DAMIAN GENGE

Pentecostal preacher.

FATHER KEVIN MURPHY

Roman Catholic priest.

CECIL NIPPARD

A scab worker. Sister Emily.

BILL HATCHER

Rod Anderson's foreman and good friend.

CONSTABLE RICHARD FAGAN

Newfoundland Constabulary based in St. John's.

LEVI AND BECKY ABERNATHY

Foster parents of Constable Richard Fagan.

These characters are fictitious. Any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental. H. Landon Ladd, Joseph R. Smallwood, and Constable William Moss are key historical figures.

Prologue

Autumn sun glinted on the surface of a wide, swift-running river. The sky was deep, clear end-of-summer blue. Close to the shore, alders bent toward the burbling water, as if the sound pleased them. Under his smooth, tanned skin, the muscles of the young Beothuk's arms bunched as he paddled his provision-laden moon-shaped birchbark canoe down the river he knew as Running Water. His brothers followed in two more canoes, each as burdened as his own.

The summer had been dry and the small river was shallow in places, difficult to navigate. The young man continued to paddle confident and sure, knowing just where the rocks were. Up ahead was the junction where Running Water ran into Big River. As he approached the larger river he paused to rest, letting the canoe drift with the current.

Summer on the coast had ended and the Beothuks were moving inland for the winter, following rivers and lakes that their ancestors had followed for generations. The rest of his family had gone ahead. Their harvest from the coastal waters was loaded aboard many canoes, and they would first make camp where the three rivers met. At this river junction, the families of the People gathered to renew old ties, exchange stories and hear the spirits speak, as children born during the past year were given their names high atop the Great Mound. As the turning-of-the-leaves season progressed, the people would continue farther into the interior to their winter homes on the shores of the Great Spirit Lake.

Angling his canoe to the right against the swift-running current, the Beothuk entered onto Big River. In a few minutes he would join his wife and young children. The current was strong, and he bent his head and dug the paddle of his canoe deep into the dark flowing waters. A few powerful strokes against the current of Big River brought another waterway into view: gentle Red Stream that sprung from high on the plateaus. Big River had its beginning far into the centre of the island where the Earth Mother was hidden. It was She who gave the People the heart gift of red ochre to cover their bodies from their naming times until their dying times.

There they were, the People of the tribes, their many canoes hauled up near the tall pine trees that guarded the River Spirit.

Beaching on the riverbank, the young Beothuk jumped out. He turned his head to see his brothers close behind, coming ashore as well. People were running to welcome them. Happy to be there at last, he looked up to the Great Mound, green and alive in the sunlight. Around its base the Beothuk families were busy erecting their mamateeks.



John Drum's snowshoes crunched on the frost-filled snow as he plodded his way down the bank of the frozen river. As a Mi'kmaq trapper, he knew the path well for upriver were his trapping grounds, where fox, beaver, muskrat and caribou were plentiful. Once, the land all around had been Beothuk country, but with the white man's coming, things had changed. Beothuk ways to the coast had been cut off, and they had been forced to live inland year-round. Now the Beothuk were no more, but their spirits could still be felt, John thought, especially atop the round hill near the river.

John's people had originally come to this large island from the lands far to the west and northwest. At first they kept to the island's west coast, but their quest for furs caused them to spread farther inland. Thirty years ago, John and his brothers and cousins had come here with their families and settled. It was a good place. Their

band had about fifty family members. They lived closely, depending on each other to survive the harsh winters. John was their chief.

White man called this river Badger Brook. It ran south and emptied into the great Exploits River waterway. Little Red Indian River, springing from high elevations to the southwest, joined the Exploits here too. The rushing waters, once joined, surged their way north to the Bay of Exploits and the Atlantic Ocean. These names were all white man's names. No doubt the Beothuk had called them something else.

John continued walking effortlessly in his snowshoes until he came to the spit of land that they called Beothuk Point. John could see the remains of the Beothuk firepits, still visible among the grass and bushes. Here was the convergence of the three rivers. This was a good place, a powerful place.



Clacking on the narrow-gauge railway, the train's wheels carried an unceasing sound that was mind-numbing to the passengers on board. Outside, trees and bogs rushed past in the evening light. The couplings protested – clank, clunk, squeal, bang – as the engine dragged the passenger units uphill and down. As the big diesel, pulling ten coach cars, snaked around a long bend, the engineer blew his lonely whistle into the stillness of the landscape.

Many miles up ahead lay Badger Station. A large wooden building with a ticket office, spacious waiting room and an area to store freight, the station was a busy place. It served a key role as the main access terminal not only for Badger but also for communities in Green Bay and Halls Bay.

