

## Dr. Calvin's Grand Illuminated Bestial Pleasure-Dome

'Dr. Calvin.'

'Professor Jespersen.'

The two men greeted each other with a solemn handshake. Then the one who first had spoken raised a mug of beer and toasted his rival silently. Calvin received his order from the barman and reciprocated.

Niceties completed, the two men stood silent for a moment.

'A profitable season?' asked Jespersen at length, his eyes fixed on Calvin. The question seemed innocent enough, but much rode upon the answer, and the manner of delivering it. Calvin did not flinch.

'Aye, just fine enough,' he conceded. 'And yourself?'

'Just fine enough,' echoed Jespersen.

There was another lengthy pause. Around them, in the saloon bar of *The Badly-Wintered Redcoat*, a solid mass of thirsty men and women heaved noisily. All, save a half-dozen open-mouthed locals, were employees of Dr. Calvin or of Professor Jespersen. The two men - neither of whom had any academic qualifications of any sort - ignored them. Theirs was a far more important game than merely getting drunk and falling down.

'Quebec?' asked Jespersen at length.

'Aye,' admitted Calvin. 'Montreal?' he enquired in his turn.

'Certainly,' replied his rival. A moment of human frailty overcame him. 'Seventeen nights,' he added. And then he regretted letting slip this information.

Calvin stuck out his lower lip knowledgeably and nodded.

'And Rivière du Loup?' he asked casually, 'how was that?'

The other man stiffened. He put down his mug and wiped his moustaches. 'Fine,' he replied, wondering desperately how this man knew so much about the movements of his company over the past five months.

Calvin smiled. 'So I heard,' he said, 'so I heard.'

At Rivière du Loup, Jespersen had seen half of the season's profits eaten up in a night of mayhem, when a group of French foresters had made off with all the scenery used as a backdrop for the crowning act of his show - "The Monstrous Miasma of the Mozambican Jungle." What they had done with the scenery was anyone's guess, but doubtless it now formed an interesting talking-point deep in the forests of the Shickshock Mountains. Much good would it do them. It had certainly done him no good at all - new scenery had to be ordered from a local painter, one of the 'Feral Boys' out of Montreal, whose knowledge of the African Jungle was, to say the least, very sketchy. But the man's sense of his own worth was, conversely, very high indeed.

Jespersen looked about him, and nervously stroked his blonde moustaches. Save for this luxurious growth of hair that all but concealed his mouth, he was quite hairless, and his head being massive in relation to his body, and being furnished with prominent teeth, he had about him the unmistakable air of Walrus. In the heaving mass of workers he spotted his General Manager, a small dark Swede. He summoned the man with a slight inclination of his head. The Swede slid through the crowd effortlessly and came to his master's side. Jespersen leaned over and whispered a few words in the Swede's ear. The Swede nodded, looked balefully at Calvin, who smiled agreeably, then disappeared back into the crowd.

‘Terrible people, on the south side of the St. Lawrence River,’ sympathised Calvin. ‘No manners, no manners at all.’ He shook his head at the morality of the backwoodsmen south of the great river. ‘Never go there myself, not any more.’

Jespersen made a wild guess. ‘So, Dr Calvin, you had Port Alfred to yourself this year?’ he asked.

‘Port Alfred was all mine, Professor,’ acknowledged the other equably. ‘A very rewarding few days. All manner of people came from Upper Quebec to see us. Half of them, I would guess, had never seen a lamp before, let alone my Electric Lighting.’ He let that phrase sink in, knowing full well that Jespersen, although he aspired to Innovation, had not yet gone so far towards embracing the Modern.

‘Aye,’ he continued, ‘that Electric Lighting fair had them astonished, so it did. Have you at all,’ he asked in undisguised innocence, ‘invested in The Electricity, Professor Jespersen? Batteries, Professor Jespersen: the thing of the future. I understand that automobiles run great distances on batteries.’ Calvin spoke in an accent that sounded faintly Scottish. It was an accent which he could vary according to his situation. His real name - McKelvie - was a secret that he kept jealously to himself. As was his past. Now in his early fifties, he had hauled himself up from oblivion to become master of his own trade.

The other man said nothing, but indicated to the barman that another mug of his atrocious beer would be welcome. Did they brew it from the bark of the trees that grew here in such abundance? It tasted so bitter that many travellers had found quite miraculous the continued ability of the locals to smile at all. As he waited in ambivalent anticipation, glancing at Calvin out of the corner of his eye, the Swede reappeared, popping out of the noisy block of fellow-drinkers like a cockroach out of the wall of some winter quarters. The short man stood on tiptoe and muttered something into Jespersen’s large left ear, keeping a good eye on Calvin, who continued to ponder the Great Inventions of Recent Years in a pleasurable manner. When the Swede had finished whispering and had scuttled away back to the wainscot, the Walrus found himself smiling again. Calvin, noticing this, did not let his mask slip, but inwardly began to worry.

‘I hear you had a little trouble at Sept Îles, Dr. Calvin?’ he asked, very politely.

