

The Perfect Storm

A true story of men against the sea



Sebastian Junger

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A True Story of Man Against the Sea



HARPER PERENNIAL
London, New York, Toronto and Sydney

TO MY FATHER, WHO

FIRST INTRODUCED ME

TO THE SEA.

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RECREATING the last days of six men who disappeared at sea presented some obvious problems for me. On the one hand, I wanted to write a completely factual book that would stand on its own as a piece of journalism. On the other hand, I didn't want the narrative to asphyxiate under a mass of technical detail and conjecture. I toyed with the idea of fictionalizing minor parts of the story—conversations, personal thoughts, day-to-day routines—to make it more readable, but that risked diminishing the value of whatever facts I was able to determine. In the end I wound up sticking strictly to the facts, but in as wide-ranging a way as possible. If I didn't know exactly what happened aboard the doomed boat, for example, I would interview people who had been through similar situations, and survived. Their experiences, I felt, would provide a fairly good description of what the six men on the *Andrea Gail* had gone through, and said, and perhaps even felt.

As a result, there are varying kinds of information in the book. Anything in direct quotation was recorded by me in a formal interview, either in person or on the telephone, and was altered as little as possible for grammar and clarity. All dialogue is based on the recollections of people who are still alive, and appears in dialogue form without quotation marks. Most dialogue was made up. Radio conversations are also based on peoples recollections, and appear in italics in the text. Quotes from published material are in italics, and have occasionally been condensed to better fit the text. Technical discussions of meteorology, wave motion, ship stability, etc., are based on my own library research and are generally not referenced, but I feel compelled to recommend William Van Dorn's *The Oceanography of Seamanship* as a comprehensive and immensely readable text on ships and the sea.

In short, I've written as complete an account as possible of something that can never be fully known. It is exactly that unknowable element, however, that has made it an interesting book to write and, I hope, to read. I had some misgivings about calling it *The Perfect Storm*, but in the end I decided that the intent was sufficiently clear. I use *perfect* in the meteorological sense: a storm that could not possibly have been worse. I certainly mean no disrespect to the men who died at sea or the people who still grieve them.

My own experience in the storm was limited to standing on Gloucester's Back Shoals watching thirty-foot swells advance on Cape Ann, but that was all it took. The next day I read in the paper that a Gloucester boat was feared lost at sea, and I clipped the article and stuck it in a drawer. Without even knowing it, I had begun to write *The Perfect Storm*.

GEORGES BANK, 1896

ONE mid-winter day off the coast of Massachusetts, the crew of a mackerel schooner spotted a bottle with a note in it. The schooner was on Georges Bank, one of the most dangerous fishing grounds in the world, and a bottle with a note in it was a dire sign indeed. A deckhand scooped it out of the water, the sea grass was stripped away, and the captain uncorked the bottle and turned to his assembled crew: "On Georges Bank with our cable gone our rudder gone and leaking. Two men have been swept away and all hands have been given up as our cable is gone and our rudder gone. The one that picks this up let it be known. God have mercy on us."

The note was from the Falcon, a boat that had set sail from Gloucester the year before. She hadn't been heard from since. A boat that parts her cable off Georges careens helplessly along until she fetches up in some shallow water and gets pounded to pieces by the surf. One of the Falcon's crew must have wedged himself against a bunk in the fo'c'sle and written furiously beneath the heaving light of a storm lantern. This was the end, and everyone on the boat would have known it. How do men act on a sinking ship? Do they hold each other? Do they pass around the whisky? Do they cry?

This man wrote; he put down on a scrap of paper the last moments of twenty men in the world. Then he corked the bottle and threw it overboard. There's not a chance in hell, he must have thought. And then he went below again. He breathed in deep. He tried to calm himself. He readied himself for the first shock of sea.

It's no fish ye're buying, it's men's lives.

—SIR WALTER SCOTT

The Antiquary, Chapter 11

A *SOFT* fall rain slips down through the trees and the smell of ocean is so strong that it ca almost be licked off the air.

Trucks rumble along Rogers Street and men in t-shirts stained with fishblood shout to each other from the decks of boats. Beneath them the ocean swells up against the black pilings and sucks back down to the barnacles. Beer cans and old pieces of styrofoam rise and fall and pools of spilled diesel fuel undulate like huge iridescent jellyfish. The boats rock and creak against their ropes and seagulls complain and hunker down and complain some more. Across Rogers Street and around the back of the Crow's Nest Inn, through the door and up the cement stairs, down the carpeted hallway and into one of the doors on the left, stretched out on a double bed in room #27 with a sheet pulled over him, Bobby Shatford lies asleep.

