

(second version)  
Never published - J.H.R.)

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

909 did not spring full-panoplied from the brow of <sup>the P.W.D.</sup> ~~Jove~~. Like other <sup>concerned</sup> ~~queer things~~ equipment of the P.W.D. she had to be designed, and then built. A good deal of engineering brains went into her. An expert even visited the Panama Canal, which was being dug in those days -- I shall be telling you her birthday next -- and came back with the latest in dipper-dredge notions. So they built a hull of heavy timbers, rectangular in shape, 95 feet by 45, and 9 feet deep; and upon the hull they built a house, high, wide, and handsome, with windows of many little square panes, like any house ashore. Within that hull and house they bolted heavy hoisting machinery for the boom and dipper, and subsidiary hoists for the spuds; and they added a dynamo, a condenser, and farther aft, behind a bulkhead, a boiler. On the fore end hung fifteen tons of steel boom, fifty-two feet long; and at the end of that was slung the dipper handle -- six tons of it -- and the four-ton dipper bucket. ~~whose bottom opened at the proper moment by a pull on the man-rope.~~ The boom swung on a wide turntable, and was supported by three-inch cables of plough steel slung over a high steel A-frame, and fastened to <sup>the hull by</sup> heavy iron bull-heads aft. You looked at the ponderous business end of 909 and wondered why she did not pitch forward on her nose; but that was because you did not know how cunningly her machinery weight had been distributed. She had a single funnel, sticking up through the house roof like any <sup>other</sup> chimney ~~ashore~~; indeed there was nothing nautical about her but a dinghy slung in davits amidships. When at work, she planted herself like a stork on the bottom, with <sup>the</sup> two <sup>spuds</sup> ~~spuds~~ of Douglas fir, 65 feet long and 3 square, one each side of her, forward. There was another spud astern, where a ship would have carried a rudder, and by this she steered. When she wished to move ahead, for another meal so to speak, she hoisted her legs straight up into the air, dropped her heavy dipper to the bottom, and dragged herself forward by pulling on the sunken bucket, as a ship warps herself up to a kedge-anchor. All this made sailors laugh; but it was a respectful laughter.

When Johnnie Lang joined her as engineer, he was thirty, with fifteen years of dredging work, of various sorts, behind him. 909 had been built on the Great Lakes, but she was designed for the Saint Lawrence, and to the Saint Lawrence she went, with a captain, and Johnnie, an oiler, a fireman, three deck hands and a cook. With her went a pair of new scows, and four men to manage them. There was a bit of trouble on her first job. She was biting the mud somewhere about Montreal when the high girders of the A-frame suddenly toppled back over the house, and crushed the trim funnel like a can under a steam roller. At the same time the boom swung wildly and fell, knocking seven bells out of an iron scow alongside. But that was a little accident of design, a growing pain you might say. They cocked up the A-frame at a sharper angle, and after that she behaved usefully, ~~all~~ <sup>in and out</sup> up and down the great stream which is the gullet of Canada's <sup>gullet</sup>. Every fall she was laid up carefully, with pipes ~~all~~ disconnected, and water drained, to suffer the winter and await the spring; and Johnnie Lang was left in charge <sup>against</sup> ~~of her~~, with a stove in his room aft, and electric light connected from the shore. He did not like it very much. He was an active man, and ~~the~~ Quebec winters were long and lonely. He was conscientious too, and except for a walk to the nearest store for supplies he never left 909 for an hour, <sup>seven</sup> ~~seven~~ days a week, the winter long. When the crew arrived in spring to connect her up again he welcomed them as a beleaguered garrison welcomes the relief force.

One fall, the prospect of another <sup>winter</sup> ~~solitary~~ vigil set him thinking. It is not always the spring that lightly turns a young man's fancy love-ward, ~~But of course, at thirty-three Johnnie is not really young.~~ Near the head of the dock where 909 lay at winter moorings lived a young woman named Melisse. She worked in her father's small store, where Johnnie bought tobacco and supplies. Melisse was not pretty, and she had no beau,



though she was twenty-five and pleasant and modest and all that a nice girl could be. Johnnie's courting was awkward, for he spoke French a little worse than Melisse spoke English. They spent two months learning to talk to each other, and at Christmas they were married, ~~and~~ Melisse came down to live with Johnnie Lang. She prettied up his room aft with curtains and bits of printed stuff, and they got new bedding and a couple of easy chairs, and were snug all winter within 909's wooden walls and frosted panes. For the first time Johnnie was sorry when spring came. But it came, and Melisse had to go home while the crew went about the summer's work. In the fall she came back, with a baby.

