



Thomas Raddall's Short Stories

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*A collection of previously unpublished manuscripts
held by the Dalhousie University Archives*

THOMAS RADDALL



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Introduction

This digital edition contains five short stories by Thomas Raddall from unpublished and undated typescripts held in the Dalhousie University Archives Thomas Head Raddall fonds, MS-2-202, Box 29, Folder 5. The pages reproduced here include Raddall's initial edits to the type written text and are transcribed to the best of our ability according to the editorial notes and hints left by Thomas Raddall. Consult the listing below for direct links to manuscript page images for each story. These images may serve as a helpful point of comparison with the transcriptions for those interested in a more detailed study of the text. We welcome any feedback that readers may have on the transcriptions presented here. We believe these works were created in the 1940s. Stories include: Main Four, Figure Head, 1909 (First Version), 909 (Second Version), In Mighty Waters, and Nine Mile House.

- Main Four – <https://findingaids.library.dal.ca/main-four>
- Figure Head – <https://findingaids.library.dal.ca/figure-head>
- 1909 (First Version) – <https://findingaids.library.dal.ca/1909-first-version>
- 909 (Second Version) – <https://findingaids.library.dal.ca/909-second-version>
- In Mighty Waters – <https://findingaids.library.dal.ca/in-mighty-waters>
- Nine Mile House – <https://findingaids.library.dal.ca/nine-mile-house>

Main Four

A cable-ship is not like other ships which have as little to do with the bottom as possible. The cable-ship's sole concern is the bottom, where the slender man-made rope of copper wire and copper tape, and gutta percha insulation, and jute cushion, and galvanised iron wire armour, lies in the dark ooze connecting continent with continent. You might think it would lie there forever undisturbed; but, there are teredo worms and other borers which thrive on gutta percha and manage to find their way through the smallest gap in the armour to indulge their taste; and there are ship's anchors, and the dragging gear of steam trawlers, and on the Newfoundland end there are icebergs grounding in the spring and crushing the shore-ends to death; and far out in the deeps, where one supposes no marine life, no anchors, trawl-gear or icebergs, the cable develops mysterious faults of itself, and goes sick, and has to be pulled up and operated upon.

The **Triton** is gone from the sea now, a cable storage hulk in a roadstead somewhere, but I still think of her with affection, and when I think of her I think naturally of Captin Tewkes, and the struggle with Main Four. I was a wireless operator then, and very young—it was just after the First German War—and the **Triton** was old and worn, on her way to discard. Within six months after I left she was condemned, and the sea—and the sea-bottom—knew her no more. But she was still a trim thing then, sitting rather low on the water, with a single grey funnel behind a high glassed-in bridge. She had a clipper bow, with a big cable sheave where you expected a figure-head, and there was another sheave astern. On the forward deck, in the big well between the bridge deck and the forecastle, stood the picking up machine, a mighty winch for lowering the grapnel and its many fathoms of stout rope, and hauling in up to the bow when the cable had been hooked. And aft, in the smaller well between the bridge deck and poop, stood the paying-out machine.

Her decks were of oak, kept holystoned like those of a man-o'-war, and all her brass work shone. You would never have thought, to look at her, that she was built away back in the 1880's somewhere, or that the war in her old age had tried her beyond the endurance required be the Lloyds'.

There had been a gun, I remember, an ancient 4.7 purchased during the war from the Japanese. It stood on the gleaming white poop, its long barrel over the paying-out sheave, with the queer laundry-marks of the Japanese still painted on it. We had a crew of gunners, the Crystal-Palace sort who were then manning guns on ships of the merchant marine everywhere, and once they fired the thing, just outside Halifax Harbour. The old gun nearly tore itself out of the poop; the concussion broke dishes in the saloon below, where the officers were gathered about the long mahogany table for lunch, and sent a cascade of flower-pots out of the skylight—an enormous thing, the captain's pride—upon their astonished heads. Old Captain Slater forbade the gun to be fired after that, submarines, or no submarines, and after the war it was taken away, without regrets. Captain Slater went soon after. He was a fine old man, an Englishman right out of the time of Drake and Raleigh, an alert, humourous, courageous old pirate with an Oxford accent and a torpedo beard. He had been on that ship 35 years, beginning as third officer, and when he left, it came to everybody as a shock that the ship could be so old. He and she had had a hard life together, all over the Atlantic, in all seasons, in every sort of weather; and they had done some jobs of laying and repairing that were famous in the cable world. But now, they were parted at last, and the chief officer, Tewkes, became Captain Tewkes, and moved his clothes and pictures from the stuffy cabin that opened off the saloon under the poop and on the water line where the porthole had to be closed as soon as the ship left her wharf—moved to the spacious quarters on the starboard side of the poop, the big day cabin, with its desk and easy chairs, the smaller night cabin, where there was a built-in bed instead of a bunk. He inherited also the captain's steward, a

thin faced, rheumatically old man named Jimmie, who had worshiped the very deck under Captain Smith's size ten half-wellingtons. Everybody wondered how Captain Salter's bond-slave would adjust himself to a new master; for Jimmie was a rude old man, immensely conscious of his position, and in his time he had offended the sensibilities of chief officer Tewkes on more than one occasion. But they got along very well, Jimmie seemed to transfer his worship to Captain Tewkes in its entirety; and Captain Tewkes was not one to hold a grudge.

He had waited a long time for this berth. The best part of his life, in fact. Captain Tewkes was an Englishman of the tall, blond, hook-nosed, sweeping-moustashed type retired colonel beloved of cartoonists and the moving pictures.

The original officers and crew of the **Triton** brought the ship out new from a Clyde-side yard to take her place on the North Atlantic cable grounds, with her base in a Nova Scotia seaport. The officers came from good but impoverished English Families, which had put their sons through second-rate schools and training ships, and exerted influence in the right quarters to get them posts in the cable service, where the pay was very much better than the merchant service or the navy. They were good men, and as good men do, they served their time and drifted home, to retire on pension somewhere in the English countryside, to put their sons through second-rate schools and exert influence in their turn.

In my time, the **Triton's** big fore-castle was full of Canadians; and of those who sat about the long table in the saloon aft, only Captain Tewkes, the purser, and the first and second electricians were English—the last three men in the twenties and thirties, of what one might call the second generation. They sat in a little group at the head of the table, with the Canadian chief engineer at the captain's right hand. At the foot of the table sat the chief officer, a Bluenose named Murchie, with a handsome square face and curly pepper-and-salt hair, with the second and third officers at his right and

left. They talked shop a good deal, and the ways of ships and men and ports they had known. But at the captain's end of the table the conversation ranged over such things such as books, plays, the latest thing in parliament, and the cricket scores as received by wireless. I think Captain Tewkes would rather have talked ships; but the electricians were a pair of those slim, pale men, with neatly brushed blond hair and white even teeth, who come out of minor English public schools like boards from a sawmill; They kept the conversation on a public school plane. Over that group at the table's head hung what might be called, in fact, the atmosphere of the old school tie. There was something ghostly about this lonely conversation, as if it were faint echos from the time when the ship was young, and the whole table surrounded by chiseled marble faces and polished accents speaking reverently of "home". That was a long time ago. Home for Captain Tewkes was a house in the Nova Scotia seaport where the **Triton** was based. A wooden house with stained brown shingles and a bit of lawn on the side and back. His wife was English like himself. A child had come to them in their middle age and the boy was now ten; Mrs. Tewkes had long since ceased to talk of "home" the sun rose and set not on the British Empire but on young Geoffrey.

As wireless operator, the lowest form of marine life, I occupied a seat between these groups, and so could listen to each. I was young then, as I have said, and the contrast between them amused me very much. I do not suppose you could find such a group anywhere on the earth today. On so small a ship, especially. We were surrounded by mahogany panels and red curtains, where cabins opened off the saloon. And overhead the sunlight poured through the long poop skylight, through the massed flower-pots of the late captain's fancy, which were Jimmie's special care. Jimmie stood behind Captain Tewkes, anticipating his every want. The rest of us had to be content with one steward to each side of the table. The ship rolled, And the knives and forks and plates slid against the fiddles, and the flower-pots clicked gently in the racks overhead, the stewards moved to

and fro, silent on the thick saloon carpet, and now from the after end of the table came a snatch of a fishing voyage to Labrador, and now from the captain's end came a grammar school accent talking about Lord's, or the last act of Chu-Chin-Chow.

We had been busy In West Indian waters all that winter, when weather made repairs in the north Atlantic uncertain and expensive—on loan to another cable firm. There was some grumbling on board. Christmas in Bermuda was very fine, but when a man has a family in Halifax, and there's the long summer season ahead, with its incessant calls out into the North Atlantic for weeks on end—in the old days, when the cables were newly laid, there was little to do except a few shore-end jobs in the summer months. Those were the halcyon days of the cables. But the teredo had followed the cables out of warm waters to the northern seas, and of course the war with its incessant depth-charging had played havoc with the bottom, and now that the cables were old and rotten there was a constant round of repairs to be made. When we came north to refit for the summer's work the married men were happy for a time, and one night, by special permission of Captain Tewkes, the crew held a dance in the big cable-shed at the head of the wharf. It was a gala affair, with Chinese lanterns lighting the gloom of the concrete walls, and the crew's own orchestra playing for the dancing. There was a big crowd, seventy men, with their families or their girls. Captain Tewkes came down to the docks in mid-evening, in mufti, and made a little speech from the orchestra platform. He was glad to see them enjoying themselves, he said, as now that he had taken command he hoped that he would always have their cooperation in the work of the ship. Frankly, he declared, he was counting on the crew in every way during the coming summer's work. The West Indian job had been a series of small repairs, in shallow water mostly, and of course the whole job was merely a loan business—it was not “our company”. “Our company” would judge, his fitness to command the Triton by the way this summer's work was done. Captain Slater had been a great cable-man (cheers) and

it would be hard to fill his shoes (a silence) but captains come and captains go, and go on forever. ("Hear ! Hear !") There was a little patter of polite applause when he stepped down, and the **Triton's** bosun, a Newfoundland-Irish giant named Hearn, called fiercely for cheers, which were given obediently. The fiddles struck up then to carry the thing through properly, Captain Tewkes should have asked the bosun's wife for a dance—as Captain Slater would have done. But he was too stiff a man, physically and mentally, for anything like that. He put on his hat and went home; and when he came down to the ship in the morning he was told that a child of one of the seamen had fallen into an empty cable tank at the end of the shed shortly after he left. It was a gloomy ship.

The **Triton** went into dry dock for some attention to her twin screws, and then there were miles of grapnel rope to be taken aboard, and the big mark buoys and their miles of moorings to be shipped, cable to be coiled in the tanks, fore and aft, and stores and bunkers for a month at sea. In the midst of these activities came the word we had expected. An iceberg, drifting down the Newfoundland coast, had grounded in the cove where the trans Atlantic mains landed, and nipped off the heavy shore-end of Main Four. We disconnected the shore telephone—to the pursers relief, for the thing rang incessantly outside his cabin whenever we were in the home port—and cast off the lines. It was the last of April, a warm spring day in Nova Scotia, but as we cleared the harbour and swung north-east there was a rising sea in the bright sunshine, and a cold wind blowing down from Labrador that chilled the deck gang to the bones. On the second day out the wind drew ahead, and the sea with it; the old ship laboured heavily. Four days out we passed through a flock of bergs, spray-whipped in the high seas. The ice movement was heavy that year. Boudreau, the navigating officer, came into the wireless cabin with his noon position, and I called Cape Race and the American ice-patrol cutter, giving details to add to their long lists of ice warnings, and presently heard the high singing spark of Cape

Race and the shrill quenched-gap whistle of the cutter screaming these new dangers to ships at sea.

We found our iceberg squatting like a big marquee in a cove amongst the black Newfoundland cliffs, aground in fifty fathoms. It was an old battle-ground for the **Triton**. Some freak of the coastal current carried bergs in there every spring, and old Captain Slater had engaged in some famous tussles with them. He had tried towing them, and dynamiting them—useless, of course—and once a small berg had upset with a working party on it, including Slater himself, and they had got away in the boat by a miracle. Captain Tewkes steamed up to the thing as if to show his contempt for it. It was thrilling to be so close to a berg, for I remembered the Titanic, and I was young and full of illusions. But after careful inspection it was decided to restore the usefulness of Main Four temporarily with a piece of cable laid around the berg. We put into St. John's to await developments. The berg was bound to shift, for it was melting, even in that cold stream along the coast, and a good off-shore wind would take it out of the bay. Probably it would tear up our temporary by-pass in the going, and possibly some the other mains. We waited. St. John's was cold and dull, and overhung with the reek of the sealing fleet; but the Newfoundland girls were rosy-cheeked and kind, and the crew enjoyed themselves and them. Such simple pleasures were not possible to the officers, decorous men, mostly of middle age, with families. They stayed on board, sipping whiskey at certain times of the day, beginning when the sun was over the yardarm and ending with a night-cap before bed, in a schedule as old as the ship. Liquors were carried in the Triton's slop-chest for benefit of the officers, they signed wine-cards and had the total deducted from their pay at the end of each cruise. In this way they drank a good deal, but there was never any drunkenness, except at Christmas and New Year, and of course a binge whenever somebody left the ship for another post. The drinking was done in company, in the purser's cabin, the chief electrician's, or the chief steward's, and for the night-cap everybody gathered about the saloon table,

with the air blue with tobacco, and the gramophone playing—sea permitting—and rats poking their sleek snouts out of the grillwork that ventilated the cabins; to listen to the music, I suppose.

Captain Tewkes had been part of these gatherings when he was chief officer; but now that the essential loneliness of the captain's position had descended upon him; he drank in his cabin over the saloon. He had absorbed a bottle of whiskey a day for years, and it never had any effect on him that could be noticed. We lay in St. John's a week. Every afternoon Captain Tewkes, dressed in tweeds, and swinging a stout silver-knobbed stick, went ashore with his red setter Mick, striding about the rugged slopes of Signal Hill; and in the evening in his cabin, old Jimmie brought forth bottle and glass and shuffled off, leaving Captain Tewkes to his whiskey and his thoughts. The strains of our music, and the clink of our glasses must have penetrated up to him, but he never came down. On the seventh evening came word that the berg had capsized and drifted off, and in the morning we went out to make a permanent job of Main Four. Shore-end cable is three inches or so in diameter, heavily armoured, and weighs something like thirty tons to the mile; but there was nothing unusual about the job. We fished up the broken ends, spliced in a new section, and let the matter drop. A simple affair, after all. The married men would be home in the family bosoms within four or five days.

Then Cape Race sang in my ear, chanting **Triton's** call letters, in the crisp dots-and-dashes that distinguished Cape Race operators amongst all others on the coast. It was a long message. For some time, he said, there had been a slight fault in Main Four, far out under the sea; not much, a slight leak in the insulation that made the tape signals blurred but readable. The fault had become steadily worse. Now it was a clear break. An absurd coincidence; as if our struggles at the shore-end had in some way jerked the long line apart, a thousand miles away. I took the thing to Captain Tewkes. He was at his cabin table, writing, at ease, with his uniform jacket unbuttoned, a glass at his elbow, and a fountain pen clutched in

his fair-haired hand. He was one of those big blond men who never sunburn but whose faces are always red, winter and summer. The red scalp gleamed through his thin wisps of hair. He stared at the message a long time, and said "Ah!" in a grim way. Then he frowned up at me over his big hooked nose and pulled at his yellow moustaches in a fierce way, as if, having "brought the bad news, I must be the author of it.

"I was afraid of this," he said at last."Main Four is old—as old as the ship, by Jove! It won't stand much pulling about. We shall have trouble getting it to the top. Um! Well, they've got a clear break, anyway—good tests both ways—an accurate position. Something to be thankful for. Latitude fifty-twenty longitude thirty-forty. D'you know where that is? It's mid-ocean. We won't get much good working weather out there."

"No, sir," I said, as if I knew all about such things. "Is there any reply, sir?" I pushed the blue pad at him, with a pencil, and he wrote an acknowledgement, printing each word in the allotted ruling with great care. As I stepped out of the poop doorway on to the well deck, he came out behind me and blew his whistle for a quartermaster. I heard boots running along the flying gangway from the bridge, and later the chief officer hurried past.

We sailed for Sydney to replenish bunkers and stores, and on May 25th we dropped a mark buoy over the break-out there in mid-Atlantic, over the deep submarine ridge that runs down from Cape Farewell through the Azores to Africa—and lowered our grapnel. There is no mystery about picking up a cable. You lower a hook and drag it back and forth over the bottom, as you might fish for a dropped necklace through a cellar grating. We were all afternoon paying out the grapnel rope in that immense depth, and at 4 P.M. the ship commenced slowly cruising back and forth across the cable ground, feeling blindly for Main Four. Four miles from the buoy the dynamometer on the picking-up machine forward registered a leap to ten tons. The big man Hearn jumped away from it, roaring up to

the bridge, "Hooked, sir! Hooked!" The ship stopped in a jangle of engine room bells. The picking-up machine revolved ponderously all through the long summer evening and at midnight, a shout came from the fo'c'sle head." Cable at bow, sir ! " I heard the rush of feet as Hearn's gang hurried to put stopper on it and get the end aboard. Then, just as I was putting down my 'phones for the night, with the sheets of press news copied from Arlington and Poldhu before me, the door opened, and I heard over my shoulder the voice of Rhodes, the chief electrician. "Go to bed, Sparks. It's a dead end. Rotten stuff." As I turned in I could hear the big forward machine monotonously paying out the grapnel rope again.

It was a bad omen. But the weather held fine. Boudreau, and Victor, the chief officer, and Updike, the lean sallow second, and Cammock, the dark savage Canadian Scot who was third, checked and rechecked their observations under a clear sky. Boudreau was a tall fleshy man from Isle Madame, with a chuckling Acadian accent, he worshiped not merely the sun, but the stars, which most sea folk never trouble their heads about. Through Boudreau's keen eye and careful figures the **Triton** always knew where she was in the desert of the sea. All the next day the Triton steamed back and forth across the grounds without success, without a flicker on the forward dynamometer except when the grapnel, deep down, a mile, two miles—I forget now—struck some obstacle in the ooze and eternal dark. But the following day—the 27th of May—we hooked an end in the morning, hauled it up carefully, and had it stoppered at the bows by mid-afternoon. Cargill, the jointer, connected leads to the free end, led them to the testing room amidships, and Rhodes and Jessup pounced on them, connected them to their instruments, and talked to Ireland. I watched them, admiring. Experts. I never had any head for the higher mathematics they used in the course of their business, and their work was always marvellous. The English schools taught good things to go with the accent and the tie. The sea was getting up fast, and Captain Tewkes hung over them anxiously as they worked their little double key, and the white spot

of their mirror galvanometer flickered back and forth across the screen. At 6 P.M., just as old Jimmie was ringing the brass hand-bell for dinner aft, and a train of white-jacketed men poured in two streams from the galley with steaming dishes of food, the cable parted. It was too rotten to stand the heave of the ship. On the new break, we dropped a mark buoy moored to the bottom.

The weather grew steadily worse, developed into a strong gale out of the east; and when that gale went down the long swell remained, pitching the slim **Triton** like a cork. Her heavy deck machinery gave her the roll that was famous amongst the sailors along the Halifax waterfront; the swell was just right for it. There was dense fog and then the wind sprang up and blew from the west. For eight days on end the tall masts of the **Triton** described an unceasing arc under a ceiling of grey scud that came first from the east, then the west; and the long seas rolled with the winds, clashing in lumpy confusion on the change. Triton was built before Marconi dreamed his dreams, and the wireless cabin had been stuck on the starboard side of the after well deck, an afterthought, an iron box, with a high weather-board and a stout oak door. The ship was always trimmed by the stern, and in bad weather the after well was continuously awash. I sat at my instruments in that little iron island, like a rat under a box, and at meal times watched my chance to dash for the companion door. Each day, monotonously, Tewkes wirelessly “our company”, given the noon position—always the same, for our mark buoys were lit at night by an electric device of Rhodes’ invention, and the ship wallowed up-wind and then down-wind between them, like a policeman on a beat and adding “Heavy weather. No cable work.”

On June 5th, in heavy rain, and despite a strong swell, we dropped our grapnel once more, and at four o’clock in the afternoon hooked elusive Main Four. A big Cunarder passed us, I remember, with passengers all lining the rails to watch our activities. In the night, with the wet oilskins of the deck gang shining under electric clusters on the forward deck, the cable came to the bow. It was a

short end again, the piece between our cut of May 27th and the original break. There was nothing for it but to pick up slowly to the break, to get the stuff out of the way, stowing it in the fore tank. That night and another day we patrolled in heavy seas from buoy to buoy. Then the weather improved. We hooked the cable again—a cable, at any rate—and got it to top. Another short end, a stray bit this time, dumped on the cable ground by some slovenly skipper in a past repair job. Again two days of heavy seas, though the sky was bright, and the nights warm and full of stars. After each meal, morning, afternoon, and evening, Captain Tewkes strode on his long legs up and down the weather side of the poop, with Mike trotting at his side. He was always bareheaded, with his hands in his trouser pockets, and deep in thought; now and again he would throw up his head and sniff the wind fiercely, as if he suspected something malignant behind it. The poop was the only possible place for exercise, thirty or forty feet of bone- white oak deck, sparkling with salt, from the bolt-holes of the old gun platform to the rail forward, and divided into two walks by the long saloon skylight. I was up there, walking the lee side one afternoon when the captain came up. I was a shabby object. The annual dress allowance covered one uniform a year, and my jacket was faded and worn, on the lean end of the year, with the twined gold sleeve braids worn down to their yellow cord on the wireless room table. I turned and he said abruptly, “Don’t go. Walk here if you like.” He looked worn and worried. Then a smile parted the grim long red face. “This isn’t the Royal Navy, you know.” It was the first thing he had said to me, except for ship’s business, since I boarded the **Triton**. I sat too far from his orbit at table, and in any case I never knew what horse won the Derby in '98; or the best fly for trout in the waters of Devon. I was absurdly pleased. I was young then. And I walked the poop—on the lee side.

