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## CLAY LIES STILL

By

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### Chapter 1

Skipper Tom Clay was a fishing captain from Friar's Cove on the Northern Peninsula who had made a huge fortune from the Newfoundland cod fishery without ever taking unemployment insurance. Having long been what he called in later years an omnivoracious reader, except for pornography, he resolved, when the fishery was halted by the cod moratorium (or, rather, by various causes of which the moratorium was made a necessary effect), to spend his retirement in formal study, so he got accepted at Memorial University as a very mature student and went after various degrees in literature and philosophy. His talent for

narrative got him a large audience when he took beer at the Thomson Students' Centre, which was often, but we are not concerned here with his longer and more complicated and most admittedly tall tales.

When Skipper Tom first visited the Thomson, a lot of (much) younger people gathered round to see whether he was really a student and what he might be studying.

“Human nature, my sons and daughters,” quoth he, taking a puff on a very smelly pipe from which he relished a faint taste of fish. “I’m here to study human nature, that’s what. I’m an avid collector of the quirks of mankind; I remembers every one of ‘em I hears. And you’d be surprised how quick I hears ‘em. You take that professor in the English department with that peculiar habit you probly don’t know about but you should if you wants a scholarship. ‘Tis only a smidgen of rumour to the university authorities, but I knows it fer a fact, because a young MUN grad from Friar’s Cove told me two years ago. That’s one reason I’m here – I’d like to try him out myself and see how I do.

“Now, this pefesser will only give you a final mark after a short slow walk on campus, when he questions you briefly but most incisive-like on some subtle points his final exams only suggests. He always gives you, the day before, the

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precise time to meet him, though he never gives the reason, and God help you if you're late.

“The Friar’s Cove grad told me he was almost certain of an English scholarship to Oxford, toward his Master’s, when someone who didn’t like en – but he didn’t know it then – wanted the same scholarship. That feller took en aside for a toast to their both havin’ done real well on the exam, but he was inclined to decline, to keep his head clear for the walk – they both knew about it by rumour. The other feller said mixing their bit of whiskey with water would keep it from causing any mental fuzziness whatever, and my neph – the first feller was a bit stunned about drinking at that time, so he swallowed it. He drank three glasses of whiskey and water and fell asleep at the table. He woke thirty seconds before the walk time, and his top running speed couldn’t get him there in less than a minute. He passed the other feller and saw he had a most malignant smirk, so he realized the trick. Just as he came puffing up to that perfesser, who was waiting most impatient and displeased, he gasped out, ‘Sir, watered Scotch made delay of the last mini-stroll.’ And I’m very pleased to tell you he got the scholarship. In fact, he’s at Oxford now, going for his doctorate. He wrote me just last week that some real stuck-ups from the English education system, who used to be the kind

of students C.S. Lewis called ‘Bloods’ in his autobiography, are over here now infiltrating Newfoundland and Memorial in particular to foster the formation of a social class system to serve the New World Order.”

“I think you’re a frightful old whopper-teller,” said a pretty girl named Ashley Artis. “I don’t think anyone can believe a word you say.”

“Lots of people have, though,” said Skipper Tom. “You’d be surprised. Especially about the science professor. Everyone believes that. But if y’ doubt what I said about the English snobs, look it up in A.E. Housman’s ‘Reveille’, though I myself do tell a scattered big one. Housman himself will tell you: Clay lies still, but Bloods are over.”

“What about the science professor?” asked Ashley. “Which one?”

“Don’t know exactly which,” said Skipper Tom. “But I heard he and his wife are undertaking a trial divorce while still living in the same house together. He calls it living ex-pair, mentally.”

“Entirely possible,” said the pretty young student.

“Thank you for that vote of confidence, my dear,” said the old man. “Just for that, I’ll give you a bit of old-time advice for your husband, when you get one, for when he goes bird-hunting as he should. You can get any half-bred

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Newfoundland dog to go any distance after the right kind of seabird you shoot, just provided you use the right mode of speech. Mutt-turre.”

“Oh, give it up,” said Ashley.

“Get me a beer and I will.”

“Worth it.”

“Oh, I’ll pay for it, me dear.” He took out his wallet. “I’m just too lazy to get it.”

“That’s what I thought.”

Chapter 2

“You’ve heard, I’m sure, about the monk who knew only part of the Divine Office?” said Skipper Tom Clay as he eased rather heavily into his chair at the Thomson and leaned elbows on table. “His prayer was always terce.”

“That reminds me,” said Ashley Artis. “Sandra and I were fooling around with epees in fencing the other night, and she made too strong a lunge and bruised me right here.”

“Ah. The vale of tierce?”

“Right.”

“Okay. But we need another one.”

“What?”

“Just a minute and I’ll tell you.” Skipper Tom thought for a few minutes. “I guess you didn’t know that if you walk under some poplars in Corner Brook,

some juvenile delinquents will throw bits of rock and brick on you from the branches?”

“Why?” Her blue eyes twinkled.

“Because the rubble always comes in trees.”

“Oh, go home, Skipper.”

Just then, Samuel Isaacs, a handsome Israeli student majoring in French, came over to their table and bowed to Ashley, smiling. “I’ve been looking for you, though I didn’t realize it,” he said. “I’ve even been good looking for you, though I never realized why, apart from my being devoutly you-ish.” He blushed deeply. Isaacs had never spoken to Ashley before, that the Skipper knew of.

“Ah,” said Skipper Tom. “A Jew d’esprit. Probably wouldn’t agree Our Lord was conceived as a Jew du Saint Esprit. But He was. That’s why Angel Gabriel said, ‘The Lord is wit’ ‘ee.’

“Hey, buddy, when you bilk somebody with a laugh, do you call that showing a good sense of Jew-more?”

“Your elderly friend,” Samuel said carefully, looking only at Ashley, “has exactly nine nieces born in Newfoundland, all to different families, and each of them is named by some variant of ‘Kathleen’. Since the last one looks almost

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exactly like your friend her uncle, she's known as 'Newfy Kay Nine'."

"Sorry for the racial slur," said Skipper Tom. "Wanted to know if you can be counted on for coming back. Ashley's a good friend."

"Oh," said Samuel. "No harm done, then. I guess. But Miss Artis doesn't look pleased."

"I'm not," said the girl. "*Men.*" She got up.

As she was going, Clay said, "All reliable men have spiky psyches."

"All 'reliable' men are prickly sickies, you mean." Then she was gone.

"Oh dear," said Samuel.



### Chapter 3

Clay was sitting in the Thomson a few days later, on a Sunday, when Ashley stopped at his table. “I don’t know if I should take a nap this afternoon or let Samuel take me out for a snack and lecture me on the Old Testament throughout.”

“Rest or rant, I s’pose,” said the Skipper.

“Do you have to?”

“A friend of mine in Corner Brook has a Jewish friend named Robert. They played Scrabble a lot. After Robert lost a series he’d suggested with a meal at stake, he had to take buddy to the Glynmill Inn. Robert thought sure buddy was really trying to rub it in, but my friend swears the pork chops were all he could eat on the menu that evening.

“Later Robert suggested another Scrabble series, for a meal at the Holiday Inn. My friend won again, and it turned out that Robert had lately won a gift certificate

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for a meal for two there.”

“Where’re the puns in that, Skipper?”

“Wit is keen but sometimes gloomy; humour’s more filling when the mind is roomy. To eat the unclean would make anyone spew; never bite off too much of a chew.”

“Oh God. You’re hopeless.” She was laughing, though. “I’m going out with Samuel.”

“You deserve each other. He’s a good man.” The Skipper frowned. “Ever notice? No one ever calls anyone a good woman. Only good girl. A good woman is beyond comment. I have no further comment.” She bent and kissed his cheek.

“See you, Skipper.”

Chapter 4

Ashley Artis was looking down at the table, holding back tears, when the Skipper dropped in at the Thomson.

“Talking any good?”

“Not here. I’d bawl out loud.”

“Go for a walk?”

They’d walked about three or four minutes. Ashley said: “It’s over. We both love God more than we love each other. It’s worse for him – like I was leaving him for another man.”

“If Our Lord is that much a presence at your age, you maybe belong in a convent, girl.”

“Maybe. But not – not just on the rebound.”

“I’m sorry, girl.”

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Next day, in class, a professor asked, “What exactly does Housman mean by “Breath’s a ware that will not keep. ’?”

