

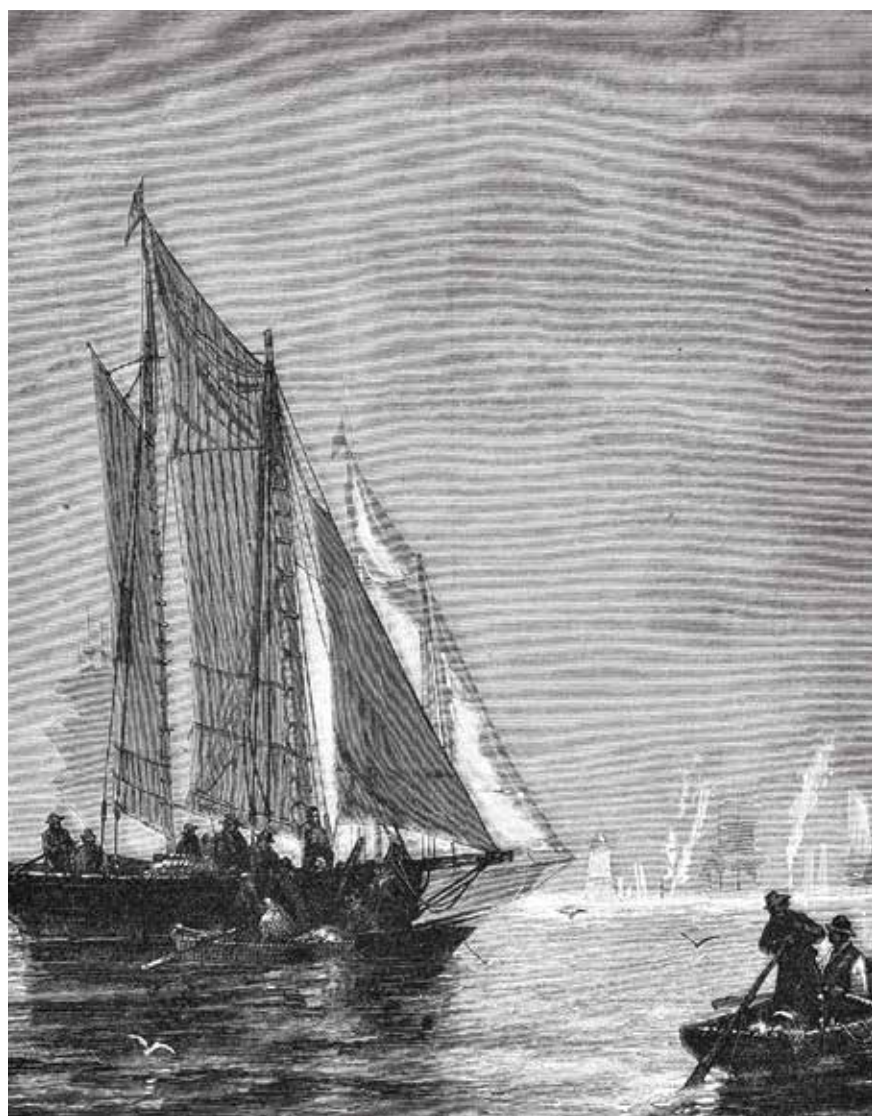
*David A. Wimsett*



*Beyond the  
Shallow Bank*

**Illustrated Edition**

**A woman's personal awakening  
amidst rumors of a selkie**



# Beyond the Shallow Bank

David A. Wimsett

# BEYOND THE SHALLOW BANK

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The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and unintended by the author

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David A. Wimsett  
Nova Scotia  
2021

## Other Books by David A. Wimsett

Dragons Unremembered: Volume I of the Carandir Saga

Half Awakened Dreams: Volume II of the Carandir Saga

Something on My Mind

Dedicated to the memory my parents,  
Margaret and John Wimsett





## PROLOGUE

*New York*  
*April, 1899*

**T**he oil lamp on the bedside table was turned down such that it cast more shadow than light. Margaret Talbot lay for an instant and panted as she stared up at the ceiling. Then the pain returned, like dozens of razors ripping through her. Margaret arched her back and muffled a scream.

The midwife leaned down and wiped sweat from Margaret's forehead before standing to make the sign of the cross. Margaret cried out, "John."

The door opened and her husband ran in to kneel at her bedside. His moustache was untrimmed and his hair was tousled. He took her hand in his and held it against his cheek. "I've hailed a carriage. We'll be at the hospital in a few minutes."

"Something's wrong."

He kissed her hand gently. "The doctor said labor could be hard with a first child."

"Not like this. Something's wrong. I can feel it."

John held her hand until the driver arrived to help carry Margaret downstairs. The pain came in stabbing waves. She tried to concentrate on the tulip and willow wallpaper, the paintings and sculptures they had collected from around the world, the stained glass window John had commissioned when they first learned she was with child—

anything but her body.