He's got one black eye. There are beer cans and food wrappers scattered around the room and a duffel bag on the floor with t-shirts and flannel shirts and blue jeans spilling out. Lying asleep next to him is his girlfriend, Christina Cotter. She's an attractive woman in her early forties with rust-blond hair and a strong, narrow face. There's a T.V. in the room and a low chest of drawers with a mirror on top of it and a chair of the sort they have in high-school cafeterias. The plastic cushion cover has cigarette burns in it. The window looks out onto Rogers Street where trucks ease themselves into fish-plant bays.

It's still raining. Across the street is Rose Marine, where fishing boats fuel up, and across a small leg of water is the State Fish Pier, where they unload their catch. The State Pier is essentially a huge parking lot on pilings, and on the far side, across another leg of water, is a boatyard and a small park where mothers bring their children to play. Looking over the park on the corner of Haskell Street is an elegant brick house built by the famous Boston architect Charles Bulfinch. It originally stood on the corner of Washington and Summer Streets in Boston, but in 1850 it was jacked up, rolled onto a barge, and transported to Gloucester. This is where Bobby's mother, Ethel, raised four sons and two daughters. For the past fourteen years she has been a daytime bartender at the Crow's Nest. Ethel's grandfather was a fisherman and both her daughters dated fishermen and all four of the sons fished at one point or another. Most of them still do.

The Crow's Nest windows face east into the coming day over a street used at dawn by reefer trucks. Guests don't tend to sleep late. Around eight o'clock in the morning, Bobby Shatford struggles awake. He has flax-brown hair, hollow cheeks, and a sinewy build that has seen a lot of work. In a few hours he's due on a swordfishing boat named the *Andrea G* which is headed on a one-month trip to the Grand Banks. He could return with five thousand dollars in his pocket or he could not return at all. Outside, the rain drips on. Chris groans

opens her eyes, and squints up at him. One of Bobby's eyes is the color of an overripe plum.

Did I do that?

Yeah.

Jesus.

She considers his eye for a moment. How did I reach that high?

They smoke a cigarette and then pull on their clothes and grope their way downstairs. A metal fire door opens onto a back alley, they push it open and walk around to the Roger Street entrance. The Crow's Nest is a block-long faux-Tudor construction across from the J. Wright Fish Company and Rose Marine. The plate-glass window in front is said to be the biggest barroom window in town. That's quite a distinction in a town where barroom windows are made small so that patrons don't get thrown through them. There's an old pool table, a pay phone by the door, and a horseshoe-shaped bar. Budweiser costs a dollar seventy-five, but as often as not there's a fisherman just in from a trip who's buying for the whole house. Money flows through a fisherman like water through a fishing net; one regular ran up a \$4,000 tab in a week.

Bobby and Chris walk in and look around. Ethel's behind the bar, and a couple of the town's earlier risers are already gripping bottles of beer. A shipmate of Bobby's named Bugsy Moran is seated at the bar, a little dazed. Rough night, huh? Bobby says. Bugsy grunts. His real name is Michael. He's got wild long hair and a crazy reputation and everyone in town loves him. Chris invites him to join them for breakfast and Bugsy slides off his stool and follows them out the door into the light rain. They climb into Chris's 20-year-old Volvo and drive down to the White Hen Pantry and shuffle in, eyes bloodshot, heads throbbing. They buy sandwiches and cheap sunglasses and then they make their way out into the unrelenting greyness of the day. Chris drives them back to the Nest and they pick up 30-year-old Dale Murphy, another crew member from the *Andrea Gail*, and head out of town.

Dale's nickname is Murph, he's a big grizzly bear of a guy from Bradenton Beach, Florida. He has shaggy black hair, a thin beard, and angled, almost Mongolian eyes; he gets a lot of looks around town. He has a three-year-old baby, also named Dale, whom he openly adores. His ex-wife, Debra, was three-time Southwestern Florida Women's boxing champion and by all rights, young Dale is going to be a bruiser. Murph wants to get him some toys before he leaves, and Chris takes the three men to the shopping center out by Good Harbor Beach. They go into the Ames and Bobby and Bugsy get extra thermals and sweats for the trip and Murph walks down the aisles, filling a cart with Tonka trucks and firemen's helmets and ray guns. When he can't fit any more in he pays for it, and they all pile into the car and drive back to the Nest. Murph gets out and the other three decide to drive around the corner to the Green Tavern for another drink.

