

The kitchen was warm. The wood stove was at Lydia's back, keeping off the drafts that sneaked into this age old house. Everything was in the neatest condition. The door to the porch was closed where the new tap so recently installed let water flow now when needed into the basin in the old sink. Behind the door, the wood box, the nails for outdoor clothes, the new washing machine, all were there but as tidy as in days long gone when there had been just the water pail and galvanized wash tub on a stool. The pantry was closed but had it been open would have revealed the same order as the porch. The kitchen was enclosed in warmth, even the door to the other rooms, the bedroom, the upstairs, was shut. The clock ticked on the mantel and occasionally Lydia glanced up at the hands which seemed to move slowly.

Ira's back was solidly at right angles to the room, his chair pushed hard against the windowsill as if somehow he could see even more clearly if those few inches were awarded him. Before his eyes lay the scene he'd loved for over sixty years. The shoreline of Collupy Point curved toward him, the house on the hill at the centre of the crest. A few feet below his house the curve continued west toward the creek and then to Osborne. The shore was rocky, some rocks so huge that they'd made hide-and-seek spots for the kids when they were small. At high tide the waves tore at the road which ended at the southern tip of the curve. Strong winds lashed the shore at times, throwing up eel grass and rock weed which clung to the rocks when the tide receded. At other times the bay was flat calm, and in the evening, Carter's lighthouse threw its beam to the shore, the lights from Lockeport adding to the display. A short distance to the east of the cove lay Mink Island and Benham's Island; farther south lay Carter's Island and its lighthouse, beyond it Cranberry Island, the Lockeport headland and the open sea. To the east of Collupy Point, Allendale Bay stretched far up to the highway and created other villages along

its sides: East Side of Ragged Island, Black Point, Rockland, until they reached the road, and a bit farther on another inlet made another string of fishing villages. Bulls Island to the southwest of Collupy Point hid the Lockeport town centre from view.

Collupy Point was a little world to itself and had been for hundreds of years even before Ira's grandfather and father fished from it. In recent times arrowheads had been found along the shore. To look out on it and beyond to the great Atlantic was the joy of Ira's days even though he fished on it daily, even though he moored his boat and rowed to the wharf and slip. Even though he walked wearily up the hill to home after a day's fishing, his first act would be to look out over the bay if only for a moment before sinking into his chair for the evening supper.

The air of comfort, of easiness between the two old people was palpable. All the children had grown up and left home. And since Ira and John kept fishing to a minimum, beginning the season late after planting and stopping early before the big storms, Ira and Lydia had settled comfortably into the quiet and peace that seemed to envelop them. Lydia would sometimes just let her eyes drift around the room to enjoy the look of the new oilcloth on the table — a decoration of many coloured flowers so newly bought it shone in the light. She'd been wanting to get rid of the old faded one and her eyes settled happily on the new creation. Each chair was in its proper place around the table — though now only two were used. The cot along the east wall was covered in a bright yellow material, and Lydia thought idly, I wonder where I got that? It's nice. And Ira sure likes that cot for a nap. Well, have to admit I do too, but I wait till he's gone to the shore. Everywhere she looked round the kitchen with its south windows facing the sea gave her a sense of complacency. Years of struggle, of poverty (though she never admitted they had been poor), were past, and this peace was reflected in the furniture and the yellow covering on the cot and shining linoleum, as though to say, "You've done well. You can be proud." But it wasn't like Lydia to brag even in her thoughts and on this morning, she turned her back from the warm stove and faced the sea in much the same position as Ira. She'd had a newspaper in her hand, the local county paper,

and unlike Ira, only half her attention was on the sea. She was reading a story that rivaled her interest in the stormy ocean.

“Look here, Ira. What do you make of this?” Lydia Hardy asked, holding the *Lighthouse* toward her husband.

“What do I make of what, child? What are you reading? No good handing it to me. I can’t see without my glasses. Go on, read it to me.”

“Well, I don’t know what place they’re talking about. Whether they mean here or not. But it says there’s going to be a park built — they’re accumulating property — that’s what it says. The provincial government is. And it’s somewhere here on the South Shore. It says it would be the first park to take in actual fishing villages. You want to hear some high falutin’ stuff, listen to this: “The spokesman refused to comment on when the land accumulation would begin but it is believed that overtures — overtures — now what is overtures? — have already been made by the government to landowners who no longer reside in the area. What’s that about, do you suppose?”

“Oh, god knows, Lydia. You never can tell about the government. If they ever did half they said they’d do, I’d be some surprised. Some surprised. If they ever did half. That’s all, even half.”