Calvin now cursed the blabbermouths of his Company. Sad Guillermo, no doubt, who could not keep quiet. But not as much as he damned the great unwashed of Upper Quebec Province. It was not enough that they should come to his Grand Bestial Pleasure-Dome and hoot uncomprehendingly at the marvels he presented; it was not enough that, never having seen a bath from one year to the next, they should pollute the atmosphere of his big tent and stain with grease the benches therein; no, that was not enough for them, but that they felt obliged to leap from their seats, surround his peaceable male Russian Bear and sport with it until, maddened by foul language and birch-goads, it turned on them; which action had obliged the local lawman to shoot it stone dead. It was a remarkable climax to his Show which Dr. Calvin had not foreseen, and, while the climax had gone down very well with the paying audience, it had left the owner with a huge gap in his repertoire. The fact that the lawman, tired no doubt after an afternoon spent in the saloon-bar, had missed three times with his hunting-rifle and rendered two of the enthusiastic audience temporarily motionless, was no comfort to Calvin.

‘A little trouble is what we all expect, now and then,’ muttered Calvin into his mug of beer.

‘People, no doubt, from south of the River,’ argued Jespersen sympathetically. His rival said nothing, but the peaceful state of his mind faded fast. He looked around for some distraction with which to change the subject.

‘I do not see Mr. Dante, Professor,’ he remarked after a few moments. ‘Trouble there?’

‘My ring-master had to be left behind in Montreal, I regret to say,’ said Jespersen. ‘A small matter of paternity, I believe.’

Calvin nodded in an understanding manner. Such small matters arose frequently in their trade, although they were infrequently brought to any decisive conclusion. ‘Mr. Dante was a man of honour, then, as I’ve always suspected?’

Jespersen shook his head. ‘A man of stature, Dr. Calvin.’

‘Stature?’

‘He was smaller than the young lady’s father.’

‘Ah.’

‘But I have a new ring-master now. Perhaps you know her?’ Jespersen tugged upwards at his moustache in lieu of raising his eyebrows.

‘A woman?’ said Calvin in a low voice, clearly shocked.

In reply, Jespersen simply nodded in the direction of a small dark-haired girl who stood entertaining her colleagues with some amusing story. This was a girl that Calvin had dismissed from his company two years back for her foul mouth, from which even the wildest animals and oldest veterans of the business had recoiled in horror.

‘Well,’ said Calvin sourly, ‘it’s nice to see such promise fulfilled. I hope you gag her before sending her out in the ring?’

‘No need, Dr. Calvin, no need. The girl has been tamed by my chaplain.’

‘You have a chaplain?’ asked Calvin, now completely out of his depth. Who else did this man have in his company? A Literary Critic, perhaps, or a Metaphysician? While Jespersen eschewed Modern Mechanical Contrivances, he was a master at choosing the best people for his company. Calvin readily admitted the man’s black arts in these matters.

Jespersen merely smiled in a superior manner. He omitted to point out the chaplain, who was at that moment at his prayers: in a dark corner of the bar, a threadbare man dressed in black, slumped over a table, clutching an empty mug, his right cheek twitching in the sour dregs.

‘And so, Professor,’ said Calvin casually, ‘what is your next port of call?’

‘Oh, I intend to stay here in Dalhousie, Dr. Calvin,’ replied Jespersen, acknowledging with a very steady eye that now, at last, the two men had come to the whole point of this uneasy conversation. ‘It is my understanding that the Restigouche County Fair Commissioners are to subsidise a winter season for a travelling company such as mine.’

‘That,’ said Calvin gravely, ‘is my understanding as well. Indeed, I was invited here for that very purpose by Mr. McDonald, Chairman of the Commission. I think you will find that the winter season is already mine, Professor Jespersen. My regrets for your inconvenience.’

‘Likewise, Dr. Calvin,’ replied his rival, not in the least disturbed. He pulled a letter from his coat pocket and spent some time carefully unfolding it. Calvin recognised the address at the top of the letter. His face fell. It was clearly another such invitation as he had received when at Quebec. He pulled out his own one, and read it carefully one more time. Only now did he read the words “you are invited to apply for a full winter season”. There was some work to be done, then.

'I am, of course, attending Mr. McDonald tomorrow morning, in his offices,' remarked Jespersen.

'At what time?' asked Calvin.

'Nine o'clock.'

'And I attend,' said Calvin, 'at ten. May the best man win.' He solemnly held out his right hand to Jespersen who, after visibly recoiling, briefly shook it.

'Small potatoes, small potatoes,' said a voice beside them. The two men, having very abruptly ceased their symbolic handshake, looked round. Beside them stood a tall thin man. He wore a beard underneath his chin, much as if a perfectly normal beard had somehow glissaded down towards his Adam's apple, leave the chin naked. A beaver-hat covered his head. He exuded cold dampness and had clearly just come in from the miserable night outside.

'P. Chynoweth Gaspard, Esquire,' said the man, introducing himself with a strong Bostonian accent. 'And I believe I am addressing Professor Jespersen and Dr. Calvin?'