The Green Tavern looks like a smaller version of the Nest, all brick and false timber. Across the street is a bar called Bill's; the three bars form the Bermuda Triangle of downtown Gloucester. Chris and Bugsy and Bobby walk in and seat themselves at the bar and order a round of beers. The television's going and they watch it idly and talk about the trip and the last night of craziness at the Nest. Their hangovers are starting to soften. They drink another round and maybe half an hour goes by and finally Bobby's sister Mary Anne walks in. She's

tall blonde who inspires crushes in the teenaged sons of some of her friends, but there's certain no-nonsense air about her that has always kept Bobby on his toes. Oh shit, here she comes, he whispers.

He hides his beer behind his arm and pulls the sunglasses down over his black eye. Mary Anne walks up. What do you think I am, stupid? she asks. Bobby pulls the beer out from behind his back, hiding. She looks at his eye. Nice one, she says.

I was in a riff downtown. Right.

Someone buys her a wine cooler and she takes a couple of sips. I just came to make sure you were getting on the boat, she says. You shouldn't be drinking so early in the day.

Bobby's a big, rugged kid. He was sickly as a child—he had a twin who died a few weeks after birth—but as he got older he got stronger and stronger. He used to play tackle football in pick-up games where broken bones were a weekly occurrence. In his jeans and hooded sweatshirt he looks like such a typical fisherman that a photographer once took a picture of him for a postcard of the waterfront; but still, Mary Anne's his older sister, and he's in no position to contradict her.

Chris loves you, he says suddenly. I do, too.

Mary Anne isn't sure how to react. She's been angry at Chris lately—because of the drinking, because of the black eye—but Bobby's candor has thrown her off. He's never said anything like that to her before. She stays long enough to finish her wine cooler and then she heads out the door.

THE first time Chris Cotter saw the Crow's Nest she swore she'd never go in; it just looked too far down some road in life she didn't want to be on. She happened to be friends with Mary Anne Shatford, however, and one day Mary Anne dragged her through the heavy wooden door and introduced her around. It was a fine place: people bought drinks for each other like they said hello and Ethel cooked up a big pot of fish chowder from time to time, and before long Chris knew it she was a regular. One night she noticed a tall young man looking at her and she waited for him to come over, but he never did. He had a taut, angular face, square shoulders, and a shy cast to his eyes that made her think of Bob Dylan. The eyes alone were enough. He kept looking at her but wouldn't come over, and finally he started heading for the door.

Where are *you* goin'? she said, blocking his way.

To the Mariner.

The Irish Mariner was next door and in Chris's mind it was *really* down the road to hell. I'm not crossin' over, thought Chris, I'm in the Nest and that's enough, the Mariner's the bottom of the bucket. And so Bobby Shatford walked out of her life for a month or so. She didn't see him again until New Year's Eve.

"I'm in the Nest," she says, "and he's across the bar and the place is packed and insane and it's gettin' near the twelve o'clock thing and finally Bobby and I talk and go over to another party. I hung with Bobby, and I did, I brought him home and we did our thing, our drunken thing and I remember waking up the next morning and looking at him and thinking, Oh my God this is a nice man what have I done? I told him, You gotta get out of here before my kid

wake up, and after that he started callin' me.”

Chris was divorced and had three children and Bobby was separated and had two. He was bartending and fishing to pay off a child-support debt and splitting his time between Haske Street and his room above the Nest. (There are a dozen or so rooms available, and they're very cheap if you know the right person. Like your mother, the bartender.) Soon Chris and Bobby were spending every minute together; it was as if they'd known each other their whole lives. One evening while drinking mudslides at the Mariner—Chris had crossed over—Bobby got down on his knees and asked her to marry him. Of *course* I will! she screamed, and they were as far as they were concerned, a life together was only a matter of time.