She had to sit up in the carriage as it bounced along the cobblestone streets and the driver urged the two horses into a gallop. At the hospital, Margaret was moved to a wheeled cot and rushed down a corridor by a male orderly. He wore a white coat splattered with reddish-brown stains. Her vision blurred and she thought she might faint.

The cot burst through a swinging door into a narrow room. Bare electric bulbs hung down from wires overhead. Doctors and nurses wearing white masks over their mouths and noses gathered around her. The orderly wheeled her beneath a light with a reflector behind it. Her legs were raised into metal stirrups. A buzz of voices echoed around the room.

She clenched her teeth as a contraction gripped her. A nurse said, "The patient is ready, Doctor."

"Forceps."

"Here comes the head."

"Ready."

"There it is."

"I've got it."

Margaret's fingers tingled, but she could no longer feel her legs. A nurse said, "Doctor, I have no heartbeat."

"Can you get a breath?"

Margaret started to sit up as nausea nearly overcame her. "What's happened to my baby? Is it a boy or a girl? Let me see."

A firm hand pressed her down. "Relax, dear," said one of the nurses loudly. "Everything is going to be just fine." The nurse continued to hold her down as she heard another one whisper, "Doctor, it's a stillbirth."

"Dead? Dump it over there and help me with the mother. I can't stop this bleeding."

It was a horrible dream, Margaret decided. She would wake up in a moment and John would put his arms around her and push the nightmare away.

"Clamp."

"Clamp."

"Suture. Someone wipe that blood away so I can see."

“Doctor, I’m losing her pulse.”

“Mrs. Talbot, can you hear me? Mrs. Talbot. Do you want a priest?”

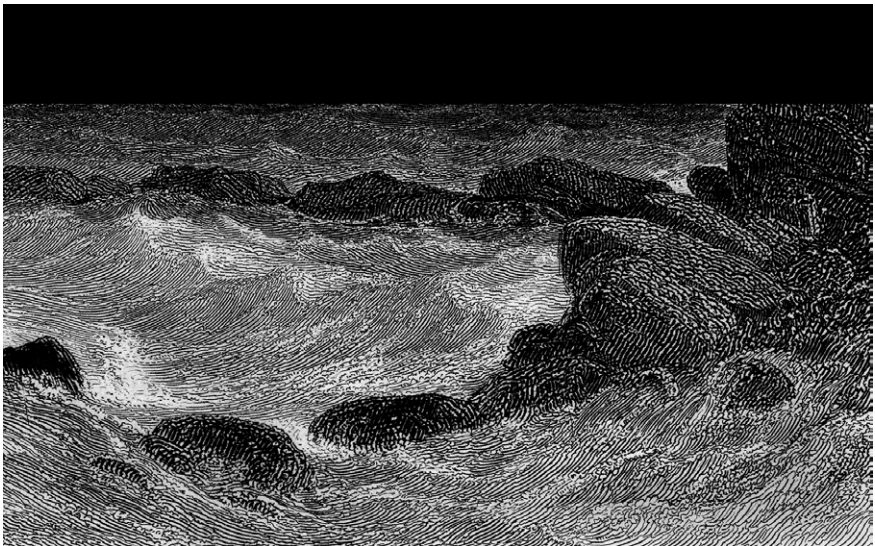
It seemed her head was floating above her and she fought to make sense of the words. Still, the doctor’s tone filled her with terror. “Where is my husband?”

She turned her head and saw John charge through the swinging door. An orderly appeared from behind and grabbed him. The voices in the room were mumbles in Margaret’s ears. The doctor spoke with John, who gestured wildly. Another orderly arrived. The doctor spoke again. John looked to Margaret with his mouth open as though he were about to scream.

Margaret had the vague feeling that there was something important she had to tell him, but the more she tried to remember, the further the memory retreated.

The orderlies dragged John back through the door. People ran around her frantically, now. It had all become a pantomime; the shouts and orders collected together into a droning roar.

She closed her eyes and the drone took on a rhythm, loud and soft, high and low, the pounding of the surf on a distant beach. She imagined herself standing there, alone except for the sea and the waves that drew ever closer.





## CHAPTER ONE



*The eastern shore of Nova Scotia, Canada  
August, 1901*

The dirt road was level now and the horse-drawn wagon carrying Margaret and John made good time on its way to the fishing village of Glasen. Margaret consulted the nurse's watch she kept pinned to her jacket. It was two hours before noon and the air was already hot and humid.

John sat on the far end of a padded bench reading a copy of the English magazine, *Fortnightly Review*. He had been studying it all morning without a single word to Margaret. This was business. That was all that held them together now.

John lowered the magazine. "You're very quiet today."