“Well, sir,” said the Skipper, “it obviously means the stuff of life is perishable goods. But it might mean also that we liveyers are ‘a-ware’ our lives can’t last. The pronoun before ‘will’ would be understood, in that case; people talked like that once. I s’pose, too, you could also take it to mean the living are aware that ‘will’, in sense of determination, won’t hold out forever. But that might be stretchin’ like Chretien.”

“Excellent,” said the professor.

“Yeah. Good puns.”

“How can you smile like that while my heart’s still broken?”

“Because your face’s still lovely. G.K.C. said being human means comedy in the head with tragedy in the heart.”

“Why would he bother saying that? It’s not a paradox.”

“No, ‘course not. Paradox means hitting two birds on a pond with one stone, in opposite directions.”

She laughed.

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“Dat’s me girl.”

Chapter 5

Skipper Tom was telling one of his longer, taller tales to a small group in the Thomson one evening when a tall, very WASP mainlander, whom Clay knew slightly, wandered over to listen. At the end of the yarn, which convulsed the whole crowd, the Skipper winked at Ashley and said, “That reminds me of the two Italian brothers who opened a grocery store in a neighborhood in Toronto. They called it a co-op. Any time they saw their Portuguese competitors, they always said, ‘Dere dey go.’”

“You ignorant racist,” said the mainlander, who’d heard about the Skipper’s first conversation with Samuel Isaacs.

“I’ll tell you about racism, me son,” said the Skipper. “I knows a man from Flowers Cove who was in Corner Brook for a really big do some years ago, and he got talkin’ to a cultivated Englishman who took an interest in his lingo and

seemed real good-natured, so he tried a bit of friendly coddin'. All of a sudden, another Limey spoke up: 'Ai say, may good mon, dew yew realaize yew're traying to tayk the Mickey owt of the Juke of Edinborrow?'

“‘Aoh, Croikey,’ says buddy, soundin’ real consternated, ‘Oi fear Oi’ve shit a Brit.’”

Everyone laughed loud, the mainlander loudest. “I see, me son,” said Clay. “‘Tis all right to make fun of Limeys and probly Yanks as well, but we mustn’t rub the noses of inferior races in their own inferiority because that’s racism, is that it?” The mainlander glared and stalked away.

“Good one,” said Ashley. “Any truth to that? Lovely if there were.”

“Nar bit. Nar bit at all.” Clay took a few puffs on his smelly old pipe. “There’s a student I know here who’s never worked a day in his life, for money that is, and never took out a student loan, and always paid all his board and tuition right on time, cash down. He’s just naturally blessed by the natural ways of fine aunts.

“The same feller last year was faced once, entirely unprepared, with having to write a paper on the role and function and general influence of the queen bee in a hive. He got around it by calling her ‘The Old Bee-ess’ and writing with great authority on that subject. His convincing the prof it was an innocent mistake

bought him time to prepare properly.

“Buddy had a brother who didn’t shine up to the aunts quite so well and had to go into business for himself. He started a chip stand and invented a vinegar that was marvellous for getting his asset ate. He sold the recipe to a group of natives in Labrador who wanted zinging up, so we can expect some social Innervations in the next few years, just you wait and see.

“There’s a bright fellow over there at the near end of the bar. Most read columnist in The Muse last year. His motto was ‘I column as I season.’ He just might have stole it from a feller in Corner Brook who wrote ‘Brass Tacks’ for The Western Star in sixty-nine; that’s where I saw it first; but maybe it’s just coincidence. He told me once about an outport feller who was asked by a prof to use the word ‘arbitrary’ in a sentence. The feller said, ‘I’m inclined to snooze when a class gets ar bit dreary; can’t help meself.’”



## Chapter 6

“I hear an influx of Turkish currency is likely to cause a considerable drop in the Canadian dollar,” remarked Skipper Tom Clay one day at the Thomson.

“Those in the know are predicting that our fe’ral finance minister’s response will be to go ban anas.”

He drew heavily on his smelly old pipe. “Speaking of government, I heard just recently there was a day during a previous administration when The Premier sat in his private office muttering, ‘Oil...oil...oil...’

“‘You’ll what, Boss?’ asked a cabinet minister who, unlike the resources minister of an earlier era, was not coming along beautifully.

“‘Not ‘I’ll’, Stondarz. ‘Oil’. Pet roleum. Rock oil in the vernacular if you’re not a Greek scholar. I’ll have to do something drastic if the Supreme Court don’t give the pet roleum, the rock oil offshore from the Rock, to us rockers. If not the

voters'll say I'm off my rocker and we'll get stoned out of power.'

“‘What kind of pet is roleum, Boss?’

“‘The kind of pet I'd be in without Oil of Olay,' said Lynn.

“‘Oh shoot,' said The Premier. 'Now she's in the conversation. Quiet a moment, Lynn. We'll get to the legal questions later. Look, Stondarz, petrus is Greek for rock, and oleum is Greek or close enough for oil. Oil found in rock, or under rock, or wherever, anyway something to do with rocks. Petroleum, b'y, petroleum. When I split the syllabus that way before, I was trying to make a pun of some kind but I couldn't quite manage. I didn't have the ruth-less-ness.'

“‘Oh. Ohhh. I see. Listen, Boss, I bin a thinkin'. If we encouraged the people – or if the Distributists encouraged 'em and we just let it happen – well, if someone sensible encouraged the people to use our other resources right and it was done, like, would we need big companies to come in and sell our rock oil right from under our noses? You take the big paper companies. They makes paper for printin' news, and the biggest news the papers can get is whether there's jobs at the paper mills so us Newfs can buy houses and fuel oil or that electric stuff. Why don't we get the people to use our own wood for our own houses and our own fuel and tell the paper companies to shag theirselves?'

““Jeepers, Stondarz, that’s an easy one. We can’t do it because ... because ... because ... I bleve that’s a legal question, Lynn.’

““Because that’s not the Canadian Way,’ said Lynn. ‘There, I didn’t work with Newfoundland’s greatest constitutional lawyer for nothing.’

““There y’ go, Stondarz,’ said The Premier. “Not the Canadian Way. Simple, what? You’re fit to lead the party some day, Lynn. Not yet, of course.’

““But the Canadian Way is only Joey’s whim for Newfoundlanders, ain’t it?’ asked Stondarz.

““Never say a word against Smallwood,’ said The Premier.

““Why not, Boss?’

““Because if nobody can criticize Smallwood, then for sure and certain nobody can ever criticize me. If he got what he deserved, they might start on the rest of us. We got to have the Canadian Way if it kills us. It probably will kill most; I can always go to the mainland, anyway. There’s the phone, Stondarz.’

“Stondarz picked up the phone and listened for four and a half minutes. He put the phone down with a sombre expression. He said: ‘Bad news, Boss. The ruling is in. The Supreme Court decided since petrus means rock and Peter is the English version, the offshore oil got to go to the closest country called after Peter, which

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is St. Pierre because the Supreme Court is bilingual.’

“The Premier turned white. Lynn turned whiter than usual. ‘Gotcha!’ shouted Stondarz. ‘Hey, how ‘bout “Pet, roll ‘ee – yum! – out the barrel.”? Huh, boss? Huh, boss?’

“‘God give me strength,’ said The Premier. ‘I don’t have the ruth-less-ness. No Newfoundland premier ever will, till the secularists start in on religious education for interfering with the Canadian Way. Then you’ll see what ruth-less-ness can look like.’

“Cabinet secrecy has kept that story quiet until this very day,” said Skipper Tom. “Fortunately, I got more sources than a Western Star reporter.”

Chapter 7

“Lucky for the caribou God got a sense of humour, what?” said Skipper Tom.

“Oh, Lord,” said Ashley Artis. “I have to ask, or you’ll pester me hinting for hours.”

“Well, when God first made the Island of Newfoundland, He looked it over with a critical eye, so to speak, and He said to Himself, ‘Yea verily, this rock is indeed a barren rock, and to what shall I lichen it?’ ‘Tis in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The scholars are all hushing it up because they want us all to think the Vikings discovered us. As G.K. says, lots of scholars like to call the Viking Norse an unmixed blessing to Western civilization rather than a bunch of pirates and a curse to Christians till they got converted. But the Vikings really were a curse, especially when serious; that’s why even Farley Mowat wrote ‘The Curse of the Viking Grave’.”

“Hopeless, hopeless, hopeless.”

“Yeah, there ain’t much hope for Mowat. It ain’t generally known yet, but he fudged a lot of so-called personal experience he wrote about in his books. I think I’ll put a magazine on to it one of these years. Maybe ‘Saturday Night’.