Figure Head

It was in the time when our town built wooden ships for the world's seas, and there was a dollar in every pocket. The old men said Albert Danglely was the finest wood-carver in the province. In a town of ship-carpenters, each with a hand for fine work when he chose, that is saying something. His father was lost in the barque Warema in 1848, and at fifteen Albert was apprenticed to a ship-builder in Malton. Each morning he rowed across the mile of water to work, and each evening returned to Cow Cove, where the silent tragic woman, his mother, kept the lonely wooden house. He was a lanky boy, with the bemused gait of an ox-teamster, with a yellow lick of hair always hanging over one eye, and his eyes a pale blue with something mysterious forever staring at something far and beautiful. He was gifted with tools. "Touched", folk said for he could do things with wood that seemed uncanny as if he had turned the hard fibre to clay and moulded it. It was not long before Will MacDonald, at the shipyard, put him on fine work, scrolls, mouldings, and such-like.

One fine Sunday, driving around the harbour past Cow Cove in his shining gig, big Alexander Dawson saw him at work in a shed by the house. He pulled up at once, for he was a pious man, was Dawson, and already something of a feudal lord in Malton, and here was young Albert breaking the Sabbath. But when Dawson saw the work, he changed his text. Albert was putting the finishing touches to a human figure in wood, and on a bench sat his model, a sleepy negro from the back street of Malton, stripped to the waist, the afternoon sunshine pouring past the dusty windows to shine on the smooth black skin. Figure and model were one. Albert had even worked into those wooden features the bored expression of the sitter. It wasn't canny, Dawson said; but he offered Albert a job in his yard, and Albert refused.

When he was twenty, Albert Dangley, gave up work in Malton and returned to Cow Cove—for good, announcing that he would do wood-carving by the job. People thought it queer to drive all the way around the harbour, or row a mile in a boat, to consult a wood-carver, at a time when wood-carvers grew on every bush. But they brought him their work. You can see some of that work in Malton to this day; the fine mahogany lectern, the oak pulpit with its elaborately figured canopy, and the pew ends, in our small church of Saint Matthias on the hill; the wardens' chairs in the Masonic lodge the painted pine statue of Captain Red Hugh Tarrel which stands in the hall of the old Tarrel house, and scares child-visitors out of their wits and here and there in attics and barns a bit of scroll work, carefully stowed out of harms way “because ’twas made by Albert Dangley in the old time.” But Albert Dangley’s best work is lost and gone. For fifteen years he made figureheads for ships that came out of Malton yards and vanished over the horizon, never to return. He made the last when he was thirty five, at the height of his powers, and the Reverend Neal Thompson calling him a “Michael Angelo in wood.” That was in 1868, the year which brought a sudden end to Malton’s golden age.

In the spring of that year, on a fine April afternoon, lean Alexander Dawson drove to Cow Cove with his wife and daughter. They were in the phaeton, drawn by Dawson’s bays, famous the country round; and young Shaddock Watkins, seventeen, Dawson’s stable-boy, was at the reins. The winter’s snow was still hanging on in the shade of the woods, but the dirt road was bare, and the frost coming out of it. The carriage wheels whirled in mud. The sun shone and it was warm. The brooks were bank high. In the shore fields, where the people had spread their fish-compost ready for spring ploughing, the scavenging flocks of herring gulls rose and settled in raucous white clouds.

Cow Cove was a nick in the steep east shore, surrounded by thick second-growth spruce and fir, except the small knoll where the Dangley house stood. Only small boats could use it, for the great

rock we call the Cow sits in the narrow mouth of it, and others are beyond, showing only at low tide, which sailormen call The Calves. Young Shad pulled up outside Albert Bangley's workshop and jumped down to the horse's heads, and Dawson got out. Mrs. Dawson, plump and caustic and fifty-two, called after him, "Mind, there's to be no more posin' an' modelin' than can be helped." Sandy Dawson nodded. He had a gaunt Scots face with bushy pepper-and-salt side-whiskers, and grey twinkling eyes that could see a dollar a mile away. He ran the busiest shipyard in the county, and operated four big barques in the timber trade to Britain, and owned a third of the Malton Banking Company; but when Lizzie Dawson spoke, he listened.

Albert was at a carving for the stem of one of the Anderson schooners, absorbed as usual, and Dawson had to give him a thump on the shoulder for attention. Twenty years had not changed Albert much; the lean gawky figure, the lustreless yellow hair, the day-dreaming eyes were those of the boy Dawson had found carving the wooden negro.

"Albert", said Sandy Dawson, "I've a commission for ye. You've seen the barque I'm buildin'?"

Albert nodded slowly, and the yellow lock swung. Everybody knew the barque Dawson was building. Not the biggest, she was certainly the finest vessel ever to come out of a Malton yard, a-building since early in '67, and to be launched in September. "I'm namin' her after my daughter; and for the figurehead I want ye to model Kate herself. Ye can set your own price."

"I never modelled a woman," Albert muttered. He had made Indian chiefs (modelled mostly from old Noel Knock Wood, who lived by the salt marsh with his squaw) and rajahs and African princes from Malton negroes, and Melville merchants from their important selves, stiff in Sunday cloth; and he had made females by copying one or two of the old figureheads lying about Malton wharves; but

he had never modelled a woman alive, and the eyes he turned to Sandy were bleak with refusal. He had shunned women all his life.

Dawson did not let him get as far as No. He was quick and shrewd, was Dawson. “Kate’s out in the carriage now. Take a few measurements an’ make a sketch, can’t ye? No need o’ modelin’, man. Look–this is the finest vessel that ever came out o’ Malton. Mebbe the last, shippin’ the way it is. There’s no wood-carver like you in the world, Albert. Will ye stand by an’ see a foreigner from outside do her figurehead? Would have have my ship followin’ a bit of foreign work about the sea?”

Albert shuffled, and turned the chisel over and over in his hands, avoiding Dawson’s bright compelling eye. When Kate came in she saw him standing at his bench, clutching the chipped edge with his long hands behind him, as if for support. She was a lovely girl with Dawson’s nose and eyes and her mother’s brown hair, and when she smiled there was a dimple in one cheek and her teeth had a moist and white shine. She had a figure to hold a sculptor’s eye, even in hoops and four petticoats. She went up to Albert and put out her hand, smiling and Albert gasped–and surrendered. The sketch could be done in two or three sittings, he said.

After four or five sittings he announced in his flat monotonous voice, and looking up at the dusty rafters, that she must come more often. She must come at least twice a week until the figurehead was finished. There were things that couldn’t be set on paper, that must be carved into the wood, he said. This news made Lizzie Dawson sniff. She had a fanatic worship of respectability that a later generation knew as Victorian. So with a generalship no less Victorian she saw that Kate had an escort on her visits to Cow Cove, this was the son of John Thorpe, manager of the Malton Banking Company. Roy Thorpe was five-and-twenty, with black hair and curly black side-whiskers and fun-warmed brown eyes. He had been away to college without learning enough to dull his good humour, and now he was learning the banking business, but he spent most of

his time driving a smart gig about Malton's streets in summer, and in winter, was the life of Malton's drawing rooms. In those days the small town banker had a social rating beyond that of princes. Roy Thorpe was the most eligible young man in town.

On the first journey to Albert Dangle's shed, Roy sat on one of the carpenter's benches, smoking cigars and talking easily while Kate posed and Albert busied himself with pencil and calipers. The wood-carver was irritated and nervous, Kate made her escort wait outside after that, and he sat, bored, in the gig, looking down on Cow Cove from the rise of the harbour road, and watching the shipping across the water at Malton wharves.

On a thundery July afternoon, with a mass of piled white cloud, black-tipped, moving restlessly about the horizon and the sea shimmering in the heat, while Kate sat in the shed under Albert's blue eye, and Roy in the seat of the gig, on one of those days the directors of the Malton Banking Company held a meeting. The bank was a single storey wooden building on Main Street, next to the Lord Raglan Hotel, with a false front for height and dignity, and a flagstaff on the flat roof. Upon that flagstaff, every morning, one of the clerks hoisted the old flag of the province, the blue St. Andrew's cross on the white field, made by the directors' womenfolk; Nova Scotia had entered into a confederation with the other Canadian provinces the year before, under promise of a subsidy, and Maltonians, figuring it out, declared they had been sold into bondage "for forty cents a head—the price of a sheep skin". Shipping towns took their politics seriously in those days.

Standing outside the bank, you could look under the arching elms to the point where main street curved by the Dawson house. The Street ran close by the harbour there, with Dawson's humming shipyard on one side and Dawson's mansion sitting white and square on the other, sheltered by old and mighty trees. The bowsprit of the new barque was stood over the street, so that teams drove underneath, and the flying jib-boom reached high over Dawson's

fence into the shade of Dawson's elms. Dawson was launching her fully rigged. Her masts were of southern pine, the only wood in the ship that had not come out of the local forest. Men were busy with palm and needle in Miller's sail loft, in Castor's, in Hewlett's, making two complete suits of sails for her. McHarg the blockmaker had fashioned her blocks and dead-eyes; and all her ironwork was coming from Pell's foundry, on the lane running up the hill, where only a pasture is now.

The men in the directors' room were talking of those things. Merchants and shipbuilders and ship owners, with a finger in every Malton pie, and both thumbs in the Malton Banking Company. They sat about the long table, perspiring in the heat, under wood-panelled walls hung with pictures of Malton ships, painted in ports half over the world; men with fine homes along the shady end of Main Street—Dawson, Enslow, Pakenham, Millock, Finucane—the merchant aristocracy of the time long gone. Some of the houses are summer hotels now, and strangers live in all. The men in the bank were holding a wake, but they did not know it, even then. John Thorpe was speaking. A heavily built man, with an indoor face rigid and, grey with the mouth of a man who had made up his mind to something unpleasant and will have it out, hell or high water.

“You've gone against my advice on our last three loans. On this, you've not even asked it. But I'll tell you, asked or not, that the bank can't loan another dollar to Mr. Dawson on this new barque—or any other—at the present time.”

“A temporary drop in ocean freights. Och, man!” Dawson cried out, rolling his r's like musketry.

“We've had hard times in the shipping trade before.” Said Enslow.

“And, weathered 'em,” declared Millock, with a pull at his whiskers.

“Not like this” John Thorpe said. “You've not seen hard times yet. Or you've forgot what times were like, fifteen or twenty years back.”

“Ah, that!” snapped the handsome red-faced white-haired man Finucane. “No significance today. None.”

“I wish to God I could feel so sure,” said Thorpe. “This bank began business in ’54, the year of the war in the Crimea, and the British government buying and chartering every ship it could find. That lasted till ’56. In ’57, came the big mutiny in India, with troops and supplies to be carried around the Cape, and sustained there through a campaign. After that, shipping dropped a bit, working down towards a normal level, if you want the truth. But then came the war across the border, the war between the States, and for five years shipping and shipbuilding climbed to the skies. At the war’s end it dropped like a stone. We haven’t seen bottom yet. I’ll tell you why. Out of the American war have come a lot of fast steamers, built for blockade running, and on the trade routes now. They make quick runs from port to port. They can give a definite sailing date—no waiting for winds; they can give a date for arrival and hit it close. They’re getting all the freight they can handle—and more being built.”

“You’re not suggesting steamers will ever replace sail?” chuckled Enslow.

“I suggest we’ve been living in a fool’s paradise, and I tell you the bank’s in deep water as a result. All our funds in local ships and shipyards and the like. They’ve been losing money hand over fist since ’65—even Mister Dawson—”

“That’s a lie!” Dawson roared.

Icily Thorpe said, “It’s what you’ve told me, whenever I asked for a payment on the old loan.”

“I’ve paid my interest,” Sandy Dawson said virtuously. “On the date. Every cent.”

“Yes. Some of you haven’t even done that. You say ‘After all, I’m a shareholder’—as if that made everything right. That’s the worst of a

bank like ours—all eggs in one basket. Well, I say it's time to face the truth.”

The voices broke out in a storm, with John Thorpe in the midst like the Cow Rock in a south-easter. The directors were all active in shipping and shipbuilding, but much of the bank stock was held by retired merchants and captains or their easygoing heirs. All of Thorpe's own savings were in the bank. He saw the thing as a monster suddenly determined to devour the food. But the men in the room over-ruled him, shouted him down, as if the heat of the July day had got into their blood. Lean Sandy Dawson's loan was put to a vote and passed—\$40,000 to finish the barque and pay debts already incurred in the building. Thorpe went home with a look of death on his face. Dawson never spoke to him again; and Kate was forbidden to see his son.

The figurehead was finished in August. There was some debate about the figure part of it, Dawson wanting the customary flowing robes and Lizzie saying sharply she would have “no image of Kate naked in a wet sheet put up where men could see”. Red Hugh Tarrel settled the matter. People called him that to mark him from Black Hugh his cousin. He was the best of Dawson's captains, chosen for the new barque. “Don't give us a wumman wi' clo'es an' hair blowin' aft, as if we'd an everlastin' head wind,” growled Red Hugh Tarrel. So Albert modeled Kate in the little jacket and bodice she favoured that summer, with the outward sweep of hip and hoops melting away into the line of the stem-head, every fold, every hair in order, as if there were to be no winds in her life, fair or foul.

Kate liked to watch Albert at work. He had made most of his tools himself, nearly a hundred; chisels of many widths, some short, some long, some with straight shanks, some with shanks bent for difficult places; and gouges whose edges ran all the way from a deep U to an edge that seemed straight to the unknowing eye. These he kept sharp with a variety of special stones. For blocking out he struck the tool with a mallet that looked like a swollen potato masher; but

after that he struck the butt of chisel or gouge with the hard palm of his right hand. The tools for immediate use were always laid out on a strip of baize, with their glittering edges towards him, and it was fascinating to see his slim clever fingers going out to pick one up, swiftly, exactly, as if there were eyes in their tips, or a brain that knew which was wanted. Albert never looked. His strange eyes were always on the wood, with swift under-glances at Kate.

The wood was a balk of English elm, specially imported by a home-bound Dawson ship. White pine was usual, being easily worked and durable and taking paint well; but Dawson would have nothing so common for the vessel that all Malton was now calling *The Kate*.

At first, she tried to get Albert to talk. But he could not work under such a handicap. So she talked, to pass the time, and because it amused her, the belle of the county, to prattle her prettiest and get no response. And one day, after some touches with a fine tool held in the very tips of his fingers, he laid the thing down very carefully and said, without looking up, "It's finished."

"It's much better-looking than I am," said candid Kate.

"It is you," he answered quietly. "When the wood came I saw you alive in the heart of it. I have set you free, that is all."

"It's beautiful," Kate said, standing before it.

"I can't bear them take it away," Albert said dully.

"Why?"

"Because you'll go with it. Because you're so beautiful, and your voice is like water running in the woods in April."

"Why, Albert," she said laughing, "how nice of you to say that." And suddenly Albert was on his knees in the chips and shavings, pressing her skirt to his cheek and weeping that he loved her. Her face went

scarlet. She had a notion to call out for young Shad Watkins, sitting in the gig outside.

“Albert,” Kate said sharply, “don’t be so silly. Albert–Albert Danglely.” When she said “silly” he got on his feet and stood very straight. A passion burned in his pale blue eyes where there had never been anything but a dream, and it was startling, like seeing a face in the window of a house long empty.

“You say ‘silly’! But you are going to marry that young loafer who knows nothing but horses, and stinks of cigars–that Thorpe!”

“I’m not,” very coldly. “And it’s none of your business. Now, let me pass, please.”

He moved aside, dragging his old worn boots, as if very tired of a sudden, and when she reached the door he called out to her.

“Ah, that Thorpe! No good! None of them! They live by the work of people like me–them and their great houses and fine horses, and the daughters of honest shipwrights waiting on their tables–ah!” She was going out head in air. “It’s rotten. Rotten! Rotten! All of it! You’ll see!”

Kate paused. “I’ll see–what?” Curiously.

“The rot–the rot! I don’t know.” He was whining like a beaten boy, but with that bewitched look on his face.” Like a stump in the woods, that looks sound, and goes to dust at a kick. “I see it like that. And you down on your knees somehow–with your face to me, fresh and beautiful. On your knees to silly Albert. You! It makes me cry!”

“You make me laugh,” snapped Kate, and laughed to prove it.

“When you come to me on your knees,” Albert said, “I shall laugh.” He screamed after her, “I shall laugh then! You hear?”

But she did not hear. She was stepping into the gig and telling young Shad to make a fast pace for Malton, and when Albert reached the door he saw nothing but her parasol floating away over the brown

dust from the wheels. He looked towards the house then and saw his mother's white face in the window. They stared at each other.

The launching was a gala affair. Soon after daylight people began to arrive in buggies and wagons from the country, and before noon all the stables were full, and the hitching racks outside the stores on Main Street; and in the vacant lots behind the Lord Raglan Hotel and Murphy's bakery the horses were tethered in rows, with a bounty of hay strewn all about their feet. There was no work in the shipyards and stores, there was silence in the sail lofts and rigging lofts, no smoke in the foundry chimney. Main Street was a mass of people in Sunday clothes, wandering up and down, talking excitedly, calling out to each other in passing. The shadows of trees crept in towards their trunks, as if for shelter from the noon sun. It was a hot still September day, and the wandering boots on the town's plank sidewalks sent up a dull sound of thunder. But there was no cloud in the high blue sky. The green of the lawns and shrubs were jaded after the summer drought. Half the wells of the town had gone dry. The dust of the street had caked on the shop fronts and on the neat picket fences that guarded the big houses past Dawson's yard, and the clothes of the country people were grey with the dust of the roads.

All the ship-carpenters were out with their families, and the caulkers and riggers, the shop-clerks and stevedores, the loafers, the crews of ships in port; fishermen from Entry Cove and Deep Cove and the little boat stagings that clustered under the ramparts of East Head; hands from the sawmills at Grenville, and farmers and lumberjacks from all the country around.

And the object of all eyes was the beautiful thing in Dawson's yard, a-flutter with bunting from stem to stern by way of the mastheads. She looked immense aloft, for she carried three royals and the wide yards went up like steps to heaven, and the hull was slim below. She dwarfed the tall trees of Main Street, and the glitter of her paint and varnish made a shabbiness all about her—the littered yard, the sheds

and warehouses with their unpainted sun-curved shingles, the thick dust of Main Street, yes, and the dusty hot-faced people in Sunday clothes now gathering like sea under her forefoot. The launching platform was set up, and draped in bunting, and there was a white sheet over the figurehead that all Malton was eager to see.

At two o'clock in the afternoon there was a burst of martial music, and the Malton brass band came down from the fire hall, with the red coats and gleaming Enfield muskets of the militia company behind, and the crowd parted to let them through. They formed a square about the launching platform and fixed their long glittering bayonets, as if determined to prevent this monster from following her bowspirit into Dawson's house. And at that moment the big front door of the Dawson mansion opened, and in decorous pairs, conscious of their worth, and full of sherry and biscuits, forth came, the aristocracy of Malton, a stately procession of stovepipe hats and parasols. They marched out of the Dawson gate in the very shadow of the jib-boom, and took their stations, with much fluttering and hitching about the launching platform, surrounded in their turn by the brave red coats. On the platform stood Sandy and Lizzie and Kate, with a select company, *creme de la creme*, of Enslows and Finucanes. There were speeches, which everybody heard raptly. Oratory flourished in the small towns in those day. Then rose the clamour of mauls beneath the hull, where under Dan Fordyce's eye, men were splitting out the keel blocks. On the barque's deck Red Hugh had gathered a gang of volunteers to attend the anchors and lines, assisted by the usual small boys, who had swarmed aboard the dolphin striker from the road.

At a nod from Fordyce, Dawson touched his daughter's arm, and Kate stepped up to the dangling bottle of wine. The people cheered. She was in blue silk from bonnet to hems, and people compared her with the ship that was to sail under her name. Both slim and handsome; both a bit over-sparred but none the worse for it. Kate swung the bottle. It gave a gentle bump on the hull and came back. She caught it and swung again. It struck harder but not hard

enough. There were loud warning voices below, where the block-splitters were jumping clear, and the hull gave a shudder of life. "Quick!" Dawson snapped and snatched away the shroud from the figurehead. Kate grasped the bottle by the neck and with an unladylike swing brought it hard on the now moving stem. Glass and champagne flew in a shower, but nobody noticed. All eyes were turned in to the towering mast-heads. Would she run away with herself? Would she jam on the ways? Would she topple on her side and ruin the Dawsons, the day and herself in one earth-shaking crash? She did none of these things. She went into the harbour with a swoop, and in a minute there was silence and sunlight where she had been born, and all the people staring at Kate, the flesh-and-blood blue-silk Kate. A chunk of the flying bottle had gashed her hand and blood dripped from her fingers. Gallant old Finucane bound it up with a handkerchief, in a thin babble of female alarm, and Kate was smiling. But the sailors and stevedores shook their heads at an omen.

As the barque took the water there was a great surge, and the planks of the launching ways spewed out underneath, a heaping wet tangle of wood. The gang on the bow let go both anchors and paid out a good length of chain to give her spring to bring up on, and the stern line, passed beforehand to the head of the packed wharf, was now heaved in mightily, to keep her stern off the flats.

Next day she was at McGarry's wharf, loading deals for England; and that evening young Shad Watkins saw Kate and Roy Thorpe in the warm dusk under the locust trees by the stable. The bandage on Kate's hand shone white in the murk, and Shad saw Roy lift it to his lips. Their voices were very low, and presently they stood close, and the pale glimmer of their faces became one and Kate's hat fell to the ground. Shad Watkins preserved that secret more than seventy years. "I was, young then," he said in his old dry rustling voice. "Seventeen-eighteen, mebbe. Struck me dumb p'raps. Roy Thorpe wasn't good enough for her, but he loved her I guess; and may the good Lord rest them kindly wherever it was they went. Malton never

saw 'em again. The West, some say. A hard life then—and neither had ever done a hand's turn.”