Time—and money. Bobby's wife had sued him for nonpayment of child support, and he went to court late in the spring of 1991. Bobby's choice was to make a payment or go to jail. Right then and there, so Ethel came up with the money, and afterward they all went to a bar to recover. Bobby proposed to Chris again, in front of Ethel this time, and when they were alone he said that he had a site on the *Andrea Gail* if he wanted it. The *Andrea Gail* was a well-known sword boat captained by an old friend of the family's, Billy Tyne. Tyne had essentially been handed the job by the previous skipper, Charlie Reed, who was getting out of swordfishing because the money was starting to dwindle. (Reed had sent three children to private college on the money he made on the *Andrea Gail*) Those days were over, but she was still one of the most lucrative boats in the harbor. Bobby was lucky to get a site on her.

Swordfishing's a lot of money, it'll pay off everything I owe, he told Chris.

That's good, how long do you go out for?

Thirty days.

Thirty days? Are you crazy?

“We were in love and we were jealous and I just couldn't imagine it,” says Chris. “I couldn't even imagine half a day.”

SWORD boats are also called longliners because their mainline is up to forty miles long. They're baited at intervals and paid out and hauled back every day for ten or twenty days. The boats follow the swordfish population like seagulls after a day trawler, up to the Grand Banks in the summer and down to the Caribbean in the winter, eight or nine trips a year. They're big boats that make big money and they're rarely in port more than a week at a time to gear-up and make repairs. Some boats go as far away as the coast of Chile to catch their fish, and fishermen think nothing of grabbing a plane to Miami or San Juan to secure a site on a boat. They're away for two or three months and then they come home, see their families, and head back out again. They're the high rollers of the fishing world and a lot of them end up exactly where they started. “They suffer from a lack of dreams,” as one local said.

Bobby Shatford, however, did happen to have some dreams. He wanted to settle down, get his money problems behind him, and marry Chris Cotter. According to Bobby Shatford, the woman he was separated from was from a very wealthy family, and he didn't understand why he should owe so much money, but obviously the courts didn't see it that way. He wasn't going to be free until everything was paid off, which would be seven or eight trips on the *Andrea Gail*—a good year of fishing. So in early August, 1991, Bobby left on the first

swordfishing trip of his life. When they left the dock his eyes swept the parking lot, but Chris had already gone. It was bad luck, they'd decided, to watch your lover steam out to sea.

Chris had no way of knowing when Bobby was due in, so after several weeks she started spending a lot of time down at Rose's wharf, where the *Andrea Gail* takes out, waiting for her to come into view. There are houses in Gloucester where grooves have been worn into the floorboards by women pacing past an upstairs window, looking out to sea. Chris didn't wear down any floorboards, but day after day she filled up the ash tray in her car. In late August a particularly bad hurricane swept up the coast—Hurricane Bob—and Chris went over to Ethel's and did nothing but watch the Weather Channel and wait for the phone to ring. The storm flattened entire groves of locust trees on Cape Cod, but there was no bad news from the fishing fleet so, uneasily, Chris went back to her lookout at Rose's.

Finally, one night in early September, the phone rang in Chris's apartment. It was Billy Tyne's new girlfriend, calling from Florida. They're coming in tomorrow night, she said. I'm flying into Boston, could you pick me up?

"I was a wreck, I was out of my mind," says Chris. "I picked Billy's girlfriend up at Logan and the boat came in while I was gone. We pulled up across the street from the Nest and we could see the *Andrea Gail* tied up by Rose's and so I flew across the street and the door opened and it was Bobby. He went, 'Aaagh,' and he picked me up in the air and I had my legs wrapped around his waist and we must've been there twenty minutes like that, I wouldn't get off him, I couldn't, it had been thirty days and there was no way in hell."

The collected company in the bar watched the reunion through the window. Chris asked Bobby if he'd found a card that she'd hidden in his seabag before he left. He had, he said. He read it every night.

Yeah, right, said Chris.

Bobby put her down in front of the door and recited the letter word for word. The guys were bustin' my balls so bad I had to hide it in a magazine, he said. Bobby pulled Chris into the Nest and bought her a drink and they clinked bottles for his safe homecoming. Billy was there with his girlfriend hanging off him and Alfred was on the payphone to his girlfriend in Maine and Bugsy was getting down to business at the bar. The night had achieved a near-vertical takeoff, everyone was drinking and screaming because they were home safe and with people they loved. Bobby Shatford was now crew on one of the best sword boats on the East Coast.