“There’s lots of little facts about Newfoundland’s natural history that popular writers like Mowat and even real experts know nothing about. Like why we got the sayings without the animals.”

“Whaat?”

“Yeah, girl. You take the moles. It’s zoological factuality that the common mole takes a terrible long time to defecate during the winter months. Now, Newfoundland got no moles. But Newfoundlanders got the saying ‘Slow as cold mole-asses.’ How do you figure that? It must be traditional lore from Ireland or England that the Vikings couldn’t extirpate. So being a Newf is like having a extra pate of useful knowledge, because the English had the regular pateful extirpated by the Vikings before they got to the rest of Canada. Because the rest of Canada don’t have that saying, though I believe some Canadians got moles.”

“You’re just drivelling now, Skipper. Sudden senility. Too bad. Poor old feller – witty once upon a time.” She patted his bald head and was about to leave.

“If you go now, I’ll never tell you about my wife Essie and the I.W.A.,” said  
The Skipper.

“You were married?”

“Yup. Esther Pinsent. Peculiar little woman.”

“She’d have to be.”

“Real good cook.”

“She must have been.”

“Who’s tellin’ this, you or me?”

“Sorry, Skipper.”

“Dead ten years ago last June. Cancer. Real painful. She wouldn’t take  
painkiller. Said she had too much sin to make up for. Probably meant mine, I  
hope. God bless her soul.” He crossed himself. Ashley did likewise. A boy on  
Ashley’s left looked embarrassed. “She made a cake one time, only one time,  
wasn’t cooked in the middle, for my sister. She didn’t want to admit she took it  
out too quick, so she cut out the middle in a round lump and told my sister it was  
supposed to be cooked in a tube pan but she forgot till ‘twas done. Essie was so  
peculiar my sister never questioned it till this day. And I never told her.”

“What about the Woodworkers of America?”

“Nothin’ about them. I was talkin’ about the International Wives Association. Sort of like a revived medieval guild for women married or about to marry. They believe women – and men – should raise their children by teachin’ ‘em how to raise their own future children. Try to get all women to do it that way. Share secrets about managing men, which ain’t too difficult fer most a’ ye anyway. The association also promotes Distributism, the wise-spread ownership of productive property – Essie was mostly responsible for my own men’s becoming captains or at least part-owners in their own right within ten years at very most of signing on with me. Them women believe in apprentice everything, leading always to mastership, especially mastership in wifehood.

“Anyhow, the I.W.A. had a cooking contest one year, and I was one of ten international judges, two for all of Canada. It was supposed to take six weeks, because the organization wasn’t real big, but I got such a reputation for praisin’ up good food, when it was good, with such great eloquence, that great cooks started joining the wives’ association just to have me judge ‘em, so before I got half back through Alberta, there were little branches springin’ up ahead all across the country. Little Esther would phone for me to come on home, and I’d say I had just one more batch to judge, and she’d say, ‘Okay, just this one more,’ for the



sake of the Wives, and then another batch'd crop up and I'd be delayed again. I was nine months gettin' back. When I arrived, Essie had a grand meal waitin', and when I finished it she asked if I ever had a better meal on the mainland. I said I never had any better food than I got from my odd Essie. That was all right for a minute, but then she twigged – she loved the Classics, in translation, of course – and she like to hit me with a heavy fry pan till I told the truth unequivocal. But I'd thought it was a good one, so I couldn't pass it up.”

“Do you miss it, Skipper?” asked the boy who'd looked embarrassed before. He didn't seem embarrassed now.

“I miss my wife, you young bugger. ‘It’ is just normalatated buggery, unless it's the woman you care about. Women aren't for men to enjoy sex, sex is for men enjoying women, and not the most important way, watching their reaction to children is. And ‘love’ isn't reason enough for sex, whatever the popes say these days, unless that love is a shared desire for children together. I think the popes themselves know that; they're just coddin' the bishops along for now, because most bishops are too pastoral the wrong way and don't want to insist on strict truth to their people. The people don't want the truth either. They're mostly promiscuous – without any promises, though – not so much because they're

naturally horny, but because they like to enjoy being horny. Same with drugs. Drugs aren't all that attractive; but people're desperate to find something attractive. Even a cat got more sense; catnip affects them strong when they come in touch with it, but they don't go look for it. That reminds me; do you know a vegetable good for attracting some seabirds? No? turr-nip, dummies. But I think 'tis time for a story.

“Ever hear about the salmon angler who could only catch small ones? No? After a while he turned a bit funny and convinced himself the small salmon were evil spirits tryin' to lure him out in the river and haul him in to drown. But his wife was a psychiatrist and she convinced him he was only parr-annoyed. He had a brother who thought he was an ailurophobe, but he was only purr-annoyed. That stuff is supposed to run in families, like some diabetes. I know a guy got diabetes and is supposed to be on a diet. He doesn't think he'll die yet.

“That one about the salmon angler reminds me how there's some people who'd never believe animals could be evil spirits but still think the lower animals have as much claim to spirit as we do. There's one woman like that, out in St. George's, who was in the Caribbean one time seeking facts to support that theory, and she tried to strike up conversation with a sea-cow. At the end, she was yelling

over and over, “I’m talking to you, manatee.” Then she gave up and went back to convincing mainlanders that us Newfs oughtn’t kill seals, because she found that’s a lot easier for some reason.

“Speaking of animals, you remember Joey Smallwood’s saying he could get a yellow dog elected anywhere in Newfoundland? There was a fellow ran for election in one district who had a terrible reputation for drunkenness so that the locals, who were good Bible-reading people, called him the dog who returns to his vomit. Before Joey would take him on, he had to prove to the locals he could stay sober. So he went mummering each of the twelve nights of Christmas, taking care to be recognized in every house and to refuse every drop of liquor offered him. Stone sober throughout – or rather not threw out. He got elected by a scandalous majority even for a Joey man, and spent his whole term in the House sozzled to the two gills. Everyone said the election result was a real masquer.” Skipper Tom finished his beer, and took out his pipe. Most of the students there then decided it was a good time to leave.

## Chapter 8

“Shoot, I’m peeved,” said Edwin Christopher, an English major who openly relished the skipper’s inventiveness. “I was just on to What’s-Her-Name on the CBC phone-in line, and she kept calling me ‘Caller’. Don’t those radio stars know ordinary people have names too? How’d she like it if I kept calling her ‘Host’?”

“That’s the anonymity of modern mass-production, me son,” said The Skipper. “Now and again it does some good to decent people but not very often. You take, frinstance, the time a Mountie just transferred in from the mainland was drivin’ across Newfoundland listenin’ to that very show. He also noticed What Surname was callin’ everyone ‘Caller’, and it annoyed him a bit, too. But that only made him listen closer. And he heard What Surname, in her very first bit of absent-mindedness in fifteen years or so, give a caller from Newfoundland the answer to a question asked from Nova Scotia two months before. She apologized all to hell,

of course, sayin' she didn't know how it could have happened. But with a jump of his nerves, the Mountie realized that What Surname, prompted largely by a tendency to lump all her callers together anyway, had subconsciously recognized the man's voice from the previous time, and it was the voice of an escaped convict from Dorchester, who'd been in for rape, fraud, and armed robbery. So the Mountie radioed headquarters and told them to have What Surname keep buddy on the line so the call could be traced, and police in Harbour Grace made the arrest right quick. I'd say 'twas a good thing that feller was callered.

"Speakin' a' complaints a' the media, did ye hear of the Londoner who was allergic to his favourite newspaper? He used to exhibit sinus of The Times. And since we're talkin' a' medical matters, you might as well know about the gynecology surgeon who was asked what sort of operation he did most often. 'Oh ... varies,' said he. And since we're talkin' gynecology, do you know what a Frenchman calls a black and white undergarment for women? Ze bra, of course."

"You've some difficulty with linguistic consistency, haven't you, Skipper?" said Edwin. "You used to speak like an educated man, but sometimes you sound just like an ig- like a fisherman with no instruction in grammar."

"Dat's no difficulty, me son. Dat's bilingual fluency. Educated grammar is

what me mudder used to talk, she bein' taught by nuns in St. John's, and she made me talk it enough to get the hang. That was reinforced by all the books me father liked well enough but never emulated in his own speech. I allus wrote much better than I talked, though, till I started to get around on me own boat doin' me own business with Corner Brookers and the like; Corner Brookers is wonderful sophisticated. 'Twas a Corner Brook man who's sposed to have said, 'Everybody's goin' to college now. Pretty soon there won't be enough of us Grade Eights left to give 'em a job.' I heard that from Katherine Penney, so I guess 'tis true."