Sandy Dawson was a thrifty man and never shipped a crew till sailing day, so when the “Katherine M. Dawson” was drawing sixteen feet, and had to be taken over the bar to complete her loading, a gang of Dawson's longshoremen took her out, under Red Hugh's tongue and eye. They anchored her opposite Fish Point, and her deck cargo was towed out in rafts by Paddy Mahan's paddle-wheel tug. With the deck cargo snug in it's lashing planks and lanyards, and the skipper, the mates and the cook settled in their fine new quarters, Sandy Dawson signed a crew in the old shipping office at the corner of Dock Street and Wentworth Lane. They stopped for a last drink here and there in the little sailors' rum shops along Dock Street and went off in the tug with their sea-bags and straw-sacks, roaring a ballad of Tress Muldoon's boarding house that nobody remembers now.

“Sail in the mornin'” Dawson told Red Hugh, “Not too early. The whole town'll want to see how she feels her canvas.”

“What about my papers?” Red Hugh said.

“I'll fix 'em up before breakfast. There's the insurance, too. All in good time. We've had a long day.”

Red Hugh gave him a shrewd glance. Dawson, looked old. Kate's elopement had hit him in the one place where his heart was soft. Town rumour said Dawson had charged John Thorpe with a hand in it, and there had been high words. Some said Thorpe was discharged by the bank directors, and some that he had resigned. But the man was down with a stroke, complaining of a great weight on his chest, as if the top-heavy bank itself had settled there.

It was a fair September evening when the sun went down, with a light breeze off the blue hills to the west. People worked long in those days and slept soundly. By ten o'clock all Malton was dark

and the air still as death. It was like that when John Thorpe died, at two o'clock in the morning, with his wife and Doctor Barnaby at the bedside. At three it was blowing a whole gale from the south-east. It came as quick as that—the famous Line Gale of '68. The town awoke in a clatter of unfastened shutters and doors, and trees beating the air and loose things blowing about the streets, and rain filling the air like something solid. Women scurried from room to room slamming the windows against the storm. Men pulled on boots and trousers and came running and shouting in little groups along Main Street, past Dawson's, past the other mansions, heading for Fish Point. South-east the narrow like a gun, with the wind thrusting straight up the barrel. The storm had found the fatal weakness of Malton Harbour and howled its triumph to the hills.

Fish Point was crowded soon with half-dressed men staring north over the water. The barque was riding to both bowers, a shape, a mere presence in the furious dark. They could fancy Red Hugh and his language, caught like that between the storm and the bar. They talked confidently of the new cables, of the good holding ground, of Red Hugh's famous luck; but mostly they talked of the anchors, made in Pell's foundry on the hillside, Each was of wrought iron, with shank, crown and flukes in one piece, the shank six feet from shackle to crown, and a span of six feet from fluke to fluke, and each fluke fifteen inches long, with a four inch point. The heavy wooden stock was of yellow birch in two pieces each nine feet long, and bound together with six iron bands to form a solid balk twelve inches through. They weighed a ton apiece, the best bit of anchor work ever turned out of Pell's, and men thought of them and the new hemp cable made fast to each great iron ring, and the cable end parcelled and served against chafe, and said that "The Kate" was safe. Some believed it, even when a great sea began to roll into the harbour, and the "Katherine M. Dawson" surged and surged in the howling dark. The bar was breaking the whole way across, now, roaring under the assault of piled seas. And the sea drove the watchers back from the shore. It ran up Fish Point and tore at the

grass sod, and ran back, into the darkness, with a sucking rattle, that deafened the ears; and then without warning sprang out of the dark again, a wall, white-foamed, at eye level, breaking in thunder and hurling cobblestones about their feet.

There was a thin sound of wheels and hooves, and the men turned and saw Dawson in his gig, with young Shad at the reins. "Does she hold?" Cried Dawson in a voice they had never heard before. "She holds!" they bawled, but as they cried they saw the barque's anchor lights swing. "Hold! Hold!" Sandy Dawson screamed, as if cables and anchors could hear. The lights moved at a gallant speed. "There!" He had not meant to sound triumphant but triumphant he sounded, and Dawson turned on him harshly. "There," he said, thrusting a bony finger out into the hissing dark, "goes all Malton!" Afterwards they knew what he meant, but not then. "God help Red Hugh and his men if she strikes on the bar!"

Red Hugh was making, that moment, the decision that saved him and his men. A bellow sent them aloft to let fall the stiff new fore topsail. That brought the barque stern-to wind and sea and gave her steerage way. Dead to leeward thundered the bar. Four points off the starboard bow he could see the tall spouts thrown up by the Cow, and steered for it, risking the Calves on the height of a full moon tide and a piled-up sea brought in by the wind. She touched one and staggered, but fled on at a speed they could only guess. Red Hugh with his own great paws on the wheel, ran her dead into the gap between the Cow and the shore. Before she struck he called all hands aft, expecting the masts to go. But the new rigging held. She struck and fetched up at once, nipped between rock and shore, and the great seas breaking over the stern. Red Hugh and the others on the half deck were swept off their feet and washed along the deck. They clambered into the fore rigging, and out along the lower fore yard arm and slid down the brace into the woods. It was as neat as that. They would not desert their ship, even then, but stayed by the shore. One man had dry matches, the quaint stinking card-matches that Charles Oslen made in his little factory on Queen Street, and

they lit a great fire, for comfort, I suppose, though the gale blew the smoke and flame all about them, and would have fired the woods if it had not been for the rain.

In the small house above Cow Cove, Albert Danglely heard the crash of Red Hugh's berthing, and ran out into the storm-beaten woods to the shore. He blundered out of the trees, the fire flamed suddenly, and the barque appeared, enormous and frightful in that narrow space, with spars towering up into nothingness. But Albert saw the bright figure of Kate, serene in jacket and bodice, kneeling at the very edge of the bank, lit by the red flame of the fire. When Dawson and the others arrived by the harbour road, they found him there, gibbering.

"What's he say?" Dawson bellowed.

"Something about a prophecy."

1909 (First version)

The Public Works Department listed her as “No.1909, dredge, dipper-type, five-yard capacity, wooden hull.” The waterfront loafers called her a “drudge”, and that is what she really was. Once she had a name, a beautiful Indian name, Malawaka, but that was painted out when the Department decided to number everything. She was very ugly, but she was well suited to her job of scooping muck out of harbors and rivers so that ships could pass.

A good deal of thought had gone into her conception. An expert had even visited the Panama Canal, which was still being dug in those days (I shall be telling you her age next), and she had come back with the latest in dipper-dredge ideas. And so 1909 was born in a scow-yard up the St. Lawrence with a timber hull ninety-five feet long by forty-five wide, and nine feet deep from deck to bottom. Upon that hull they built a wooden house, square and flatroofed, with doors and windows like a two story dwelling ashore, so that at a distance the whole thing looked like a doll's house afloat on a herring box.

The house contained quarters for the crew; and house and hull together contained the powerful hoisting machinery, a condenser, an air pressure tank, a sturdy Scotch boiler, a dynamo and so on. But you saw none of that when you stood on the wharf. What took your eye there was the great steel boom, which was fifty feet long and weighed fifteen tons; at the forward end of that boom the six-ton dipper handle and the four-ton dipper bucket. All this forward weight was sustained by three-inch steel cables rigged over a tall steel A-frame and fastened to the hull aft. Not knowing how cunningly the weight of her machinery had been distributed in the hull to balance it, you looked at that ponderous boom and bucket and wondered what kept her from pitching on her nose.

When at work 1909 anchored herself to the river bottom by putting down two long timber legs called spuds; and there she stood like a

stork, scooping at the bottom with her beak. She had a third spud which she trailed astern, and by this she steered. When she wished to move ahead for another bite at the mud, she hoisted her legs straight up into the air and dropped the heavy bucket to the bottom, then she hauled herself forward by dragging on the sunken bucket, as a ship warps herself up to an anchor. All this made sailors laugh.

When Johnnie Wister joined 1909 as engineer he was thirty years old and he had worked in dredges since he was a boy. Besides himself the crew consisted of a captain, an oiler, a fireman, three deck hands and a cook. There was a bit of trouble on the first job. The tall girders of the A-frame suddenly toppled back on the house and crushed the trim funnel like a can under a steam roller, and the boom swung wildly and knocked seven bells out of an iron scow loading mud alongside. But that was a little accident of design, a growing pain you might say. They cocked up the A-frame at a sharper angle and after that she behaved properly.

It was a seasonal job, for of course the St. Lawrence river froze every winter and stayed frozen several months. Every Fall 1909 was laid up carefully in one of the river ports, with water drained and pipes disconnected, to suffer the winter and await the spring. And Johnnie was left in charge of her, with a stove set up in his room in the house. The winters were lonely until he met Melisse who lived near the dock where the dredge was moored.

Melisse was not pretty but she was respectable, and twenty-six and she could cook and sew. Johnnie's courting was awkward, for he spoke French a little worse than Melisse spoke English. They spent a couple of months learning to talk to each other. Soon after the New Year they were married and Melisse came down to live with Johnnie on board the dredge. She fitted up their room with curtains and bits of printed stuff, and they bought new sheets, blankets and a couple of easy chairs. Altogether it was a snug and happy winter, and for the first time Johnnie was sorry when Spring came. But it came, and when the crew arrived, Melisse had to go ashore and stay

with her parents. In November, when the dredge returned to the familiar winter berth, her crew departed as usual and Melisse came back aboard—with a baby. In this way her life went on for years. They were married in the early part of the 1914 war, and when the post-war slump fell upon the world in 1921 there were four children, three girls and a boy, all of whom looked and talked like Melisse.

With the slump there was talk of retrenchment, a strange word. Dredging schedules were cut like everything else, and amongst other economies Dredge 1909 was laid, up until further notice. Johnnie's job remained, for there had to be someone to look after 1909, and he received permission to keep his family on board with him. Men out of work about the docks envied him. He had not only a job but the softest job in the world. But after a soft year or two Johnnie was not so sure. It was strange and disturbing, the summer days and weeks going by in idleness, the dredge silent except for the voices of his children, nothing moving but the family wash fluttering on the line rigged to the funnel. Melisse on the other hand was content. She was living in her own house and close to her own family. She had a husband with a steady job and she had children. What else could any woman want? Every month she put part of Johnnie's pay in the bank, in her own name, for she had the French-Canadian woman's careful instinct in such matters and she was the family treasurer.

Years went by like this, like a dream in which everything stood still except the offspring of her marriage. As the children grew the family took over the rest of the sleeping quarters, and Melisse fitted curtains in the other windows, and little pots of geraniums. She was a pious woman and she took the children regularly to church. She was ambitious for them, too, and every weekday morning she bundled them off to school. Her own people lived not far from the dock and there was a great visiting back and forth, with a lively chatter of **Quebecois**, a language that Johnnie found very difficult. Melisse in her sensible way had learned quite a bit of English for his benefit and she talked to him in his own tongue with a droll mixture

of French words that he knew; but amongst her people he might as well have been deaf and dumb. He felt a foreigner in their midst, and although he tried to teach his children English there were times he felt a foreigner amongst them, too.

Following the war the world seemed to be in a very queer state. Sometimes there came sudden flurries, telegrams demanding to know how soon 1909 could be made ready for a dredging job, and Johnnie after much furrowed thinking would wire back “Two weeks” or “Three weeks” according to his state of mind. But nothing came of these affairs until the year 1927. Then at last Dredge 1909 was ordered into commission, a commission at what seemed the end of the earth, a port on the salty coast of Nova Scotia. Johnnie, Melisse, her family, everyone was astounded. **“Comment? Nouvelle-Ecosse? Impossible!”** But it was possible, they found that out. When the new crew arrived, Melisse moved her children ashore and rented rooms in a tenement close by the home of her people. She kissed Johnnie goodbye, in her matter-of-fact way, and the children, seven of them now, stood in a little row beside her and waved their hands.

The dredge and its attendant scows went down the broad river and the gulf, in tow of a tug, a queer little flotilla. It irked Johnnie to see a gang of strangers moving about the rooms which Melisse had made so bright and comfortable with her bits of chintz and home-made rugs. They chaffed him about the curtains and the flowerpots in the windows. But he said nothing. It was good to be doing his proper job again and at full pay after all that penny pinching and scraping. And winter would come again, even in Nova Scotia, and then he could send for Melisse and have his family about him once again. He even cherished a hope that down there on the coast where everyone spoke English, the children might come a little closer to him.

But when winter came and the crew departed, when the dredge was snugly moored to a Nova Scotia wharf, there came a letter from

Melisse. Impossible to come all the way down there, she wrote. Seven hundred miles, someone had told her. Too far. Too expensive. Besides there was the children's schooling, and she did not wish to go far from a church. Although Melisse now spoke English fairly well in her fashion she could not write a word of it, and so the letter was in French. It took Johnnie some time to puzzle out all the words. In the end he shrugged, as a Frenchman might have done, and made the best of a lonely winter in the dredge, seven hundred miles from Melisse and the seven young replicas of her.

The dredge worked in various harbours on the rugged Nova Scotia coast. For two summers she worked at Port Ballard. It was a river mouth with a bar composed mostly of silt dropped by the stream where it met the tide. A mile or two beyond the bar stretched a long concrete mole that guarded the anchorage, for the estuary was exposed to the sweep of the Atlantic. 1909 scooped away at the bar channel swinging the reeking muck into her scows; and a tug dragged the scows out to sea to dump the stuff and bring them back again. Each winter 1909 was laid up, and at Christmas time Johnnie got permission to leave her for a week to visit his family. Port Ballard was a quiet place in winter. It was not a large town and along the waterfront everyone knew everybody else. Before long everyone knew Johnnie Wister. They called him Cap'n, facetiously but pleasantly, and they never failed, to ask him how things were aboard his "ship". They were a seafaring people and 1909 with its window curtains and geraniums amused them very much.

At the end of the second summer there the crew were laid off as usual. It had been rumored amongst them that 1909 would be returned to the St. Lawrence now that the Port Ballard job was done, and after they had gone a telegram came to Johnnie. He opened it in hope and read it in dismay. **Dredge 1909 to be laid up at Port Ballard until further notice. Request you remain caretaker.**

And so again the emptiness of seasons that came and went in idleness. From time to time a government inspector appeared,

otherwise Johnnie would have felt certain that the Public Works Department had forgotten 1909. His children were strangers now. They wrote to him, rarely and stiffly, evidently at the command of Melisse; always in French. Once or twice at his urging Melisse left her brood and came east by train to stay a year or two with him on the dredge. Her hair was getting grey and her face was worn. It had not been easy, she pointed out, bringing up that large family on a dredge-engineer's pay. She met his clumsy affection with a stolid indifference, and something inside him was chilled. He yearned to go home with her, not just for Christmas but for long enough to get acquainted with his children once again. But the dredge inspector told him, "Times are hard, Wister. Big slump since '29—Men out of work everywhere. Government's cutting expenses like everybody else.—They could hire a watchman cheaper than an engineer like you. In your shoes, I would not call attention to myself, not for a minute. Sit tight, say nothing, take your pay and be thankful. That's my advice."

All through the 1930's people came down to the Port Ballard docks and stopped to gaze at the dredge, pointing out the great boom, the heavy bucket, the thick supporting cables, and smiling at the curtains and the flower pots. 1909 had become a fixture, a permanent show-piece of the salty waterfront. Melisse's letters became fewer and shorter and more empty as the time went by. Her one cry was **dépense**. Expense of shoes, of clothes, of schooling, of rent, of everything but the **dépense** of separation that gnawed at Johnnie's heart.

He busied himself with painting. The PWD doted on paint as a preservative and the dredge inspector made sure that he got a good supply. Johnnie began aft and worked forward, plying his brush with slow and careful strokes. He painted the hull and topsides a deep yellow and trimmed it with red. The funnel was yellow with a black top, and he renewed the **PWD 1909** in clear white letters on the black. The big turntable forward was a bright red, and the same red went on the capstans at each corner of the deck, and on the great

steel boom. He clambered about the steep girders of the A-frame painting them the same deep yellow as the hull. The dinghy hanging in its davits, the one nautical touch about 1909, did not escape his notice and his brush.

Then he turned to the interior. The walls of the living quarters he kept a chaste and shining white. The engineroom walls were grey. Black paint went on the engine casings. The fat asbestos jackets of the steam pipes were lemon yellow. As a final touch he painted the big condenser in the aftermost part of the engine room a bright grass green. Altogether, inboard and outboard, above and below, it was a huge expanse for one solitary brush. It took a whole summer to make the round and by the time he was putting the final touches on those absurdly domestic window frames the paint on the hull aft had begun to blister and flake again. And so he painted his way through the seasons, the depressing years of the 1930's, inch by inch, on foot, on ladders, in boatswain's-chairs slung by blocks and tackles, with his gaze fixed on the homely surface of 1909 and his back to the wharf and the world.

The owner of the wharf was a man who had rendered some sort of service, nobody knew quite what, to the right party at election time. His wharf was a shaky affair. It was old and tired and it drooped on its rotten piling over the harbor water as if contemplating suicide. No self-respecting schooner would tie up to it. But when 1909 came to Port Ballard the wharf became, for some mysterious reason, the only one suitable for mooring a dredge. The owner received fifty dollars a month for its use, and as the months grew into years, and the years went on one after another, he came quite naturally to regard 1909 as a permanent plum that yielded him six hundred dollars a year.

It was such juicy plum that other eyes became fixed on it. Now and then during the year the government changed at Ottawa, and there were reverberations all the way down to the sea. Whenever this happened, 1909 was moved to another wharf as ramshackle as the

first, but owned by a man on the more fortunate side of politics. Thus at intervals of years Johnnie's floating home, his pride, his job were shifted from the Liberal to the Tory wharf, or from the Tory back to the Liberal wharf; and as the longshoremen fastened the lines again they cried up to his brooding presence on the house, "There! Another voyage, Johnnie boy! Why don't you blow your horn?"

Inside Johnnie's heart was sad. But aloud, he insisted that 1909 was kept at Port Ballard for good purpose, and one day they would see. He repeated this one day in 1938 to the dredge inspector, a new man, short and red and blunt of speech. The inspector smiled grimly.

"Wister, let me tell you something. She's out of date. She was obsolete ten years after she was built. Too expensive to operate—that's why she's still laid up. Cheaper nowadays to let out the dredgin' to private contractors."

"I don't believe it" Johnnie cried. "Um," the inspector grunted. "Well, get this. 1909's old—old as the Ark. And obsolete, like I said. Takes eight men to operate her, all on wages, government scale. Cheaper, cheaper far to leave her where she is and let out the dredging on contract to some of these nifty new diesel-electric rigs that private owners operate. This thing? Cha! She'll never dig another yard o' mud. Should ha' been junked years ago, tell the truth, and saved all this expense. But I s'pose she's on the books somewhere for what she cost and they hate to write it off."

"But," Johnnie cried, "she's in good shape. I've kept her fine. I've painted..." "Ah!" They were standing in the engine room, and the inspector noted the ornamental, gilt stars with which Johnnie had touched off the ends of the pressure tank. "Paint" he said. "IT's your bloomin' paint alone that's holdin' her together, Wister. That, and a book-keeper's entry at Ottawa." As he went ashore he stabbed a thick finger at the tidal flats across the harbor. "That's where she belongs. Tow her over there and let her rot, if I'd my way. She's

not worth another dollar's wharfage. If you come to the fine point, Wister, she isn't worth another day's pay. Not another lick of your brush. She isn't worth a damn."

Long after the man had gone Johnnie Wister stared across the narrow harbor. Gulls drowsed like small whitewashed images in rows along the tidal flats. He tried to imagine 1909 over there, stripped of his paint by suns and frosts and rains, her wooden hull a roost for those feckless birds. Old? The very word was shocking. He went to the chamber where the shreds of Mellisse's curtains still hung, and stared at himself in the mirror she had left behind. Old! It was true. The proof was right there in the glass. He was old himself. He had passed half his life in this floating tomb, this painted coffin, and it seemed incredible.

He moved about in a trance for days, for weeks, his paint-pots forgotten. Parmentter, the grocer at the head of the dock lane, declared that that old boy had gone queer at last, and no wonder after daubing that old tub round and round, for years and years. He went no more to the post office. He was afraid to go for fear there might be a notice from the P.W.D., remembering him after all these years and writing him off the books with 1909. He stayed on board, mostly lying in his bunk, thinking on Melisse and his children, nearly all grown up now but still somehow under the eternal *dépense* that took his pay. I must hold on, he thought, I must keep the job, I must hang on to 1909 until they go over the books in Ottawa and decide to give her to the birds.

He was lying there in just that fashion, at the end of the summer of '39, when the inspector came thumping up the worn gangway, straight from the train. It was raining and the inspector's bowler shone with wet. The drip from his raincoat made a small pool on Johnnie's painted floor.

"Wister!" he shouted. "Wister, wake up, man! There's a job for 1909. Believe or not. By gosh, it took a war ..."

“War?” Johnnie said, rising slowly and staring at the man. “War?” The word meant nothing to him except a dim memory of 1914, when he and Melisse had married in the little town beside the St. Lawrence, when he and she and 1909 were young.

“War!” the inspector repeated loudly. “The Germans again. Don’t you ever read the papers? It’s been coming on for months, and now it’s here, and hell’s a-popping. Amongst places the Canadian Navy’s decided to use Port Ballard. They want the bar dredged down another two feet and 1909’s the only thing available. Don’t stare at me like that. Snap out of it, Man!”