A chill shook her, even in the hot summer air. John's dark brown eyes stared into hers. She imagined him crawling into her head and seeing the secret thoughts hidden there. She reached down to the floor of the wagon and retrieved a sketchbook and a pencil. She began drawing little circles and arcs on the pad. "I was thinking of what to illustrate next. Eight weeks isn't much time."

John returned to the magazine. "We've met worse deadlines. We'll make this one."

Did he know she was thinking of leaving him? It would not be easy. Divorce wasn't legal in New York. Margaret's friend Edith had traveled to Mexico to obtain one. When Edith had returned to New York, her commissions had dried up. The galleries turned down her work. She was no longer invited to parties. She stayed with an aunt, not her mother. One day, Edith just wasn't there anymore. Margaret hadn't heard from her in years.

As she had so many times before, she considered returning alone to the New Jersey farm where she'd been born. John probably wouldn't care. It wasn't as if they were really married. Not as man and wife; not since *the incident*.

It was something neither of them spoke of. Where once they had fallen asleep in each other's arms, now they slept in separate rooms. Margaret knew her socialite friends would find nothing strange in this. Indeed, they had always considered her and John to be quaint but somewhat odd for their displays of affection. There were no longer any such displays.

When she'd awakened in the hospital, drained and frightened, she'd feebly reached her hand out to John. He'd stared at it, as though trying to make out what it was, then looked to the doctor standing next to him before stepping back from Margaret's side. From that moment, John had cut off all physical contact with her.

He'd given no reason. He didn't even acknowledge the change. Margaret wasn't certain if he blamed her for their child's death or if he had just grown tired of her.

She studied him now. At thirty-six, he was five years older than her. His skin was tanned and slightly cracked from years in the sun. His dark hair, so unlike her blond tresses, was combed straight back. He wore a neatly trimmed moustache that used to brush softly against her skin the instant before they kissed. She forced down the memory deep within her.

She shifted back to her professional illustrator persona and ignored the voices clawing inside her. There was a magazine article to create, as they had created so many others over the past decade. She did not have the luxury of indulging in distracting thoughts.

She started by sketching the wagon driver, James Duncan, who sat on a bench in front of them. Margaret judged him to be nearly

fifty, a stocky man, short with graying hair. The wagon had two benches and a bed in the rear. It was lacquer black with red spoked wheels. Duncan held the reins loosely in his hands, guiding the single chestnut horse that pulled the wagon. Having grown up on a farm near the sea, Margaret was certain the horse knew the road so well by now that it could make the journey by itself.

The wagon plodded through a forest so dense she could see no more than a few feet into the woods. It spread in all directions, broken only by streams, rivers and lakes that would appear suddenly through the foliage. Oak and spruce and ash and pine and sugar maple formed a patchwork of varying green hues that splashed across the canopy in a spectrum running from yellowish green to deep emerald. Standing in stark contrast were the trunks of the birches, their light bark peeling in horizontal curls. Directly above was a bright blue sky with fluffy clouds.

Margaret sketched the woods. While she worked, she made notes on the side to describe the colors. The notes and sketches were quick impressions, frameworks for illustrations to be completed later in ink.

“John, what hue would you say the leaves of that birch are?”

He looked up from the magazine. Sweat had formed on his forehead just below the band of the motoring cap he wore along with a tweed coat neatly buttoned up to his starched collar, even though it was sweltering. The wagon rolled on for a moment before he set his magazine down. “Why do you ask?”

“For the illustrations in the article.”

He looked at the forest and back to her. “Every illustration you have ever drawn has been in black ink on white paper.”

“Well, perhaps I’d like to work in color.”

“Pen and ink is our trademark. Everyone expects it.”

“Did you ever consider that I might want to produce something other than an illustration? Maybe I want to do a painting.”

John ignored her and returned to his magazine.

She drew circles on the side of the sketchbook. “A few paintings would be nice for that lecture series you want to give.”

John closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “How many times do we have to have this discussion?”

She flung her sketchbook to the floor of the wagon. “Why don’t you just say it? You’ve never wanted me to paint.”

“Where did you get such an idea?”

“Where do you think? Every time I mention painting you have some excuse why I can’t. ‘We have a deadline.’ ‘The ship’s about to sail.’ Always some subtle reason. Well, you’re not so subtle when you think I’m not around.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You thought I was in another room at that party last month when you told James Fredrick I had no talent for oils. Remember? *I* do, and God knows who else does.”

“I said you were not practiced in oils, as in, you had not practiced in a while. Why do you read something extra into everything I say?”

“Because you put it there.” She bent over, retrieved her sketchbook and started to drawing arcs again. “All I want is some time away from the articles. Is that so much to ask?”

John fanned himself with the magazine. “At the moment, we’re celebrities. Editors buy our material at premium prices and people read them religiously because we produce a new one while they’re still thinking about the last.”