There were other babies. One came in the first winter of the 1914 war, without waiting for Johnnie to hurry Melisse up to the hospital. That was in Sorel. When the war ended there were two boys and a girl, and Johnnie got permission to use ~~more rooms~~ <sup>the</sup> in the living quarters during the winter lay-up. He liked spring, of course, and the fine hot summers along the big river, and the summer's round of work. But <sup>he</sup> ~~he~~ looked forward to, when he could have the family with him again, and the joy of Melisse's cooking and the smart tap of her heels about the wooden decks, and the children running about the gallery of the engineroom, peering upon the bright oil-smelling mysteries like children at a bear-pit in a zoo. ~~With these about him he could look forth~~ <sup>SEE a new</sup> with pleasure in the frozen river, and the snow on the silent docks.

The war ended, and government ~~talked~~ <sup>had always</sup> of retirement. Dredging schedules were cut down. In the fall of '21, Dipper-dredge 909, five-yard capacity, was laid up in the usual way, but Johnnie was told to remain on board indefinitely. Melisse and the children were delighted. Johnnie was pleased too, in a way. But it was strange, the summer days going by, and the dredge silent ~~all~~ but the voices of the children, and nothing moving about the dock but the washing on Melisse's line. The world was topsy-turvy, Johnnie said, and newspapers confirmed it. But his pay went on, summer and winter, and every month they put a little in the bank, in Melisse's name, for she was the family treasurer. Sometimes there were false alarms, telegrams demanding, "How soon could 909 be made ready for dredging?" And Johnnie, after much brow-wrinkled figuring, and walking round and round the engineroom, would wire back, "With a full crew, three weeks." But nothing ever came of these till 1925.

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

The dredge worked two summers at Port Ballard. It was a small river harbour with a sandy bar just below the town, and outside the bar, in the estuary, a long concrete breakwater ran out from Todd's Point to guard the anchorage against south-easters. Dredge 909 scooped away at the bar, and dumped the reeking spoil in her scows; and the tug towed the laden scows seaward, where they dumped their reeking cargo into the bosom of the Atlantic. The town was small, dependent on the fishery, a quite place; though on Saturday nights, when the fishing fleet was in, and the country folk came down to shop and see the moving pictures, Main Street was a busy place, even in winter. It was one of those places where everybody knows everybody else. At the end of the second winter everybody knew Johnnie Lang. They hailed him, "Hello, Mr. Lang!" "Hello, Johnnie!" as he passed along the street, and he liked that. (A) When the third spring of his exile ~~rolled~~ <sup>rolled</sup> around, there came one of those ominous telegrams. "Dredge 909 will remain laid-up until further notice. You will remain as caretaker."

~~which he opened a hope, and read in bewilderment~~



(A)

When ~~the~~ the town's best life insurance agent called aboard, honoring him "Johnnie old boy", he signed a twenty-pay life policy for \$5000 without a question.



*Months except into years*

So he ~~remained~~ remained, awaiting a further notice that never came, year after year, forgotten in Port Ballard. Forgotten, that is, except for the monthly cheque, and the periodical visits of the government dredge inspector, and the letters from home. The children wrote rarely and stiffly, at Melisse's urging. Once or twice she ~~left~~ left them and came east by train, and stayed a <sup>SUMMER</sup> week or two with him on the dredge, putting things to rights. Her hair was getting grey, and her plain face rather worn. It had not been easy, she <sup>SUGGESTED</sup> sighed, bringing up two boys and a girl on a dredge engineer's pay. She had always been a matter-of-fact body, and the long ~~distance~~ <sup>PARTIAL</sup> spells of absence had somehow drained ~~all~~ sentiment out of her. She accepted his clumsy affection calmly, even resolutely, like a woman performing a duty; and something inside him was chilled. He would have liked a holiday, to go home and see his children; for Christmas, say. But the inspector told him confidentially that times were hard, and dredge men everywhere hunting work; ~~and~~ he had better not call attention to 909. Watchmen could be hired cheaper than engineers.