“They want 1909?” whispered Johnnie, staring. The inspector regarded a thin, stopped, grey wisp of a man, a ghost of a man, but for all that the engineer of 1909.

“She’s a god-send, Wister, sittin’ right on the spot the way she is. Not a right job for a dipper, mind, not as dredgin’ goes nowadays. To do the job fast and sure they ought to have a suction-dredge, nothin’ less, but try and get one now! The crew’ll be here in a day or two. I just dropped off the train to warn you and take a look around.”

He threw open a club-bag, pulled out a suit of blue denim overalls and drew them over his neat brown serge. Then, regardless of rain, he ran about the deck, squinting at the steel cables stretched over the A-frame, staring at the heavy bull-heads aft as if in some inhuman fashion he could see the cable-ends under the mass of babbitt there. He swarmed up the boom on all fours like a fat blue ape to look at the sheaves. He came down and dived into the engine room. Then he was out on deck again, pulling up the plates of man-holes, rattling down iron rungs, ferreting about inside the hull with a pocket-knife and an electric torch. At last he went away saying fiercely, “I dunno, Wister. T’ain’t in the nature o’things to stand idle all that time and still be fit to run. Not without a thorough overhaul at a shipfitter’s dock. But there y’are. What’s a man to say, and a war on? She’ll do. She s got to do.”

The crew came, a scratch crew picked up in a hurry, and for three weeks the interior of 1909 gave forth sounds of men in struggle with wood and metal. The new captain regarded Johnnie Wister with doubt at first. The engineer looked as old, as crazy as the dredge itself. But the man actually knew where everything was, the parts carefully laid away in grease, all those important nuts and bolts and fittings whose fate in laid up dredges is to disappear.

Port Ballard beheld a phenomenon, 1909 actually moving, not from one political wharf to another but down the harbor itself, towed by a tug and flanked by a pair of iron scows. Her late berth looked naked and forlorn, as if, a large and unusually well-painted part of it had on a sudden floated away. The town, without warning, had lost its best and oldest joke. On the harbor bar 1909 halted, put down her spuds and gripped the bottom. Johnnie went trembling to his levers, praying for his old skill to come back.

It took several working hours, it cost the scows a resounding thump or two as the bucket came down too far or too fast, but the knack returned. Johnnie sweated over the levers, his pale blue eyes anxious in the grey unshaven face, but there was a smile on his lips. He wanted to shout. He wanted to dance. He glanced back towards Port Ballard, that huddle of roofs and wharf-ends where the river entered salt water. He shook his fist. He cried aloud, "Laugh now, damn you, all of you! A war—a war, that's what she was kept here for. It was the Navy sent for her and put her on the job."

The captain surveyed him curiously. Cracked, he thought. A good enough engineer, familiar with this bloody museum, but cracked alright, no doubt of it. Oh well, he was no worse than the dredge itself, at that.

The harbor bar was quite narrow and the channel was not wide. Working day and night the old dredge made good progress. The job was almost done, when early one October morning the lightkeeper on Town Point came out of his white wooden dwelling and hoisted

a black drum and cone on the yard-arm of the signal mast. It was a fine Fall day. The chimneys of Port Ballard, two miles up the estuary, smoked peacefully in the sunshine.

“Hello,” the captain said, regarding the symbols on the mast ashore. “That’s a storm wannin’, ain’t it?”

“Yes,” Johnnie said. “The cone points down—that means a gale from the east. And the drum means it’s a big one. Better shift up into Port Ballard.”

“Itchin’ to get back to that ol’ wharf ain’t, you?” returned the captain amiably.

“Look,” Johnnie mumbled. “This bay’s wide open to the sou’east.”

“What d’you mean, ‘wide open’? There’s the breakwater, Johnnie. Shelter there. That’s what they built it for. I’ll get the tug to pull us out clear of the bar and into the lee of the breakwater. We can get bottom there with the spuds—I’ve seen the harbor chart—and if it’ll make you feel any safer I’ll put out the anchors too, all four of ’em. There we’ll be, hooked to the bottom like a cat to a carpet, and the breakwater between us and the wind. Then let it blow.” He turned to hail the tug and make these arrangements.

As the tug moved 1909 and the two scows into the lee of the breakwater Johnnie caught the captain’s arm again.

“Moon,” he said. “Moon’s nigh full. Come a sou’easter and a full-moon tide, you’ll see things fly. I know. I ain’t been here in salt water all these years for nothin’.” The captain shrugged. He was looking at the breakwater, long and large between the river mouth and the sea.

“I seen the sea goin’ clean over that, like it wasn’t there, in a sou’easter,” Johnnie said. “And here ’tis Fall, the hurricane season.”

“This ain’t the West Indies,” chuckled the captain. He was a St. Lawrence river man himself and he had a freshwater man’s opinion

of saltwater yarns. The breakwater was of reinforced steel and concrete and it reached well into the bay. Moreover it stood twelve feet above ordinary spring tides, and its wide top was a favorite parking place for Port Ballard couples in cars on balmy summer nights.

A low grey scud drew in from the south and covered the autumn sky. Rain fell lightly, stopped for a time, and then came down in a deluge. A low swell began to roll into the estuary. It curled around the end of the breakwater and set up a rocking motion in the tug, the dredge and the scows. 1909 lifted and dropped hard on her studs once or twice, and the captain ordered Johnnie to draw them up clear. She rode comfortably to her anchors then, all four of them. "As safe as a church", the captain said.

The swell increased, and suddenly a wind came swooping up the bay, lifting spray from the sea as it came and blowing it in a fine mist through the harbor and the town. By the mid-morning the estuary was a shrieking white froth. The growing gale whistled through the high girders of 1909's A-frame and set up a deep bass moaning in the great steel stays of the boom. But the house and the hull below were sheltered by the solid bulk of the breakwater, and the crew amused themselves with poker, looking up from time to time to watch the rain cascading down the window panes.

Johnnie remained on the top deck where he could look over the breakwater and watch the sea. The tide was low when the wind began. Finally it turned. As the tidal flow increased so did the gale, piling the sea into the river mouth in steep waves that came quickly on each other's heels. Borne on the wind Johnnie could hear the dismal clang of the fairway buoy, somewhere in the wet riot to seaward. In Port Ballard by mid-afternoon trees that had stood for centuries were blowing down. At four o'clock the steeple of the Baptist church, the tallest in town, toppled into the graveyard and demolished twenty tombstones at a stroke. At five o'clock the plate glass windows of half a Port Ballard shops blew in and exposed

their goods to the cataract of rain and wind. At half-past five the steam laundry lost its tall brick chimney. By that time most of the inhabitants of Port Ballard were huddling in their cellars, feeling the house frames shudder in the gusts, hearing the great wind rushing through the streets like a procession of mad locomotives. It was a hurricane, alright, they said; the worst in fifty years, in a hundred years, in the whole history of the town. All this time the tide was coming in.

At six o'clock the tide had risen close to the breakwater top. The skipper of the tug bawled through a megaphone that he was pulling up his hook and making for the inner harbor. He offered to take the dredge in tow, a brave enough gesture in view of the tumult on the harbor bar. The captain of 1909 looked at the seas on the bar and would have none of it. He was frightened now but it was too late for regrets. He stood on the deck, in the blast of wind and rain, shaking his head to the tug skipper's offer, and finally waved him off with a hand in which, forgotten, the last deal of poker cards was still firmly clutched. He pinned his faith on the breakwater, the good, long, solid breakwater, and he clung to a belief that the tide and sea could rise no more.

The tug steamed away. As she made the passage of the bar she leaped and plunged like a rodeo pony in the great seas piling up and breaking there, but she made the passage right enough, and disappeared in the spume beyond. The dredge cook, an unimaginative man, had prepared supper in his stolid way and the crew sat down to eat. They kept their eyes on the windward windows and ate uneasily, for with the growing tide, their floating home lifted and exposed itself more and more to the blast coming over the breakwater top. They looked at the shrinking lee of the breakwater incredulously, as if the thing for some preposterous reason were sinking under its own weight into the harbor bottom. Only two nights ago it had stood tall and massive, dotted with the parked cars of spooning couples from Port Ballard. Now it was just a

long reef on which heavy seas broke and leaped in white explosions, tossing spray clean across and spalling the dredge-house walls.

The dredge hull had only two feet or so of freeboard, and the seas washing around the end of the breakwater had begun to sweep her deck. But the hull was tight. Johnnie sounded the well and found no water.

“What time’s high tide?” the captain said in a shaken voice.

“Eight o’clock,” Johnnie said coldly.

“The wind’s got to shift soon, eh? These hurricanes—when they get to the worst you’re right in the eye of the storm and the wind comes round the other way that’s right ain’t it? That’ll give us an off-shore wind and blow the sea down, won’t it?”

For an answer Johnnie jerked a thumb at the barometer on the cabin wall. It stood at 29. The captain gave it a rap and the needle flickered a fraction lower.

“You ain’t seen nothin’ yet,” Johnnie said.

By seven o’clock the breakwater had disappeared under the enormous tide built up by the maniac wind. Far away to leeward, within the harbor bar, huge broken seas were leaping amongst the trees in the little park on Town Point, washing the green-painted benches before them like bits of driftwood, hurling stones, some as big as footballs, into Park Road itself. At twenty minutes past seven a long green fold of the tortured North Atlantic rose above the now submerged breakwater, towered for a moment, then curled and toppled upon the anchored dredge. It smote the house, smashed every window on-the seaward side, and poured inside a torrent the full width of every window frame.

The crew uttered a chorus of shouts, screams, oaths, prayers. The more active of them seized boards, hammers, nails, and attempted to close the empty frames, standing knee-deep in the cold Atlantic

water swashing about inside. Johnnie flew to start his steam pumps. Then, glancing to leeward he saw the town of Port Ballard apparently afloat itself, and moving rapidly towards him. It came to him that the great wave had parted windward anchors of the dredge, and that she was now drifting over the other two. He turned to the captain, mouthing words lost in the uproar of the wind. But already the dredge was over the other anchors, indeed was past them. As the remaining cables came taut, 1909 brought up with a ponderous jerk that parted them both as a grocer snaps his parcel strings. In another moment 1909 was rising and falling on the waves and making straight for the harbor bar.

The wind's pressure on her vast boom and dipper-bucket swung the dredge stern to the sea, not that it mattered. She was vulnerable from all sides, she was like a raft that bore a riddled box, a still nicely painted box, that drifted rapidly towards the bar, where in the dusk the tide and the incoming seas were tossing up walls of water capped with dirty yellow froth. The crew huddled together in the pilothouse, not crying any more, not fumbling any more with nails and boards, not even looking at the sea, but at the captain and each other. It was dark now, the utter darkness of a foul night in autumn, without a moments twilight. There was not a light in Port Ballard, for its fine old elms and maples falling across the streets, had flung down the electric wires. Only the lighthouse shone, sweeping a futile white arm in the darkness at the shore end of the bar.

Now Johnnie remembered his dynamo and his full head of steam. He threw the big switch and all 1909's lights came on, including the powerful floodlights over the deck, hung there in clusters for night work. A few bold and curious watchers on the shore saw the dredge sail into the tumult of the bar lit up like a floating Christmas tree. But not for long. The great waves of the Atlantic, running up the estuary, squeezed and shouldered together by its narrowing shores, smote the dredge blow on blow. The deck lights vanished in one sweep. The dinghy went, gripes and all. The funnel went. The two iron scows, moored one each side, broke clear and drifted away

into the dark. A flood poured into the engine room and doused the dynamo and everything else. Johnnie and the fireman half swam, half clawed their way to safety in the upper part of the house. A dozen mighty sea-giants, black and enormous in the night, yelling and smiting together, somehow combined to heave the dredge over the bar and into the river mouth where Port Ballard crouched and shuddered in the storm.

In a few minutes 1909 was in Port Ballard, fumbling blindly along the waterfront as if in search of her old wharf. All the wharf sheds loomed indistinctly. They looked very queer. They seemed to be squatting in the water. And they were. The full tide, swollen by the waves heaped into the bottleneck of the harbor, had flooded the whole dockfront of the town. The sea was already above the wharf tops and now was tossing a raffle of fish barrels, herring boxes, tubs, oil drums and rubbish along Dock Street itself.

And now, as if by a homing instinct, 1909 surged in towards a familiar object. It was the shed on the Liberal wharf. There was a great thump and a crunch. 1909 was drawing eight feet of water and as yet the tide over the wharf was only two or three. She thrust her boom through the rotten frame and shingles of the shed, wedged her great bucket firmly inside, and seemed to wait for the next swell.

It came. 1909 lifted with it and her boom tore the whole end out of the shed. She drew off and came in again like a wet and vengeful elephant. The wharf itself shuddered and gave way. Planks and broken sections of piling came to the surface. The shed sagged on its knees and collapsed into the flood.

For perhaps a minute 1909 hung there, wedged on the ruin of the wharf. "Now's our chance!" cried the captain. He set a bold example by leaping from the end of the great steel boom. The water came to his waist but he found footing for all that, and the crew followed quickly, plunging amongst dim floating objects, scrambling over the ruins of the shed. At the head of Dock Street, where the water was already lapping over the doorsill of Wong Kim the laundryman,

they found a little group of citizens, including the editor of the Port Ballard weekly. They told their tale, with cries, with gestures in the windy dark. The editor could see his headline already. Epic Affair of Dredge. Nobody missed Johnny Wister.

And now having shattered the Liberal wharf, 1909 drifted off and surged towards another, a hundred and fifty yards further on. Like the first it was under two or three feet of water but its ancient red shed stood firmly above the flood. It was the Tory wharf. 1909 came heavily out of the darkness and the submerged wharf shook. She drew off and came again, and the wharf's worm-eaten piling snapped beneath the shock. Again, and Tory wharf melted into the flood. The shed foundered on its side, and the small flagstaff on its peak waved a tipsy farewell in the darkness as 1909, caught now by a shift of the wind, sheered off. She drifted slowly towards the other side of the harbor.

On that side the familiar mud-flats opposite the town were now lost under the flood. The sea had even risen several feet over the marsh beyond and was washing at the railway line. Johnnie Wister, alone in the deserted pilot-house, peered hard in that direction. He could see nothing; but inshore he could hear a terrific clanging and he guessed exactly what it was. One or perhaps both of the runaway scows were there, lifting and falling amongst the boulders by the edge of the railway line and ringing through the storm like gongs.

The storm centre had passed, and now the wind was coming around the other way, blowing as hard as ever. As 1909 sailed over the flooded flats Johnnie made a last attempt to save her. He released the brakes on the bucket cables, heard a shriek and a whirr, felt the jar of tons of dipper-bucket striking bottom. For a minute or two she held, clutching the bottom with her iron fist. Then she lifted on another mighty swell and came down, stiff-armed, on the dipper. The strain of that was too much for the tired old cables over the A-frame, corroded at the bull-heads, eaten out beneath the babbitt in all those years of idleness. The A-frame bent forward, drooped,

collapsed; and its weight, added to the now unsupported tons of the boom and dipper, tore the turntable clean out of the forward deck. The whole iron mass went overboard into the yeasty sea; and the hull, eased of the burden it had borne so long, bobbed up like a released cork. There was no hope for 1909 now. The wild gusts pressing on the house thrust her over the flats and over the flooded marsh, where the broken waves from the bar were romping freely. And there stood a tooth of Port Ballard granite, waiting for her.

When the sea went down in the morning the old dredge lay high and dry like the Ark on Ararat, with an acre of salt-grass around her and the great granite tooth through her belly. The water had run out of her through the rent in the rotten hull. When the captain and crew and the men from Port Ballard reached her shortly after noon, wading through the marsh pools and the sodden grass, they found what was left of Johnnie Wister on the engine room floor. His hands and mouth were full of sand and across his skinny chest like the sash of a sea-order lay a broad ribbon of kelp.

“Too bad. How did he look?” asked the Port Ballard editor later, busy taking notes.

“Well” the captain said. He tipped up his cap and scratched his head. “You may think it a funny thing to say. But he looked sorta peaceful, no that’s not the word. Satisfied. He looked satisfied.”

909 (Second version)

She was known to the Public Works Department as a dredge, dipper-type, five-yard capacity, and her number on the record was 909. Once she had a name—Oshawa—but that was painted out, years ago, when the Department decided to number everything. She was an ugly thing to be sitting about the places where men go down to the sea in ships; but where she went, ladling smelly spoil into her attendant scows, there was sure to be deep water afterwards, and men who go down to the sea do not like to touch bottom en route.

909 did not spring full-panoplied from the brow of the P.W.D. Like other things she had to be conceived, and then born. A good deal of thought went into her completion. An expert even visited the Panama Canal, which was being dug in those days—I shall be telling you her birthday next—and came back with the latest in dipper-dredge notions. So they built a hull of heavy timbers, rectangular in shape, 95 feet by 45, and 9 feet deep; and upon the hull they built a house, high, wide, and handsome, with windows of many little square panes, like any house ashore. Within that hull and house they bolted heavy hoisting machinery for the boom and dipper, and subsidiary hoists for the spuds; and they added a dynamo, a condenser, and farther aft, behind a bulkhead, a boiler. On the fore end hung fifteen tons of steel boom, fifty-two feet long; and at the end of that was slung the dipper handle—six tons of it—and the four-ton dipper bucket. The boom swung on a wide turntable, and was supported by three-inch cables of plough steel slung over a high steel A-frame, and fastened to the hull by heavy iron bull-heads aft. You looked at the ponderous business end of 909 and wondered why she did not pitch forward on her nose; but that was because you did not know how cunningly her machinery weight had been distributed. She had a single funnel, sticking up through the house roof, like any other chimney; in fact there was nothing nautical about her but a dinghy slung in davits amidships. When at work,

she planted herself on the bottom like a stork, with the spuds—two legs of Douglas fir, 65 feet long and 3 square, one each side of her, forward. There was another spud astern, where a ship would have carried a rudder, and by this she steered. When she wished to move ahead, for another meal so to speak, she hoisted her legs straight up into the air, dropped her heavy dipper to the bottom, and dragged herself forward by pulling on the sunken bucket, as a ship warps herself up to a kedge-anchor. All this made sailors laugh; but it was a respectful laughter.

When Johnnie Lang joined her as engineer, he was thirty, with fifteen years of dredging work, of various sorts, behind him and he pronounced her, with unconscious irony, a “dredge”. 909 had been built on the Great Lakes, but she was designed for the Saint Lawrence, and to the Saint Lawrence she went, with a captain, and Johnnie, an oiler, a fireman, three deck hands and a cook. With her went a pair of new scows, and four men to manage them. There was a bit of trouble on her first job. She was biting the mud somewhere about Montreal when the high girders of the A-frame suddenly toppled back over the house, and crushed the trim funnel like a can under a steam roller. At the same time the boom swung wildly and fell, knocking seven bells out of an iron scow alongside. But that was a little accident of design, a growing pain you might say. They cocked up the A-frame at a sharper angle, and after that she behaved usefully, in many places up and down the great stream which is Canada’s gullet.

Every fall she was laid up carefully, with pipes disconnected, and water drained against frost, to suffer the winter and await the spring, and Johnnie Lang was left in charge with a stove in his room aft, and electric light connected from the shore. He did not like it very much. He was an active man, and Quebec winters were long and lonely. He was conscientious too, and except for a walk to the nearest store for supplies he never left 909 for an hour the winter long. When the crew arrived in spring to connect things up again

he welcomed them as a beleaguered garrison welcomes the relief force.

One fall, the prospect of another winter vigil set him thinking. It is not always the spring that lightly turns a young man's fancy love-ward. Near the head of the dock where 909 lay at winter moorings lived a young woman named Melisse. She worked in her father's small store, where Johnnie bought tobacco and supplies. Melisse was not pretty, and she had no beau though she was twenty-five and pleasant and modest and all that a nice girl could be. Johnnie's courting was awkward, for he spoke French a little worse than Melisse spoke English. They spent two months learning to talk to each other. At Christmas they were married. Melisse came down to live with Johnnie Lang aboard the dredge. She prettied up his room aft with curtains and hits of printed stuff, and they got new bedding and a couple of easy chairs, and were snug all winter within 909's wooden walls and frost panes. For the first time Johnnie was sorry when spring came. But it came, and Melisse had to go home while the crew went about the summer's work. In the fall she returned, with a baby.

There were other babies. One came in the first winter of the 1914 war, without waiting for Johnnie to hurry Melisse up to the hospital. That was in Sorel. When the war ended there were two boys and a girl, and Johnnie got permission to use the whole living quarters during the winter lay-up. He has always liked the spring, the fine hot summers along the big river, and the summer's round of work. But now he looked forward to cold weather when he could have the family with him again, the joy of Melisse's cooking and the smart tap of her heels about the wooden decks, the children running about the gallery of the engine room, peering upon the bright oil-smelling mysteries like children at a bear-pit in a zoo. He could see a new beauty in the frozen river, and the snow on silent docks.

The war ended, and government talked of retirement. Dredging schedules were cut down. In the fall of '21, Dipper-dredge 909, five-

yard capacity, was, laid up with more than the usual precautions. Johnnie was told to remain on board indefinitely. Johnnie was pleased and Melisse and the children were delighted. But it was strange, indefinite days and months going by, and the dredge silent but for voices of the children, and nothing moving but the washing on Melisse's line. The world was topsy-turvy, Johnnie said, and newspapers confirmed it. But his pay went on, summer and winter, and every month they put a little in the bank, in Melisse's name, for she was the family treasurer. Sometimes there were false alarms, telegrams demanding, "How soon could 909 be made ready for dredging?" And Johnnie, after much brow-wrinkled figuring, and walking round and round the engine room, would wire back, "With a full crew, three weeks." But nothing ever came of these till 1925.