“Don’t you think I know that? I’m only asking for eighteen months. That will let me finish my studies with Robert Henri. He’s living in New York now and taking on selected students for private instruction.”

John made a cutting motion with his hand. “I’m not talking about this anymore.”

“When you asked me to marry you, I told you I wanted to paint, and you promised the articles would end in five years. Five years and I could return to painting full time. I made that bargain happily, but there wasn’t a day I didn’t think about working in oils.

“Then, when the time came to stop, you asked me to help finish the articles we had already planned. ‘Just a little while longer,’ you said, ‘and we can leave a completed legacy.’”

John fanned himself more vigorously. “Yes, I know what I said.”

She shook her head slowly. “No, John. You don’t know. If you did, we wouldn’t be having this conversation. Either you’ve forgotten or you hoped I would. Well, I didn’t, and if truth be known I never



wanted to complete any of those articles. I wanted to paint, but I put that aside once more because you asked me to. That ‘little while’ has become two years and there’s still no end in sight. I’ve waited seven years, John. I’m tired of waiting!”

John tried to whisper through clenched teeth. “This is not the time or place to talk about it.”

“It is never the time or place.”

John twisted the magazine in his hands. “And just where is the money going to come from?”

“Don’t treat me like a child. We have savings.”

“For our old age.”

A dull ache grew behind her right eye as it often did with these discussions. “We are not destitute. If you’re so worried about money, write some articles without my illustrations.”

A look of fear seemed to cross John’s face in that instant. It was gone before she was certain.

He said, “We have a system that works. You’d agreed that it would be my decision as to when we had enough money to stop.”

“After five years.”

“After however long it takes.”

A cloud rolled in from the sea and blocked out the sun. She turned her head to the side. “There’s a hole inside me, John, and I’m terrified. I have to be an artist and I’m running out of time.”

John’s voice softened. “Margaret, you are an artist, a great artist. I’ve lost count of the dinners that have been given in your honor, and you’ve earned each one.”

“They were just dinners.”

“They were telling you that you are the best, and you are. How many people have been given awards, *medals*, from both publishers and universities? Only you. You’re recognized at parties. People love your work.”

She dabbed her eyes with a linen handkerchief. “They’re just illustrations, not legitimate art.”

“What’s legitimate?”

“You know what I mean. Renoir is legitimate. And Monet.”

“More people have seen your work than both of them combined.”

“It’s not the same.”

“How?”

She looked up to a sky that swirled with gray clouds. “It’s like the difference between writing magazine articles and poetry.”

John’s posture grew rigid. “Are you saying I’m not a real writer because I don’t write poetry?”

“I’m saying there’s a difference between a magazine illustration and a painting.”

“So, let me see if I understand this. You won’t accept a compliment for your illustrations because magazine work simply isn’t up to your standards, and everyone who writes for a magazine, like me, is just a hack.”

“You’re not listening to me again.”

“Oh, I think I’ve heard enough.” He raised the magazine in front of his face.

Margaret felt her forehead flush hot as she grabbed the periodical out of his hands. “Don’t you dare cut me off like that.” She threw the magazine out onto the road.

John stared at her before leaning forward. “Mr. Duncan, please stop the wagon.”

“No,” said Margaret. “Keep driving.”

John looked back to her. “Are you mad? Mr. Duncan, stop.”

“Keep driving.”

Duncan pulled on the reins. “I’m sorry, ma’am, but it be your husband who hired me and it’s his order I must follow.”

John gave Margaret a short stare before walking back down the road.

Margaret leaned forward. “Drive on. Quickly.”

“I dunna’ think I can do that ma’am.”

“It’s all right. The walk will cool him off.”

John returned and climbed back on the wagon. Margaret immediately stood up and climbed down to the road. She wasn’t sure why she had done so or what she was going to do next. It simply felt like a victory.

James Duncan remained motionless. John said, “What are you doing?”

“I’m sitting up front. You don’t mind, do you, Mr. Duncan?”

“Well, ma’am, it’s just...”

John waved a hand in the air. "If you want to sit in front go ahead. Perhaps we can reach Glasen in peace."

She climbed up next to Duncan and immediately regretted her decision. The bench she had been sitting on was softly padded and covered in leather. The driver's seat was hard wood. She squirmed uncomfortably for an instant, too prideful to return to the rear bench.

As the wagon moved forward the whole fight seemed so pointless. They couldn't even talk about the color of leaves. What hope was there? There certainly wasn't love anymore.

When she had been very young, her grandmother had told her of a magic spell that would make a husband love his wife again. "*It comes from the sea, Margaret,*" her grandmother had said, "*where all magic lies.*" Together, they had spent an hour carefully selecting seashells. In her grandmother's bedroom, they arranged them on the top of a dresser, spreading sand to connect them. Then, her grandmother had sung a song whose words were nonsense, but whose tune Margaret still remembered.