Sometimes in summer, people came down to the docks, and stopped to stare at 909, pointing to the big boom, the dipper, and the size of the cables. He appeared on deck at once, inviting them aboard, showing them around. There was a strong smell of fish on the waterfront, and visitors did not linger any more than they could help; but they found Johnnie rather garrulous and had difficulty in getting away. He was glad of a chance to talk. He had never left the dredge for more than an hour or two, and as time went by he ~~cut his shoregoing more and more~~ <sup>became more & more of a hermit</sup>. For a long time Melisse wrote once a month, about the time he sent her the monthly pay; but the letters ~~became~~ <sup>became</sup> fewer, and shorter, and more wooden. He had long since ~~cut out the daily call at the post office~~ <sup>cut out the daily call at the post office</sup>. He occupied himself with painting. ~~She was a big thing.~~ He started aft, and worked forward, painting with great care, as if 909 were a work of art. He painted the hull and topsides a deep yellow, trimmed with red; the funnel was yellow too, with a black top, and P.W.D. 909 in big white letters on the black of it. The big turntable forward, the patent capstans which stood like bollards at the four corners of the deck, and the great boom itself, were a bright government red. He painted the dinghy, white inside, yellow without. He clambered about the high A-frame, painting the girders with his universal yellow. When he had completed these he turned to the interior. He kept the walls of the living quarters a chaste white, but covered the engineroom walls with grey. The engine casings were black, but the fat asbestos jackets on the steam pipes he painted yellow; and the big condenser at the back of the engineroom was a bright grass green. It was an immense surface for one man with a careful brush, and when he put the final white touches on the window frames it was time to begin on the hull once more. Inspectors doted on paint as a preservative, and saw that he got all he wanted. He went over her, inch by inch, with his back to the world, and the months and years went by like the endless procession of rubber boots on the wharves. Dredge 909 <sup>became</sup> ~~became~~ fat with paint. But Johnnie Lang grew thinner, a slight wistful wisp of a man, as if the fat gleaming dredge were somehow sucking the life out of him.

The owner of the wharf received \$30 a month from the P.W.D. It was a soft little income, for the wharf was not used very much, and Dredge 909 could be shifted for a day or two when her berth was needed. When the government changed, of course, the wharfrage went to somebody else. <sup>for other things</sup> Through the years, Dredge 909 ~~made several short~~ <sup>was shifted</sup> ~~from the Liberal to the Conservative wharf, and back again, with a gang of longshoremen walking about the capstans, shoving on the bars.~~ When Johnnie went ashore to shop, the loafers winked and said, "I see ~~you~~ <sup>you</sup> made another v'yage, Mister Lang." And with another wink, "How might a man go about gettin' a job like yours?" This always touched him on the raw, and he explained, seriously, how the P.W.D. kept him on 909 because he was an engineer, a man who knew 909 from dipper to spuds; some day, he said, they would want 909 in a hurry, and she would be there, and he would be there, ready and waiting.

He said this one day in 1938 to an inspector, a new man, short and red and blunt of speech. He heard Johnnie's <sup>confidential</sup> ~~recital~~ with a quizzical smile. Then he said, proudly, "Lang, man, she's old ~~as~~ <sup>as</sup> the bloomin' hills. She was obsolete ten years after she was built. Cheaper to let the dredging out to contractors, with these nifty diesel-electric

*He was one of the accepted  
Port Ballard  
signs of the waterfront*

*swollen*

*positively*



(A) Mixing cause and effect, he suspected a conspiracy on the part of these ~~dollar~~ ~~statutory~~ wharf owners; they were using the mysterious and far-reaching power of small-town politicians to keep ~~the~~ Dodge tied to their idle wharves. There was no other explanation. 909 was being betrayed, month after month, for thirty pieces of silver.



rigs. 909? <sup>CHa!</sup> She'll never dig another bucket-full. Should ha' been junked years ago, <sup>But</sup> she's on the books -- 'Dredge 909; dipper; ~~capacity~~ <sup>five</sup> cubic yards; cost, umpteen thousand -- and they hate to write it off, <sup>That's</sup> government for you. So ~~here she's been and here she stays, eatin' up the taxpayers."~~

"But she's in good shape," Johnnie burst out. "I've kept her fine, you know. I -- " "Paint!" snapped the inspector, with a glance around -- they were standing in the engineroom. He noted the ornamental stars, gilt on green, with which Johnnie had touched off the ends of the pressure tank, and the ends of the ~~spare oil drums~~. "Paint's <sup>is</sup> holdin' her together, Lang. ~~Nothing but paint~~ <sup>and a look every at Ottawa</sup>. And as he walked ashore, noting how the small iron wheels of the gangway had ~~cut~~ <sup>cut</sup> deep grooves in the timber of deck and wharf, he turned and pointed a thick finger at the mud flats across the river. "There's where she'd be, if I had my way. Tow her over and leave her to rot. She's not worth junking now, <sup>that's</sup> my opinion."