Chapter 9

“He who hasn’t sauntered denatures the treasured ‘n’ – though one are too many,” Skipper Tom announced one day at the Thomson after a night of playing Scrabble. “He who has ears to hear, let him see.”

“What’s the pun in that?” said a much younger student.

“All puns are wordplay, but not all wordplay is puns,” said the Skipper.

“Although, since that there had some spin on it, that there was spun, I s’pose.”

“Got to the bottom of the barrel at last, have we?” said a less younger student.

“If you firk around the bottom of the wrong barrel, you might get the bull et,” said Tom. “Not healthy to eat too much bull.”

“Oh, shit.”

“Well, yes. I myself was too polite to say so. Besides, it wouldn’t be a pun, except in ‘Once a pun a toilet airy, I made a noise both loud and scary, crapping,

crapping, overflow; quoth I raving: “Nevermore.” Sorry, kids. Got carried away by sudden inspiration.”

“Only figuratively, dammit,” said the less younger student.

“Best way,” said Tom. “Better than most people carried away mostly by dead things moving these days, anyway.

“Speaking of death reminds me of aging, of which I’ve done more than you fellas. Did you know Ghanaian men’s sexual ability doesn’t diminish as they get older, like most Newfoundlanders’? They’re non-Caucasian, you see.”

“Good one,” said a girl just joining the group all male till then. Skipper Tom blushed hilariously.

“I was doing some research in Greek history the other day,” he went on hurriedly and loudly. “There was one small community of ancient Greeks practised their ostracism by sending offenders out to live on a small island where the citizens regularly rowed out and pelted them with units of decomposing avian reproductive material. If they put up with it long enough without complaining or cursing their tormentors, they were eventually released from Rotten Eggs Isle. Which shows a proper regard for civic authority, I think, don’t you? This is a Greek anecdote which gains a bit in translation, of course.



“There’s another idiom from the same general region that gains in translation, too. When a native lunatic in Turkey believes he’s really someone in authority, the other Turks will say he’s ‘baying at the moon.’ I’ve wondered sometimes whether G.K. intended something similar with a line in Lepanto, or maybe made an unconscious pun: ‘Don John’s hunting and his hounds have bayed.’ Not like G.K. to pun unintended.

“That reminds me of a really cruel Turkish ruler who used to send out spies to hear if anyone said anything nasty about him, true or not, as it usually would be. Then he’d wait, real patient, till that man did or said something that might be deemed favourable to his rulership and pretend to be highly pleased, and order a banquet in that man’s honour and decree some gifts to him. But he’d vary that treatment of such people from the kind he’d give people he really meant to reward, by pretending to be about to add another gift but stopping short. That would be the signal for horrible tortures to be inflicted after the pleasant stuff, which would be meant to set the victim up properly and surprise him thoroughly. And whenever that ruler thus signalled his true intent, the servant who took the orders would reply, ‘I hear “and–”, O Bey,’ just to make sure they weren’t getting their signals crossed. And if the bey cleared his throat a certain way after that, the

poor devil who'd crossed him was in for a hard time after a feast. You can take a manager from the bay, but you can't take the bey out of management.

“But that's enough about tyranny and nasty subjects – only nasty subjects put up with even any mention of tyranny. You hear about the scientist who likes tasting gum that was already chewed? It's his own ex-Spearmint.

“There was a friend of mine who was much inclined to blame his five-year-old son for putting his car in gear and letting it roll down a steep slope into a real bad collision, but he couldn't prove anything and the little fellow would never really admit anything though he never categorically denied it but said some kind of evil spirit was really at fault. My friend thinks now it's probably just as well; there'd likely been murder done at the time if he'd actually seen the imp act.

“That reminds me – do you know the police have a special new instrument for viewing the scenes of really bad traffic accidents? It's called a collide-o-scope.

“Some fancy fashion designer over in Europe has some up with an under-garment for women who like to wear see-through blouses. It's made of two snake-skin hoods sewn together. He calls it the—”

“Co-bra, of course,” said the girl who'd embarrassed Tom by joining the group late.

“Oh, you read the newspapers too,” said the Skipper. “Sometimes they’re interesting, as then. What’s your name, my dear?”

“Mary Norris. Glad to meet you, Skipper. Your reputation goes Clayer across the city.”

“Thank you, my dear. That’s nice of you. Did you see in the paper the other day that the Queen was visiting a working-class family in Birmingham and a little boy put his puppy in her lap. ‘And what sort of little dog is this?’ says she. ‘Shih-Tzu,’ says he. ‘Oh, surely not,’ says she and she puts the pup carefully on the floor.

“I heard Jean Chretien say on television the other day that the Liberals have a master plan to devil up all the country’s potential. I don’t doubt it in the least, do you?”

“Not me,” said Mary Norris.

“‘Not I,’ you mean.”

“You already told us that.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

## Chapter 10

“I was reading in the paper the other day – it wasn’t a real conspicuous story, of course – that the Chamber of Commerce had a young fellow charged with committing blasphemy at the Corner Brook Plaza; that’s a shopping centre on the west coast, you understand.”

“I’ve heard of Corner Brook, of course,” said Mary Norris. “I didn’t know they had their own shopping centre.”

“Three, actually.”

“Oh, wow.”

“Anyway, the young fellow was charged with blasphemous libel, and the case against him looked pretty grim for a while. But when it came time to present his defence, he told the court that he hadn’t ever said, ‘Screw the mall,’ but really what he said at the time in question was ‘Screw them all,’ in reference to all the

world's religions. The judge said that raised a reasonable doubt in this case, and let him off with a warning to be careful of his language.

“There're all sorts of misunderstandings about religion these days. An old friend of mine who hasn't been to church for years went just last Sunday to see if Vatican Two had really made a mess of things as some are saying or if it made God more accessible to the common man as others claim.

“‘Bejeez,’ he said to me on Monday, ‘Vatican Two got all the Catholics thinkin’ now that it won't never rain anywhere unless the Catholics plays lots of Bingo.’

“‘Wha-at?’ says I.

“‘Yup. Fact. They got this new hymn where they sings, ‘Thy rain extend, O King B-9, to every land and nation.’ I never thought a Catholic could be that superstitious. So that's what the Church is comin' to.’ I didn't enlighten him, of course,” said the Skipper, “because he's bound and determined to stay away from Mass on Sunday anyway, and if he's got that kind of excuse he mightn't go quite so far down in Hell for it. When he really looks less like a black old Protestant, I might explain the real line to him.

“However, speakin' of court cases now reminds me of an outport scamp who

was taken up for selling fake pig meat: the judge ruled he was running legitimate bay-con.”

“That was my cousin!” said Miss Norris, with exaggerated indignation. “How can you make fun of my family!”

“Oh, was I?”

“Not really. I’m just hamming it up.”

“Disgusting. Really disgusting. The pun, I mean. The acting’s not bad.”

“Thank you. I’m in the drama club.”

“What do you want to draw yer ma fer? She good-lookin’?”

“Same as me.”

“Not bad then. She ever come to St. John’s?”

“Lots of times; she’s got a great sense of humour.”

“That really isn’t a non-sequitur, I take it?”

“Wasn’t meant to be.”

“Right.”

## Chapter 11

Skipper Tom was out to a restaurant with Mary Norris and her mother, a widow who'd heard he'd like to meet her.

“There’s a bilingual French teacher in Corner Brook who has two sets of twins, aged eight and ten,” he said. “His wife insisted on calling them Davina, Denise, Doreen and Darlene. They tend to rampse a lot in their room before they go to bed at night, so he always goes in and says, ‘Les Dees! Les Dees! Les Dees ought to be ladylike!’”

“I always said that,” said Mrs. Norris. “Didn’t I, Mary?”

“That’s why I’m so ladylike,” said Mary. “Got any lawyer stories, Skipper? Mom loves lawyer stories.”