The two men nodded reluctantly. They had already checked each others' faces, and it was clear that neither of them recognised this newcomer.

'Honoured, honoured,' continued Gaspard. 'Oh, so very greatly honoured! May I buy you two gentlemen a drink?' He called for three whiskies and rubbed his hands in a show of great anticipation. When the three tumblers arrived, he passed one to each and raised his glass in a toast: 'To the two living legends of Travelling Circus Entertainment of Northern America!' With which enthusiastic words he downed his whisky in one and called for three more.

'You spoke the words "small potatoes",' said Jespersen. 'What did you mean by that?'

Mr. Gaspard said nothing, merely tapped the side of his nose, then placed a warning finger over his lips. He waited calmly until three new tumblers had arrived, and courteously handed them round. Then, lowering his head and lowering his voice, he said: 'New York.' Then he raised his head swiftly and looked around, as if to ensnare any eavesdroppers.

'New York?' asked Calvin.

Gaspard nodded once quickly. 'I have just come from there, sirs, by railroad. It was a long journey - three days in this blessed poor weather. Believe me, gentlemen, the railroad is not the great comfort that those grand advertisements claim. By no means. I have heard of men who move their circuses and menageries by the railroad.' He shook his head despairingly. 'That means of transportation is not for men of sagacity, no-oo sir! Not at all. The ship's the thing, sirs, eh? Now, I have letters for each of you.'

'For us?' said Jespersen suspiciously. 'Who would be sending us letters from New York?'

'Just read it and judge for yourself, Professor Jespersen. You too, Dr. Calvin.' He handed over an envelope to each man. On the outside were the stern words "In the Strictest Commercial Confidence - to be Opened Only by the Addressee." One bore the address of "Professor Knud Jespersen, of 'The Combined Traveling Menagerie and Olympic Show'"; the other directed itself to "Dr. James Calvin, Proprietor of 'The Grand Illuminated Bestial Pleasure-Dome'."

Each man cautiously opened his envelope and withdrew a folded letter. The paper was heavy, expensive. At the top of the letter stood the address of "The New York City Chamber of Commerce" with a recent date underpinning it: "Seventh Day of October, 1908." Jolted into unusual attention by these auspicious beginnings, the

two entrepreneurs read further and found that they were invited to supply entertainment through the winter season from November 1908 to March 1909 to the citizens of New York, under An Exclusive Licence Issued by the Chamber of Commerce. Further, the invitation stated that only two candidates, “of nationally-acclaimed worth and proven capability” were to be invited to apply for this licence; that the licence might be renewed on an annual basis, “in perpetuity”; finally that “in the event of both Proprietors, thus invited, expressing an interest in the Licence, then the first making himself known in person at the offices of the Chamber of Commerce, and attended in the city by his entire Company, will be successful in his application.” The letter had been typed out mechanically, but the words “in person” and “his entire company” were heavily underlined in red ink. The letters were signed, again in red ink, by J. Edward Simmons, President of the New York City Chamber of Commerce.

Each man read his letter twice. Mr. Gaspard watched them patiently with a smile on his face.

At length Jespersen folded up his letter, re-inserted it carefully into the envelope, and slid the envelope into his coat pocket.

Calvin did likewise. ‘New York, eh?’ was his only remark. He looked hard at Gaspard. ‘You have just come from there?’ he asked. ‘You would swear on the Bible to that?’

‘I would swear on anything at all, even the head of my dear and only son, Peabody Junior,’ said Gaspard, much astonished at being questioned in this way. ‘Why would I dissemble? This is your good fortune - I was only appointed to deliver it. My trade, gentlemen, is in the swift delivery of important messages.’

‘Well, here, Professor Jespersen, is a conundrum.’

‘A conundrum, Dr. Calvin? I fail to understand you.’

‘It is this, Professor: which one of us should remain here in Dalhousie, where he is warm, comfortable, and assured of a solid winter of profit; and which one of us should venture in those stormy seas down to New York, and risk all against this man’s say-so?’

‘A conundrum indeed, Dr. Calvin,’ agreed Jespersen after a moment’s pause in which his moustaches were lovingly stroked. ‘One I shall perhaps sleep on. Abruptly, Jespersen conjured a long woollen scarf like a snake from his pocket, wound it over his head three times and turned to the door. With a flick of his wrist, he summoned his Swede to heel and went out into the night. A cold blast of freezing night air flowed in, causing a momentary pause in the surrounding noise. The heads of those in Jespersen’s company were seen to bob about and then converge in speculation.

Calvin studied the closed door for a long minute. Then he began to bite the nail of his left thumb, a sure sign of deep consideration. He turned abruptly to Mr. Gaspard.

‘On your oath and on the life of your son, sir, tell me: is this man -’ he paused to remember ‘- Simmonds - is he dependable?’

P. Chynoweth Gaspard stepped back astonished. ‘Dependable? Sir, I know of no man of greater integrity than J. Edward Simmonds of New York. Had you lived in that great metropolis for any length of time, you would not even think to ask. The man’s name is synonymous with Civic Pride, with Christian Charity and with Downright Honesty. I might add that he is, sir, the godfather of my only son!’