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

~~But now~~ Between the lines of her letter, as through a window, he saw Melisse herself, grown stout and indifferent, a religious woman, absorbed in church and children. It stabbed him to think how little of their life had been lived together. It seemed to him that their marriage had become obsolete and forgotten years ago, <sup>like the dredge</sup>. More than that, he saw his ~~whole~~ life as fore-ordained, laid down on these barren lines from the moment when, a boy of fifteen, he had walked aboard a dredge in an Ontario town and asked for a job. In a sudden eruption of protest and self-pity he threw himself on his bed and wept, in horrible choking sobs. He lay there all through the bright afternoon, while the sunbeams crept across the walls. Outside, the motorboats of the fishermen came roaring in from the grounds, and boots drummed on the wharf planking, followed by the monotonous slip-slap of wet fish <sup>forked</sup> up from the holds, the rattle and clink of the weighing ~~scales~~, the splash of culls thrown into the tide. A small coaster came in, diesels purring, and tied up at the Conservative wharf ~~up-stream~~. The tide was on the flow, battling with the river current, and the ~~lop~~ made chuckling ~~sounds~~ under 909's low flank, and against the spiles of the wharves. Across the river the sun ~~dropped behind the pines~~, and ~~threw in passing~~ <sup>spread a</sup> brief red flush on the grass of the marsh and the bare brown flats where the gulls were now stirring and taking off, disturbed by the incoming tide. The wharf bustle died with the six o'clock whistle of the box factory, which regulated the working hours of the town. Darkness fell, and electric bulbs sprang into light along the waterfront, and the tide, deep now, reflected them in long quavering ribbons. The tall ~~fish~~ sheds were ghostly and silent, like ~~buildings~~ of a deserted city, <sup>haunted by the wailing of fish</sup>. Only the rats moved, an aimless scurry of grey shapes in and out of the ~~pools~~ of light. Beyond the sheds and warehouses, two dark blocks away, the lights of Main Street threw <sup>electric</sup> glare into the sky, and a confused sound of motor-cars, and strains of music from the radio shops, all mingled and remote, Port Ballard's Saturday night.



*man made worth \$5000 to Nelson and the children. Ship was...*

Somewhere a girl laughed. From a porthole of the coaster a bottle splashed into the tide. Johnnie Lang lay on his bed and wished himself dead.

But he did not die. The morning came, Sunday, the drowsy fly-buzzing Sunday of the docks. He had never worked on Sunday. But this day he went to the paint locker, as he had gone, day in, day out, for years, with the infallible movements of a machine. He had started aft on his interminable round, and was now at the funnel once more. He finished the funnel that day, and from then on he ~~made~~ made a point of working Sundays, defying the gods for the thing they had done to him. He never went to the post office ~~now~~, except when his cheque was due. People missed him on the street at mail time, and asked if ~~he~~ old 909 had been abandoned at last, and when he ~~went up to the shops~~ <sup>back street</sup> for tobacco and ~~supplies~~ groceries the storekeepers said, "There you are, Mister Lang! Well, well! Though you'd died. How's ol' 909?", ~~the way they addressed rheumatic old gentlemen tottering down on Main Street on warm afternoons in the spring.~~ <sup>citizen</sup> He had become a citizen of the town. It was disgraceful. He hurried back to the dredge and did not stir ashore for a week. The Liberal wharf-owner, taking pity on his loneliness, gave him an old radio. Johnnie strung a wire from the funnel to the tip of the A-frame, and lay on his bed hearing music and strange voices. He did not like it at first, a noisy toy; but, he listened more and more to the thing, the music became soothing and the voices friendly.. When one of the tubes died he was absurdly distressed, until a young man came down from the radio store to replace it.

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

"Lang! Believe it or not, ~~there's~~ a job for 909 at last! By Jove, it took awar --"

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

"Why," Johnnie said, "the bar was drudged by a gov'ment contractor this very summer. ~~It~~ <sup>she</sup> couldn't fill ~~us~~, quick as that, ~~she~~." <sup>shook</sup>

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

"Why do they want 909?" Johnnie whispered, dumbfounded.