“As a mattery fact... Did you hear about the lawyer with one of the more prominent Corner Brook firms who rendered the marriage debt – pardon me,

ma'am, but he was a lawyer after all – so thoroughly that his back got all out of kilter several kinds of ways at once? No? You sure? Well he prayed to Saint Yves the patron saint of lawyers to heal him up in time for his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary celebration, and bingo! St. Yves himself appeared to him in person and offered to cure all his ills, including some he hadn't yet known about, if he'd give five thousand dollars to an underpaid Legal Aid lawyer that had a big case coming up in defence of an innocent man accused of aggravated sexual assault with excessive violence or whatever the formal charge language is. And St. Yves told the lawyer, who was in great pain at the time, to put all the money, which he happened have handy – you know how lawyers are – into his wife's new purse she hadn't used yet and hold it up in front of him, because he didn't trust the lawyer not to weasel out if cured but he did want to help a fellow Catholic if possible at all, and the lawyer did all he was told and held up the purse full of money and then poof! St. Yves disappeared, taking with him the purse an' all injuries. The Legal Aid lawyer returned the purse next day with nothing in it, and neither of them said anything about anything at the time, though both knew exactly what had happened, because of course St. Yves gave the Legal Aid man the straight goods, too – he was celebrating a lesser anniversary as it happened.”



“I like good stories about lawyers, where they win important cases through quickness of wit to impress the juries,” said Mrs. Norris, whose late lawyer husband had never done anything of the sort, though she’d often urged him to. In fact, he’d hardly ever won a jury trial, though his knowledge of the law usually had triumphed in cases tried by judge without a jury.

“I got a story about a lawyer really impressed a bunch of cannibals in a really desperate situation,” said Skipper Tom.

“I’d like to hear that one, I think,” said Mrs. Norris, a little stiffly.

“Four friends of mine – David Pynn, Luke Pennell, Pat James and Peter Janes – all belonging to the same law firm, took a trip in their yacht down the South Seas and got washed aboard an island where some of the natives had a secret society that still was cannibal on certain high occasions. When they got invited, two of my friends thought they were goin’ to Masons Lodge and the others thought it was the Knights of Columbus, the cannibal group was that shifty. Then they found out they were supposed to be the main course, and dear old David, the quickest talker of the firm, tried to convince all the cannibals they’d be far more efficient and skilful and savage predators if they’d take lessons from him in dressing up in silk robes and grey trousers with black lines in them, and

impressing the hell out of judges with their determination to win monstrous costs in civil litigation. The cannibals were so impressed all right that right then and there they all went in for Pynn's tripes and nobody ever heard of them four lawyers again. I only heard about their fate when I was stranded once with two cannibals who'd rather listen to good puns than eat; I was so grateful to get away with a whole hide I never even turned them in."

"You're not exactly celebrating the triumph of the rule of law tonight, are you?" said Mrs. Norris. Mary looked amazed, then took another sniff of the air around the Clay pipe and her expression cleared somewhat. Her father's one real fault had been a rather stinky pipe. Mrs. Norris, even in the deepest grief of early widowhood, had been relieved to be rid of it. Mary's attempt at matchmaking was going nowhere this time. It was too bad, too, because Clay was saying, "That reminds me of another story about another bunch of yachters, a group of feminists from Florida who used to invite immature males of sufficient physical age, who cared more for sex than about women themselves, out on sailing trips of which the young fellows developed great expectations before getting accidentally lost at sea. The club called themselves The Anti-Boy Yachties."

Mrs. Morris began a quick involuntary smile before saying acidly, "I despise

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men who make jokes about feminism. Pay our bill, Mary, and let us depart.”

Outside, she said, “You were right about the wit and humour, dear, but why on earth did you never mention that awful pipe?”

“Aw, Mom!”

Chapter 12

“I knew a girl in Friar’s Cove, who was called June Smith,” said Skipper Tom at a table in The Thomson. “She married Harold Orr, a really good-lookin’ and handy fisherman, who was a decade older than she. On their tenth anniversary, she said she was ten years his Junie Orr. Harold always said his financial situation was always perfectly in order, no matter how audit looked. He had a Chinese brother-in-law who was a highly skilled financial consultant and always let him know whether any investment he was considering was likely to be flawed. One such scheme was a proposal to raise strawberry-potato hybrids by growing the two species in ten drills.”

“See that really nice-looking girl at the bar, Skipper?” said a student desperate to distract the flow. “She doesn’t really think any man is worth going out with for his character.”

“Ah, merely scenical, is she?”

“Just interested in money, really.”

“What I said. See-nickel.”

““Scuse me, Skipper. Gotta go.” That one student left, and after putting out his pipe, the Skipper was joined by a whole flock. “Any new yarns from up the coast?” asked a long-haired youth with a red mustache.

“One rather sad story, as a mattery fact,” replied the Skipper. “I heard just last night about two men, twins, identical, I used to know fairly well. They both came down with Gehrig’s and wanted to die with dignity at the same time, after life got thoroughly troublesome and helpless and undignified, so they got a doctor from the mainland to send them the loaded needles they wanted, whereof the effect would be slow and irreversible after they were took, and could be pretty well scheduled. So they took the needles, got the substance well in their systems, and then, being more or less practical Catholics, sent for the parish priest and said they wanted confession. Well, he heard them all right, but he hesitated about absolution, because he doubted repentance was sincere. While he was dithering, one of the twins said, ‘Well, whether or not you forgive us, I’m sure God will, because we done our part, even if you won’t. I’m looking forward to Heaven in

maybe nine minutes.’

“‘If you two are really looking forward to Heaven that soon,’ said the priest, ‘I’d say you’ll have two halos in eight.’” The group’s reactions pleased the Skipper immensely: most of them just walked away, having typical modern attitudes to heroism in medical as opposed to military situations. Three remained, including the youth who’d prompted the brief tale. “Got another,” said the Skipper. “Want another?” He took out his pipe again but didn’t light or even begin to fill it. “Couldn’t hurt,” said the student, whose name was Aubrey – surname or first, the Skipper hadn’t heard.

“There were three cousins down the coast who were all named for a locally famous grandfather called Alexander for his Christian name, and generally called Alec. To distinguish them, they were referred to by their wives’ names added on, which were usually shortened a bit also, so that the one married to Kathleen was just about always called Alec-Kath, with no slander at all intended, because nobody in the area liked puns anyway. Anyhow, the cousin whose wife’s name was Pat to most people but a little longer to intimates, was a bit diabetic and also schizophrenic, and had his doctor’s permission to give himself shock therapy at home, being rich enough to afford the equipment in his basement and pretty well

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read up on the treatment, as he had tried medical school a long time before he first wiggled out. Well one day he went into diabetic shock and couldn't talk. One of his brothers thought he was having a psychotic episode and giving them the silent treatment, from not being able to trust nobody, so they should jolt him as usual, but the other figured they should feed him Orange Pekoe laced with lots of sugar, which was what he usually took for diabetic shock. They soon agreed they should give him – Alec-Tricia – tea.”

“What did they call the third cousin?” said Aubrey.

“Irrelevant. Overruled.”

### Chapter 13

“There was a boy in a family I knew once who never spoke to anyone at all, but used to roam a lot on the family property which had a lot of trees. When he found any hollow tree at all, if it was hollow where he could reach, he’d restrict his food intake for three days, then take his father’s chisel and chisel out a slot in the tree trunk big enough to put a quarter in. And on four o’clock of that third day, he’d tip a quarter into the hollow tree, through that little slot. He did that with every hollow tree he could find on his father’s own land, but he’d never bother to find out even whether any trees anywhere else were hollow at all. Because his parents used to take him all over all kinds of other wooded areas, just to test him. Anyway, a clinical psychologist finally diagnosed his condition as a variant of low-cal pay-tree autism. And when the boy cut down some dead hollow trees and cut them up for little sailing boats, the doctor said it was definitely yachtism of



some kind. For he said any irrational sense of strong obligation should be called oughtism.”

The Skipper paused and drew on his pipe. “Boys and girls, last night I took up a new art form. Know what a clerihew is, anyone?”

“Cut-rate clergy?” said a male student.

“Named for Edmund Clerihew Bentley, who invented it. Friend of G.K. Chesterton. Ashley Artis’d know, but she switched to St. F.X. like a sensible girl. I’m too old a Catholic for the secular profs here to corrupt me, and I don’t need any degree to get a job now anyway. I’m retired, well retired.”

“Your puns are pretty tired, too,” said the student who’d just spoken. “I hope clerihews are better, whatever they are.”

“Well, some clerihews got a pun or two. Take my first effort, now, in honour of himself, as is only right and proper, fitting and just:

“Edmund Clerihew Bentley

Experimentally

Mixed biographic news and views

And set them forth in clearer hues.

“Definition and sample in one slice. How’s that?”