Young Johnnie was fifteen then, and going to high school in the town, and Marie was eleven, and Louis ten. Dredge 909 was to be put in commission for a job down east, in the salt water of the Nova Scotia coast. Melisse moved her family ashore and rented a house, so their schooling might not be interrupted. The dredge and her scows went east in tow of a tug. It grieved Johnnie to see a strange crew moving about the rooms that Melisse had made bright and comfortable with her carpets and bits of chintz. They joked, in a friendly man-fashion, about the curtains and flower pots in the windows. But he said nothing. There would always be winter. When winter came and the crew departed, the dredge was moored to a dock in Port Ballard, far east in Nova Scotia. The family could not come. So far. Too expensive, wrote Melisse. And there was the children's schooling. Like a delicate plant it could not be transported. Once more Johnnie knew loneliness.

The dredge worked two summers at Port Ballard. It was a small river harbour with a muddy bar just below the town; and outside the bar, in the estuary, a long concrete breakwater running out to guard the anchorage against south-easters. Dredge 909 scooped away at the bar, and dumped the spoil in her scows; and the tug towed the laden scows seaward far past the breakwater, and dumped their

reeking cargo in the clean bosom of the Atlantic. The town was small, dependent on the fishery, a quiet place; but on Saturday nights, when the fishing fleet was in, and country folk came down to shop and see the moving pictures, Main Street was busy, even in winter. It was one of those places where everybody knew everybody else. At the end of the second winter everybody knew Johnnie Lang. They hailed him, "Hello, Mr. Lang!" as he passed along the street. He liked that. When the town's best life insurance agent called aboard, hailing him "Johnnie, old boy," he signed a twenty pay life policy for \$5000 without a question.

When the third spring of his exile rolled around there came a telegram which he opened in hope and read in bewilderment. "Dredge 909 will remain laid-up until further notice. You will remain as caretaker."

So he remained awaiting a further notice that never came. Months crept into years, forgotten in Port Ballard. The children wrote rarely and stiffly, at Melisse's urging. Once or twice she left them and came east by train, and stayed a summer week or two with him on the dredge. Her hair was getting grey, and her plain face rather worn. It had not been easy, she suggested, bringing up two boys and a girl on a dredge engineer's pay. She had always been a matter-of-fact body, and the long partings had somehow drained the last trace of sentiment out of her. She accepted his clumsy affection calmly, even resolutely, like a woman performing a duty; and something inside him was chilled. He would have liked a holiday, to go home and see his children; for Christmas, say. But the inspector told him confidentially that times were hard, and dredge men everywhere hunting work; he had better not call attention to himself and 909. Watchmen could be hired cheaper than engineers.

In summer, visitors came down to the docks, and stopped to stare at 909, pointing to the big boom, the dipper, and the size of the cables. She was one of the accepted sights of the Port Ballard waterfront.

For a long time Melisse wrote once a month, when he sent his

pay; but the letters became fewer and shorter, and somehow more empty. He cut out the daily call at the post office and occupied himself with painting. 909 was a big thing. He started aft always, and worked forward, painting with great care, as if 909 were a work of art; the hull and topsides a deep yellow, trimmed with red; the funnel yellow too, with a black top, and P.W.D. 909 in big white letters on the black of it. The big turntable forward, the patent capstans which stood like bollards at the four corners of the deck, and the great boom itself, were a bright government red. He painted the dinghy, white inside, yellow without. He clambered about the high A-frame, painting the girders with his universal yellow. When he had completed these he turned to the interior. He kept the walls of the living quarters a chaste white, but covered the engine room walls with grey. The engine casings were black, but the fat asbestos jackets on the steam pipes he painted yellow; and the big condenser at the back of the engine room was a bright grass green. It was an immense surface for one man with a careful brush. When he had put the final white touches on the window frames it was time to begin on the hull once more. Inspectors doted on paint as a preservative, and saw that he got all he wanted. So he went over her, inch by inch, with his back to the world, and months and years went by, half-seen, half-heard, like the endless procession of boots on the wharves. Dredge 909 seemed positively swollen with paint. But Johnnie Lang grew thinner, a wistful wisp of a man, as if the fat gleaming dredge were somehow sucking the life out of him.

The owner of the wharf received \$30 a month from the P.W.D. It was a soft income, for the wharf was not used very much, and Dredge 909 could be shifted for a day or two when her berth was needed for other things. When the government changed, this plum went to somebody else. As elections came and went, Dredge 909 was shifted from the Liberal to the Conservative wharf, and back again, with a gang of longshoremen walking around the capstans. When Johnnie went ashore to shop, the loafers winked and said, "I see you made

another v'yage, Mister Lang." And with another wink, "How's a man go about gettin' a job like yours?"

This always touched him on the raw. Mixing cause and effect, he suspected a conspiracy on the part of the wharf owners; they were using the mysterious and far-reaching power of small town politicians to keep the dredge tied to their idle wharves. There was no other explanation. 909 was being betrayed, month after month, for thirty pieces of paper. He explained, seriously that the P.W.D. some day would want 909 in a hurry, and she and he would be ready and waiting.

He said this one day in 1938 to an inspector, a new man, short and red and blunt of speech. He heard Johnnie's confession of faith with a grim smile. Then he said, brutally, "Lang, she's old as the bloomin' hills. Obsolete ten years after she was built. Cheaper to let the dredging out to contractors, with these nifty diesel-electric rigs. 909? Cha! She'll never dig another bucket-full. Should ha' been junked years ago. But she's on the books-' Dredge 909; type, dipper; capacity, five cubic yards; cost, umpteen thousand '-and they hate to write it off."

"But she's in good shape," Johnnie burst out. "I've kept her fine, you know. I-"

"Paint!" snapped the inspector, with a glance around—they were standing in the engine room. He noted the ornamental stars, gilt on green, with which Johnnie had touched off the ends of the pressure tank, and the ends of the spare oil drums. "It's your paint is holdin' her together, Lang. Just that and a book-entry in Ottawa." And as he walked ashore, noting how the small iron wheels of the gangway had cut deep grooves in the timber of deck and wharf, he turned and pointed a thick finger at the mud flats across the river. "There's where she'd be, if I had my way. Tow her over there to rot. She's not worth another month's wharfage."

He left, and Johnnie Lang stared across. He had come to like that

view. The mud exposed at low tide, where gulls, drowsed, immovable, in rows, like small bird statues in the summer sun and the low shore, the expanse of salt marsh covered with rich green grass, sheltered from north winds by a ridge of pines. It was pretty in its way. He pictured 909 over there, stripped of paint by suns and rains, her wooden bones a roost for the motionless birds. Better that than broken up, body and soul, in some ship-knacker's yard. Old? It was astonishing. She had been his life. He walked aboard, into the windowed room where Melisse's curtains still hung, gathering dust, like rotten shrouds, and looked at himself in the glass. It was true. He was old, like 909. He was sixty. Life had gone by like a dream. He felt a sudden anger at the mysterious powers decree that he and 909 should spend their prime in idleness. Then he thought of his wife and children. They were strangers, by the same decree. He had not seen the children in thirteen years. Melisse had written, after a silence of months, that she would not be coming down this summer. (She had said the same last year, and the year before that.) John had a junior post in an office in Quebec city. Marie wanted to be a stenographer. Baby Louis would be starting high school next year. There was so much expense—her old incessant cry.

Between the lines of her letter, as through a window, he saw Melisse herself, grown stout and indifferent, a religious woman, absorbed in church and children. It stabbed him to think how little of their life had been lived together. Their marriage had become obsolete and forgotten years ago, a mere book-entry, like the dredge. In a sudden eruption of protest and self-pity he threw himself on his bed and wept, in horrible choking sobs. All through the bright afternoon, while the sunbeams crept across the walls. Outside, the motorboats of the fishermen came roaring in from the grounds, and there was a drumming of boots on the wharf planking, and the monotonous slip-slap of wet fish flung up from the holds, the rattle and clink of the weighing machine, the splash of culs thrown into the tide. The tide was on the flow, battling with the river current, chuckling under 909's low flank, and against the spiles of the wharves. Across the

river the sun dropped behind the pines, and spread a passing flush on the grass of the marsh and the bare brown flats where the gulls were now stirring and taking off, disturbed by the incoming tide. The wharf bustle died with the six o'clock whistle of the box factory, which regulated the working hours of the town. Darkness fell, and electric bulbs sprang into light along the waterfront, and the tide, deep now, reflected them in long quavering ribbons. The tall sheds were ghostly and silent, like a deserted city, haunted by the smell of fish. Only the rats moved, an aimless scurry of grey shapes in and out of the light. Beyond the sheds and warehouses, two dark blocks away, Main Street threw an electric glare into the sky, and a confused sound of motor-cars, and strains of music from the radio shops, all mingled and remote, Port Ballard's Saturday night. Johnnie Lang lay on his bed and wished himself dead, and worth \$5000 to Melisse and the children.

But he did not die. Morning came, Sunday, the drowsy fly-buzzing Sunday of the fish docks. He had never worked on the Sabbath. But this day he went to the paint locker, as he had gone, on week-day mornings, through the idle years. He had started aft on his interminable round, and was now at the funnel once more. He finished the funnel that day, and from then on made a point of working Sundays, defying the gods for the thing they had done to him. People missed him on the street at mail time, and asked if old 909 had been abandoned at last, and when he went up Dock Street for tobacco and groceries the storekeepers said, "There you are, Mister Lang! Well, well! Thought you'd died. How's ol' 909?", the way they addressed rheumatic old citizens tottering down on Main Street on warm afternoons in the spring. It was disgraceful. He hurried back to the dredge. The Liberal wharf-owner, taking pity on his loneliness, gave him an old radio. Johnnie strung a wire from the funnel to the tip of the A-frame, and lay on his bed hearing music and strange voices. He did not like it at first, a noisy toy; but as he listened more and more, the music became soothing and the voices

friendly. When one of the tubes died he was absurdly distressed, until a young man came down from the radio store to replace it.

On a day in '39, in September, just when, in the old time, 909 would have been getting ready to lay up, the radio announced war. It did not disturb him very much. These voices came from another world. He listened, dreamily. Then, straight from that other world, the dredge inspector came, squat, hard-voiced and competent.

“Lang! Believe it or not, a job for 909 at last! By Jove, it took a war—”

It was raining and the inspector's bowler hat shone with wet; moisture dripped off his blue trench-coat and made little pools on the floor, and one drop hung on the end of a very red nose and shone like a crystal in the light from the window.

“Why,” Johnnie said, “the bar was drudged by a gov'ment contractor this very summer. It couldn't fill in, quick as that.”

“Bar!” shouted the man. He took off his hat and shook rain from it with sweeping arm movements, up and down. “Who said bar? It's the breakwater, out there on Todd's Point. They stuck a rock-an'-crib extension on it last year, and of course the first south-easter knocked it into the channel. Ordinarily it wouldn't have mattered much—fishing vessels don't draw much water, nor the coasters; but there's a war, and the navy people wantin' to use Port Ballard for an anti-submarine patrol. A fussy lot, they don't like a pile of rocks in the fairway! So here we are! We've got to dredge a breakwater out of the channel. D'you ever hear of such a thing? I tell you it's priceless—and it couldn't happen anywhere but in the—”

“They want 909?” Johnnie whispered, dumbfounded.

“Only thing available. She's a god-send, right on the spot like this. A crew'll be here in a day or two. I just dropped off the train to warn you and take a look around.” He threw open his club-bag, pulled forth a suit of overalls, and drew them over his neat brown serge. Then, regardless of rain, he ran about the deck, squinting hard at

the big steel cables over the A-frame, staring at the bull-heads, as if in some super-human way he could see the cable ends under the iron and babbitt, and climbed on all fours up the boom like a fat blue denim ape, to look at the sheaves. He came down and dived into the engine room. Then he was out on deck, pulling up man-plates, going down rusty iron rungs, and ferreting about inside the hull with an electric torch. He went away, saying grimly, "I don't know. It's a long lay-up—even for a gover'ment dredge. Not in the nature o' things to stand so long and still be fit to run. But there y'are—what's a man to say, and a war on? She'll do. By Jove, she's got to do."

The crew came, and for a month the interior of 909 gave forth sounds of metal and men in struggle and torment. The new captain felt he needed a good engineer in such a relic; and he looked upon Johnnie Lang with doubt. You could make a watchman out of an engineer; but after twelve years, or twenty, whatever it was, you could not expect to find an engineer under the watchman's dungarees. But Johnnie knew where everything was—the parts carefully laid away in grease, all those important nuts and bolts whose common fate in laid-up dredges is to disappear. He scurried about the engine room like a small grey cat with shining eyes. The other men did what they were told. Under Johnnie's trembling knotty hands and the lash of his tongue, the bowels of 909 were drawn together again.

The town beheld a phenomenon—909 moving, not merely from one political wharf to another, but down the harbour, towed by a strange tug, and flanked by iron scows. Behind her the Liberal wharf looked naked and forlorn, as if a large and unusually well-painted part of it had suddenly floated away. Port Ballard had lost its oldest and most seasoned joke.

Off the end of the breakwater, 909 put down her spuds and gripped bottom. Johnnie sprang to his levers. It took him a few working hours, and cost the iron scows a thump or two, to get the feel of the dipper again; but it came back.

The ill-fated extension to the breakwater had consisted of large boulders dumped inside a cribwork pier. The cribwork had floated away, and the rock littered the floor of the channel in irregular heaps. Johnnie Lang felt for those heaps with the big dipper, swung up a boulder at a time, and set it down gently in the scow. Captain and crew acknowledged his artistry. The old man knew his stuff. And the old man's face was a study. The country had need of 909 at last in a perilled hour; and the things he had guarded so carefully all these years were justifying themselves and him.

Properly it was not a job for a dipper dredge at all. Every time one of those big boulders came out of the sea, the captain expected the A-frame to collapse, the cables to snap, but nothing happened. The old dredge seemed as solid as Gibraltar. He was amused at his own fears.

The job was practically done when early one morning the light-keeper on Town Point came out of his small white tower and hoisted a black drum and cone on the signal mast. It was a fine fall day. The town, two miles up the estuary, smoked blue in the sunshine.

"Umph" said the captain of 909. "Storm warnin'!"

"Cone's down," Johnnie pointed out. "That means an easter. Better shift inside the bar."

"Itchin' to get back to that wharf, ain't you?" the captain said amiably. "But I ain't shiftin' till the job's done. Blow high, blow low."

"Harbour's open to the sou'-east," Johnnie mumbled.

"Sure, sure. But I've got the old tub moored to four good anchors. A hurricane couldn't move her. Let it blow."

"The moon," went on Johnnie in his mild old voice, "is nigh full. Come a sou'-easter, and a full moon tide—you'll see things fly. I seen the sea breakin' clean over the breakwater yonder, ten or twenty feet,

like it wasn't there at all. That's what chucked the extension into the channel."

"I'll believe it when I see it," chuckled the captain. He was a St. Lawrence River man, and had a cold opinion of what he called salt-water yarns. The breakwater was of solid concrete, jutting four hundred yards into the estuary; it stood twelve feet above ordinary spring tides and had a flat top twenty feet wide, a favourite parking place for cars on summer nights.

A low grey scud came in from the south and covered the sky. Rain fell, lightly for a time, then in cascades. A long slow swell began to roll into the river mouth. The dredge lifted and fell hard on her spuds once or twice, and the captain ordered Lang to draw them up clear. She lay to her anchors. The swell increased. After a time the wind came, with a swoop, straight up the estuary. The crew saw to the scows' security lashings and withdrew behind 909's window panes. The tug remained at anchor, inside the breakwater. The tide was on the ebb. The tug would be snug; for a time, at any rate. By the middle of the forenoon the estuary was a shrieking white froth. The growing wind howled in the A-frame of the dredge, and set the big stays humming, and flung streams of rain and spray across the neat square-paned windows on the windward side. The crew amused themselves with poker. From one of the engine room windows Johnnie Lang kept a morbid watch on the sea. The tide turned and, as its flow increased, so did the wind, piling the sea into the river mouth in steep waves that came quickly upon each other's heels. The bell of the fairway buoy, somewhere in the rain to seaward, clanged wildly without end. In the town streets, trees were falling that had stood for centuries, and the steeple of the Baptist church blew off and fell in the graveyard. The worst storm in fifty years, Port Ballard said, a hurricane out of the West Indies, giving the cold north a lash of its tail.

By six o'clock the tide had reached to the top of the breakwater. The tug, after some futile megaphoned argument with 909, prudently

pulled up her hook and steamed up into the river. The dredge crew sat down to supper, but they looked out of the windows and ate uneasily. They were Montreal men, not used to such a spectacle. The dredge had only a foot of freeboard; each sea boarded her and thundered against the house itself. The big wind roared up the estuary like a train in a tunnel. The captain of 909 wished he had gone inside with the tug; but he did not say so. After all, there was the four good anchors. He asked when the tide would be full, and Johnnie said "eight o'clock," with a grim glance forward, where the sea could be seen making a clear breach over the breakwater.

At seven o'clock the breakwater was under the enormous tide. 909 surged violently on her anchors; no man would venture forth to ease the moorings. At half-past seven a big sea boarded the dredge, smashed her absurd window panes, and poured a green stream into her. Alarmed at last, the crew hurried with boards and nails, and posts to brace them against the Atlantic. Then old Johnnie shouted, pointing. Through the lee windows in the dusk the village of Todd's Point could be seen careering past. The anchors to windward had gone. She drifted rapidly over her lee anchors and brought up with a single massive jerk that parted these cables also, like twine.

Pressure of wind on the out-stretched boom and dipper kept her roughly stern to the sea, not that it mattered. She was vulnerable from all sides, like a raft, a raft sailing with astonishing speed up the estuary towards the bar, where the sea was flinging up walls and towers of white water. She reached it in darkness. The town was blacked-out, as if for an air-raid; fallen trees had flung down electric light wires everywhere. This unexpected darkness somehow added to their terrors. Only the lighthouse shone, a burning white eye on Town Point, where the bar touched shore. For comfort, more than anything else, the captain switched on his lights, even the deck floodlights, hung in clusters for night work. Dredge 909 sailed into the watery madness of the harbour bar like a nautical Christmas tree, a spectacle for the watchers along the waterfront. The sea, broken, rising on all sides, smote her blow on blow. The deck lights

went out at once. The boat went, gripes and all. The funnel went. Both scows clear and vanished. Through smashed windows poured the sea, sweeping Johnnie Lang's curtains and flower-pots into oblivion. Scared, the fireman ran up from the boiler-room and huddled with the rest in the flooded quarters aft. Johnnie Lang left them and stood on the engineroom gallery watching water splash his beloved machinery.

A thousand watery fiends hustled the dredge over the bar, all yelling and smiting together. Then she was in the harbour itself, drifting along the waterfront. Wharf sheds loomed indistinctly, and looked very odd. They seemed to be squatting on the water, and so they were. The tide had risen above the wharf tops and was floating a mass of fish barrels, dories and other waterfront litter, into Dock Street.

Dredge 909 swept in against the Liberal wharf with a mighty thump. There was two feet of water on the wharf top, and she drew eight. She struck it like a reef. Here in the lee of Town Point were no waves, but a mass of broken water surging to and fro confusedly, like liquid shaken in a cask, pouring over the docks, gutting the sheds, flooding the cellars of Dock Street. 909 drew off and came in again, like a battering ram. The wharf shuddered. Planks and bits of spiling came to the surface. "Now for it!" cried the captain suddenly, and set an example by leaping upon the submerged wharf. The crew followed, plunging over their knees amongst dim floating objects and squattered towards the darkness of Dock Street without looking back. There, counting noses, they discovered the absence of Johnnie Lang.

In the meantime the dredge, having dealt faithfully with the Liberal wharf, staggered off with a fine impartiality to sit on the Conservative affair. She lifted with the surge, and sat again, and the wharf sagged to its worm-eaten knees. A third time she sat, and the wharf's bones melted. The Conservative shed leaned tipsily, half awash and half aground, and the Conservative flagstaff waved a

tipsy farewell as 909, caught now by a shift of wind, drifted off into the darkness across the harbour.

Johnnie Lang was in the engine room, at the boom controls. The hull was intact; there was still a head of steam, the dynamo ran, and there was light within. The tide was far over the flats, upon the marsh itself, and a yeasty sea was washing out the roots of pines at the very foot of the ridge that guarded the railway line.

As 909 drifted over the flats, Johnnie Lang resolved to drop the heavy dipper to bottom, hoping to hold her. At worst she would lie on mud when the tide went down. Farther inshore, on the edge of the marsh, he could hear above the storm a terrific metal clangour—one of the runaway scows lifting and falling on the rocks there, and ringing like a vast iron gong. The winch roared, the giant cogs clashed, the dipper vanished from the out-flung glare of the engine room lights. He felt the thing strike bottom, jarring the whole hull. The dredge lifted again. This side of the harbour was fully exposed to the new shift of wind, and to the tumbled seas pouring across the bar. 909 came down again, heavily, and as the dipper struck bottom once more he heard the big cables snap. They had gone at the bull-heads, rusted, eaten out, in the years of idleness. The A-frame drooped forward and gave up the ghost, and its weight, added to the 25 unsupported tons of boom and dipper, tore the turntable out of the forward deck.

The whole mass went overboard into the darkness, and the hull released of its weight, bobbed up like a cork. And as she floated thus, free of the burden she had borne through the years, the wind caught her, drove her over the flats to the ragged boulders by the edge of the marsh. He heard timbers smashing, and the inpour of sea. Then the lights went out—for Dredge 909, and for Johnnie Lang. When the sea went down in the morning she was high and dry on the marsh, like the ark on Ararat, with grass all round, and a mighty tooth of Port Ballard granite thrust through her bottom. The water had run

out of her through the smashed hull. Seaweed was littered through the coarse grass, and a good deal of sand.

They picked what had been Johnnie Lang off the shattered engine room floor, his hands and mouth full of sand. He looked peaceful, the people said.