Ira lifted himself from the kitchen chair he’d sat in to look at the sea when Lydia stopped him, an armload of kindling still cradled in one arm. He took the kindling through into the porch as she talked, placed it neatly in one end of the wood box and started back to the woodshed to bring in the night’s wood.

“Well, I don’t like the looks of it,” Lydia said, folding up the paper, taking off her glasses and looking out over the sea as she spoke. “I don’t know how some people would feel if they were turned out of house and home for some campers. But I know how I’d feel. I don’t want no park around here, I can tell you.”

Ira had stopped with his hand on the doorknob to hear his wife’s views but he looked impatient with her complaining.

“A park! What they want with a park. Nothing around here but park anyways. Someone wants to pitch a tent for a night, I’d let him. Good place just down there for a tent. Place Sal puts up her tent when she comes home. That’s a good place. Don’t want

no park around here. Just one big park as it is. I can tell you, Lydia,” turning to his wife and seeming to scorn her rather than those out there with crazy ideas, “You know darn well yourself. Ten years ago they was going to build a wharf. See any wharf there?” He waved his arm in a derisive gesture toward the point of land below their house.

“No wharf, no government wharf. Just the one me and John built. That’s all. They won’t do nothing. Not while we’re alive.” And he turned the door knob and went out for the wood.

Most of what Ira said was true. But then you couldn’t always trust them. They didn’t do good things. But they could be pretty fast doing things they shouldn’t do. Like digging up the pit for gravel then leaving it for poor little Jimmy to drown in. I don’t know. Ira can scoff but it scares me. Mind you, it’s not apt to be here. Up to the westward probably. Beautiful there too.

Lydia had long since put the paper aside, and all the time she was musing she was looking over the ocean, the spring sun hot through the window though it was still cold outside. There’d been a bit of frost earlier but new grass was growing around the edge of the well and on the warmed slopes of the field. The wind was blowing strongly from the northwest. No one had gone out to their traps today. The boats, their bows pointing landward, rolled against the swells in the sheltered harbour. Out beyond the islands, the sea was white-capped and streaked with deep blue and green as shifting clouds altered the light on its surface. It was a beautiful day for looking out, but for the lobster fishermen, one more lost day in the short season.

Ira came back in with his armload of wood, dropping it into the box in the porch and brushing the pieces of bark from his plaid mackinaw into the dustpan, not a piece of dirt falling on Lydia’s clean floor. He came back to the kitchen, leaning for a minute over the hot stove and looking over his wife’s shoulder to the sea.

“Well, that’s some wind out there today. Don’t think it will bother the traps. It’s all offshore but it’d be some job hauling them, I can tell you. Saw Richardson go out when I was up around six. He goes good or bad. Don’t make no difference. And doesn’t get

a thing. Poor bugger. Out there today. Might's well stay home near the fire. Never gets a thing, he don't."

"You'll have to go down to the wharf then — when he comes in. He'll want to sell his lobsters," Lydia half stated, half inquired.

"Yes, he might have one or two. I'll have to keep an eye out for him. The lobster truck should be down today. There's a couple of crates to go. What we having for dinner, old thing?" he said, nudging Lydia's shoulder. "Got something cooked up, have you?"

"I put some salt fish on to soak. Guess we'll have that and some boiled spuds, a bit of turnip left over. We'll find something. Always have."

Lydia rather enjoyed the joke about making-do. In fact she and Ira were quite comfortable now what with their old age pensions and the children all grown up. In lobster season Ira kept his hand in, buying a few from the fishermen for a Boston company as he had for years, but for the most part he just split wood, hauled it into the shop to dry out for winter. There was always plenty to do. The shop door was hanging off its hinges. The back door wouldn't lock. Then he and John did some summer fishing but they kept it within bounds. Fine days only and close to port.

"Anyway, it's not dinnertime yet. I've got to get upstairs and start moving stuff out of the north room. Lily's coming tomorrow to help me with spring cleaning."

"Spring cleaning! I can't see no more sense in that. Why the house ain't dirty — just you and me most of the time now. Alex home now and then. Jessie and her man. Ain't hardly been anyone sleep upstairs since last summer. How could it get dirty, I ask you."

By this time Ira had sat himself down in the rocking chair by one of the big windows facing the water while he teased Lydia, his small blue eyes scrutinizing the water.