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“Different, anyway, and neat,” said the student. “Didn’t that Bentley fellow write detective stories? Don’t they have ‘Trent’s Various Cases’ or something at Coles or somewhere? Didn’t I hear one was called best of the century or something? Hey, how about:

“Edmund Clerihew Bentley  
Could tangle your mind, evidently,  
In his longer detective yarns, but in verse  
He was terse.”

“Got it in one. As Edmund or G.K. would say.” The Skipper applauded.  
“Absolutely.”

“Hey, I got one,” said a bright-haired, bright-eyed girl who’d had no trouble getting high marks in one of the literature classes Clay took. She said:

“‘I’faith, my namesake Miller  
Is the more horrendous lady-killer,  
With envy saith  
Wraith of Henry Eighth.

“How’s that sound?”

“I’d say we’ve got three samples of Class Six,” said Skipper Clay.

“You know,” he said, “I got a cousin named Charlie who’s even better at puns than I am, and makes ‘em more often, though I don’t think he’d be any match for me at clerihews. Anything a friend or relative, or even chance acquaintance might remark on, Charlie has a pun handy. He tells those poor people they’re always blatantly provoking those puns of his, but those people always say they do their best not to give him anything to build them on. They just groan at Charlie.

“Any of you read any of the Apocrypha?” said Skipper Tom. “No? Let me give you a sample. There’s a story in there about a highly Gnostic heretic who claimed to be the incarnation of God the Father. And in them days, you know, incarnation didn’t mean a whole nation in cars. Anyway, he got hold of this faithful young Christian one day, down by a river, and tried to convert him to Fatheritism – as he called it. He kept ducking the young fellow’s head under the water and holding him down, letting him up just enough to ask him, ‘Are you my son yet?’ and plunging him under as soon as he said no, or right away if he didn’t answer quick. But soon the heretic noticed that whenever he hauled the boy up out of the water, the little feller was always perfectly dry. And that miracle converted the Gnostic to true and orthodox Christianity.”

“That’s in the Apocrypha, is it?” said the first student, whose name was Robert

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Smith. “Must be, I guess; I didn’t notice any pun about that.”

“Right you are,” said Skipper Tom. “The young feller was completely un-my-sonned, you see.”

“You old bugger,” said Robert Smith.

Chapter 14

“There’s a hymn Catholics sing now which really irks me,” said Skipper Tom, tamping tobacco into his smelly old pipe. “They sing it often, too – too often, by far, though once would be more than enough. One line of it is, ‘We’ll save each man’s dignity and guard each man’s pride,” which are two perfectly stinking ideas perfectly well linked. Any really Christian hymn would say, ‘We’ll honour woman’s dignity and laugh at all men’s pride.’ G.K. had it right. He said there’s nothing on earth more distasteful than a woman who isn’t dignified, except a man who is. Neither he nor I could prove that to you. You see it or you don’t. As a rarely sensible woman said about the natural connection between coition and conception, it’s either self-evident or incomprehensible. G.K. went so far as to say that if you really must sin, it’s not so bad to sin like an animal as to sin like a gentleman, because the Devil’s own sins are those of gentlemen. In other words,

if you avoid drunkenness only to preserve your own dignity as worthy of yourself, that won't get you into Heaven; you might as well pick hell yourself as try to make yourself wordy in Pecksniff's way.

“So much for that little sermon. I s'pose you never heard, yet, about the short little woman with a really slender torso who had a really big behind and always wore terribly tight slacks? Fashion models used to wonder at her audacity.”

Robert Smith groaned. “Give us a clerihow, for the love of Mike. Anything's better than that.”

“The Devil thought the soul of Launcelot du Lac

Was in the sack

When he started to grin and leer

At Guinevere.

“How's that?”

“Passable. Barely. Like Launcelot's being in the sack. Malory says he got contrition, became a monk, right?”

“Right. Lewis calls it the iron of contrition in Malory. As long as we're being religious, how about:

“The Buddha, Gautama,

Had an ordinary mama.

He wasn't worth

A virgin birth.”

“Not bad. But this chimes better with what you were saying earlier:

“Only on meeting Christ the Buddha

Would a-

Wake

To the jest of being humble for one's own sake.”

“Splendid, my son. We'll Christianize you yet.”

“I've been reading up on your buddy G.K., on the Internet. How's this?:

‘G.K. Chesterton

Was not a sequestered one.

He wowed

Many a crowd.””

“Thank you. Worthy of meself.”

“At least.”

“Did you hear of the bootlegger in Fortune Bay who brewed the ale he sold  
and told his customers it was so good that it was endorsed by George Lucas and

his selling it was tacitly approved by the Mounted Police Force, whose members, according to him, bought it themselves? The beer was so good most of his customers half believed him and one or two were totally credulous. One of the latter talked too much to the wrong men, and the Mounties therefore sent an undercover member to make a bootleg purchase and subsequent arrest. But the bootlegger was on to him, and told him he only made the stuff for his own consumption: 'It's really not Force Ale,' he said."

Poor Robert groaned. Twice.

"I had a cousin who had another cousin by marriage, who was always getting on her nerves," said Skipper Tom. "His name was Isaac O'Gorman, usually called by a nickname, and he was always preaching on the need for and the utter graciousness of complete and perfect tactfulness. Whenever he could catch her eye at a family gathering, he'd sidle over and start on his favourite topic, and it really cheesed her off, because she was already far too tactful to cut him off or try to change the subject on him; she just did her level best all the time to simply avoid Ike on tact."

"Let's all try to think of some really good clerihews," said Robert. "How about—"



“I thought of a couple last night,” said Skipper Tom. “Two about the old hand-washer, in fact.

“Pontius Pilate

Procured Judea but couldn’t beguile it.

When the Emperor became acutely conscious

Of that, he pulled his Pontius.”

“There’s another version of that, actually,” said Robert:

“Pontius Pilate

Ruled Judea while it

Wouldn’t sit on its haunches;

It couldn’t stomach those Romans with great Pontius.”

“Marvelous,” said the Skipper. “I usually have to think a while first, and then polish a bit. That one’s really marvelous quick-witted. Thank you, my son.”

Robert bowed. “Anyway, here’s the other one I made up last night:

‘The pupils of Pontius Pilate

Would always dilate

When he looked at Procula, Claudia.

Later on, he’d get even baudia.””

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Robert snickered. “We ought to start a little cycle on moderns,” he said, “just to see what we come up with.”

“Okay, let’s sleep on that. In fact, I’m thinkin’ already. Let’s meet here tomorrow and see what we got.”

“Right on.”

Chapter 15

“Here’s my favourite among last night’s,” said Skipper Tom:

‘Lucien Bouchard

Is not a bard.

His pace-challenged like’ll

Never manage an epic cycle.’”

This was greeted with half-horrified laughter from a group of twenty who’d gathered with some expectation.

Said Robert Smith:

“Paul Martin

Is bleeding us for sartin.

He gets new boots out of taxing us:

Why not boot his gluteus maximus?”

There was loud and sustained applause. Then the Skipper said:

“Jean Chretien  
Is capable of stretien  
The truth  
Without ruth.”

The applause was mostly merely polite. The Skipper said:

“If Jane Russell  
Wanted help with her bustle,  
Howard Hughes  
Wouldn’t refuse.”

“I thought we were confining ourselves to moderns this time,” said Robert.

“We are. Not all moderns are perfectly contemporary.”

“Oh. Right. In that case:

‘If you bothered Edmund Bentley,  
Even unmeantly,  
He’d take care of you  
With a clerihew.’”

Admiring applause and some laughter.

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Said the Skipper:

“Monsignor Ronald Knox  
Would clean the clocks  
Of most preachers post-Vatican Two.  
That’s what knowing the Attic can do.”

“I guess Attic has something to do with Greek,” said a first-year student, “but who was Monsignor Ronald Knox?”

“Check the friggen Internet,” growled the Skipper. “I’ll save a couple more on him till you do.”

“Didn’t he write some good detective stories?” said Robert.

“Ah,” the Skipper said:

“Author Ronald Knox  
Could readily outfox  
The average mystery fan.  
At least, that was his plan.”

“Must look him up,” said the first-year.

Said Robert:

“Premier Tobin (Brian)

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Is far too glib with a line.

Newfoundland would be cheerier

If it kicked his gluteus inferior.”

“You’ve got glutei on the brain, haven’t you?” said a medical student.

“So have others,” said Robert. “Like some politicians. For instance:

‘Robinson, Svend

Will die in the end.

It might be from AIDS

For rejecting maids.”

Said the Skipper:

“Lucien Bouchard

Holds only one card,

In desperation.