"Only thing available. She's a god-send, right on the spot like this. The crew'll be here in a day or two. I just dropped off the train to warn you and take a look around." He threw open his club-bag, pulled forth a suit of overalls, and drew them over his neat brown serge. Then, regardless of rain, he ran about the deck, squinting hard at the big steel cables over the A-frame, staring at the bull-heads, as if by some super-human ~~quality~~ <sup>way</sup> he could, the ~~the~~ cable ends under the iron and babbitt, and climbed on all fours up the boom like a fat blue denim ape, to look at the sheaves. He came down and dived into the engineroom. Then he was out on deck, pulling up man-plates, going down rusty iron rungs, and ferreting about inside the hull with an electric torch. He went away, saying grimly, "I don't know. It's a long lay-up -- even for a gover'ment dredge. Not in the nature o' things to stand so long and still be fit to run. But there y'are -- what's a man to say, and a war on? She'll do. By Jove, she's got to do."

The crew came, and for a month the interior of 909 gave forth ~~sounds~~ sounds of metal and men in struggle and torment. The new captain ~~had come down feeling~~ that he needed a good engineer for such a relic; and ~~when~~ <sup>with</sup> he looked upon the little grey engineer of 909 he was doubtful. You could make a watchman out of an engineer; but



after twelve years, or twenty, whatever it was, you could not expect to find an engineer under the watchman's dungarees. But Johnnie knew where everything was -- ~~all~~ <sup>IMPERVIOUS</sup> those parts carefully laid away in grease, all those nuts and bolts whose fate in laid-up dredges is to disappear. He ~~stumbled~~ <sup>stumbled</sup> about the engineroom like a small ~~grey~~ <sup>grey</sup> cat with shining eyes. The other men did what they were told. Under Johnnie's trembling knotty hands and the lash of his ~~furious~~ <sup>furiously</sup> tongue, ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> bowels of 909 came together again.

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

Off the end of the breakwater, 909 put down her spuds and gripped ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> bottom. Johnnie ~~leapt~~ <sup>leapt</sup> sprang to his levers. It took him a few working hours, and cost the iron scows a thump or two, to get the feel of the swinging dipper again; but it came back, ~~as if the last job were yesterday~~ <sup>it came back</sup>. That night he reeled off to his bed, wrung limp with fatigue; but there was a light in his old blue eyes, a passion in his quivering hands.

The ill-fated extension to the breakwater had ~~been~~ <sup>been</sup> consisted of many large boulders dumped inside a cribwork pier. The cribwork had floated away, long ago, and the rock littered the floor of the channel in irregular heaps. Johnnie Lang felt for those heaps, ~~carefully~~ <sup>carefully</sup>, with the big dipper, swung up a boulder at a time, and set it down gently in the scow. Captain and crew acknowledged his artistry. The old man knew his stuff. <sup>Every time the dipper lifted a boulder out of the sea, the captain expected the A-frame to collapse, the cables to snap, but nothing happened. The old dredge seemed as solid as Gibraltar. He was amused at his own fears.</sup> (A)

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

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

"Come down," Johnnie pointed out. "That's ~~far~~ <sup>far</sup> east, <sup>or</sup> Better shift inside the bar, -- tie up ~~at the wharf~~ <sup>at the wharf</sup>."

"Itchin' to get back to that wharf, ain't you?" the captain said amiably. "But I ain't shiftin' till the job's done, blow ~~or no~~ <sup>blow</sup>."

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

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

"The moon," went on Johnnie in his mild old voice, "is nigh full. Come a sou'-easter, and a full moon tide -- you'll see things fly. I seen the sea breakin' clean over the breakwater yonder, ten or twenty feet, like it wasn't there at all. That's what chucked the extension into the channel."

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

A low grey scud came in from the south and covered the sky. Rain fell, lightly for a time, then in a ~~torrent~~ <sup>torrent</sup>. A long slow swell began to roll into the river mouth. The dredge lifted and fell hard on her spuds once or twice, and the captain ordered Lang to draw them up clear. She lay to her ~~four~~ <sup>four</sup> good anchors. The swell increased. After a time the wind came, with a swoop, straight up the estuary. The crew of 909 saw the scows well lashed alongside and withdrew behind their window panes. The tug remained at ~~her~~ <sup>her</sup> anchor, inside the breakwater. The tide was on the ebb. She would be ~~safe~~ <sup>safe</sup> for a time, <sup>at any rate</sup>. By the middle of the forenoon the estuary was a shrieking white froth. The growing wind howled in the A-frame of the dredge, and set the big stays humming, and flung streams of rain and spray across the neat square-paned windows on the windward side. The crew amused themselves with poker. From one of the engineroom windows Johnnie Lang kept a



(A) And the old man's face was a study, ~~delight~~.