Even as a child, Margaret had not believed in magic. Real problems didn't vanish just because she wanted them to. Sometimes, it felt as if nothing would make them go away.

*It's time to leave,* she told herself. *As soon as this article is done.* She picked up the sketchbook and touched the pencil to it, but was unable to draw either arcs or circles.

The wagon skirted the forest to run along a gravel beach. One wheel dropped into a jarring rut and Margaret's charcoal pencil slashed across the paper. James Duncan said, "Sorry. It be a rough ride here and abou'. There's li'l traffic and they'll not spare time to fix the road till it washes out. Seems we ne'er ken the worth o' water till the well be dry."

Margaret had grown accustomed to his Scots burr, but still had to listen intently.

She flipped over a new sheet of paper and looked east. The Atlantic waters could be glimpsed past the openings of small coves and around offshore islands. Gentle waves lapped against the shore,

the full force of the ocean contained by the natural barriers. Thin stalks of eelgrass bobbed on the surface of the water and undulated rhythmically beneath. Still more of it lay washed up on the beach, dry and fragile, like shreds of green paper.

She thought about her family's farm near the shore. Since she had been a small child, Margaret had always felt uneasy when she was away from the sea for too long. The sight of the Atlantic filled her with a quiet comfort.

They came to low bluffs of crumbling shale and sandstone that rose above the shoreline. The wagon left the ocean and climbed into thick woods again. The hillside rose steeply to the left and then fell more moderately to the right. Above, a vaulting ceiling of branches nearly cut off the gray sky. Birds fluttered from branch to branch, their songs competing with the clinking tack of the horse.

She and John had spent years planning the current article. It would examine the turn of the twentieth century, contrasting its reception in their urban, New York home with its coming in a rural fishing village.

Margaret's wide-brimmed hat, secured with a lace ribbon beneath her chin, offered some shade from the sun when it peeked in and out of rolling clouds. It brought no relief from the warm, cloying dampness. The long sleeves and high collar of her blouse stuck uncomfortably to her skin. The heat was made worse by her blue, waist-length coat and a thick, ankle-length skirt.

There was a break in the trees and she could see the ocean again. She spied the dual masts and billowing sails of a schooner. This was how most people traveled to out ports like Glasen, all in a day's voyage. Both she and John felt the article would have more impact if they saw the land and stopped at other villages. It was their way—to immerse themselves in their subjects, and they had done so in locations ranging from the arid landscape of the Mojave Desert to the lumber camps of British Columbia; from the steppes of Russia to the savannahs of Africa.

The heat and humidity intensified. Margaret reached up to the collar button of her blouse, hoping not to shock James Duncan by undoing it. At that moment, the air lightened as the clouds overhead formed into dark masses. With no warning, rain poured from the sky.

She lifted her head and opened her mouth as droplets flowed down her face and drenched her garments.

Closing her eyes, she recalled standing in the rain as a child, the youngest of eight, and having her eldest brother, Jake, lift her up so she could reach her arms out and try to touch the clouds.

She felt the sketchbook in her hand and opened her eyes with a start. The pages were wet, though the charcoal images were still intact. Laughing, she raised herself off the seat, placed the book beneath her, and sat down to protect it, noticing James Duncan silently watching from the corner of his eye.

Within a few minutes, the rain stopped, leaving the air cleansed of the horrific heat. She breathed in the earthy fragrance. A cool breeze came up from the east and a shiver ran through her. She wanted to ask John to pass up her shawl from the wagon bed, but was still too angry to speak with him.

She said, "Have you ever been to Glasen, Mr. Duncan?"

"Aye, ma'am. I travel through several times a year."

"We're staying at the Glasen Hotel."

"A fine place. Built a year ago. All brick, it is, so's it won't burn down like the last one. There's steam heat and hot water right out o' the wall. It's a wonder to behold."

In their first meeting at the port of Halifax she had asked him if everyone in Nova Scotia spoke with an accent.

He had smiled, "Well now, we could say it's you what's got the accent and we here speak normal."

Margaret remembered blushing.

Duncan had given a laugh. "I take no offense, Ma'am, and intend none. It be a matter of perspective. Now, as to your question, I'm a Lowlander from the south of Scotland, near Paisley. I came across but eight year' ago. You won't hear much Auld Scots in Glasen. It were the people of the Highlands what settled there." He had begun loading their trunks into his wagon even before they had officially hired him. "You'll hear the Gaelic," he had said, "even when they speak English."

Margaret settled back into the wagon bench as comfortably as possible and watched the trees move slowly past. She imagined herself luxuriating at the Glasen Hotel while sitting in a warm tub

with scented bath oils. After riding camels in Egypt, living in tents on the Serengeti, and trudging through mud in Argentina, Glasen sounded like a very pleasant assignment.