At these words, Calvin merely nodded. Then he pulled out the heavy envelope and read the letter one more time. At length, he tucked it away safely in his coat and looked around.

‘Captain Brown,’ he called. A thick-set man of distinctly maritime appearance looked over from the amorphous crowd. ‘Step over here if you would.’

The sailor came over. ‘Captain Brown,’ said Calvin in a low voice, ‘in confidence, please.’ He lowered his voice even more and whispered in Brown’s left ear. ‘We sail at seven tomorrow.’ Brown jerked up his head, much surprised, and was about to ask the obvious question; his employer pulled him close again. ‘For New York,’ he added.

Brown said nothing but pulled his head back a foot or more, the better to examine Calvin. He did so, severely. ‘You’ll be in your drink, Dr. Calvin,’ he said with some assurance.

‘That I am not,’ said Calvin, irritated. ‘I am as sober as a judge, and tomorrow morning at dawn we sail. Do you hear me?’

‘Aye, Dr. Calvin, sir. I hear you very clearly indeed. But,’ he added, ‘let me tell you that I think you have lost your mind.’ He looked suspiciously at Gaspard who still stood quietly, a benign presence. ‘Has this person threatened you? I can deal with him. A man can vanish altogether easily in New Brunswick.’

Calvin shook his head. ‘That will not be necessary, Captain Brown. Indeed, this gentleman may be sailing with us?’ He looked inquiringly at the courier.

Who shook his head. ‘Sir,’ said the man, ‘I thank you for your most kind offer; but I have also an urgent message to deliver to certain merchants in Montreal - *à propos*, I believe, of a large consignment of furs: it promises to be a cold winter, and the ladies of New York will wish to step out of doors and witness certain entertainments!’

Calvin turned back to his captain. ‘Make it so,’ he said shortly. He nodded to both men and then hurriedly left *The Badly-Wintered Redcoat*. There was much work to be done.

Before dawn on the following morning, *The Gopher Wood*, the vessel chartered by The Grand Illuminated Bestial Pleasure-Dome Company for the summer, was ship-shape and ready to sail. All crew and all members of the company had been roused from the inns and houses of low repute in Dalhousie - there were barely two of the former and six of the latter, it being a place of few conveniences - and now crowded on the deck, where Calvin explained the urgency of their mission. Considerable excitement greeted the unexpected news, and much merriment: having exhausted the flesh-pots of Dalhousie in one short evening, the prospect of an entire season here did not fill anyone with fervour. Whereas in New York...

It was at this moment that the sharp-eyed lad who tended the sea-lions for “The Melodious Mermaid” reported that the other ship had gone. The “other ship” was the *Georges Leclanché*, out of Halifax, chartered by Jespersen for the summer season.

The boy proved a mine of information. ‘Slipped out last night at midnight,’ he stated proudly. ‘See’d her go myself.’ For his sharp eyes, and for not telling anyone sooner, the boy was smacked soundly round the back of his head and set to gouging the eyes from frozen potatoes. For not the first time in his life since he had escaped from a small two-act travelling company which held an unenviable monopoly on the Coast of Labrador, he regretted his quickness of wit. The Melodious Mermaid mothered him, but he was a solitary boy.

Captain Brown approached Calvin gloomily. ‘That ship,’ he gestured in a futile manner out into the foggy expanse of Chaleur Bay, ‘will not be caught. She’s a faster

boat than mine, even with that imbecile MacWilliam at the helm. Unless he hits an iceberg, he'll be in New York several hours ahead of us.'

Calvin was not a man to admit defeat; but he now stared a humiliating one in the face. All eyes were upon him. Should he cut his losses and stay in Dalhousie; should he make a race of it?

At that moment, a tall dark figure appeared on the pier, wreathed in the dark fog of that early morning. It was Mr. Gaspard.

'Stolen a march on you, has he, Dr. Calvin?' he asked in a light-hearted tone.

Calvin glared at him. 'This is no time for levity, sir,' he growled.

'Indeed it is not, Dr. Calvin,' replied the other. 'But if you will permit me to come aboard for a minute, I believe I can shorten the odds again.'

Furious and intrigued at once, Calvin signed that he should come aboard. Mr. Gaspard stepped lightly up the gangway and thrust his head between those of Calvin and Captain Brown.

'Five words, sirs,' he murmured. 'Five words: the Chignecto Marine Transport Railway.' Having said his five words, he turned swiftly, launched himself down the gangway and vanished like a spirit into the gloomy dawn. The sharp-eyed boy made to say something, sneezed instead, and continued blinding his potatoes.

'What does that mean?' asked Calvin, mystified.

Captain Brown shook his head. 'Foolishness, Dr. Calvin: unbridled and unnatural foolishness. It is better to concede defeat than listen to such words.'

'Maybe so, Captain Brown,' replied Calvin coolly. 'But I pay the piper around here. So tell me about this Railway.'