THEY'D been at sea a month and taken fifteen tons of swordfish. Prices fluctuate so wildly, though, that a sword boat crew often has no idea how well they've done until after the fish have been sold. And even then there's room for error: boat owners have been known to negotiate a lower price with the buyer and then recover part of their loss in secret. That way they don't share the entire profit with their crew. Be that as it may, the *Andrea Gail* sold her catch to O'Hara Seafoods for \$136,812, plus another \$4,770 for a small amount of tuna. Bob Brown, the owner, first took out for fuel, fishing tackle, bait, a new mainline, wharfage, ice, and a hundred other odds and ends that added up to over \$35,000. That was deducted from the gross, and Brown took home half of what was left: roughly \$53,000. The collected crew expenses—food, gloves, shore help—were paid on credit and then deducted from the other

\$53,000, and the remainder was divided up among the crew: Almost \$20,000 to Captain Billy Tyne, \$6,453 to Pierre and Murphy, \$5,495 to Moran, and \$4,537 each to Shatford and Kosco. The shares were calculated by seniority and if Shatford and Kosco didn't like it, they were free to find another boat.

The week on shore started hard. That first night, before the fish had even been looked at, Bob Brown cut each crew member a check for two hundred dollars, and by dawn it was all pretty much spent. Bobby crawled into bed with Chris around one or two in the morning and crawled out again four hours later to help take out the catch. His younger brother Brian—built like a lumberjack and filled with one desire, to fish like his brothers—showed up for help, along with another brother, Rusty. Bob Brown was there, and even some of the women showed up. The fish were hoisted out of the hold, swung up onto the dock, and then wheeled into the chill recesses of Rose's. Next they hauled twenty tons of ice out of the hold, scrubbed the decks, and stowed the gear away. It was an eight-or nine-hour day. At the end of the afternoon Brown showed up with checks for half the money they were owed—the rest would be paid after the dealer had actually sold the fish—and the crew went across the street to a bar called Pratty's. The partying, if possible, reached heights not attained the night before. "Most of them are single kids with no better thing to do than spend a lot of dough," says Charlie Reed, former captain of the boat. "They're highrollers for a couple of days. Then they go back out to sea."

High-rollers or not, the crew is still supposed to show up at the dock every morning for work. Inevitably, something has broken on the trip—a line gets wound around the drive shaft and must be dove on, the antennas get snapped off, the radios go dead. Depending on the problem, it can take anywhere from an afternoon to several days to fix. Then the engine has to be overhauled: change the belts and filters, check the oil, fill the hydraulics, clean the injectors, clean the plugs, test the generators. Finally, there's the endless task of maintaining the deck gear. Blocks have to be greased, ropes have to be spliced, chains and cables have to be replaced, rust spots have to be ground down and painted. One ill-kept piece of gear can kill a man. Charlie Reed saw a hoisting block fall on someone and shear his arm right off. Another crew member had forgotten to tighten a shackle.

The crew isn't exactly military in their sense of duty, though. Several times that week Bobby woke up at the Nest, looked out the window, and then crawled back into bed. One can hardly blame him: from now on his life would unfold in brutally short bursts between long stretches at sea, and all he'd have to tide him over would be photos taped to a wall and maybe a letter in a seabag. And if it was hard on the men, it was even harder on the women. "It was like I had one life and when he came back I had another," says Jodi Tyne, who divorced Billy over it. "I did it for a long time and I just got tired of it, it was never gonna change, he was never gonna quit fishin', though he said he wanted to. If he had to pick between me and the boat he picked the boat."

Billy was an exception in that he really, truly loved to fish. Charlie Reed was the same way; it was one reason the two men got along so well. "It's wide open—I got all the solitude in the world," says Reed. "Nobody pressurin' me about nothin'. And I see things other people don't get to see—whales breaching right beside me, porpoises followin' the boat. I've caught shit they don't even have in books—really weird shit, monstrous-looking things. And when

walk down the street in town, everyone's respectful to me: 'Hi, Cap, how ya doin' Cap.' It's nice to sit down and have a 70-year-old man say, 'Hi, Cap.' It's a beautiful thing."