In Mighty Waters

The sea was very still. The weight of fog and darkness seemed to have pressed the life out of it. The eighteen-foot dory sat on the black water almost without movement, like a child's boat on a pond. She was a yellow-painted thing of pine boards, with a narrow flat bottom and deep sides. Somewhere not far away in the mist were eleven others exactly like her, nested one within another on the deck of the Elmira B. MacCleave. The men in the dory were not alarmed in their loneliness. They had found their lost trawl at sunset on the previous day, and a sudden shutting down of the fog had compelled them to spend the night in the dory. The Schooner could not be far. There had been no stir of wind over the face of the sea since the northerly gale set their trawl adrift and drove the Elmira B. off the Grand Bank with it. There was field ice about, scattered by the storm; they had seen several floes and one or two small bergs in the dusk as they picked up their trawl. The fog was cold—not the edged cold of winter, that cut and thrust in one stroke, but the dank grave-vault cold of a spring night on the Banks. The men were well clad. Under their dripping yellow oilskins were thick sweaters and flannel shirts and frieze trousers and heavy fleece-lined underwear, and within their rubber boots were felt in-soles and two pairs of thick woollen socks. Their hands were warm and dry in heavy white wool mittens. The oars were shipped, the looms tucked inboard under the thwarts, the blades resting between wooden thole-pins. Newfie Sam had whittled these pins himself, from a stick of wire birch cut on the road from Sydney Mines; the bark was still on them, except where the oars had chafed them bare.

“Comin’ light,” observed Newfie Sam, out of a night’s silence. “I can make out d’bark on me t’ole pins.”

“Yeah,” Davis said. “Must be gettin’ on fer five.”

“Where you reckon a’scunner lays?”

“Over there to the westward a bit. Reckon when the fog shet, MacCleave jest took in all sail an’ waited fer mornin’, same as us. Ain’t bin a morsel o’ wind, an’ I don’t reckon we drifted a mite.”

“I could do wid some brekfuss,” Newfie Sam said.

“‘Twas lucky to find our trawl,” murmured Davis. “After gittin’ blowed off o’ the Bank an’ all.”

“Yeah, luck,” said Newfie Sam.

Daylight came slowly. The fog seemed to hold the night, paling reluctantly from black to grey, but they could make out objects now, even to the moisture beads, on their own stubbled faces. Newfie’s face was long and thin, running down to a point at the chin, where a bead of water slowly gathered, hung trembling a moment, dropped on the breast of his oil-skin jacket, and began to grow anew. His eyes were deep-set and shadowed under the brim of a black sou’-wester. Thirty summers and winters in the Bank fishery had seamed his skin like an old boot; there were fans of deep wrinkles from the eye-corners, and two strong folds ran past his mouth from the bridge of his nose, giving his mouth corners a downward droop in the passing. The tale of all his sea-summer and sea-winter was written there.

Davis on the other hand had the round hard head and square jaw of the Nova Scotia-man. His hair was quite grey, and his moustache, and the glistening stubble of beard, but his eye-brows were black as night, and his blue eyes small, and steady under them.

His years were fifty-two; a devout man and pleasant, but a man best not roused. In the Bank fleet they knew him as Bully Dan, an echo of his younger days and not quite fair at fifty-two. Newfoundland Sam-Newfie for short—had no kith or kin. For ten years they had been dory-mates.

“Listen!” demanded Newfie Sam, “I hears music.”

“Ah, music!”

“Yiss! Some o’ dat jazz stuff. ‘Twere dat plain.”

They strained their ears in the fog. With the wet weight of the salvaged trawl, and its kegbuoys and anchors, the dory was down by the stern, and the black sea chuckled a little under the exposed inches of bottom at the bow. But now Davis heard the music too. A long way off.

“Dere!” said Newfie Sam with triumph. Davis nodded.

“Schooner over there somewheres with a radio goin’,” he said positively. “The Dora M. Kenzie an’ that new boat o’ Rigby’s—lots of ‘em now—carry radios an’ listen fer weather warnin’s an’ all that, an’ pick up the broadcastin’ from the States atween whiles. Bank-fishin’ ain’t what it used to be.”

“Listen, Dan. Dere’s a hymn dey’re playin’ now—jist as plain!”

“Right. Tum Tum tum-tum tum-tum. They sing that toon sometimes in the church down home.”

“What dey doin’ hereabouts, Dan?”

“Blowed off the Bank, same as the Elmira B., s’likely.”

“Let’s go over dere, eh?”

Davis considered a moment. “Naw. Awful deceivin’, sounds is, thick-o’-fog and half night like this, Newfie. We ain’t stirred a stroke sence the fog shet down last night, an’ I ain’t gonna stir a stroke now. Got a hunch the fog’ll lift a bit when it comes full light—a stir o’ wind wi’ the sun, mebbe—like as not we’ll see the ol’ Elmira B. Right where we left her. Music! I tell you, Newfie, the on’y music I wanta hear s’mornin’ is the ol’ schooner’s fog-horn.”

The invisible orchestra took up another hymn, abandoned it abruptly in the middle of a bar. For a time there was nothing but the fog-drip and the chuckle of water under the bow. Then, faintly, another sound felt rather than heard. The two men stared eastward. “Oars!” blurted Newfie Sam. He could always name a sound before

anybody else. There was nobody like Newfie Sam with a thick night and a schooner running blind for home with a full fare, add a bell-buoy to be picked up somewhere in the windy dark under the very smell of the land. The oars had a ragged beat, as if the rowers were tired, or unskilled, but they drew nearer, and there were voices. "Women!" Newfie Sam whispered. Davis looked at him in scorn. But in a minute Davis heard a woman too. Newfie Sam was never wrong. It was uncanny to have ears like that. And now the sound took form and substance, a rather fragile substance, for in the half-light and the wet drift all things seemed out of focus, but they recognised in part and then in whole a ship's life-boat, beamy and unhandy to their fishermen's eyes and deeply laden, moving painfully under three oars rowed all-anyhow. A man stood at the stern, clasping the rudder lines, an officer of some sort; they could see his brass buttons and the braid on his sleeve. He had no cap, and he was either very blond or very grey, and might have been any age short of sixty. He looked care-worn but infinitely calm, as if a weight of long anxiety had smoothed his mind as the fog seemed to smooth the sea.

A woman sat with her back against his knees, a Polack woman, by the look of her. She had a heavy-boned passive face and long black hair hanging in damp strings. She clutched a child against the breast of her flannel night-dress, with a ship's blanket draped about both, and a black shawl arranged in a loose cowl over her head, the sort of thing immigrant women wore. Upon a thwart facing her sat a man of forty or so looking very odd in an evening jacket and a large white life-belt and a small grey cloth cap. He had a brown walrus moustache and a prominent nose, and a stump of dead cigar was clutched firmly between, his right back teeth. He plied one of the three oars, though his hands were apparently sore and bound with strips of handkerchief. On the next thwart, also facing aft, was a young woman with a blanket drawn in a hood about head and shoulders. The woman beside her was much older, a fleshy person in dress covered with sequins with a collar of jewels at her throat;

an expensive-looking fur coat was draped about her shoulders and over all she wore a white life-belt. She looked enormous. A black leather satchel of some sort was tucked under her arm. The sole occupant of the next thwart was a bare-headed man of twenty or thirty in a soiled white jacket, a steward's jacket, with an oar in his hands. He had a small shrewd cockney face, and the fog-beads clinging to every stiff hair of his close-cropped head gave it the appearance of a steel casque and the third, final oar was pulled by a man in the bow, naked to the waist except for the white bulk of a life-belt soiled with his finger-marks. His eye-sockets and ears were little sooty caverns, and the fog-drip had made little clean runnels in the grime of his shoulders and hairy chest. There was a sweat-rag knotted about his throat. He was bald, with a fringe of wet black curls above his ears.

In all the boat's company these seemed the only ones awake. Davis guessed twenty or thirty others huddled in the boat's bottom, as if for warmth, a vague human mass. The frosty breath of the sea drifted about in thin wisps, and the life-boat seemed to suck light out of it, a blurred halo in which the seven figures on the thwarts were curiously distinct. The officer gave an order in a hushed voice, and the three rowers backed water clumsily, in a dull automatic way, as if their hands alone received the word of command. There was no emotion in their faces. They seemed absorbed in thoughts that had nothing to do with oars or boats. The boat lost what little way it had and lay rocking gently three fathoms'-length from the staring men in the dory.

"Ahoy!" Davis cried in his hailing voice. The plump woman turned on the thwart, as if seeing him for the first time.

"Not so loud!" she said severely. The younger woman threw back her blanket.

"Sssssh!" she warned the woman, and put a slender finger to her lips. Her shoulders were bare and smooth and very white. There was a little knot of blue silk flowers at the low breast of her dress. A

necklace glittered dully. Her hair was the colour of the dory in which Newfie Sam and Davis sat gaping.

“Well” the plump woman complained, “the man was yelling fit to wake the dead-”

“Please!” the girl begged. She turned a pale fair face towards the dory. “You needn’t shout, men,” she said clearly. “We can hear you perfectly. These poor people will feel so terribly cold if they wake. We must let them sleep as long as possible.”

“Sorry ma’am,” Davis murmured, awed. He had never seen a woman so beautiful or so sad.

“What day is this?” the officer said.

“It’s-uh-the sixteenth of April,” Davis said.

“And the time?”

Newfie Sam fumbled under his oil-skins and pulled out his old silver watch. He was very proud of the big key-winder and was always eager to tell people the time. “Jist twenny to five,” he announced.

“Ah!” acknowledged the officer. He turned to his oddly assorted crew. “The ship went down about 2:20 A.M. on the fifteenth. Roughly, we’ve been twenty six hours in the boat.”

“More like twenty six years,” the fat woman said drearily. She pulled the fur coat about her throat again and shivered.

“What happened?” Davis said.

“It all seems so strange,” the fair girl said. “I was sitting in the reading room with my husband”-her voice trembled, but she went on-“and there was a bump, a jar-not enough to throw anybody off their feet, you understand. It couldn’t have been much after eleven. Just that, you know, a dull sound, a little tremble of the ship, as if she’d struck a log or something like that. Then the engines stopped, and

my husband said, "We must've dropped a propeller. I'll go on deck and find out." You've no idea how quiet everything was then. The sea was perfectly smooth, not even a ripple-well, just the way it is now-and that enormous ship steady as a rock. A few feet away from me in the reading room a woman sat embroidering. I watched her thread another needle, and she found the eye with the first stab. The ship was as steady-yes, and we all were as steady as that. Then my husband came back, laughing, and said we'd struck something, not very big, a bit of ice probably."

"Bah!" snapped the steward at the second oar. "It was an ice-berg, lidy, 'igh as Nelson's monniment. Bit o' ice indeed!"

"Blather!" said the fireman at the bow oar.

"Wot d'you know abaht it?" demanded the steward, "you Liverpool-Irish--"

"Hush!" commanded the plump woman.

"Where was 'e when we 'it?" grumbled the steward. "Dahn in the stoke-'old with a slice-bar. Don't tell me there ain't ice-bergs big as Nelson's--"

"It was a small berg-what you fishermen'd call a growler," the officer said. "It didn't show up white the way you'd expect; a dark lump, not very high. The ship seemed to barely touch it with the starboard bow."

"Berg nothing!" exclaimed the man in evening dress suddenly. "I tell you I looked over the side a minute after we struck, and there was nothing but little sheets of ice like that stuff we saw ten minutes ago. I guess I've got eyes as good as anybody's. It was a clear night."

"Stars," the fair girl said. "I never saw a night so beautiful."

"Well, go on with your version my dear," said the plump woman. "The ship must have had a hull like paper, for she certainly didn't

hit anything very hard; I was walking along to my cabin when it happened and it didn't even make me stumble. But let's have no more of this ice business. These men have been arguing half a lifetime about it, or so it seems to me."

"It was a small berg," the officer repeated coldly. "The ship was well past it before any of you got on deck. If the look-out couldn't see the thing till it was right on the starboard bow, how could anybody rushing up from a brightly lighted cabin see it half a cable's length astern? The ship was doing twenty knots and better. The ice ripped her side plates under water like a tin-opener."

"Well, it don't matter very much now," the fireman said. "Go on, ma'am."

"It matters a lot!" said the officer fiercely. "There'll be an investigation of some sort, there always is, and they'll want the truth; and here we are, forty people or more, and forty different stories."

The fair girl said patiently, "Well, we struck something, whatever it was, but not very hard, and nobody was alarmed, not even when the officers and stewards began to come through the passageways knocking on doors and telling everybody to dress and put on life-belts. We all thought it rather a joke, especially the cork-belts—everyone looked so fat and queer. There was a fearful din on deck, the steam blowing off, everybody said, you had to scream to be heard—but not much excitement, even when they began to lower the boats. The deck had a tilt towards the front of the ship, not much, you know; but the air was so calm and the sea so smooth, it seemed absurd to get into the boats. The ship looked huge and safe, all the deck lights blazing, and it seemed an awful distance down to the water."

"Seventy feet when we got the first boat down," the officer said precisely, as if he were testifying before a board. "As the ship settled

it got less. We cut this boat clear, as the ship sank under it. It must have been three hours from first to last.”

“I remember thinking,” the fair girl said with a queer little smile, “we’d probably spend a chilly half-hour in the boats, and then they’d decide the ship was all right and we’d be taken up again, feeling very cold and foolish, and all the men laughing at us. We were all on the top deck at first, where the boats were, but after they started lowering the boats all women were ordered to the deck below—”

“That was B deck,” the officer said. “They could get into the boats easier there.”

“My husband made me go down,” she said, “but when I saw the boats filled with women and children, one boat after another, and the men left behind—I—I—it came to me then what it meant if things really were serious. I couldn’t—wouldn’t—go. My husband begged me, but I wouldn’t. The thought of separation was horrible. So we went back to the top deck.”

“You were a fool, my dear,” the fat woman declared callously. “I’d like to see **my** self passing up a place in a boat, for any man. I just got on the top deck in time to jump into this one—I’d gone back to get my jewels and money.”

“It was the last boat,” the officer said. “Jammed when they first tried to lower it, so they left it hanging forty feet from the water. After the ship began to plunge we got in and cut the falls clear—a near thing, I tell you.”

“Things happened very quickly at the last,” the fair girl said. “My husband fairly threw me in, and stepped back to help another woman. The ship’s lights went out, and everything was dark. We could see the reflection of the stars in the water, and suddenly the water rose right up to the boat. Yes, it was just like that. The ship went very quietly. I don’t know what time that was—”

“Must have been about half-past one,” the officer said. “She went to a terrific angle and hung for a time on end, with the stern in air.”

“People jumpin’ off the stern,” the fireman said. “Hear ’em splashin’ an’ cryin’ out, you could, all in the dark.”

“Don’t!” the fair girl cried.

“It was hard to see,” the officer said, “but you could make out the stern against the stars. It hung there a long time, half an hour, three-quarters maybe, hard to say. It spun slowly at the last—went under with the deck facing east. We pulled over and picked up as many as the boat could hold—”

“The other boats had all pulled away,” declared the man in dress clothes angrily. “Cowards!”

“Suction,” the steward said. “Fraid o’ suction, they was—big ship like that, y’know—you can’t blime ’em, you can’t reely.”

“I don’t think there was much,” the officer said. “Seemed to be more of a splash than anything else. The ship gave three or four big sighs as water closed over her and deck chairs and that sort of thing began popping up everywhere. We pulled clear then.”

“We thought we saw a light,” the fair girl said, “and so the men rowed over that way, hours and hours. But we never saw the other boats again. So we’ve come back. It’s been such a long time.”

“They can’t be far,” the officer said stoutly.

The Polack woman looked at Davis suddenly. She pointed at the dory and then beyond it vaguely. “Milwaukee?” she asked eagerly. “Milwaukee?”

A strange word. Davis and Newfie Sam wondered what she meant.

“We belong to the schooner Elmira B. MacCleave,” Davis explained politely, ‘outta North Sydney, Nova Scotia. Got drove off the Grand

Bank in a norther, an' come by chance on some of our gear down this way. Me an' Newfie put off a dory an' picked it up—'twas our trawl, see?—Number One—it's painted on the keg-buoy. We got it here in the dory now."

"Where's your vessel?" asked the officer.

Davis jerked a mittened thumb towards the west. "That way a bit. She ain't far, but we sat here sensible-like, waitin' fer mornin'. Bob MacCleave'll start his fog-horn a-goin'-com-pressed air off o' the engine, see?—soon as it comes broad daylight. You folks better hang alongside us an' come aboard the Elmira B. Some o' them ladies must be awful cold."

"Might be a good idea," said the officer diffidently. "Still, the Carpathia should be here by this time. And there's the Frankfurt and the Olympic and the Californian and some others probably. Sparks was in touch with half a dozen. They'd come very slowly, I fancy, on account of the ice field. But they're here now, for a cent."

The man in dress clothes said firmly, "We're not going aboard any fishing schooner! Get that! The other liners'll be on the look-out for us. We'll be all right as soon as this everlasting fog lifts."

"It would be nice to get warm for a minute or two," the fair girl said wistfully.

"Warm!" The fat woman gave another hitch to her seal coat. "My dear, you've stuck it so far like a brave girl, surely you're not going to weaken now? A nasty smelly fishing-boat? I want a comfortable berth on the Carpathia, a warm bath and a hot breakfast—all that or nothing!"

"I'm thinking of all these poor people in night-clothes," the girl said, nodding at the vague humanity about her knees.

"There's other people ter think abaht, lidy," the steward protested. "Look 'ere, s'pose we go aboard some bloomin' little fishin' 'coker?"

They don't carry food, water—nothink enough fer a crowd like us, considerin' we're 'undreds o' miles from the nearest port. They'd 'ave to start fer 'ome at once—an' we'd be a week gettin' anywhere—two weeks, 'oo knows? I tell yoo, lidy, I got to get 'ome an' look up another berth quick as I bloomin' well can. I got a wife an' four kids ter think abaht.”

“Hear, hear,” agreed the Liverpool-Irish fireman. His eye whites glistened in the sooty face. “Look at me!” he urged. “It's half-naked I am, an' half frozen wid sittin' here listenin' to idle conversation. Am I complainin'? Not I! But niver mind the Elmira What's-her-name—let's move along the way we were headin' when we met these fellas. It's tuggin' on the oar warms me blood. Ah, for a bunk in the Carpathia's firemen's quarters—that an' a hot plate o' burgoo—an' you could have the baths an' the rest, lady!”

“You better do de same as we, b'ys,” Newfie Sam spoke up, “an' set quiet till de fawg lifts. 'Taint no good wanderin' about in fawg, b'ys. You on'y gits lost worse.”

“Lost!” snapped the officer. “Look here, what sort of ass d'you think I am? I know where we are. The ship went down in 41-46 north latitude, longitude fifty and a few minutes west. We thought we saw a light to the sou'-west and rowed off that way amongst the ice—sou'-west-by-south it was, to be exact—and kept that course for several hours. The fog shut down and we saw no more of the light, and after a bit we turned back—reversed the course—I figure we're now about where the ship went down.”

“Ain't seen no wreckage,” the steward said, with some disapproval.

“Of course not,” the officer retorted. “There's a north-easterly drift hereabouts, even in flat calm like this. I'm reckonin' by rowing time and compass. Crude, I admit. Best I could do. The ships'll come to the position Sparks gave out and look for wreckage later. If only we'd get a slant of wind to take off this hellish fog—”

“There you go,” the plump lady said sharply, “swearing, now! I still think if we’d kept on going the way we were going we’d have caught up with the other boats. There’s land over that way somewhere, too, quite likely.”

“Land?” the officer said. “Ma’am, we are five or six hundred miles southeast of Halifax if we’re an inch.”

“I don’t believe you know what you’re talking about,” the lady said severely. “We’ve been an age rowing up and down in this fog, and it’s all your doing. If you ask me the Carpathia’s been here and gone again, long long ago.”

“I still think,” the fair girl said meekly, “we’d better stay with these fishermen and go aboard their vessel when the fog lifts. These poor people from the steerage must be half dead with cold. It’s been ever so long since any of them moved.”

“No, no!” declared the man in dress clothes vigorously. “They’re asleep, and a good thing, too. Don’t wake ’em till we see the Carpathia or one of the others. I’d like the fastest boat bound for New York, myself. I must get to Wall Street as quickly as possible. D’you know what’s going on in Europe? There’s a war brewing. I tell you within a year or two you’re going to see the world turned upside down.”

“Faith,” chuckled the fireman grimly, “we’ve seen somethin’ o’ the sort already, eh, mate?” He nudged the stewards back with the butt of his oar.

“Blimey, yes. Looked like ‘arf the bloomin’ world, didn’t she—tied up at Southampton quay?”

“Besides, my dear,” said the fat lady shrewdly, “it’s likely your husband’s been picked up already, and there he’ll be, aboard one of the steamers, worrying about you.”

The fair girl smiled a little at that, but her smile was strangely sad.

“D’you think so? It seems such a long time since I saw him. We were married only last summer, you know,” she said across the water to Davis and Sam—the people in the boat looked bored, as if they had heard all this before—“His father gave us a year’s travel abroad for a wedding present—a twelve-months’ honeymoon, he said. We were married in Baltimore in June, and went right over to see the Coronation.”

“Ah!” said Newfie Sam. “I seen the pitchers o’ that.”

“Beautiful, wasn’t it?” she said eagerly. “King George looked so handsome—and—and steadfast, and the Queen was lovely. It wouldn’t do in the States, of course; but I could understand what it meant to British people. I remember seeing some of your Canadian mounted police in the procession. The London people gave them a special cheer. We went all over the continent after that, and spent the winter in Naples. Ah, how happy we were! And how long ago, it seems.”

“Milwaukee?” said the Polack woman with that anxious smile. “Milwaukee?”

Newfie shook his head. It must be a Polack word. But now the fireman spoke again, urgently.