Captain Brown shook his head, sighed. 'It is a thing, sir, intended to take a ship unnaturally from the water, transport it across land; unnaturally, sir; and deposit it once more in water. All very unnatural. I would strongly counsel against such a journey.'

'And where is this thing?' demanded his employer, disregarding the advice.

'It crosses the Chignecto Isthmus from the Northumberland Strait to the Bay of Fundy.'

Calvin had some grasp of the geography. A small light, such as might be powered by one of his lesser Electric Batteries, flashed briefly in his head.

'And will it shorten the time taken to voyage to New York?'

Captain Brown let out a deep sigh. 'If what they say is true, sir, which I very much doubt, then a voyage of some four hundred miles down the treacherous east coast of Nova Scotia might be shortened to a hundred odd miles in sheltered waters. But -'

Calvin interrupted him: 'But nothing, Captain Brown. We shall take the railway.'

'But, sir,' argued Brown desperately, latching on to the only weapon which he knew his employer feared most: 'It is devilish expensive!'

But the owner and sole proprietor of The Grand Illuminated Bestial Pleasure-Dome was not to be dissuaded: a season, maybe limitless seasons, in New York? 'Hang the expense, I say!'

Astonished, and momentarily dumbstruck by this profligacy, his entire company cheered wildly.

And so it was that, two days later, at around the very time that the imbecile MacWilliam and a green-hued Jespersen were battling their way into the choppy October waters of Cabot Strait, *The Gopher Wood* arrived in the calmer waters off Tidnish, the northern terminus of the Chignecto Marine Transport Railway. Captain Brown, in the closest possible company of Guillermo the bear-wrestler, was sent

ashore in a rowing-boat to negotiate transportation. After an hour, he returned glum-faced and shaking his head. Calvin's heart sank.

'What went wrong?' he wanted to know.

Captain Brown sighed. 'I regret to inform you that our application for passage has been accepted,' he said mournfully. 'But we must start now, or else lose the opportunity.'

'At what cost, man?' demanded the entrepreneur.

'At the cost of eighty dollars,' replied his captain, with a sense of *Schadenfreude* welling up inside his breast. 'Eighty Canadian dollars, Dr. Calvin,' he repeated for the avoidance of doubt.

Calvin kept his face expressionless. He measured the costs briefly - success against failure, a season in Dalhousie against several seasons in New York. He was never a gambling man, but sometimes a man who owned a circus and a menagerie had to take risks.

'Take us in,' he ordered Captain Brown. Defeated, the captain went to arrange matters.

After the ship entered the magnificent dock, a gang of dockers busied themselves with ropes and capstans, and soon had it secured. Captain Brown locked himself on the bridge and looked black looks at the outside world. In truth, it did not offer an enchanting prospect. The rain lashed down from a deep grey sky, heavy clouds drifted low, and the landscape beyond the dock was flat, grey where it was not brown, wet where it was not flooded, monotonous. Ahead, in a wide and straight line, a raised embankment stretched out into the foggy distance. On top of it ran three parallel railway-tracks. Two enormous locomotives stood ready on the two outer tracks, facing away from the dock, jetting their steam into the air.

Once *The Gopher Wood* was tied up firmly, a gang-plank was pushed against the side, and a busy-looking representative of the Railway Company came aboard. He headed straight for Calvin, clearly a man who recognised authority when he saw it.

'Fussey,' he said, holding out a hand, the one which did not hold a stout leather brief-case.

Calvin looked blank. 'Fussey,' the man repeated. 'William Fussey, officer of the Chignecto Marine Transport Railway Company. I am your pilot for today and will take charge of your ship during the crossing of the isthmus. But first I must bother you for the completion of all arrangements.'

The "arrangements" were soon made, in Calvin's cabin. Sixteen crumpled five-dollar bills, much palmed, and worse, by the unwashed of Upper Quebec, were passed from a portable safety-box into the hands of Mr. Fussey. This amount represented much of the profit of the entire summer season, once the various costs of a bear's funeral had been deducted. But to the Railway Company, it was just another transaction, such as been passed from hand to hand several thousand times in the past ten years. Mr. Fussey issued a receipt for the amount, which both men signed, and then marched off to invade Captain Brown's bridge.

The Captain refused them entry.

Exasperated, Fussey turned to Calvin. 'If I am to pilot you across the isthmus,' he said primly, 'I must do so from the ship's bridge. All according to the regulations, to which you have agreed by signature. There is no choice. And the fee is non-refundable.'

Calvin urged Brown to reconsider. After ten minutes, he reluctantly did so. He unlocked the door to the bridge. Fussey and Calvin were admitted. 'I protest against this invasion and abuse of my bridge,' he stated firmly, facing due south, his eyes



meeting no one's. 'The bridge is the domain solely of the captain. I am that captain. To have anyone else on my bridge constitutes an assault on my authority.'

Mr. Fussey ignored the seafarer's formal complaint. It was obvious that he had seen and heard it all many times before. 'Now,' he said, 'we should brace ourselves. The hydraulic lifts are about to raise us out of the dock.' He leaned out of the bridge and with his flashlight signalled to the shore. An answering signal was received from a watch-tower that loomed over the dock; there was a long shrieking whistle from some machinery, smoke rose from a high chimney-stack, and a series of thuds and clanking noises came from the bowels of the ship.