Perhaps you'd have to be a skipper to really fall in love with the life. (A \$20,000 paycheck must help.) Most deckhands have precious little affection for the business, though; for them fishing is a brutal, dead-end job that they try to get clear of as fast as possible. At memorial services in Gloucester people are always saying things like, "Fishing was his life," or "He died doing what he loved," but by and large those sentiments are to comfort the living. By and large, young men from Gloucester find themselves at sea because they're broke and need money fast.

The only compensation for such mind-numbing work, it would seem, is equally mind-numbing indulgence. A swordfisherman off a month at sea is a small typhoon of cash. He cannot get rid of the stuff fast enough. He buys lottery tickets fifty at a time and passes them around the bar. If anything hits he buys fifty more plus drinks for the house. Ten minutes later he'll tip the bartender twenty dollars and set the house up again; slower drinkers may have two or three bottles lined up in front of them. When too many bottles are lined up in front of someone, plastic tokens are put down instead, so that the beer doesn't get warm. (It is said that when someone passes out at the Irish Mariner, arguments break out over who gets his tokens.) A fisherman off a trip gives the impression that he'd hardly bother to bend down and pick up a twenty-dollar bill that happened to flutter to the floor. The money is pushed around the bartop like dirty playing cards, and by closing time a week's worth of pay may well have been spent. For some, acting like the money means nothing is the only compensation for what it actually must mean.

"The last night, oh my God, the drunkenness was just unreal," says Chris. "The bar was jam-packed and Bugsy was in a real bad mood cause he hadn't gotten laid, he was really losing his mind about it. That's important when you only have six days, you know. They were drinkin' more and more and it was time to go and they didn't get enough time on land and didn't get enough money. The last morning we woke up over the Nest 'cause we were real ruined and Bobby had this big black eye, we'd gotten physically violent a little bit, which was the alcohol, believe me. Now I think about it and I can't believe I sent him off to sea like that. I can't believe I sent him off to sea with a black eye."

IN the year 1850, Herman Melville wrote his masterpiece, *Moby Dick*, based on his own experience aboard a South Seas whaling ship. It starts with the narrator, Ishmael, stumbling through a snowstorm in New Bedford, Massachusetts, looking for a place to spend the night. He doesn't have much money and passes up one place, called the Crossed Harpoons, because it looks "too expensive and jolly." The next place he finds is called the Swordfish Inn, but it, too, radiates too much warmth and good cheer. Finally he comes to the Spouter Inn. "As the light looked so dim," he writes, "and the dilapidated little wooden house itself looked as if it might have been carted here from the ruins of some burnt district, and as the swinging sign had a poverty-stricken sort of creak to it, I thought that here was the very spot for cheap lodging and the best of pea coffee."

His instincts were sound, of course: he was given hot food and a bed to share with a South Seas cannibal called Queequeg. Queequeg became his adopted brother and eventually saved

his life. Since the beginning of fishing, there have been places that have taken in the Ishmael of the world—and the Murphs, and the Bugsys, and the Bobbys. Without them, conceivably fishing wouldn't even be possible. One night a swordfisherman came into the Crow's Nest reeling drunk after a month at sea. Bills were literally falling out of his pocket. Greg, the owner of the bar, took the money—a full paycheck—and locked it up in the safe. The next morning the fisherman came down looking a little chagrined. Jesus what a night last night, he said. And I can't *believe* how much money I spent...

That a fisherman is capable of believing he spent a couple thousand dollars in one night says a lot about fishermen. And that a bartender put the money away for safe-keeping says a lot about how fishermen choose their bars. They find places that are second homes because a lot of them don't have real homes. The older guys do, of course—they have families, mortgages, the rest of it—but there aren't many older guys on the longline boats. There are mainly guys like Murph and Bobby and Bugsy who go through their youth with a roll of tens and twenties in their pockets. "It's a young man's game, a single man's game," as Ethel Shatford says.

As a result, the Crow's Nest has a touch of the orphanage to it. It takes people in, gives them a place, loans them a family. Some may have just come off a trip to the Grand Banks, others may be weathering a private North Atlantic of their own: divorce, drug addiction, or just a tough couple of years. One night at the bar a thin old man who had lost his niece to AIDS wrapped his arms around Ethel and just held onto her for five or ten minutes. At the other end of the spectrum is a violent little alcoholic named Wally who's a walking testimony to the effects of child abuse. He has multiple restraining orders against him and occasionally slides into realms of such transcendent obscenity that Ethel has to yell out to him to shut the hell up. She has a soft spot for him, though, because she knows what he went through as a child, and one year she wrapped up a present and gave it to him Christmas morning. (She's got the habit of doing that for anyone stuck upstairs over the holidays.) All day long Wally avoided opening it, and finally Ethel told him she was going to get offended if he didn't unwrap the damn thing. Looking a little uneasy, he slowly pulled the paper off—it was a scarf or something—and suddenly the most violent man in Gloucester was crying in front of her.