They reached a wide, grassy meadow where a picket fence enclosed a garden with potatoes, turnips, and carrots planted in neat rows. Next to it was a house whose base was nearly square. From the front it appeared to be a single-story building with a high-pitched roof, but on the gable end was a second story window where Margaret knew a bedroom would be found. She had seen this type of structure as they traveled along the coast. Everyone referred to them as *saltboxes*.

The house stood atop a low bluff that overlooked the ocean. The clapboard siding was white and the windows were highlighted in dark green trim. Rising above the wood-shingled roof was a stone chimney from which smoke poured across the darkened sky. A ladder next to the chimney hung down from the peak of the roof to the eaves and Margaret knew this was to allow quick access to the chimney if there was a fire in the flue.

At the edge of the bluff was the top landing of stairs that she assumed ran down to a beach. A lithe-framed woman watched the ocean from the landing. Margaret felt certain she was no older than twenty. The young woman wore a skirt and blouse with a shawl wrapped over her brown hair. The shawl's ends whipped wildly in the wind and Margaret would not have been surprised to see the woman's small body knocked over.

"Do you know who that is, Mr. Duncan?"

"That be Sara, wife of Ian Grant. Ian fishes the waters in his small dory, fair or foul. When a storm brews up a' sudden you'll find Sara out there waitin' for him. If you're to write a story on Glasen you'll hear plenty abou' her."

"Why is that?"

He pulled on the reins to bring the horse back to the center of the road. "Five year ago, Ian rowed off in his fishin' dory as he did every day, but he didn't return that evening. His house stood empty for a week and more than a few thought he had drowned. Then, there he was rowin' into Glasen with Sara in the boat. He said he had taken her as wife in his travels."

“Where does she come from?”

“Neither she nor Ian has ever said. All I know is it must be very different from here. The first time I spoke with her, she looks at my horse and asks what it is. So I says, ‘Don’t you have horses where you come from?’ And she says the queerest thing. She says, ‘They’d have nowhere to stand.’

“Then, she reaches up and puts her hand on the old mare’s cheek. Now, that were a horse what did not abide human company and would as soon bite your fingers off as look at you. But, Sara says somthin’ to her—I din’a catch what it was—and that horse nuzzles up to her as tame as a kitten.”

“Some people just have a way with animals, Mr. Duncan.”

“True enough, ma’am. Still, from then on, that nasty old mare was the kindest animal you could ever want.”

Margaret studied the young woman standing at the bluff, caught between the press of the land and the darkening storm clouds above the sea. She felt a sense of kinship with this stranger that she was unable to explain.

Sara turned and looked directly at her. Margaret found she could not pull her gaze away. The young woman stood bright against the dark sky. Margaret imagined the sound of waves mixed with one of the nonsense songs her grandmother used to sing about waves and kelp, though she could never remember how it ended.

The lure of Sara’s image intensified. The sky dimmed. All Margaret could concentrate on was Sara’s eyes. Margaret began to pant. The sound of the horse’s tack was muffled, and all the while Sara’s image grew brighter.

Then, Sara blinked and turned away to stare once more out to sea. The contact broken, Margaret shook as a chill ran down her back and legs. Her throat tightened and she nearly fainted.

John leaned forward, his voice alarmed. “Margaret, what’s wrong? Are you ill?”

Her voice came dry and hoarse. “Water.”

James Duncan stopped the wagon and pressed a canteen into Margaret’s hands. She took a deep drink.

John said, “Mr. Duncan, how far are we from Glasen?”

“We’re nearly there.”

“Please help me move the trunks in the bed so Mrs. Talbot can lie down.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Then drive us directly to the doctor.”

Margaret felt her airway clear. She took in a long, deep breath as she set the canteen on her lap. “It’s all right, John. I’m fine now.” She was still shaking, unable to either describe or explain what had happened. She convinced herself that she was just upset with John and that James Duncan’s story had reminded her of her grandmother and the sea. The strain of the horrible decision to leave John had exhausted her, she told herself.

There was worry in John’s eyes as he studied her.

“Are you certain you’re all right?” he asked. “It wouldn’t take a moment to fix the bed.”

She found herself smiling. “I really do feel much better. Thank you.”

“At least come sit back here where it’s more comfortable.”

She nodded and returned to the padded bench.

The very fact that John showed concern had calmed her. It was another glimpse of the man she had met and married, and made thoughts of leaving him difficult. At the same time, a cold sadness settled in her chest as his concern reminded her of how rare such moments were now, and of just how much she had lost.