'God preserve us, Dr. Calvin,' remarked Brown stoically, as near now, he imagined, to losing his ship as he had ever feared. He braced himself against the wheel, awaiting the final sigh of his ship as it keeled over.

It did no such thing. Slowly, steadily, with some groans and creaks from the hull, the ship was raised out of the filthy water of the dock. From the hold came the sounds and smells of the animals, long accustomed to the slaps of waves, now driven to terror by the crashing and flexing of metal plates underneath their very feet. Those of the company who had remained on deck peered over the sides and saw, emerging from the water, a huge steel cradle that supported the ship.

As the ship rose slowly out of the water, Mr. Fussey calmly rattled out facts and figures, in a manner which suggested he could do so in his sleep. 'Construction began in the year 1888, according to the designs of Mr. George Henry Clopper Ketchum, deceased, of this Province. Engineers consulting were Sir John Fowler and Sir Benjamin Baker. Also Edwin Clark, inventor of the Lifting Docks which you now see being utilised. Resident engineer, Fletcher F.S. Kelsey. Engineers in charge of the Hydraulic Works, Mr. Dennison and Mr. May. Chief Contractor, John G. Meiggs of London, England, replaced in 1890 by Pearson & Sons, also of England.'

'At sea, which is where God intended ships to sail,' stated Captain Brown flatly, 'there is no need for so many engineers. There is the tide and the wind, there is the ship and its captain, and there is the Good Lord's Mercy. It has worked for hundreds of years.'

Fussey ignored him. 'Rails made of toughened steel, shipped from England. Steel cradles, shipped from England. Stonework for the archway, from Scotland. And there we are. Very nicely done.'

With these last words, Fussey indicated that the whole ship, complete with all who sailed in her, human and animal, and also those in between, was now clear of the water. A deep-throated whistle sounded twice. Captain Brown breathed rapidly, but otherwise moved not a muscle of his weathered face; he continued to stare fixedly forwards, down the line of the railroad and to the south where, he knew, the safe waters of the Bay of Fundy rose and fell, some seventeen miles away.

The whistle sounded again, three times. 'Hold fast,' instructed Fussey. The ship gave a lurch and then began to inch forward on its massive cradle, towards and above the landward end of the dock. Captain Brown, seeing his pride and joy about to make a landfall in a manner which he had never imagined in his worst nightmares, now closed his eyes. He felt a deep sense of Shame, of Wrongness, of Dislocation of the Spirit. He contemplated these oppressive matters internally and did not re-open his eyes for some time.

'Dawson, Symmes and Ussher, Ontario,' intoned Fussey, 'earthwork and masonry for the railway lines and docks; also dredging, plate-laying and ballast, and breakwaters. Easton and Anderson, provision and installation of hydraulic machinery. Rhodes and Curry of Amherst, construction of buildings to house

machinery, and pine sleepers for Dawson and Company. Harris and Company of Saint John, cradle wheels. The Canadian Locomotive Company of Ontario, heavy tank locomotives. And there we are.'

The whistle sounded again. That portion of the cradle which formed a huge railway-wagon settled itself slowly upon the central railroad tracks.

'All very nicely done. Very nice indeed,' observed Fussey, making an entry in a notebook. 'And now, gentlemen, the transit commences.' The representative of the Railway Company put his notebook away in his briefcase, placed the case on Captain Brown's seat, and stood with his hands clasped.

Outside, there were shouts and whistles and the puffing of steam locomotives. In the midst of this, the ship sat, as solid, apparently, as a rock, high above the tides and on dry land. The animals had calmed down, and most of the company had retreated inside, escaping from the torrential rain that continued to pour down from the skies.

'Wet weather,' observed Fussey to Calvin. 'Very wet indeed. The last time we had it this bad was in 1888. Unpleasant.'

Calvin made no reply. In his mind's eye, he was relishing the sight of the rage and incomprehension etched on Jespersen's face when he sailed into New York Harbour and saw *The Gopher Wood* tied up against the pier. Onwards, onwards, he urged the ship, on over the Chignecto Isthmus and into the Bay of Fundy.

'Chignecto,' stated Fussey, apparently reading Calvin's mind, 'a word used by the Micmac Indians to describe a Great Swamp.'

'Not much has changed, then,' commented Captain Brown, his eyes still closed.

'Indeed, Captain, my good sir,' conceded the Railway man politely. 'Only now, the Ingenuity of Civilised Man has conquered the Indians' Great Swamp with the World's Only Ship-Railway, running from Tidnish to Fort Lawrence by Amherst. Begun 1888, completed 1898. Four thousand labourers from all over the world. Five bridges, including one across the line of the Intercolonial Railway to Halifax. The diversion of the Tidnish River. Very few mishaps along the way. A small matter of the collapse of Baring Brothers Bank in London, after a revolution in South America. The whole project assisted to completion by our great and democratic Canadian Government in 1892, with an injection of capital which allowed the final mile of track to be laid, and the hydraulic machinery to be installed. And there we go, very nicely indeed.'