It’s separation.

“Actually, I kind of sympathize with separatists. Or I would, if Newfoundland  
had more.

“Newfoundland’s Premier Brian

Thinks it’s fine

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To teach only a smidgen  
Of religion.”

Said Robert:

“When Preston Manning  
Got good at panning  
Jean,  
The race was ean.

“That’s it for me, so far.”

Chapter 16

“Being outside doesn’t have to be tedious,” said Skipper Tom. “But if thou rangest too far, thou mightst be found strange. And a conductor’s relations with a performer who detains could well be a bit strained.’

“Scrabble again last night?” asked a student.

“Yup. And poker the night before. In one hand during that game, two players each held an ace of spades. One of them said, ‘Odd ace youse play.’”

“Ingenious, but far-fetched,” said the student.

“Half the fun, me son. Did I tell you about the Scotsman who complained to me that the man who lived next door to him was always bothering him with puns like that, or worse? ‘He’s a dreadful nuisance, ye understand,’ said the Scot to me, ‘but he’s nae bore.’ The name of the man next door was Michael, and he was also used to inventing word games that always deceived the poor Scot when he tried to



fathom their logic, resulting in a joke on him; buddy used to call him Mick's dupe.

“Speaking of dupes, I knew a young man used to ride the bike a lot. He saw an advertisement for what were supposed to be really super inner tubes especially for his brand of bike, and bought eight of them. They were all defective. He brought them back to the salesman and made pointed mention of the company's TV commercial. ‘Oh, that's just tube ad,’ said the salesman.

“Anybody know what's usually said before a meal of royal jelly?” Skipper Tom went on rather quickly. “Let us bees eat it’ – what else?

“I feel a couple of clerihews coming on,” he said then.

“Sir Thomas More

Could hardly adore

A mere king

On a fling.

“How about:

‘Former premier Clyde Wells

Jingled all hell's bells

To teach every Newfoundland school-tot

What's hot.

“A man and his wife were camping one night on an island in a lake when they heard a loud bird call. ‘I guess that’s an owl,’ said the wife. ‘Loon, easy,’ replied her husband.

“Anyone know how to get a Chinese girl to the right address in Canada? Use Mei Ling labels.

“Another Scrabble insight is that female ingrates take all rocks for granite.

“There was an interesting contest at Burke House the other night: a wit and a humorist competed to show which had the wider and deeper sense of fun. The prize was a large box of chocolates; I won’t directly advertise the brand, but it was a yellow box with the brand name in green. After the contest, the chairmember of the three judges said to the humorist, ‘You don’t get it; the wit, man, ‘s ampler.’ Not very humorous, but a bit witty.

“There’s a professor here who’s quite a bit of a connoisseur of liquor made from fermented honey. However, he used not long ago to drink several varieties in quick succession, and that used to get him thoroughly mixed up in his head, so that he’d take money from his wife’s handbag to buy hangover remedies. After a couple of times, his wife put her foot down, so that his imbibing only one variety

in three whole days is a rule much akin to the laws of the meads and the purse sins.

“There’s a feminist on the faculty who thinks all living things on Earth, but especially insects, are cells of the body of the Goddess Gaia. Her more intelligent students refer to her privately as ‘Our Ms. Tick.’

“I heard a couple of days ago that a student at a vocational school, taking a cooking course, proudly offered his instructor a soup he’d concocted all on his own. ‘Lots of tasty herbs in it,’ said he, ‘including cinnamon.’ The instructor tasted the soup, then said, ‘Cinnamon is a spice, not a herb. It emphatically is not soup herb.’”

Chapter 17

“My confessor here in St. John’s told me an amusing little yarn the other day,” said Skipper Tom, drawing on his pipe as he sat in his usual chair at the Thomson. “Seems this elderly little woman came to him the day before that and said, ‘Father, what have not raking up all the grass in the yard after ‘tis mowed got to do with not standing during the Consecration at Mass?’ The good pastor, expecting a nice punch line, said, ‘I don’t know, Mrs. Clinton; what do they have in common?’

“‘I really don’t know, Father; that’s why ‘tis I’m askin’.’

“‘But why do you ask? I don’t see the connection right away, myself.’

“Well, my son Henry was raking up the grass the other day, because I likes to have the yard tidy, which he don’t care about at all, and I’m afraid I had to nag a bit first, because sometimes you has to, to get the menfolk moving, and after he

thought he was finished, I pointed out four little scraps here and there and asked him why he hadn't raked them up. And he said 'twas because he was a kneelist.'

"I'm afraid your son has picked up on a bit of abstruse theology I'm not familiar with,' said the priest. 'It's likely something to do with praying not to have to mow the lawn too often, I should say.'

"Oh, thank you, Father. It's nice to know there's still some clergy you can count on for answers about religion.'

"My doctor – I mean my physician, not my literature prof – told me one the other day, too," said Skipper Tom. "He had a woman patient the day before who wanted some attention not covered by Medicare, or not usually, anyway. He said he'd try to find a way to have it covered, but it might take a while. 'Well, get a move on, Doctor,' said the woman's daughter, who'd brought her in. 'Because I can tell you now she's really not to pay; she ain't, at all.'

"Do you know why so many Asian women wear long dresses? Shy knees, that's why.

"Of course you don't know, either, why dogs pee to mark their territory, although that's been obvious for centuries: piss session is nine points of the law.

"I knew a young feller whose father had seven sisters, and none of the seven

could get along with any of the others. The young feller invited ‘em all to a party he called an auntie social.

“I was reading in a Western the other day, not by Louis L’Amour, about a tinhorn gambler who always kept up his sleeve a half-score of copies of the highest card in spades. He had a reputation as a tenacious cheater.

“There’s a second-year student in Burke House who’s majoring in English literature, and hates all bad poetry with a hearty passion. He’s highly persistent in trying to date a very lovely female student with a marvellous talent for putting him off with verse of the most tedious kind and description. He remarked to me the other day, ‘I’m accustomed to dog her well.’

Chapter 18

“I heard two fellers talking about politics the other day,” said Skipper Tom, easing into his favourite chair at The Thomson. “Politics in general, not partisan, or Newfoundland politics. One said he thought people in public office are too oafish, all. The other said he thought the best any politician could do was try to be a non-‘orrible gentleman.

“Also the other day an eye-specialist friend told me about a visit from a patient who wanted to be informed delicately and sympathetically if his examination turned up any kind of trouble. After giving him a thorough going over, the eye doctor said to buddy, ‘Last week a friend of mine told me his boss wanted him to look after her pet Siamese for a week, never letting it out of the house and cleaning its litter-box three times a day and not letting his own tomcat have her even if she comes in heat. My friend was reluctant, believing all cats should have

the run of the outdoors and not liking to have to deal too much with litter. I suggested he fake an allergy to the dander of Siamese cats especially and exclusively. He wondered whether he could fake that well enough to fool his boss. I said, “It’s cat or act.”

“‘Good one,’ said the patient. Then, ‘Oh my Jupiter, is it bad?’ My friend told him it was just beginning and might never amount to real trouble.

“Two nights ago, I heard this morning, an outport bayman taking first year arts turned up at a bar on George Street and made a bet with the bartender. He said he could identify by smell, from six feet away, all the ingredients of any drink mixed, provided it was moved back and forth once on a level with his nose. If he failed to identify any ingredient in any drink, he’d pay for the drink and chug it down. After six such drinks, he’d play checkers with the bartender for a hundred dollars a game for three games and fifty dollars for every checker the bartender took, there being no penalty for the bartender’s losing individual checkers. If he identified every ingredient in every drink till the bartender quit, the bartender would pay for all the drinks and offer them to anyone in the bar who felt like them and also pay the first-arter the price of all the ingredients in the drinks.

“Half an hour later, the bartender was deep in debt, and he said he had to find



some rare stuff out back which was guaranteed to win for him. He went and got some odourless Scotch specially developed for some Irish doctors who favoured that bar, then mixed in some ordinary rye, and just because he was specially peeved with the bayman he snuck out the back door and got a tiny pinch of ripe pet's mess from the alley and stirred that up well in a shot of the odourless Scotch. When he waved that back and forth once, on the level six feet in front of the young bettor's nose, the young bayman said, "I'm not drinking that dog-turd whiskey. Something's awry; you're scotched."

"Anyway, 'tis true enough that if you drink a lot of the right fluid, you'll get an idful. No pun there, just Scrabble influence on a riotous sense of humour.