“Let’s be off, for it’s freezin’ I am!”

The officer hesitated and looked at the fair girl respectfully, as if hers was the sole judgement he could trust in that boat over-laden with people and opinions. She turned reluctantly.

“Very well,” she sighed. The oars dipped and struggled. It took half a dozen ragged strokes to get the boat into motion at all, and to the watching dory-men there was something pitiful about the deep three lone oars so languidly rising and falling. The officer, intent on his steering, never once turned his head. The rowers stared sightlessly at a point over his shoulder, lost once more in their own thoughts. Only the fair girl on the after thwart looked back at the

men in the dory. Her mournful eyes seemed to hold them by an invisible thread until the life-boat vanished in the mist. The painful beat of the oars died in the direction of the the morning.

There was a long silence in the dory. Then Newfie Sam said, "Somet'ing queer about dem people. A kind o' fuzzy look."

"'Twas the fog," Davis said abruptly. "Fog an' the dawn light. Reckon we looked as queer to them. Yes, man."

"Voices queer, too," persisted Newfie Sam. "Like cold winter nights back 'ome, when you can 'ear people talkin' 'udder side o' Porposie Cove dat plain—make out every word, y'can—but like voices over a tellyfome."

"Bah!" Like an echo of the disgusted Davis came a faint "Ah!" from the westward.

"Listen now," Davis said, fumbling for the boat compass, "an' we'll take a bearin' on it. That's the ol' Elmira B., sure as shootin'." In half a minute they heard it again, the unmistakable blast of the schooner's fog-horn. Davis put the compassbox between his feet and they began to row confidently, Newfie Sam holding the rusty tin dory-horn between his broken teeth and sounding a calf-blat every minute in answer to the schooner. At last he let it drop.

"You goin' to tell Cap'n Bob o' dem people in d'boat?"

"Sure! Why not? He'll want to shift outa this, I reckon. 'Taint healthy fer a li'L ol' fishin'-schooner hereabouts, thick-o'-fog, an' half a dozen big steamers prowlin' about lookin' fer people off a wreck."

Newfie Sam rowed a few strokes in silence, regarding the back of Davis's sou'-wester. "Dat music we heared, Dan—I dunno what de rag-time piece was, but dere was a hymn come next I know right good. 'Twas 'Nearer My Gawd To Thee'."

"Don't signify nothin'," Davis said.

“No? Den come anudder hymn-choked off quick in d’middle-”

“Radio!” said Davis. “Someone switched it off.”

“Choked off in d’part dat goes,”
‘Hold me up in mighty waters,’
‘Keep my eyes on t’ings above.’

“Dat’s a hymn called Autumn. I know dem chunes, Davis, man.”

“It don’t signify, I tell you,” Davis said, and his voice was sharp.

“An’ everyt’ing about dat boat was new-notice dat? D’paint on d’strakes, d’rope in dem cut boat-falls still hangin’ from d’farrard eye, d’life-jackets on d’people, yiss-even dat orfcer’s goold braid an’ buttons-all bran’ new.”

“What of it?”

“D’ fat leddy, she said about ’em bein’ in d’boat half a lifetime.”

“Aw! That’s a silly woman for you! You heard what the offcer said, didn’t you? Twenny-six hours since their ship went down, he says.”

“Years, d’ woman said.”

“Tell you she was hysterical! That young gel had her senses about her. Been to the coronation, says she. King George an’ all that. This is nineteen-thirty-eight, ain’t it? Coronation was last year, wasn’t it? Eh? Where’s your brains, Newfie? My God, Newfie, don’t look at me like that!” Newfie said slowly, “You see d’ name on dat life-boat, Dan?”

“No name on it,” Davis said hurriedly, and his voice was frightened.

“I seen it, Dan. Plain. Ain’t got much learnin’ but I can read names when dey’re printed, like. Begun wid a T.”

“Ah!” Davis cried. “Lots o’ names begin with T.”

“An’ there was a I an’ another T, an’ a A, an’ then a N-”

“Ah, stop it! Newfie man! You ain’t got a right to fancy like that.”

“Sposin’ I told ye d’ next letter was a I?”

“Tell you it don’t signify, none of it don’t signify!”

Newfie Sam rested his oars and turned to look ahead, where they could glimpse the stained sails of the *Elmira B. MacCleave* flapping slowly in the mist. The trumpet-note of her fog horn rang over the dark water. Davis looked too, and then Newfie Sam swung his sea-haunted eyes full on Davis’ own.

“Know what dat last letter was, Dan?”

“A!” Davis caught at a letter as at a straw. “Likely an A, Newfie,” he said feverishly. “There’s boats called *Titania*, like that schooner *Ronnie McCuish* launched last summer. ‘Member? His daughter found the name somewheres, in a mid-summer dream, she said, this *Titania* bein’ a sort o’ fairy—”

“Fairies?” Newfie Sam murmured absently. “But ’tweren’t an A, Dan. Runs in my mind ’twas—”

“No! Such things can’t be, I tell you! Listen, Newfie. A fishin’ dory’s the loneliest thing in the world, like a li’l yella coffin o’ pine on the broad face o’ the sea, with fog like this, one day in every three—sky gone, vessel gone, other dories gone—mebbe even your own trawl buoys clean outa sight—nothin’ there but you an’ your mate an’ the pine board under you—an inch o’ pine atween you an’ the sea and all things below a man ain’t meant to look upon—no, nor think about, an’ him right-minded. Keep your thinkin’ on the edge o’ soundin’s, Newfie. There’s things a man’s got to b’lieve an’ hold by, if he’s to make his livin’ on the Banks an’ keep his mind from broachin’-to. You got to fasten your thoughts on somethin’ canny, like the *Elmira B.*, an’ the price o’ fish—things you can get a-hold of an’ see an’ feel. The rest you got to forget. I tell you such things can’t be!”

“Twere a C, Dan. I can’t help it. I seen it. Very plain, it were-d’ paint new an’ all. I’m sorry, Dan.”

But Davis-Bully Dan Davis of the Elmira B. MacCleave-had dropped his oars and thrust his face into his mittened hands, weeping like a child.

Nine Mile House

It must have been in 1908 that Jack and Sheila Hannison came to Milltown “looking for a place to settle.” They created quite a stir in our quiet little lumber town, where no settlers had come since the days of the pioneers. The tide of immigration—in full flow in those spacious pre-war days—ignored the Atlantic provinces as if they did not exist, seeking the prairies and the fabulous “wide open spaces,” the Golden West of novels and magazines. Jack Hannison was then about twenty three, a slim good-looking fellow with a neat blond moustache. There was a touch of ice about him, reflected in his eyes, grey like the colour of river ice that has been darkened by a spring sun . He was dressed in what some London outfitter considered the proper thing for Canada, a quaint garb more suitable to Greenland than the kindly climate of southern Nova Scotia, and his trunks were packed with other properties equally incongruous. With his strange clothes, his accent, his impersonal smile and aloof manner he was an object of Pine County interest in his own right. In combination with Sheila he was a sensation. How shall I describe Sheila Hannison? It is more than twenty six years since she went away from Nine Mile House for ever, but her loveliness, the rich lilt of her laughter, the instinctive grace of her every movement and gesture, her gay courage that was like a flame within, these are still an ache in the heart. She was taller than Jack and she wore her dark hair curling about her shoulders in what is nowadays called the “page-boy bob”. It was very unusual in those days of knobs and stiff piled pompadours. The nostrils flared away from the tilt of her nose in a way that suggested a keen and sensitive animal sniffing the savour of life and her lips, long and full and wide, pouted a little as if she were eager to taste as well. Her eyes were dark and enormous, with a perceptible cast in the loft, which far from detracting from her looks was oddly appealing. The skin on the lower lids formed

long sacs with a vague bluish gleam. I was in love with her—What callow youth in Milltown was not?

“Squire” Baring took them into his rambling Dutch-colonial house on the slope overlooking the river, for there was no hotel in Milltown in those days, and tried to talk them out of their magnificent ideas. They wanted “a section of forest land” where they could “chop out” a farm, with “a bit of a stream” for preference, and it had to be “well removed” from the settlement. There were good farms for sale in the northern part of Pine County, Baring told them. Here in the southern district the land was rocky with intervals of clay bottom where water settled and swamps flourished, and the uplands were covered with a dense growth of pine, hemlock, oak, beech and birch, and black spruce, red maple and hackmatack grew around the bogs. It was, he told them bluntly, “the devil’s own job to clear, and hell to cultivate.” He wasted his breath, of course. Jack Hannison’s firm mouth grew tighter the longer Baring argued, and at last, inspired perhaps by remembered talk of misfits returning to England, he accused the “Squire” of “not wanting strangers here.” Old Baring bristled, for hospitality is not more sacred in the Arabian desert than in Pine County; and the quiet accusation, uttered in an accent which Baring dimly associated with “dudes,” laid a foundation for the Milltown belief that Hannison was “one of those who-are-you-damn-you Englishmen.”

Sheila melted the old man’s uprush of anger with one of her quick smiles, and Baring leaned back in his great leather morris-chair, staring out over the houses clustered about the saw-mills on the river bank, and said, “Strangers are always welcome here, mister. I’m just tryin’ to save you some of the misery that my own ancestors chose for themselves. They came from New England to Nova Scotia in 1760, not long after the Acadians had been driven out. They might have gone up Fundy Bay an’ taken up some of the rich dyke’lands left empty by the Acadians—they might have gone ‘most anywhere, same as you—but here they came. They were towns-folk lookin’ for a better way of life somewhere handy to the seaboard, for they

didn't fancy the inland wilderness. They didn't know any more about farmin' than I reckon you know, and for two generations they broke their hearts and backs tryin' to till this sour rocky land of ours. Look at the stone walls they built around these little fields with the rubble they dragged aside! Four foot thick an' shoulder high, ton upon ton of it, an' a drop of sweat in every ounce. An' the women—go down to the old buryin' ground, mister, an' take a look at the dates on the tombstones. Hardly a woman got past the age of forty—most of 'em died off in the twenties an' thirties, workin' 'emselves to death. That's what I'm comin' at, mister. You're a man that uses plain talk an' I'll give you a plain answer. If you want to go in these woods an' break your back tryin' to make a farm out o' land that God meant for growin' timber—that's your own funeral an' you can do your own mournin'. But your wife —”

Hannison was about to say something hot at this point but Sheila cut in swiftly with some disarming remark and the upshot of the whole matter was that they bought a section of timber land “well removed” from Milltown on the old post road to Fort Royal. They built their home near the nine-mile mark on the post road, a crude Roman numeral chiseled in a roadside boulder by pioneers blazing a trail to the northern district. Apparently Hannison had money, for he hired carpenters, masons and plasterers in Milltown and set about building the place which every traveller came to know as Nine Mile House. It was not a large house by any means, perhaps thirty feet by twenty five on the ground floor, rising to a half story upstairs, with little dormers peering from the steep shingled roof. Jack Hannison had set his heart on some sort of English cottage, but the problem of expressing a brick-and-stone idea in terms of wood and the further difficulty of conveying his notions to the Milltown carpenters, who were used to the simple colonial architecture, finally persuaded him to fall in with Sheila and a house in the style of the country. The sills were hewn from logs of red pine, cut near the site, but the white pine beams, groove and tongue sheathing, clapboards, the hemlock joists, the birch flooring and the spruce shingles were

hauled in ox-teams from the saw-mills at Milltown. With its great central chimney, its white painted clapboards, its windows flanked with ornamental green shutters, its little portico over the front door, Nine Mile House was to all outward appearance a dwelling such as you might see anywhere in Pine County. Inside there were differences. The dining room, for instance was panelled in natural pine, a thing unheard of at that time. There was a room containing a built-in tin bath, at which the Milltown workmen marvelled. As far as I know it was the second permanent bathroom in the Milltown district. It seems absurd to think that only thirty years ago the hip-bath on the bedroom floor or a wash-tub in the kitchen constituted almost the sole bathing facilities of urban as well as rural Pine County. The world does move.

There were fireplaces in two bedrooms and another huge oak-mantelled cave in the big living room. The carpenters told him that the fireplaces would not heat the place in zero weather, that he would have to install stoves, and then the yawning fireplaces must be covered to prevent the escape of precious heat. But he was obdurate, and those who were privileged afterwards to sit before that mighty living-room fire, blazing with four foot maple and beech logs, were pleased to admit that in winter, it was a “darned sight more cheerful than a Franklin, and pretty nigh warm as a stove.” The kitchen occupied the back of Nine Mile House, with great windows facing south and west, so that the room in which Sheila spent much of her day would get a maximum of sunshine. It was a pleasant place, even in winter when the sun describing its low arc in the southern sky filled the room with light and even a sense of warmth. I have stood in the kitchen of Nine Mile House upon a day in February when the thermometer shrank under the zero mark, and felt the flush of the afternoon sun on my face as if it were Spring. But I was a boy then and in love with Sheila Hannison and perhaps it was the light and glow that she herself diffused. I can see her now, holding forth some new triumph of cookery in a spoon or upon a fork for

our taste, and watching us with enormous brown eyes as if her life's happiness depended on the verdict.

The house was about seventy five yards removed from the westerly side of the post-road. By this you may gauge Jack Hannison's aloofness, for traffic on the road was limited to the teamsters hauling goods to the northern district merchants from Millton, a dozen wagons a week perhaps, and in winter the sleds of a few lumbermen. Later he set out an apple orchard between the house and the road, but that was after a breaking-up bee convinced Jack Hannison that the world of men was still at his door. Thirty years ago the bee was a thriving institution in Pine County, an inheritance from the pioneers. There were various bees. When a young couple started "on their own" there was a raising bee, attended by men women and children from miles of countryside. The men brought tools—every man his own carpenter—and the necessary lumber on ox-wagons, and there was a day of furious labour. A small house might be put up in a single bee, or "raised" to a point where the young husband could finish off according to his fancy. In the evening there would be singing and dancing—games only in the Hard-shell Baptist sections—and a great feast of home-made wine and pastry. If a man fell sick in spring-time there was a ploughin bee or a planting bee; and in the Fall he would awaken one morning to find a cordwood bee in full blast outside, and see a winter's supply of fuel cut, sawn and piled in his wood-shed before dark.

A few mornings after Nine Mile House received its gleaming coat of white paint, with a light and cheerful green on doors, window-frames and shutters, there was a hubbub on the post-road and the Hannisons beheld a bee approaching their domain. The country folk were a bit shy of these exotic strangers but the ancient custom was not lightly to be set aside. Jack Hannison came out on his doorstep as the cavalcade pulled up beside the house and asked curtly, "What's this, may I ask?"

The clamour subsided. Someone said "breakin'-up bee" in the hush.

He regarded them with an amazed anger, as if he found himself in the presence of slightly demented burglars. He did not know what to say. They explained; awkwardly, even defensively. When dimly he understood, Hannison was disposed to order them off, for he clearly regarded the whole thing as an impertinence; but as usual it was Sheila whose intuition and disarming smile melted the rising resentment of both husband and visitors.

“Oh Jack, how kind!” Her voice had that music in it. She seized his arm and swept him down the steps amongst them crying, “How nice to find so many friends, so soon.” Shelia was a born politician. She shook hands, memorized names and faces, patted children, with just the right glow for the women and just the right impersonal little smile for the men, and insisted the women should come in and see every part of Nine Mile House while their men laboured outside.

Jack Hannison took his axe and fell to with the rest, working with the energy of a man possessed, as if to show that he was quite capable of taking care of himself. He was capable enough physically. When you watched Jack Hannison in movement you watched an athlete and knew it. But after a time he was glad to take example from the Pine County men, whose unhurried axe-strokes fell so surely and cleanly, with rhythm of swing and economy of effort. “Squire” Baring was there with his three sturdy sons and two yoke of oxen. Hannison went over and reminded him pleasantly of his statement about the impossibility of farming in the Pine County woods. Baring’s kindly smile stirred his broad face. “Sure. We break up land hereabouts for garden plots an’ pastures. Always have. But not for real farmin’, son. ‘Course, mebbe we’ve got the wrong slant on this thing. Mebbe you can show us somethin’. Man’s never too old to learn; an’ if the lumber business don’t pick up soon we’ll all be growing cabbages for a livin’. But right now, son, I still think you’re workin’ up grief for yourself.” He nodded towards the gleaming paint of Nine Mile House. “You seem to have a bit o’ capital, son, an’ it’s not too late to change your mind. You’ve got a nice lot o’ timber here—some good pine, and a fine stand o’ hemlock. There’s a lake not more than a mile back o’

your house, about three miles long an' a mile wide. It flows to the river through a good deep brook. That means you've got first-rate lay-out for a small lumberman. There's good timber all around the lake. I know because I've looked it over. If I was you, son, I'd buy up the timber between Eight Mile an' Ten Mile, an' get options on the rest, all the way round the lake within good haulin' distance. Cut an' peel your hemlock in summer, pine in the Fall. Soon as snow comes, hire a few ox-teams an' start sleddin' down to the lake ice. A winter's work at that, what with swampin' an' loadin'. Then in spring float your stuff down the brook to the river—sell it to some feller that's bringin' a drive down to the mills—I'll take it, if you like. After you've got the hang of the thing, an' a few good men in your pay, branch out more; cut enough for a decent drive an' bring it down to Milltown, get it sawn on a share basis an'—why, son, I've pretty nigh got you into the lumber business already.”

Afterwards, of course, we knew that Jack Hannison had sunk his money in Nine Mile House, bitterly resolved that Sheila should have a decent habitation in the wilds, but at the time he sounded very curt and superior.

“Fraid you're off the mark, Baring. I might cut a few logs in winter when there's nothing else to do, but as I said before, I'm a farmer and I know what I'm doing.”

The breaking-up bee performed great labours in the wilderness. At dark there was a decent clearing about the house for a hundred yards, shorn of trees and undergrowth, the soil well grubbed. But there was also an appalling display of Pine County geology, great boulders of granite and whinstone boldly naked in the red glare of burning stumps and slash, too big for oxen to remove. They were ominous to the experienced eye, tombstones for the hopes that Jack Hannison was to bury there. Still Hannison had a fine pile of young hardwood trunks lying beside the back door for fuel, and a number of saw-logs at the post road ready for hauling to the mill, and there was a general chorus of satisfaction at the day's work.

A wash-boiler of tea steamed gently in Sheila's kitchen, and the women opened their baskets and began to pass food to the men clustering about the doors. "Come in, men, do" Sheila said. They peeped at the interior with frank curiosity. One or two walked in delicately; the rest said their boots were muddy and their hands mighty dirty, thank you ma'am, and they'd make out all right outside. So they ate squatting against the house in the spring dusk, while the horses swished and stamped at their tethers in the edge of the new clearing and the ox bells rang a discordant carillon beside the wagons. After supper somebody produced a fiddle and at Sheila's urging a large self-possessed woman tried to organize a square dance in the big living room; but the men would not come in and a few shy girls made an attempt alone without "getting things started". Sheila flitted through the crowd like the bright friendly bird she was, sparkling, cajoling, rallying, but the atmosphere was heavy with constraint. It was Jack Hannison's fault. There was something about him that suggested a gentleman confronted with well-meaning boors. It was just an unbending something that he could not help, a withdrawn quality, an aloofness bred in his bones. The party came to a close very soon after the empty dishes were packed away in the baskets. Men hitched up their horses and oxen, women and children climbed in the wagons, and the breaking-up bee vanished in the darkness towards Milltown with a clop-clop of hooves and the receding jangle of ox bells. Looking back over thirty mellowing years I wonder if visitors or visited sighed with the greater relief.

The report of the breaking-up bee was brief and to the point. This fellow Hannison was a stiff-neck, they said; but his wife was real nice, and she could play the piano and sing better than anybody in Pine County. Some of us, sons and daughters of Milltown merchants and small mill-owners, fell into the pleasant habit of driving out the post road to Nine Mile House on summer afternoons and evenings, and a fine Sunday was sure to see a row of horses hitched to the rail fence and a park of dusty buggies about the house. Sheila Hannison played and sang lively little songs, most of them Gilbert and Sullivan,

though we did not know it then, and we taught her lumberjack songs and shouted them in chorus. I remember an evening when she slipped away for a few minutes and came back wearing Hannison's working kit, stained denim overalls, mackinaw shirt, high laced boots and a battered felt hat, and struck an attitude, brandishing an axe and singing "The Jam on Gerry's Rock" in brilliant parody of the mournful lumber camp troubadours. We joined in—Sally Blantyre, Bill Kerr, blond Madge Connor, Harry and Mac Baring, demure little Gaby Ross—a dozen of us, putting on long soulful faces and drawling out the notes until we all collapsed with laughter. All but Jack Hannison, who stood at the window regarding sourly his own reflection in the black glass. Our laughter died. Sheila studied his disapproving shoulders with a slow sidelong glance and then fled to put off the offensive raiment. I never knew what quirk of the past or the moment lit that particular fire in Jack Hannison. Later we understood many things, but that incident remains unsolved, a thing apart.

It could not have been a dislike for seeing his wife performing for others' amusement for her vivacious gifts were soon enlisted for concerts put on in Milltown by local talent and Jack Hannison usually played her accompaniments. She was a success from the first, always greeted with a storm of applause and obliged to give encore after encore. She offered to dance for one affair and the offer was accepted with alacrity by all but her husband. Hannison's small neat face froze into a blank mask, familiar enough, but for once Sheila seemed not to notice it. She did a spirited Spanish thing with the fire and grace that was hers alone. It was new to Milltown concerts, where dancing moved in the shadow of a puritan conscience inherited from the pioneers, and the younger folk were in raptures; but Aunt Sarah Grindling, the fearsome spinster who was the bony figurehead of public opinion, pronounced loudly and acidly, "A bit free with her laigs, if you ask me," and Sheila's performance was Officially damned. Jack Hannison, returning unobtrusively from the piano to his seat, over heard Aunt Sarah.