The two locomotives were now attached to the massive wagon that had emerged from under the water, now bearing the entire weight and bulk of the ship. With twin blasts of their whistles, they moved forwards, at first not at all, then imperceptibly, but gradually gathering pace to a sedate five or six miles per hour. Creaking, groaning, rattling, the wagon and ship together moved along behind. They headed towards that broad gap in the forest through which ran the railroad. Behind them, the grey waters of Northumberland Strait receded into low cloud and rain and then vanished.

'Very nice indeed,' observed Mr. Fussey, nodding at Calvin. He hauled a huge silver pocket-watch from his waistcoat and examine it closely for several seconds. 'It is now 9:23. We shall arrive at the Fort Lawrence terminus at 11:52 precisely.' He replaced his watch.

'This is the first time the Company has had the honour of transporting a circus across the Isthmus,' remarked the pilot conversationally. 'A red-letter day, if I might make so bold. I shall be sure to make a note in the log-book. And perhaps, when we reach Fort Lawrence, we might record the occasion with a photograph. At no expense to yourself, Dr. Calvin - all with the compliments of the Railway Company!

Might I ask which animals you have in your circus? I will be sure to mention every detail in the records.'

Calvin reached into his pocket-book and pulled out a handbill. 'You will find all you need to know here, Mr. Fussey. But, should we ever come this way again, I will be certain to stop for a couple of nights at Amherst. I have not yet had the pleasure of visiting that fine town. You will be pleased to note from this bill that we have at present eight horses, a lion from Darkest Africa and a tiger from Furthest India, an ape from the Indies and two - no, sadly: one - bear from Russia, four peacocks, six sea-lions. The Company also boasts, Mr. Fussey, two tightrope walkers, seven dwarves certified by the British Incorporated Board of Dwarves, a singing Mermaid, the Strongest Man in the World, and a two-headed chicken.'

Mr. Fussey was greatly impressed. He noted the appearance of all these animals and entertainers on the hand-bill, and nodded at each one. 'Very nice indeed, Doctor,' he murmured.

'And,' added Calvin, 'we have the only Big Top illuminated by Electric Lighting that exists this far north.'

Mr. Fussey whistled. 'Electric Lighting, sir! That is telling, most telling. The Railway Company has only just acquired some electric lights. And you have them for your Big Top?'

'Indeed, Mr. Fussey: this is no cheap-skate dime-show. This is The Grand Illuminated Bestial Pleasure-Dome.'

Fussey examined the hand-bill one more time then placed it carefully inside his notebook, and placed that carefully inside his briefcase. He shook Calvin's hand solemnly and nodded with satisfaction.

By now, the massive train had advanced down the line some distance, perhaps three miles or more, moving inexorably southwards with its astonishing load. The sky had, if anything, darkened further. With his eyes closed, Captain Brown chose to hear the comfortable slapping of Atlantic waves against the windows of the bridge, rather than the relentless swathes of solid rain.

'Terrible weather in 1888,' acknowledged Fussey, unwilling, it seemed, to let any silence blight the enjoyment of his clients. 'It rained non-stop that year for thirty-seven days and nights, and the swamp was filled to overflowing. Nine and one-third inches of rain during October, and a further nine and one-half inches in November. Locals could not remember such rainfall in over thirty years. Because of the flooding, work was delayed by several months.'

'Not much has changed, then,' commented Captain Brown one more time from his elected position at the useless wheel. He had a very poor opinion of the weather on dry land.

'Indeed,' conceded Fussey graciously. 'We continue to take measurements daily, of course, and you might be interested to learn that the rainfall in the past six weeks has begun to exceed that of 1888. The Company is, of course, confident that the demonstrably sound foundations of the Railway will be quite unaffected by the increased rainfall. Ten years ago, not far from here,' he nodded encouragingly forwards into the driving rain and cloud, 'a large boggy section, which had previously lain undetected, required filling to a depth of sixty feet with solid rock.' Fussey laughed lightly and shook his head, expressive of admiration. 'Remarkable,' he said, 'quite remarkable, what engineers can do if they put their minds to it!'

Then, for almost the first time since they had left Tidnish, Fussey paused uncertainly for several breaths; he peered out into the swirling rain; he looked backwards and forwards; he consulted his watch again. They had passed the first

section of trees and a grey formless landscape now opened up before them. All around the raised embankment, as far as could be seen, flooded land.

‘It was just here, in fact,’ he said.

Following which words, the whole ship lurched backwards.

Captain Brown opened his eyes at the moment when the bow of the vessel suddenly began to point skywards. With a deep thrill that filled his head with the music of the sea, he found himself going down with his ship. This, at least, was respectable.