"Fat lot you know about it," Lydia said in a voice that often made the children wrongly think their parents, who had never quarreled, were now beginning to in their old age. "You know as much about house cleaning as I know about baiting trawl. Less I think. But let the house just get dirty and you're the first, mister,

to say, ‘What’s the matter, Liddy? The broom wore out?’ You’re someone to talk, you are.” They enjoyed the repartee. Lydia got to her feet, her tall form and full figure seeming twice that of the wiry Ira.

“Well, if you’re going upstairs and there’s no sign of dinner yet, I’ll haul my freight down to the shore. Guess I can work on some traps till Rich gets in.”

Ira put his cap on top of his graying, neatly cut and combed hair and went outside. Everything about him was neat. The woolen trousers were tucked into rubber boots. The gray flannelette shirt under the mackinaw was closed at the neck with a tie and covered with a wool sweater, every button intact. The skin of his face, newly shaved, was clear and fresh looking. He looked seventy, but a healthy strong seventy.

Lydia lingered at the window a minute watching him go down the path to the road. She saw him lean over. Rising, he looked toward the window and showed her the dandelion he’d discovered in the grass. He put it in a buttonhole of his jacket and went on his way.

“A dandelion,” Lydia said aloud. “I guess he’ll be able to find a buttercup or two any day now. Looks like Lady Spring’s on her way spite of the cold,” and she turned, picking up a sweater from the chair and buttoning it around herself before going to the cold rooms upstairs.

When Ira came back for dinner about noon, Richardson still hadn’t arrived in from hauling lobster traps. “Where do you suppose he is?” Lydia said as they sat at the kitchen table watching the sea while they ate. Ira sat at what he called the north end of the table. This gave him an unimpeded view, and while he stirred his tea or peeled his boiled potato, he watched the sea spread out before him.

“I don’t know where he’s got to. Should’ve been in long ago. He’s only got twenty, thirty traps. I thought he’d be in before dinner. Maybe he didn’t get anything. Went straight home. But you always get one or two.” Ira Hardy was puzzled and worried. It wasn’t right.

“You never can tell with Rich,” Lydia said though she too felt

uneasy. The men were always in by dinnertime. “Here, let me get you some more tea.” She struggled to keep her voice matter-of-fact but as she went to the stove with Ira’s cup, she couldn’t help peering even more intently at the windy ocean.

“Did you hear any talk about the park down at the shore? Anyone else see it in the paper?”

“Wasn’t no one down the shore this morning. Except Lenny, and he doesn’t know nothing. Frigging around there with a few old lobster pots. I don’t know what’s going to become of him. He ain’t no more of a fisherman than I’m a lawyer. His father was the best kind of a fisherman but Lenny’s all thumbs. I’m telling you they’d better get him a shore job somewheres. Makes me sick watching him — trying to bend a bow or nail a lathe. Ain’t his fault,” Ira said thoughtfully, aware perhaps that he sounded harsh, “poor fellow. Don’t know what’s going to become of him.”

“He’ll learn, I expect,” Lydia said idly, her mind on Richardson and the park as she cleared the table.

“Learn. No, of course, he won’t learn. He just don’t seem to have the knack somehow. You seen Sal trying to do something around the house. Just don’t seem to know where to begin. Good thing she’s getting some education, I can tell you. But Lenny, I don’t know.”

By this time Ira had pulled his boots on again over the gray wool socks he walked about in at dinnertime. He felt frightened. The thought of the park, his irritation with Lenny, his love of his unconventional daughter Sal, the cold almost winter-like spring day, even the dandelion he’d found were all part of a fear he could hide from Lydia (he thought) but not from himself. Where was Richardson? What seemed so menacing about the day suddenly?

“I’ll get back to the wharf. Richardson’s got to come sometime. I see something out there now,” he said, eagerly pressing his face to the window. “Your eyes is good. There, Lydia. Just by Gull Rock a bit.”

“Doesn’t look like Rich’s boat to me,” Lydia said, disappointed. “Too big for Rich’s.” But Ira was out of the door not waiting to hear her answer.

Around three o'clock Lydia came downstairs to get warmed up and rest a bit. Rich never left her mind. Rich and Della. She'd gone to school with Della, known Rich for years. They weren't close friends, just a part of the fabric of her life. She sat down in her chair between the stove and window just in time to see Ira coming to the doorstep. He went straight to the porch where Lydia could hear him kicking off his boots, first one then the other hitting the floor. He would straighten them against the wall, hang up his overcoat — she knew the meaning of each sound he made, slight and quiet though it was.

"I suppose Rich got in," she said cheerfully. "Did he get anything for all his work?"

"No, Rich didn't get in, Liddy."