What passed between him and his wife on the long ride home I do not know, but the Hannisons apparently accepted Sarah's verdict as excommunication, and from that time the village hall saw no more of the master and mistress of Nine Mile House. Aunt Sarah passed to her reward long since. She must be a nuisance to the other saints.

During the first winter we kept up our visits to Nine Mile House as often as snowstorms permitted, whipping along behind the horses in little two-seated cutters, with the harness bells filling the silence of the woods, and the runners creaking on the snow and the white road sliding past. And sometimes there was a sleigh drive of the old-fashioned kind, the long sled boxes piled with straw and fifteen or twenty youngsters wedged in with blankets and buffalo robes and two or three pairs of horses in the harness, whips cracking, bells tinkling, voices chanting sleigh songs, and a ribbon of sky frosty with stars flowing overhead like an inverted river in the dark canyon of pine and hemlock. Then the noisy arrival at Nine Mile House, with Jack and Sheila framed in the yellow light of the doorway, and the invasion of red cheeks and flashing teeth; caps, mittens, mackinaws, furs, hurled right and left, overshoes in a slowly dripping pyramid in the hall; shouts and songs, and the table covered with hot dishes of baked beans—Sheila cooked them lumber camp style in great earthenware crocks with chunks of fat pork and a generous dash of molasses—and the smell of coffee and—but why go on? I was nineteen then, and Jack Hannison twenty four, and Sheila at twenty six, the oldest and youngest of us all. All that fizzing youth is gone, like Nine Mile House and the curious idyll that passed within its walls, and the living hearts are scattered from Halifax to the Rockies after the fashion of our roving Nova Scotia folk: Bill Kerr and Harry Baring are quiet under the Norway maples in the shadow of Vimy monument, Lance Porter vanished in a shell explosion under the old ramparts at Ypres, and angelic Harvey Delhanty who sang in the Milltown choir was killed in a paltry row with Japanese soldiers on Kepeck Hill in Vladivostock. The cutters are mouldering and their iron runners rusting in lofts and corners of Milltown barns,

for the post road is a motor highway now, kept open in winter with tractor-driven ploughs, and the old days are drowned in the stink of gasolene. Time, with its disillusion, its cold memories and empty longings, this was the spectre that hung over us and Nine Mile House.

In the three years that followed, the Hannisons gradually acquired a dossier in Milltown's verbal Who's-Who. Some of it was pure guessing; some, I know now, was accurate enough, though how the knowledge came to Milltown is one of those mysteries of country towns. Jack Hannison, it said positively, was the younger son of a well-to-do English family. Sheila was an actress. They had eloped, and Jack's family had written him off the books. An old story, and simple enough. There were various details. Some were absurd, and the rest you can fill in for yourself. One thing was certain. Jack Hannison regarded his home and family with a fanatic hatred. He never spoke of home, that word which is ever on the Englishman's lips; and if in the course of talk there was mention of England or the English he dismissed them tersely with "over there" and "those people." The postmaster knew that Sheila sometimes wrote to England, and that letters came for her with English postmarks; but Hannison never sent nor received so much as a postcard.

He persisted doggedly with his "farm," and hired Dixie Willis to do odd jobs about the place. Dixie was an old broken-down wanderer returned to roost at last, a Milltown character, full of tales of the sea, and General Robert E. Lee, and petty trading adventures in Mexico and Honduras. People scoffed at Hannison's choice of a hired man, though I saw Sheila's warm hand in it. Jack could not afford much in the way of wages, but he needed help of whatever sort. Dixie was grateful for tobacco money and his meals and a good roof over his head. In the second summer they raised a fair crop of potatoes and Indian corn, and at Dixie's urging harvested wild hay in the swamp meadows near the lake. You will have an idea of Jack Hannison's ignorance of Canada when I tell you he intended raising wheat and gave up the notion only when he found with astonishment that

there was not a flour mill within a hundred miles. Wheat—in the Nova Scotia woods! And his blind optimism took your breath away, for wheat is a business requiring wide acres for success, and there he was at Nine Mile, hewing away at the wilderness with his puny axe. People laughed at him of course, and then felt sorry for him, remembering old family tales of struggle under the same delusion; but as he became more and more of a recluse the interest dwindled. Old Dixie drove the wagon into Milltown every Saturday afternoon for mail and supplies, but he was close-mouthed about Nine Mile affairs, and news was confined to the few of us who still called to see Sheila's smile and endured Hannison's coldness for the sake of it. He knew this and resented it, I am sure of that. Gradually his frigid courtesy chilled the welcome that had sparkled so brightly in the first two years, and by the winter of 1911, we had ceased to drive out the post road altogether. Our old pre-Hannison concerns resumed their former interest. When we drove it was down the river to Rockport, where there were moving pictures three nights a week and frequent dances. Teamsters sometimes brought word of seeing Sheila about the house and yard, but little was ever seen of Hannison except the smoke of his clearing-fires in the bush.

Once, in September, a pair of moose-hunters, Indians, came into Milltown with a strange tale of a "witch" frolicking in the waters of Nine Mile Lake. Their description was vague, for the witch fled into the woods at sight of them, and for their part, they plied their canoe paddles in the opposite direction praying Holy Mother Mary (and for good measure Glooskap and other ancient gods) to see them safely down the brook. Aunt Sarah Grindling cornered wooden-faced Joe Penaul in Porter's General Store one day and wormed the scant details out of him. "Witch!" she said. "It's that stage woman at Nine Mile. Swimmin' in her shirt! A fine how-d'ye-do, I must say." Probably it was true. I cannot imagine Sheila Hannison in a pre-war bathing suit. She had too keen a sense of the ridiculous. The lake was hidden in thick forest a mile from the road and I suppose she had not thought of hunters coming up the brook from the river.

I can fancy her peeping at them from the security of the alders, and her glee at their frantic retreat. But the incident set the seal of Aunt Sarah Grindling's disapproval upon the mistress of Nine Mile House. From that time Sheila Hannison was an "abandoned woman" in truth, and Aunt Sarah did not have to wait very long to see her verdict sustained in every particular.

The spring of 1912 was late, but when the warm rains came at last they made a thorough job of breaking up the winter. The snow and ice disappeared in a flood that turned the brooks and rivers bank full, and the frost came out of the dirt roads in one sustained eruption. For two weeks they were simply channels of fluid mud. When they were at their worst a small theatrical troupe came to Milltown, advertising "Charlie's Aunt" in gaudy posters. I always felt sorry for those strolling players who left the beaten circuit to stage their brave little shows in the lumber and fishing towns. They were third-rate companies at best, and even in that far-away era and that out-of-the-way place they faced an audience whose taste was made critical by the cinematograph. Too, they usually chose the spring time in a hope that people bored with long months of winter imprisonment would flock to see their show. The results were frequently disappointing, and the village hall with its great rusty stove in the centre of the floor and no heat at all back-stage was a frigid place in which to face a scanty audience. The players always went through their parts with a certain air of defiance, as much as to say, "The feeling's mutual, damn you," and went away calling loudly for strong drinks.

On the night of "Charlie's Aunt" however the hall was full, and just before the tattered curtain went up Jack and Sheila Hannison came in. They were spattered with mud in spite of the buggy's leather dash-board, and they had to take a pair of rickety chairs well up towards the front. "Charlie's Aunt" found favour. Laughter filled the hall, and the players taking courage went through the merry farce with unusual spirit. The posters announced them "straight from Drury Lane," which was open to doubt, but their accents were

English enough and I was not surprised, when the curtain came down on the last act, to see Sheila Hannison mounting the stage by the little side steps and disappearing behind the ragged daub of Mount Blomidon. Hannison followed her slowly and with obvious distaste. I waited in the empty hall, filled with a sudden hunger for Sheila's smile. I had not seen her in six months. I stood in the empty village hall for a long time, hearing the muddled echo of lively conversation back stage, and then I was aware of Jack Hannison staring at me gloomily from the shadow of the wing door. He had followed her no farther than that. The great round-bellied stove, cooling for lack of fuel, made little cracking noises, a chilly sound. I turned up my collar and went out of the hall and out of Sheila Hannison's life.

Two or three days after that happy-go-lucky troupe vanished into the outer world it was whispered in Milltown that "the dancing woman" from Nine Mile House had run away with Charlie's Aunt. Elmer Ternholm, that gossipy man-who-should-have-beena-woman, told me, and I kicked him faithfully and told him to wash out his mouth with a good strong brand of soap. But it was true. Old Dixie came in for supplies the next Saturday. Aunt Sarah Grindling tried to get something out of him but had to give up in disgust, and on his way out of the village Dixie saw me and pulled up the horse quickly. He leaned over and spoke from the side of his old slack mouth. "She's gone," he said, and whipped up the horse again. Jack Hannison made no attempt to follow her. It would have been hopeless in any case, for it was known that the troupe were heading for the United States, and a third-rate theatrical company was a very small needle indeed in that haystack of one-night stands. I thought once or twice of driving out to Nine Mile House to offer my sympathy, or rather to share Jack Hannison's misery, but I shrank from the prospect of his cold grey stare. In all probability he would have said it was none of my business, and he would have been quite right.

Two years later the war came and our petty current of local affairs

was lost in a tide of great events. Before it was over the boys who had known Nine Mile House were scattered from Ypres to Siberia. A few who belonged to the militia went overseas in the Fall of '14 with the first contingent, but there was a general belief that the whole thing would be over in a few months and there was no rush to enlist until the next spring when the news from Ypres shocked us like cold water. By the summer of 1916, one alone, the owner of Nine Mile House, stayed at home. We were not surprised, for we remembered his hatred of England and the English. Those who saw him wrote that he was a wreck of a man, working himself to death in his timber clearing and refusing any contact with the world, and people who had a word or two with him in the way of business said that he spoke through his teeth, very short and to the point, as if he grudged the time and breath involved. Then, abruptly, in the late summer of '16 he packed up a few belongings and left, telling old Dixie to sell the furniture and keep the money for his wages.

“What about Nine Mile House?” old Dixie said, wondering about the taxes.

“The house,” said Hannison, “can go to hell, Dixie, for all of me.” And that was the last Pine County saw of him.

It was queer how much we talked of “home” when we were overseas and how little it satisfied us when we came back to it. There was a restlessness that took several years to work off, and in the meantime the country was over run with men wandering up and down, full of vague talk about getting out of the old rut and striking out at something with a future. It was summed up in the song that came from Tin Pan Alley about this time and swept the country—

“How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm
Now that they've seen Patee?”

For my part I had no wish to see Milltown, and when in the streets of Halifax I met Bob Nash, just out of the Air Force and bursting with enthusiasm about forestry in British Columbia, I decided on

the spot. British Columbia it was. I had to learn forestry all over again, of course, for trees, rivers, mountains—everything there was on a scale beyond Atlantic measurement, but it was strange and interesting, sometimes exciting, and just what I needed. There were transfers and promotions and changes from employer to employer. There was hard work always. And sometimes there were girls, tall willowy girls for choice, with humourous brown eyes and a knack of jolly little songs. There came a chance to launch out for myself, and then increasing problems that pushed me farther and farther away from the trees and deeper into an office chair. The years went by. You know how they go. I kept in touch with Milltown all this time by letter and by a subscription to the Pine County Courier, and across the width of a continent I watched the decline and fall of Nine Mile House.

Old Dixie held the fort until some time in 1922, selling the furniture in Milltown bit by bit for taxes, and living God knows how. Then one day the strength went out of him and some teamsters found him waving feebly from the doorway. That incredible old man had lived in the barn for six years, keeping the empty house spotless for the Hannisons' return. To his dying day he believed they would come back. Mac Baring was there when they took him away to the sick ward at the County Poor Farm, and saw the old man drive off with his personal trinkets in a handkerchief and a little rocking chair that belonged to Sheila Hannison tied on the back of the buggy. He had saved that from the tax sales and would not be parted from it. "The saddest thing," Mac wrote, "I ever saw in my life."

Mac Baring and some others boarded up the doors and windows and fastened a plank across the barn door, but they knew it was labour wasted. No barriers could keep out the damp and frost and the rot that comes in their wake. There had been six unheated winters, and already the hardwood floors had begun to heave, the paper to leave the walls, and the pine panelling of the dining room was warped beyond hope. The house was doomed. By 1926, when the Sherriff went redundantly through the form of seizing it for

outstanding taxes, the roof leaked in a dozen places and the floors were like a relief map of the county complete with hills, valleys, streams and lakes. It was offered for sale, but who would buy a derelict house at Nine Mile? Hunters and hoboes began to use it for shelter, tearing boards off the barn for kindling, until the structure collapsed in an autumn storm. The county authorities sent a man out to board up the house again, and he found windows broken, plaster lying in heaps on the corrugated floors, and a porcupine den in the kitchen. And when the timber at Nine Mile Lake was logged by Black River men and other gentiles, the doors and window sashes vanished one by one and turned up in various camps, and so it went. There was nothing unusual about it after all. An abandoned house in the woods.

In 1928, too late, the human depredations were checked in a strange way. Poor-house visitors had told poor Dixie Willis something of the destruction, and one day the old man got permission to go to Milltown in the supply wagon. He was eighty three, a thin dried stick of a man, but he compelled the driver to take the long way round, past Nine Mile House, and went weeping through the shattered rooms, and on the bare white plaster over the great fireplace he wrote with a stub of lumber-crayon, "The Peple who distroyd this House will some day Come to Want."

When I went there last year the sprawling blue letters were still distinct, like a curse in that melancholy place. The economy and power of the words impressed me, like something out of one of the more vindictive psalms, as if some brooding spirit of the house had guided the old man's hand. It had been potent, too. There were no recent signs of human presence in that damp and silent wreck. Old signs were not wanting. The hardwood flooring was gone, torn up and burned, I suppose, and the hemlock boards of the under-floor rotten to the danger point. The plaster was nearly all down, the laths wrenched off for firewood. There were no doors, no windows. The gaping frames stared out of the drunken walls like sightless eyes. The stairs had collapsed. I could only guess at the ruin upstairs. The

living room fireplace was deep in the caked ashes left by hunters and wanderers. A blackened little billy-can stood on the mantel. The corners were sodden heaps of drifted leaves. Soon, when the frosts came, there would be another layer. A depressing smell of wood rot hung in the rooms. Squirrels skittered over the sagging floor above my head, and a fitful wind came out of the woods and rattled the loose clapboards outside like castanets.

It was late September. On the edge of the clearing the maples were a flame in the sunshine. The apples in Jack Hannison's pitiful orchard were dropping from the trees. The ground was littered with bruised fruit, and I knew the deer would come out of the woods at dusk to hold feast. Behind the house, stretching back towards the lake hidden in the pines, the fields were shaggy with uncut grass, and wire birch were springing up, and thick bunches of alder bush. The rail fence mouldering on the ground no longer separated the sown from the wilderness. In ten more years the forest would reclaim its own. I walked down past the ruined heap of the barn to look at the well and found Sheila Hannison sitting on the stone curb. I had a mad thought that I was looking at her mother. It seemed impossible that Sheila should grow old. She had the same straight-backed figure, a little riper perhaps, but the black cloud of hair was now a clipped gleaming silver confection that rippled in hair-dresser's waves below a smart little three-cornered hat. She was wearing a grey costume of some sort with a rich mink cape about her shoulders and the long shapely ankles were crossed in grey silk. Her hands were quiet in her lap.

She said "Hello, Jeff. This must be visitor's day." Quietly, just like that. I had a feeling that she had been watching me. I said, "Yes," inanely. I could think of nothing to say. It was like talking to a stranger. Her long lips were thinner than I remembered, perhaps because they were compressed, and expressionless. In the old days her mouth had been a barometer for her emotions; you could read her mood from the lower lip alone. Her face now seemed to have drawn inwards, leaving a long faint shadow under the high cheek-

bones. The passionate flaring nostrils were the same, though, and the arched black eyebrows, and her eyes were enormous and very bright, but there was a brooding in them where the gaiety had been, and a suggestion of hardness. There was a hint of rouge, delicately shaded, high on each cheek. She was a handsome woman. "If we'd been sweethearts," she said evenly, "this is the point where I should say, 'At last, my darling, you have come.'" I felt between my shoulder blades the queer chill that my mother used to call 'somebody walking on your grave.' I said, "It must be, what—twenty six years?"

She pulled at the fur cape and examined her gloves. "Yes. I went away to New York. You knew that, of course." I smiled faintly. "With Charlie's Aunt, wasn't it?"

"I played in their company for a time, yes. They went broke in a small town in New Jersey, and I went back to New York. It was like that for several years; getting a job in a road show, going broke somewhere, returning to New York, hunting about the agencies again. Then I got a chance in a musical show, and people liked my singing and dancing. After that, more singing and dancing. Then drama, which was what I really wanted. It was easy, really."

"I never saw your name," I said. She stirred the cape with her shoulders.

"I couldn't use my own name. Jack had that." So that was it. He had cast off the family name along with the rest. An absurd thought came into my mouth.

"It'd be queer, Sheila, if Jack were to come along now." She gave me a long deep look. There was no reproach in her eyes, only that touch of hardness. There was something horribly unreal about it, this chic elderly ghost of Sheila Hannison talking of lights and music and fun.

"It would be very embarrassing. He's married, quite happily I think, and there's a family of three boys and two girls, the oldest almost

at college age. And there's the management of the family affairs. But you wouldn't know about that."

"I thought—we all thought—that Jack was some sort of runaway nobleman," I said.

She laughed. There was music in her laughter still, but no warmth, like the tinkle of ice in a glass. "I wondered what Milltown thought. Jack's people were merchant aristocracy, which is very much more respectable. The Nonconformist Conscience. An actress in the family? No no! So we ran away to live like the babes in the woods. Jack hated them for the way they treated me, and I hated them for the way they treated him. It was a jolly fine hate. But Jack and I couldn't get along on that alone." She was silent for a moment, and then said very rapidly, "You thought we were madly in love, didn't you? So did we. But you saw how utterly different we were. It was impossible. You thought I left him in a noble spirit of self-sacrifice, didn't you?—so he could go back to his people and the life he was fitted for! Well, you were wrong, all of you. I left him because I couldn't stand it any longer. I wanted lights and music and all the fun of the fair. He wanted to lose himself in a nightmare of work and loneliness. I felt like the girl in the fairy tale, dragged off into the forest by an ogre in the shape of a young man. Cooped up in that lonely house! The long dull days and the awful nights! I never wonder now at those prairie tragedies where a man or woman goes mad and slaughters the whole family, preferably with an axe. It's so utterly logical; like two and two making four."

I put the question that was burning my tongue. "And Jack? Do you know what became of him, I mean?"

"Yes. Humphrey, the older brother, was killed in France quite early in the war. Humphrey was decent. He and Jack were very fond of each other. It was Humphrey who risked the parental wrath and scraped up the thousand pounds we brought to Canada. The news came to Jack in some casual way months after Humphrey died, and he went to England and enlisted as a private. In the name of

Hannison—my name. He must have been good fighting material. He was a captain when the war finished. He had that stubborn ruthless streak and a grudge to work off, a touch of the devil within, I suppose. There was no hate left in him, when peace came. He went home to the family bosom, the prodigal son and heir. A few years later he got a divorce. Grounds, desertion, of course. I saw a legal advertisement in one of the New York papers, the Times, I think.” She was smoothing her gloves again.

“You seem,” I said bluntly, “to have followed his career very closely.”

“I was interested, of course. And information came to me in roundabout ways.”

“Married?”

She gave me a quick glance. “You forget I’ve had a career.”

“Actresses marry,” I said. “Are you sure you’re not still in love with Jack?”

“After all these years? How absurd. Of course,” she said slowly, “I still consider myself his wife. I always shall. I don’t mean anything sentimental or religious; and certainly no legal foolishness. There was nothing after Jack; in those few years I’d given him everything, and when it was over I had no more capacity for marriage. I’m not making it very clear, I’m afraid. It’s like giving away, no, using up, a part of your nerves and perceptions! After that, all men are just so many talking dummies. They never seem quite human, at least not in an intimate and personal sense.”

“Then,” I said brutally, “sentiment aside, what are you doing here?”

She drew in those expressionless lips and gazed towards the ruin of the house. “The murderer and the scene of the crime. I wanted to see it again. After all, we had some happy times here, all of us, in those first two years, I’ve thought of them often. And old Dixie. What ever became of Dixie?”

“He went to the poor-house after a time. I think he was quite happy there. When he was dying somebody—the keeper’s wife, I think; she was a Willis from Milltown—mentioned something about burying him in the Milltown Baptist cemetery and Dixie called out in a loud voice that he’d be damned if he’d be buried amongst strangers. So his grave by request is in the poor-house yard.”

“Poor Dixie.” For the first time there was a tremor in her voice. But when I looked at her she met my eyes firmly, even coldly. That touch of hardness.

A long and glistening car pulled up beside mine on the post-road, and a horn blew a little harmony on three notes. It was an expensive sound. Sheila stooped to brush her skirt and stood up settling the cape about her shoulders. Her eyes met mine. She lingered in front of me smiling faintly, as if I were something quite impersonal and rather amusing, a not-very-talkative dummy perhaps; and then I looked down and saw her out-stretched hand. “This is goodbye, Jeff. To you and to Mac and Harry and Bill and Harvey and the rest.” I wondered if I should say that half the boys were dead and the girls married and gone long ago, but it did not seem important.

I shook her hand and dropped it woodenly. “And Nine Mile House?” I said.

Again that long look. “I said good-bye to Nine Mile House twenty six years ago. This is only a ghost. I shall always think of it as I knew it.”

Without another word she left me and walked past the ruins to her car. She did not turn her elegant head once. There was none of the old animal grace, but a perfect poise and timing that was beautiful in its perfection, steady, serene, confident, as if she were making an exit from a stage, as if she had just played a difficult scene and played it rather well.