Ethel, he said, shaking his head, no one's ever given me a present before.

Ethel Shatford was born in Gloucester and has lived out her whole life half a mile from the Crow's Nest Inn. There are people in town, she says, who have never driven the forty-five minutes to Boston, and there are others who have never even been over the bridge. To put this into perspective, the bridge spans a piece of water so narrow that fishing boats have trouble negotiating it. In a lot of ways the bridge might as well not even be there; a good many people in town see the Grand Banks more often than, say, the next town down the coast.

The bridge was built in 1948, when Ethel was twelve. Gloucester schooners were still sailing to the Grand Banks to dory-fish for cod. That spring Ethel remembers the older boys being excused from school to fight the brush fires that were raging across Cape Ann; the fire burned through a wild area called Dogtown Common, an expanse of swamp and glacial moraine that was once home to the local crazy and forgotten. The bridge was the northern

terminus of Boston's Route 128 beltway, and it basically brought the twentieth century downtown Gloucester. Urban renewal paved over the waterfront in the 1970s, and soon there was a thriving drug trade and one of the highest heroin overdose rates in the country. In 1984, a Gloucester swordfishing boat named the *Valhalla* was busted for running guns to the Irish Republican Army; the guns had been bought with drug money from the Irish Mafia in Boston.

By the end of the 1980s the Georges Bank ecosystem had started to collapse, and the town was forced to raise revenue by joining a federal resettlement program. They provided cheap housing for people from other, even poorer, towns in Massachusetts, and in return received money from the government. The more people they took in, the higher the unemployment rate rose, stressing the fishing industry even further. By 1991, fish stocks were so depleted that the unthinkable was being discussed: Close Georges Bank to all fishing, indefinitely. For 150 years, Georges, off Cape Cod, had been the breadbasket of New England fishing; now it was virtually barren. Charlie Reed, who dropped out of school in tenth grade to work on a boat, saw the end coming: "None of my children have anything to do with fishing," he says. "They'd ask me to take them out on the boat, and I'd say, 'I'm not takin' you now here. You just might like it—brutal as it is, you just might like it.'"

Ethel has worked in the Crow's Nest since 1980. She gets there at 8:30 Tuesday morning, works until 4:30 and then often sits and has a few rum-and-cokes. She does that four days a week and occasionally works on weekends. From time to time one of the regulars brings in fish and she cooks up some chowder in the back room. She passes it out in plastic bowls and whatever's left simmers away in a ceramic crockpot for the rest of the day. Patrons go over to sniff it, and dip in from time to time.

Clearly, this is a place a fisherman could get used to. The curtained windows up front have the immense advantage of allowing people to see out but not be seen. The entire bar can watch who's about to appear in their collective reality, and then the back door offers an alternative to having to deal with it. "It's saved many a guy from wives, girlfriends, whatever," says Ethel. Drunks reveal themselves as well: Their silhouettes careen past the window and Ethel watches them pause at the door to steady themselves and draw a deep breath. Then they fling the big brown door open and head straight for the corner of the bar.

People stay upstairs anywhere from hours to years, and sometimes it's hard to know at the outset which it's going to be. Rates are \$27.40 a night for fishermen, truckers, and friends and \$32.90 for everyone else. There's also a weekly rate for long-term guests. One man stayed so long—five years—that he had his room painted and carpeted. He also hung a pair of chandeliers from the ceiling. Fishermen who don't have bank accounts cash paychecks at the Crow's Nest (it helps if they owe the bar money), and fishermen who don't have mailing addresses can have things sent right to the bar. This puts them at a distinct advantage over the I.R.S., a lawyer, or an ex-wife. The bartender, of course, takes messages, screens calls, and might even lie. The pay phone at the door has the same number as the house phone, and when it rings, customers signal to Ethel whether they're in or not.