The wind died down just after five o’clock. They rounded a bend and descended into the fishing village of Glasen. It lay nestled in a valley that opened onto a small harbor. The dirt road ran along its south shore, where houses were built on piers. Across the water, on the north side, was a long wharf on which stood several large buildings made of brick and wood.

Dozens of small boats and a single schooner floated on water so calm it left only ripples against their hulls. Margaret stared in fascination as men stood in the boats, hooked fish with long, barbed poles, and hoisted them up onto the wharf. She made quick sketches as men, women and children took the fish, cut off the heads, split them along the belly, gutted them, and hung the flesh from rungs on racks that looked like stacked cloths lines. Others took fish on a



different rack and stacked them in wooden barrels. When a layer was complete coarse salt was sprinkled over them. Men lifted full barrels and hauled them into the buildings. A dull rumble of voices floated on the water, punctuated by the screech of gulls.

They passed two men at the edge of the dock. One sat on a stool while the other took a pipe from his pocket.

The man on the stool said, "*Bha grain ann mu thuath.*"

The other lit his pipe. "*Bidh side mhath a dhìth oirnn a-màireach.*"

The first man looked up. "*Cò iad?*"

The other turned around. "*chan eil fios agam.*"

Margaret said, "Is that Gaelic, Mr. Duncan?"

"Aye, ma'am."

"What are they saying?"

"They're jus' discussin' the weather, and you."

The wagon moved away from the wharf's din and into the village. She heard the jingle of a bell as a young boy came out of a shop with two small parcels tucked under one arm. Across the street was a dry goods store with a sign reading *Lamont Bros.* Inside, three women stood before a counter. John had been corresponding with a Phillip Lamont. Next door, a blacksmith pumped the hand bellows of his forge as sweat glistened on his muscular arms. A sense of excitement grew in her as she began to plan what she would sketch for the article.

At the end of the street, a white church steeple stood tall above the other buildings. Margaret looked for signs of the Glasen Hotel.

Side streets led off to the left and right with more saltbox houses painted white and green and brown and gray. Some had one or two dormers jutting from the high-peaked roofs and some just second story windows at the gable ends. Many sprouted additions on the backs, sides, or both.

Although thick forests surrounded Glasen, only a handful of trees—mostly maples and elms—stood inside the village itself. The sounds of children playing filled the air. She laughed when someone's mother shouted, "You'd best be home 'afore I count t' three."

James Duncan pulled on the reins when they reached a watering trough in front of the post office which shared its wooden building with a printer's shop. "The horse be needin' water, sir, and I hope

you don't mind if I take a moment to deliver these here parcels."

John asked, "Is the hotel nearby?"

"Right close, sir. I won't be but a minute."

As they had proceeded up the coast, Margaret discovered that a minute in the Maritimes could mean many things. One did not simply drop off or pick up goods. A certain amount of socializing always took place. *How is the weather? Did your uncle's leg heal? Angus sure seemed sweet on Fiona after church.* Her life in New York was so brisk. Her friends would never be able to stand the gentler pace of life. "I think I'll just stretch my legs," she ventured.

John continued reading. "We're almost at the hotel."

"I'll be back in a minute."

She got down from the wagon, tucked the sketchbook under one arm and slid a pencil into the pocket she had sewn into her skirt, wondering, as she had many times before, why women's garments were not designed with such a useful feature.

During the last decade, Margaret and John had traveled to many small towns around the world for their articles. Often, they had been greeted with suspicion and fear.

So far, John had dealt with the local merchants on this trip. They had seemed pleasant to Margaret, even friendly. But she knew from experience that how innkeepers treated travelers, who were their life blood, was often very different from how the local population treated strangers who asked questions.

She stepped into the Lamont Brothers' store. A young man stood behind the counter, wrapping a package in brown paper. He tied it with a string that came from a metal ball on the counter, fed up through a loop in the ceiling, and came back down to the counter again.

She said, "Excuse me, Mr. Lamont?"

The man looked up. "No, ma'am. I'm their clerk, Angus MacLeod. Neither of the brothers is in today. Alistair Lamont, now he don't come to the store much anymore. Phillip Lamont runs things, but as I said, he's not here today. Can I help you?"

The young man's speech lacked James Duncan's burr, yet still flowed with a musical lilt. He smiled broadly and Margaret found herself smiling back. "My husband and I have been corresponding

with Mr. Phillip Lamont and I was just curious to meet him. I understand he is the local magistrate as well as the proprietor.”

MacLeod’s eyes widened. “You’re Mrs. Talbot, aren’t you? Mr. Lamont has been talkin’ up a storm over your visit. I’m sure glad to meet you, ma’am. We got your latest article right here for sale in the store. You’re really goin’ to be makin’ a story on us, are you?”

“Yes. We’ll be staying into September and speaking with everyone we can.”



Two middle-aged women stood a pace away. One wore a green skirt with a brown jacket. The other had a white bonnet with lace trim.