A platform separated the station from the track and on this frosty winter evening many people stood waiting for the train. The arrival of the Express, as it was commonly called, was a daily social event for many of the townspeople, even in winter. It was an excuse to go and see who was boarding and see if any strangers were getting off. Young women would don their bandanas, apply their lip-

stick and walk arm in arm up the road to stand on the platform, to eye each other and to be eyed.

Among those waiting was Ralph Drum puffing on a cigarette and leaning against the freight platform, his black hair brushing the collar of his dun-coloured coat. Of medium height, his slight stature belied the strength of his sinewy frame. He moved with a natural grace, which was the reason he had easily earned a job as a driver when the logs were on the river. Most striking about Ralph were his dark, almost black eyes set wide in his angular face. His light brown skin was clean-shaven. As he stood there he noticed some of the girls looking at him out of the corners of their eyes. He raised his hand and tipped his salt-and-pepper cap to those he knew.

Ralph gazed east along the track stretching toward the trestle. He was waiting for the arrival of the train that today would be carrying with it recruits for the International Woodworkers of America, the new loggers' union. A few weeks ago the union had called a strike against the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company, a pulp and paper conglomerate whose owners were English.

The union had rented an empty house, owned by Mrs. Noel, over on Church Road, as a lodging place for the strikers from out of town. Ralph's instructions were to take the incoming men over there and bed them down.

Ralph flicked his cigarette down onto the snow by the tracks where it fizzled briefly. His mind drifted back to his old grandfather who used to tell him about the time when the railway was laid across the bogs, through the thick forests and over the high plateaus. A river of iron, he said, a pathway to a different world.

Grandfather's memory was long and there were many evenings when Ralph sat beside the old man and listened to his stories. Grandfather told him that before the railway came, even before the white man, his ancestor, a Mi'kmaq trapper, came to Badger Brook from the western part of the island. His name was John Drum and, followed by his brothers and cousins, he became the first chief. There was a time when they shared this area with a few remaining Beothuk. Ralph's grandfather, who said he had been born some-

where around 1859, told him that *his* father, Michael, had remembered the sad, dispossessed people as the remains of a once proud and handsome race.

It was said that John took a Beothuk woman into the family. *Beothuk blood runs through us, my son*, Grandfather had said, and there was pride in his voice.

Why are you proud of that, Grandfather? young Ralph had wanted to know.

Because the Beothuk was a strong Indian, Grandfather had answered. *A smart, strong Indian.*

The sound of the train's whistle interrupted Ralph's thoughts. The train thundered over the trestle spanning Badger River and pulled up in front of the station platform. Huge and invincible, the large locomotive came to rest. The small crowd on the platform turned expectantly, subconsciously sniffing the peculiar grease-steam-toilet smell that only trains had, and that evoked a sense of faraway places. The doors of the passenger cars flew back and about fifty people climbed down, most of them loggers who had joined the new union. They had come from points east, having made their way in to the train stations from various bays and coves. They had answered a call, and knew they had ahead of them many long cold hours on a picket line in mid-winter. Ralph stepped forward and, raising his normally soft voice, called out to assemble the men.

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Part I

WHERE THREE RIVERS MEET

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During the night the river water had risen high enough to come in over the floor. When Bridey Sullivan swung her legs out of bed they landed in the ice-cold wetness.

“Ned,” she screamed. “Get up! We’re going to drown!”

Ned Sullivan shot up in bed, all sleep immediately gone from his eyes. His first instinct was to panic, but he took one look at Bridey’s terrified face and quickly found an inner reserve of strength. Ned was like that. Whenever there was a crisis, with the family or in his job on the drive, people said you could count on him to be calm in the middle of the storm. He tried to shush his wife, but she continued to scream. “What are we going to do Ned? Jesus, Mary and Joseph, we’re trapped here, Ned,” she shrieked.

“Calm down Bridey, it’s going to be all right. These houses are built for this kind of thing.” Ned got up and waded in bare feet through three inches of water to find his goat rubbers over by the door. He sat down on a chair by the table and pulled them on over his feet, his toes already turning blue.

Ned went to the window and looked out to see water surrounding his house. The scene was something he had never witnessed before and could never have imagined. During the night the mighty Exploits River, known to locals simply as “the River,” had overflowed its banks. Gone was the roadway, the fences just showing their top posts. Cut off by flood waters, every house looked like an island unto itself, one isolated from the other. He could see

a small boat and a couple of canoes bobbing on the water as they took residents to dry land.