"One significant cultural difference between Canada and China is that in Canada you walk the dog and in China you wok the dog.

"There was one old Newfoundlander who briefly came back from the dead to make sure his heirs got a good price for the dory he left them. He'd made sure it had an awning aboard, in case of long fishing trips in bright weather, but he'd completely forgotten to provide thwart. Some people who looked at it deemed him a shade tawtless.

Chapter 19

“Clerihew time again,” said Skipper Tom Clay, putting his pipe, still old and smelly, back in his vest pocket.

“Pontius Pilate

Would not defy fate

Or even Tiberius

Even when the matter was completely serious.”

“Not bad,” said Robert Smith and Mary Norris, both at once. They looked at each other, held the look with some dawning of mutual interest, and then quickly looked back at Skipper Tom, who apparently was entirely pre-occupied with his next clerihew. They stole a quick glance sideways, each, then waited, with the fifteen or so others who’d noticed none of all that.

Said the Skipper suddenly:

“George Bernard Shaw

Found in a lion’s paw

Handy patter to pad

A playful idea he had.”

“Brilliant!” said Mary and Robert together at once. The rest of the group was silent until Robert, with Mary waiting as if she wanted to, explained the reference to Androcles and the Lion. “You a fan of Shaw?” asked Robert. “Since Grade Nine,” said Mary. “That, of course, was the year after some really precocious boys in Grade Four were inclined to regard me as a Grey Date.” Robert snickered. So did the Skipper, who now was at least aware of what was going on under his nose. He winked at Robert. Robert blushed just a little, and Mary, noticing that, looked away, with a demure small smile.

“There was a kid in school back in Friar’s Cove a few years ago who was always throwing the class into a mild uproar by answering all the teacher’s questions with puns,” said the Skipper loudly to keep the rest of the audience from twigging and teasing. “One day the teacher asked him, ‘Billy, why are you such an incorrigible punster?’ Billy replied, ‘Miss, the others keep laughing at it. That’s very incorriging.’”

“Nother clerihow, ladies and gentlemen:

‘Henry Miller,  
Just for filler,  
Made the Tropics  
Hot topics.’

“Have another?:

“Howard Hughes  
Had decided views  
And few regrets to spare. Ah,  
But he did regret, I’m willing to bet, that he never married Clara.”

“Clara who?” asked someone.

“If you find out, come back and tell me and take a bow,” said the Skipper.

“Sir Thomas More  
To the scaffold wore,  
And joked about, his beard.  
Quite airy he appeared.

“One more fore I tells another story:

“Said the Bishop to Father Knox:

‘When you preach to your flocks,

I’d rather you didn’t read.’

Monsignor replied: ‘From pastoral letters I’m freed?’”

Clay took a puff from his pipe. “Just last year, a young man on the west coast went into a burning house to rescue a child he was mistakenly told was at home there. When the firemen finally raked up the ashes, they found no sign of him except his backbone, the fire had been that hot. But his backbone was still all connected by the gristle or ligaments or whatever you call them, and all of that was as sound as ever it would be in a living body. So people called it a miraculous relic and tried to have the young man’s mother donate it to the local parish church for veneration while they put his cause for canonization before the Pope. But the hero’s dear old mother wanted to keep the relic in her own house and appealed to the bishop for permission. And whenever anyone from the parish tried to persuade her to give it up, she’d say with a sad smile, ‘Please don’t take my son’s chine away.’”

He blew out smoke.

“Seems there were some Israeli sailors staying at a hotel that catered to Palestinians. They got into a row and were kicked out. They went to another,

highly similar establishment, and the same thing happened again: the Jews didn't change their ways because of the crew's eviction, I guess." He looked up. Mary Norris and Robert Smith had left the group and were sitting at opposite sides of a small table, talking earnestly and looking deep in each other's eyes.

"Fans of Edmund C. Bentley

Intermittently

Renew

His work with subjects like Clare and Hugh."

More smoke.

"It was a habit of Cyrano

To give some laughter to a foe

Before turning fierce

And bringing him to tierce."

The Skipper puffed reflectively.

"Howard Hughes

It might amuse

To give Miss Clara a show

But it would be wrong for him to take a Bow.

Burke – Clay – 79

“One more, okay?”

“Queen Esther

Didn’t pester.

She knew how to work, says

Scripture, on Xerxes.

“Couple of years ago, the powers that be at the Shaw Festival at Stratford decided that whoever wrote the best new really controversial play that season would be regarded as the Festival’s royalty for the rest of that year. Quite a few playwrights competed to be Shaw king.”

Chapter 20

Mary Norris caught Skipper Tom alone at his favourite table at the Thomson. “Skipper,” she said, “Robert and I are really, really deeply, deeply in love. Does that justify...you know...?”

“Emotional experiences don’t justify nuttin’, my dear little girl. Deeds are justified by right reason following from proper first principles. One of my first principles is: Coition” – Miss Norris faintly blushed – “is meant for having children. Real sexual love is a desire to have children with another person, that special person and no other, for some reason that really warrants having children. For a Catholic, the best reason would be wanting to give God an opportunity to create another spiritual soul you’d educate to love Him best of all.” He expounded, giving his own personal, peculiar take on the universal teachings which they both professed. When he finished, Miss Norris said, “Thanks a lot,



Skipper. At least if we do it after this, before marriage, I'll be sure it's a sin and know why.

“Got any new clerihews?”

He nodded, and she waved to other students to join them.

While waiting for the arrivals to settle, the Skipper lit his pipe. Two of the arrivals departed. The five others waited.

“Alexander,” said the Skipper,

“Didn't quite pander

To a quick resurgence

Of Persiance.

“There was a group of explorers to the South Pole ran out of food early in the expedition, so they started telling one another highly interesting stories. Kept the project going on nar ration.

“James Joyce

'S choice

In language

Gives the normal reader anguish.

“Charles the First

Burke – Clay – 82

Was curst

Because ‘Divine right of Kings’

Was one of his favourite things.

“Speaking of royalty, I suppose you history scholars know Queen Victoria had a long and lasting friendship with a commoner named John Brown, who was a horse looker-after or something like that? You probably don’t know, though, that his private nickname for her was ‘Emp’ – short for Empress of India? Well, one afternoon they were having a long chat and the queen suddenly asked John Brown if there were any sort of small favours she could do for him. Mr. Brown replied, ‘Emp, you’re a tease.’

“Jane Austen

Tossed ‘n’

Turned,

Dreaming ‘Lady Susan’ would by G.K.C. be spurned.

“There was a group of teachers one year wanted a special concession from a Department of Education official named Furey. Another teacher who didn’t join their delegation but stood to gain if it succeeded, told them to get angry with that official because then he’d be tempted to lose his own bad temper, which he was

ashamed of, and might grant their concession just to have a chance to calm down. When the group came back home, they had to tell their supporters, ‘We didn’t get to Furey, us.’

“Chesterton thought Evelyn Waugh

Wielded his pen in a filthy paw,

Not enough dejected

By the rotters he dissected.

“Henry the Eighth

Did little to build faith

Between the sexes.

Just ask his exes.

“One successor to the late redoubtable Ank Murphy as leader of the opposition party in Newfoundland always gave his colleagues the impression he was a little over-confident. They kept hoping he’d really for a little time at least fill Ank’s shoes.

“Sir Thomas Browne

Wore a frown

While doctorin’

Doctrine.

“Belloc, Hilaire

In Heaven’s aware

That he and G.K.

Are still having their say on Earth today.

“There was one egoistic young man who wanted every girl in whom he was a little bit interested to get positively ill from wanting him, before he’d consent to date any of them. But none of them would ever seek en.

“Charles the Second

Gladly beckoned

Any wench

He wished to clench.

“The reputation of Richard the Third

Quickly deferred

To Bolingbroke,

Who sold a crock.

“I once read a really good pun about the way one Beothuck warrior painted himself before battle. But that particular incident didn’t really ochre.

Burke – Clay – 85

“C.S. Lewis

Couldn't quite 'refewis',

Although he had a good nose for dopery,

To cry, 'No potpourri!'

“Now tell me, boys and girls, do any of you know why certain birds are called crows? No? Beak caws; that's why. But I'm sure all of you must know that a rock shelf where young crows learn to fly is called a caw-ledge?

“One more for the road, okay?

“Lord Verulam, Francis Bacon,

When it came out that he had taken,

Said, 'Tis widely known we scribes

Badly need all our bribes.'

“Good night, boys and girls. Till next time.”

The End – VCB