To his disappointment, the descent into the deep lasted no more than a few seconds, then came to an abrupt halt. *The Gopher Wood* shuddered, and listed heavily to starboard. And then it righted itself on an even keel, bobbed several times in an uneasy manner, and subsequently lay still. Below decks, the frantic cries of wild animals, terrified birds and a widowed bear rose in dreadful cacophony. Pablo and Maria the tightrope walkers balanced precariously on the gunwale, each on one leg, peering down over the side. When all aboard the ship had steadied themselves, the extent of the catastrophe was revealed.

An entire section of the railway embankment had suddenly subsided, doubtless saturated by the everlasting rain; the weight of the ship as it passed over had been, as it were, the last straw. Embankment, rails and all had slithered away underneath, taking with them the huge wagon that supported the ship. Wagon and ship had slid backwards into a watery void. Of the wagon, only the front twenty feet showed above the water, leaning at an impossible angle against a slope of mud, rubble and twisted steel. At the top of this slope, one of the locomotives was perched precariously, still steaming madly, half on the rails and half off. The engineer stood beside it, wringing his hands, expecting momentarily that his beloved machine would tip backwards into the abyss.

As for *The Gopher Wood*, the ship had now released itself entirely from the supporting buttresses that lined the edge of the wagon, and was floating free in a small lake about a hundred yards in diameter. The lake lay new-formed in the bleak landscape of the borderlands of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Beyond its perimeter in every direction lay mile after mile of bog, of tree, of autumnal desolation. The lake was completely enclosed. No river led out or in.

The three occupants of the bridge of the ship, nursing bruises and scrapes, looked around, aghast. Simultaneously, all three let out a groan of despair.

‘We’ll never reach the sea again,’ whispered Captain Brown, patting the wheel distractedly.

‘We’ll never reach New York before Jespersen,’ muttered Calvin, oblivious to Captain Brown’s remark.

‘Oh, this is a disgrace,’ fumed Mr. Fussey. ‘The first time in ten years that we have not kept to schedule.’ He gathered up his briefcase and went off to communicate tersely with the locomotive engineers.

No sooner had he reached the prow of the ship than there was a great commotion below. The performers and animal-trainers stood uneasily in groups, looking out at the surrounding devastation, visible now and again through the continuing blankets of rain. Their worried contemplation of their surroundings was interrupted by a lively chorus of screams, as those nearest the staircase that led down to the animal-cages turned and ran for their lives. Leaping out from below, their cages doubtless sprung by the upheaval, came the lion, the tiger, the widowed bear and the ape.

As one, the trainers and performers made for safety. Most headed for their cabins, slammed the doors and pushed the bolts home. Guillermo the bear-wrestler caught the look in the widowed bear's eye, and pushed his immediate neighbours up the steps to the bridge. Half a dozen forced an entrance, much to Captain Brown's dismay.

'You cannot come in here!' he exclaimed, outraged.

His protests fell on deaf ears. The door was carefully shut and the circus staff peered anxiously down through the window. Among them was the sharp-eyed lad who tended the sea-lions. He said something to The Melodious Mermaid; his words caught Calvin's attention.

'What did you say, lad?' asked Calvin, appalled by this retreat and suspicious of mutiny.

The boy fell silent. The Mermaid shoved him forwards with a flick of her tail. He blushed. 'I knowed it would all go wrong, Mister Calvin,' he repeated. 'Soon as I see'd him there. The man's a liar.'

Calvin was taken aback. 'Who? Who did you see? Where?'

'That Mr. Gaspard, sir, at Dalhousie.'

'You know Mr. Gaspard?' asked the Sole Owner and Proprietor of 'The Grand Illuminated Bestial Pleasure-Dome'. An uneasy feeling began to creep around the pit of his stomach.

'Course I do,' said the boy much astonished. 'That's the man what I ran off from.'

'You mean - Gaspard is the owner of a circus?' said Calvin in a low voice, the colour draining from his face.

'I said so, didn't I?' stated the lad boldly. 'But not nearly as big as your one, Mister Calvin, not as exciting. No lions or tigers. No sea-lions at all, not even one. Only The Bearded Lady and The Cod-Man, and they're not even that. Anyways, I see'd him and I said to myself - Bobby, I said, this will all go wrong.' He nodded at the assembled company with a look of wisdom beyond his years. 'And didn't it half?'

Calvin said nothing, just stared at the boy with sightless eyes. His legs felt suddenly weak. Gaspard was doubtless holed up snugly for a winter season in Dalhousie, while his two main rivals had steamed off on a wild goose chase to New York. And now...

There was a shout from the front of the ship. Mr. Fussey was standing at the very prow, gesticulating wildly to the two engineers who stood on the ragged edge of the railway embankment, well clear of the delicately-balanced locomotive. Ten feet behind the pilot, the tiger languidly contemplated its options, while the ape capered encouragingly. Mr. Fussey desired the two engineers to effect some kind of rescue. They simply shrugged and held out their hands in a gesture of helpful futility. From where they stood, they could see a ship full of animals trapped in a shallow, oily, boggy lake in the centre of the Great Swamp Chignecto.

'Just like Noah,' remarked one admiringly, being well-versed in the Book of Genesis.

'But not,' trumped the other, 'on Ararat.'