Bridey splashed through the water, screaming even louder, "Oh my Sacred Heart of Jesus, Ned. My trunk, my trunk! Help me."

He tore his eyes away from the flood scene and turned to see Bridey, her nightgown trailing in the water, tears streaming down her face. She was trying to drag a big old leather trunk over to the bed. As he sloshed toward her, Bridey's nightgown became tangled around her legs and down she went, sending up a splash. He reached out to help her up, but she pushed him away screaming, "Never mind me, get the trunk up out of the water!"

Not wanting to make the bed wet, Ned grabbed the precious trunk and hoisted it up onto the kitchen table. Bridey had brought the trunk all the way from Stock Cove, and it held heirlooms and years of memories. She had been collecting things for it ever since she was a young girl. It meant the world to her and Ned knew it.

There was a bang on the door, but first Ned wrapped Bridey in a blanket and settled her back on the bed. He kissed the top of her head and her sobs subsided as he moved to the door. He pulled it open, sending a little wave of muddy brown water in over the kitchen floor.

Outside, two men were looking up at Ned from a canoe at his doorstep. One of them had pounded on Ned's door with his paddle. Already aboard were Mrs. Pike and her five-year-old daughter. Her scared face peered up at him from under a thick woollen cap. Paddling the canoe was Mr. Peter Drum and his son Louis – two Mi'kmaq men. They looked strong and capable and instinctively Ned felt he could trust them. Old man Drum spoke out of one side of his mouth, the other side full of a large wad of chewing tobacco.

"Morning, Ned. Well b'y, the shaggin' River is up again. No one expected it this year. You ever see the like? Some state, isn't it?" He sized up the watery scene as he spat a stream of brown baccy juice over the side of the canoe.

"Well sir, I'm some glad to see you fellas this morning. My

missus is having a fit in there. Can you load her aboard your canoe and take her up to dry ground?"

"Yes, b'y, that's what we're here for. We're the rescue party." Young Louis rolled his eyes and smirked.

In the front of the canoe the Pike child started to wail. "I'm scared, Mommy, I want to go home."

Ned looked back to Peter Drum and asked him to wait a couple of minutes. As he returned to Bridey he could hear Mrs. Pike trying to calm the youngster.

He found his wife dressed and no longer crying, but the distress and shock was evident in her face as he lowered her into the canoe. She was still fretting about the trunk, but Peter Drum told her that the water would never go as high as the kitchen table and, in fact, would soon start to recede, as the dynamiters were at work downstream.

As the little canoe pulled away Bridey realized that Ned wasn't aboard. "Ned, Ned," she cried, "come with me!"

"Don't worry, my duckie," Ned called back. "I'll be along later. I'm going to see if I can help out. Another pair of strong hands won't go astray in Badger this day."



In 1925, Ned Sullivan had come to Badger seeking work in the lumberwoods. During the months working with the A.N.D. Company, he came to like the growing Company town with its hustle and bustle, its access to services and, especially, the camaraderie among its people. When he came down out of the woods he would often climb the round hill that overlooked the River and a great sense of peace and belonging would steal over him.

Originally, Ned's plan was like that of the other men: to go back to his home in Stock Cove, Bonavista Bay, when the time came to fish again. But gradually he began to dream a different dream on those long evenings up on the hill. Life inland had begun to appeal to him, and the longing to be on the salt water that seized so many

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my publishers extraordinaire at Flanker Press – Garry, Margo, and Jerry Cranford – who gently led me through the editing process. From them I learned that it’s one thing to write a story, but it’s quite another thing to get it between two covers and onto the shelves.

A special thank you to Anne Hart for editing this book.

My late husband, Felix Ricketts, took great pride in everything that I wrote. His favourite comment was, “By the jumpin’s, old girl, you can sure put it together.” Even though it is sad that he is not here physically to see my book published, I always feel he is with me in spirit, encouraging me, pushing me along to the finish line.

Even though this story is woven around a true event, all characters are products of my imagination. Any errors in interpreting the logging operations during the 1950s are mine and mine alone. The eyewitness account of the riot is from my own memory of the event.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JUDY (DAY) RICKETTS was fourteen years old at the time of the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) Strike of 1959. A native of Badger, she, along with other schoolchildren, watched from the roadside as loggers and local authorities came together in a famous melee that effectively ended the strike. She believes that the children of the day never recovered from witnessing this terrible event in Newfoundland's history. Fifty years later, she knows that the emotions still run deep. Judy can be reached by email at jaricketts@nf.sympatico.ca. Her author website is www.jaricketts.com.