~~909~~ had justified his existence all these years, in one grand stroke. The country had need of <sup>909 at last</sup> ~~her~~ a perilled hour; and the thing ~~had~~ had guarded so carefully all these years were justifying themselves and him.



morbid watch on the sea. The tide turned, <sup>and</sup> As its flow increased, so did the wind, piling the sea into the river mouth in steep waves that came quickly upon each others heels. The bell of the fairway buoy, <sup>SOMEWHERE</sup> lost in the rain seaward, clanged wildly without end. In the town streets, trees were falling that had stood for centuries, and the steeple of the Baptist church blew off and fell in the graveyard. The worst storm in fifty years, <sup>off</sup> a hurricane out of the West Indies, giving the cold north a lash of its tail. <sup>Ballard said</sup>

By ~~6:00~~ <sup>6:00</sup> six o'clock the tide had risen to the top of the breakwater. The tug, after some futile megaphoned argument with 909, prudently pulled up her hook and steamed up into the river. ~~The big sea was now breaking from one side of the estuary to the other.~~ The dredge crew sat down to supper, but they looked out of the windows and ate uneasily. They were Montreal men, ~~and were~~ <sup>and were</sup> not used to such a spectacle. The dredge had only a foot of freeboard; ~~the sea was sweeping~~ <sup>each sea</sup> boarded her and thundered against the house itself. The big wind ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> roaring up the ~~estuary~~ <sup>estuary</sup> like a train in a tunnel. The captain of 909 wished he had gone inside with the tug; but he did not say so. ~~Outwardly, he was at least,~~ <sup>after all, there were the four good</sup> he was confident in his anchors. He asked when the tide would be full, and Johnnie said "eight o'clock", with a grim glance at the forward windows, where the sea could be seen making a clear breach over the breakwater. At seven o'clock the breakwater ~~had~~ <sup>was</sup> vanished under the enormous tide. 909 surged violently on her anchors; no man ~~dared~~ <sup>dared</sup> venture forth to ease the mooring cables. At half-past seven a big sea boarded the dredge, smashed her absurd window panes, and poured a green stream into her. <sup>ALARMED AT LAST</sup> The crew hurried with boards and nails, and posts to brace them against the Atlantic. Then old Johnnie shouted, pointing. Through the lee windows the village of Todd's Point could be seen ~~career~~ <sup>pass</sup> past in the dusk. The two anchors to windward had gone. She ~~drifted~~ <sup>drifted</sup> rapidly over her lee anchors and brought up with a single massive jerk that parted the cables like twine.

Pressure of wind on the out-stretched boom and dipper kept her roughly stern to the sea, not that it mattered. She was vulnerable from all sides, like a raft, a raft sailing with astonishing speed up the estuary towards the bar, where the sea was flinging up ~~towers~~ <sup>towers</sup> and walls of white water. She reached the bar in darkness. The town was blacked-out, as if for an air-raid; the fallen trees had flung down the electric light wires all through the streets. This unexpected darkness somehow added to their terrors. Only the lighthouse shone, a burning white eye on Town Point, where the bar <sup>traded alone</sup> began. For comfort, more than anything else, the captain switched on ~~all~~ <sup>all</sup> his lights, <sup>even</sup> including the deck floodlights, hung in clusters for night work. Dredge 909 sailed into the watery madness of the harbour bar like a nautical Christmas tree, a spectacle for the gaping folk along the waterfront. The sea, broken, rising on all sides, smote her blow on blow. The deck lights went out at once. The boat went, gripes and all. The funnel went. Through the smashed windows poured the sea, sweeping Johnnie Lang's curtains and flower-pots into oblivion. Scared, the fireman ran up from the boiler-room and huddled with the rest in the flooded quarters aft. They were afraid, and confessed it <sup>religiously</sup> one to another. Johnnie Lang left them, ~~walked through into the~~ <sup>walked through into the</sup> engine room, and stood on the gallery watching water ~~pouring~~ <sup>pouring</sup> over his beloved machinery.