Ira came and sat in his chair by the window. He seemed to have no life left. His weariness was like a presence between them. "They found his boat. Just floating out there — gear on board. Everything. But no Rich."

Lydia's throat ached with the pain, the sudden confirmation of what she'd been fearing for hours. She and Ira didn't have to say anything. They knew the other's feelings as well as they knew their own. At first, in the years when they were young, Lydia had thrown her apron over her face and wept when the news came, but now a deeper sorrow born of years of losses allowed no relief in tears. They were silent, watching the dancing waves.

"Is there any chance, Ira?" Lydia broke the silence. "Did he have a punt on the boat?"

"No, nothing. He must have been pulled over with a trap. He couldn't last out there today. They've gone out looking. Needed a bigger boat to tow Rich's in. That's all they can do."

Ira rose, put some wood in the stove, returned to the window. At the same minute, Lydia and Ira discovered the speck on the horizon they'd hoped for — at the same time they knew the hope was in vain.

"They're towing her in — that's Sam Swim towing, I think. I'll go to the shore, Liddy. Connie has a radio. He can talk to Sam when he gets in to Lockeport. Should be in by the time I get to the shore."

Lydia sat by the window watching Ira as he almost ran to the shore. Not long after, she saw Connie Townsend and Phil Morash walking past, then John, Ira's shipmate left his house near the wharf to join the others. The men were gathering at the shore to hear what news they could. Nothing they could do but it seemed right for them to gather at the wharf.

Lydia sat for a long time at the window. Occasionally she would see a fisherman move onto the wharf or slip. She saw Connie row out to his boat. But no one left the shore. Perhaps that hadn't been Richardson's boat. Perhaps they had hopes for him yet. Grieve as she might, worry as she might, she could not go to the wharf. The men wouldn't know what to make of that. She would have to wait. She thought briefly of Sal and knew she'd be down at the shore in a flash. But Lydia couldn't defy custom no matter how unfair it was. Wearily she rose to make biscuits for supper. Anything to pass the time. She couldn't leave to go upstairs to work with Rich on her mind. When supper was ready and Ira had still not come, she sat once more by the window. Finally she saw Ira coming up the road from the wharf. He was just past John's house and Phil was with him. They were talking, or Phil was, and every once in a while Lydia could see Ira's head turn to Phil. Lydia could tell the news was bad. "I don't know what Della's going to do," she said, "if Rich's dead. But it don't look good to me." Her husband was almost at the door but he didn't look at her though she knew he saw her at the window. Phil walked, eyes lowered, up the road to his house. Lydia got up to open the door for Ira.

"He's gone," Ira said. "They found his body tangled in the rope of a trap. He didn't have a chance." This time Ira sat briefly in his window chair before going to the porch, his sorrow making his back ache, his old bones filled with tension and weariness.

"Well, poor Della, Ira. I've been thinking of her."

"Yes, poor Della is right. That's all there was for both of them — Della and Rich. Rich and her, you never seen one without the other. Sometimes she even walked down to the wharf with him. Maybe this morning, god knows."

They sat at the window long after the time for supper. The spring sun still shone on the bushes across the road but tall spruces

threw shadows on the road from the lowering sun. As night came on, the wind calmed. The lights from Lockeport rippled across the harbour to break on the rocky shore below Ira and Lydia's house. The wharf, the fish houses and the boats could barely be seen in the thickening night.

Ira pulled himself out of his chair and moved to his place at the table, but neither had any appetite for food. They nibbled on the new biscuits and drank the strong tea and moved back to the window, leaving the supper dishes on the table. But the window bared nothing in the increasing darkness and Ira made his way to their bedroom, lifting his braces from his shoulders as he went, the voyage into sleep holding no pleasure for him.

Lydia always stayed up longer than Ira. Because Ira'd had so many years of getting up at midnight to go fishing and going to bed at seven for the midnight awakening, he was always an earlier sleeper and an earlier riser. He'd be up at five while Lydia slept on till nine or so. This evening, unlike her usual ones spent with knitting or mending socks or perhaps reading a book, she played solitaire, her mind going over and over the events of the day. She let the fire out not wanting to waste wood. The room was cold. Even the new shining tablecloth felt cold to her touch as it absorbed the cooler air. Reluctantly she joined Ira, she for her bed and Ira asleep on a cot in the room. For some time he'd felt reluctant to waken her as he got up at dawn, and so, almost without being aware of it, he had deserted the bed in which their ten children had been conceived and born. Lydia didn't mind the change. She did sleep better. But she and Ira were like Rich and Della, too close to be separated by cot or bed.