The woman with the green skirt said, “You like makin’ magazine articles, do you?”

Like MacLeod, the woman’s speech carried a sing-song rhythm. Margaret wasn’t certain if this was a question or a challenge, but she smiled anyway. “It’s our business.”

“I read the one o’er there,” said the woman with the bonnet. She pointed to copies of *The Wide World Magazine* sitting on the wooden counter. “Did you really travel to China?”

Margaret tried to gauge the women, but their neutral expressions told her nothing. “We have traveled around the world many times.”

The woman shook her head. “I never heard tell of such things before. You made all those pictures?”

“Yes.”

“Never saw no worth in picture makin’,” said the green skirted woman.

Margaret tensed.

The woman gave a smile. “Please forgive me. I didn’t intend any offense. I just meant to say that I never thought abou’ it much ‘afore I saw that article of yours, and now that I have, I want to see more. I’m Mrs. Gunn. You must come for tea while you’re here.”

“Yes,” said the second woman as she held out a gloved hand.

“Mrs. Patterson. You must come around for tea. We’d all like to hear your stories and see more of your pictures.”

The women’s faces brightened as they extended the invitation. “I would be very pleased to have tea,” Margaret replied.

Mrs. Gunn leaned forward. “Pardon my question, Mrs. Talbot, but why did you come in August?”

“Aye,” said Mrs. Patterson. “You’ve missed the worst of the black flies, but it’s still hotter than all blazes. You should have waited a month and come in September. That’s the best time.”

Margaret laughed. “Unfortunately we have a deadline to meet. Publishers don’t care about the season or how uncomfortable it is.”

“Well, you just come around to tea,” said Mrs. Gunn. “I live in the yellow house next to the church.”

Margaret promised to visit, feeling a sudden affection for the two women. They made their farewells and left the store.

Through the window, Margaret could see that John still sat alone in the wagon, his attention focused on the magazine. She reached into her pocket. MacLeod blushed deep red and turned his head. She felt herself blush as well. “Excuse me, Mr. MacLeod. I was just getting a pencil.”

He turned back slowly, one eye still closed. “City folk have different ways.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to embarrass you. I was just going to make some quick sketches, if you’ll permit me.”

MacLeod nodded his head. “I don’t believe I won’t.”

It took Margaret a moment to work out that the double negative meant MacLeod had no objection. She drew the interior of the store, the long counter made of wide spruce boards held in place with wooden dowels, the glass jars of candies, the bolts of cloth, the ploughs and saws and hammers. Finally, she drew a likeness of the clerk.

“Thank you, Mr. MacLeod.”

She left the shop and decided to walk a little farther.

At an intersection she began to draw the one-room schoolhouse with its red-shingle siding and tall, white-trimmed

windows. A girl in a plain dress and mobcap watched her intently before approaching. "You're the woman from away who draws for magazines."

"Yes. I'm Margaret Talbot." She extended her hand.

The girl nervously reached out with her own. "Eleanor McDonald." She curtsied. "Pleased to meet you. Mrs. MacKay said you and your husband had arrived with James Duncan and you'd drawn a picture o' Angus in the Lamont Brothers' store."

Margaret remembered the names of the two women she had met as being Gunn and Patterson, and she was certain she had not mentioned James Duncan to anyone. "Word of our arrival seems to be spreading."

"Well, not too fast. I heard from Mrs. MacKay who was hangin' wash when her sister come by and she had just talked to Liam Black who had come in from his logging camp to buy some nails which the Lamont Brothers just got a new stock in from Halifax and Liam is married to Mrs. Patterson's daughter Emily and so he stopped to pay his respects. So, you like makin' these drawings, do you?"

Margaret smiled at the whirlwind explanation. "Yes. Do you do any drawing yourself?"

"Oh, no. Mama says it's a waste o' time."

Margaret suppressed a laugh as she continued down a narrow street. She turned a corner and drew in a sharp gasp. Before her was the burned-out hulk of a brick building. The inner walls and roof were caved in. The brick was cracked and covered with soot. The air was heavy with the smell of burned wood. Men worked to shore up a wall with timbers as people stopped to stare for a moment before moving on, all the while giving the building a wide berth. In front, a charred sign read "*Glazen Hotel*".

A scratchy voice came from behind. "Are ya' proud a' ya' work, witch?"

Margaret turned to find a short, fat woman with gray streaked hair partially covered by a shawl. She wore black, lace mittens that had been designed so as to leave the fingers

exposed.

Margaret said, "I'm sorry, were you addressing me?"

The old woman looked at the smoking ruins. "You've brought death and destruction to Glasen, but you'll do no more harm." She took a long knife from the folds of her dress. "I know what you are. The others are fooled but I have second sight. Your murderous ways are over."