<sup>Both screws broke short and jammed.</sup> The dredge ~~sailed~~ <sup>sailed</sup> over the bar hustled by a thousand watery fiends, all yelling and smiting together. Then she was in the harbour itself, drifting along the waterfront. Wharf sheds loomed indistinctly, and looked very odd. They seemed to be squatting on the water, and so they were. The tide had risen above the wharf tops and was floating a mass of fish barrels, dories and other waterfront litter, into Dock Street. And now appeared the humour of the gods. Dredge 909 swept in against the Liberal wharf with a mighty thump. There was two feet of water on the wharf top, and she drew eight. She struck it like a reef. ~~There were no waves~~ <sup>There were no waves</sup> there in the lee of Town Point, but a mass of broken water surging to and fro confusedly, like liquid <sup>SHAKEN</sup> in a cask, pouring over the docks, gutting the sheds, flooding the cellars of Dock Street. 909 drew off and came in again, like a battering ram. The ~~wharf~~ <sup>wharf</sup> ~~shuddered~~ <sup>shuddered</sup>. Planks came to the surface. "Now for it!" cried the captain suddenly, and set the example by leaping upon the submerged wharf. The crew followed, plunging over the knees amongst dim floating objects, and squattered towards the darkness of Dock Street without looking back. There, counting noses, they discovered the absence of Johnnie Lang.



In the meantime the dredge, having dealt faithfully with the Liberal wharf, staggered off and sat on the Conservative wharf <sup>with</sup> a fine impartiality. She lifted with the surge, and sat again, and the wharf sagged to its worm-eaten knees. A third time she sat, and the wharf's bones melted. The Conservative shed leaned tipsily, half awash and half aground, and the Conservative flagstaff waved a tipsy farewell as 909, caught now by a shift of wind, drifted <sup>off</sup> into the darkness across the harbour.

Johnnie Lang was in the engineroom, at the boom controls. The hull was still intact; there was still ahead of steam, the dynamo still ran, and there was light within. The tide was far over the flats, over the marsh itself, and the yeasty sea was washing out the roots of pines at the very foot of the ridge that guarded the railway line. As 909 drifted, Johnnie Lang <sup>on the flats</sup> decided to drop the heavy dipper to bottom, hoping to hold her there over the ~~the~~ submerged flats. At worst she would lie on mud when the tide went down. Farther inshore, <sup>on the edge of</sup> towards the marsh, above the storm he could hear a terrific metal clangour -- one of the runaway scows lifting and falling on the rocks there, and ringing like a vast iron gong. The winch roared, the giant cogs clashed, the dipper vanished from the out-flung glare of the engineroom lights. He felt the thing strike bottom, jarring the whole hull. The dredge lifted again. This side of the harbour was fully exposed to the shifting wind, and to the tumbled seas pouring across the bar. 909 came down again, heavily, and as the dipper struck bottom once more he heard the big cables snap. They had gone at the bull-heads, rusted, eaten out, in the years of idleness. The A-frame drooped forward and gave up the ghost, and its weight, added to the 25 unsupported tons of boom and dipper, tore the turntable out of the forward deck. The whole mass -- A-frame, boom, dipper and turntable -- went overboard into the darkness, and the forward end, released of this weight, bobbed up like a cork, tilted the dredge to a steep angle. And as she floated thus, light and unencumbered at last, the wind caught her, drove her past the flats to the big ragged boulders at the edge of the marsh. He heard the timbers smashing, and the inpour of sea. Then the lights went out -- for Dredge 909, and for Johnnie Lang. When the sea went down in the morning she was high and dry on the marsh, like the ark on Ararat, with grass all round, and a tooth of Port Ballard granite thrust up through her bottom. The water had run out of her through the smashed hull. There was seaweed in the grass, and a good deal of sand. Dredge 909 <sup>had come to the end of her pilgrimage</sup> <sup>was scattered through the course</sup> <sup>amongst the stiff stems of grass</sup> <sup>what had been</sup> <sup>bleaching</sup> never move again. She would stay there on the marsh, her wooden bones whitening in the sun as Johnnie Lang's paint weathered off. They picked Johnnie Lang off the engineroom floor. His hands and mouth were full of sand. But he looked very peaceful, the people said. As if his barren life and divided love, the young love that died, and the faith in 909 that grew firm as it grew old; the long wait, the weary years, and empty hopes, the dry-rot that touched all things but his soul; as if all these things had been fulfilled for a purpose; as if in the moment of death and revelation, he had found that purpose good.

three-fold

He looked peaceful, the people said