By and large it's a bar of people who know each other; people who aren't known are invited over for a drink. It's hard to buy your own beer at the Crow's Nest, and it's hard to leave after just one; if you're there at all, you're there until closing. There are few fights

the Nest because everyone knows each other so well, but other waterfront bars—Pratty's, Mitch's, the Irish Mariner—are known to disassemble themselves on a regular basis. Ethel worked at one place where the owner started so many brawls that she refused to serve him at his own place; the fact that he was a state trooper didn't help matters much. John, another bartender at the Nest, recalls a wedding where the bride and groom got into an argument and the groom stormed off, dutifully followed by all the men in the party. Of course they went to the nearest bar and eventually one of them pitched a sarcastic comment to a quiet, stocky guy sitting off by himself. The man got up, took his hat off and walked down the bar knocking out the entire male half of the wedding party, one by one.

The closest it's ever come to that at the Nest was one night when there was an ugly cluster of rednecks at one end of the room and a handful of black truckers at the other. The truckers were regulars at the Nest, but the rednecks were from out of town, as were a hopped-up bunch of swordfishermen who were talking loudly around the pool table. The focus of attention of this edgy mix was a black kid and a white kid who were playing pool and arguing, apparently over a drug deal. As the tension in the room climbed, one of the truckers called John over and said, Hey, don't worry, both those kids are trash and we'll back you up no matter what.

John thanked him and went back to washing glasses. The swordfishermen had just gotten off a trip and were reeling drunk, the rednecks were making barely-muted comments about the clientele, and John was just waiting for the cork to pop. Finally one of the rednecks called him over and jutted his chin across the bar at the black truckers.

Too bad you gotta serve 'em but I guess it's the law, he said.

John considered this for a moment and then said, Yeah, and not only that, they're all friends of mine.

He walked across to the pool table and threw the kids out and then he turned to the swordfishermen and told them that if they wanted trouble, they would certainly find plenty. John's friends were particularly large examples of humankind and the swordfishermen signalled that they understood. The rednecks finally left, and by the end of the night it was back to the same old place it had always been.

"It's a pretty good crowd," says Ethel. "Sometimes you get the wild scallopers in but mostly it's just friends. One of the best times I ever had here was when this Irishman walked in and ordered fifty beers. It was a dead Sunday afternoon and I just looked at him. He said that his friends would be along in a minute, and sure enough, an entire Irish soccer team came in. They'd been staying in Rockport, which is a dry town, and so they just started walking. They walked all the way down Route 127, five miles, and this was the first place they came to. They were drinking beer so fast we were selling it right out of the cases. They were doing three-part harmonies on the tabletops."

EARLY fishing in Gloucester was the roughest sort of business, and one of the deadliest. As early as the 1650s, three-man crews were venturing up the coast for a week at a time in small open boats that had stones for ballast and unstayed masts. In a big wind the masts sometimes blew down. The men wore canvas hats coated with tar, leather aprons, and cowhide boots known as "redjacks." The eating was spare: for a week-long trip one Gloucester skipper recorded the

he shipped four pounds of flour, five pounds of pork fat, seven pounds of sea biscuit, and “a little New England rum.” The meals, such as they were, were eaten in the weather because there was no below-deck where the crews could take shelter. They had to take whatever God threw at them.

The first Gloucester fishing vessels worthy of the name were the thirty-foot chebaccos. They boasted two masts stepped well forward, a sharp stern, and cabins fore and aft. The bow rode the seas well, and the high stern kept out a following sea. Into the fo’c’sle were squeezed a couple of bunks and a brick fireplace where they smoked trashfish. That was for the crew to eat while at sea, cod being too valuable to waste on them. Each spring the chebaccos were scraped and caulked and tarred and sent out to the fishing grounds. Once there, the boats were anchored, and the men hand-lined over the side from the low midship rail. Each man had his spot, called a “berth,” which was chosen by lottery and held throughout the trip. They fished two lines at twenty-five to sixty fathoms (150-360 feet) with a ten-pound lead weight, which they hauled up dozens of times a day. The shoulder muscles that resulted from a lifetime of such work made fishermen easily recognizable on the street. They were called “hand-liners” and people got out of their way.

The captain fished his own lines, like everyone else, and pay was reckoned by how much fish each man caught. The tongues were cut out of the fish and kept in separate buckets; at the end of the day the skipper entered the numbers in a log book and dumped the tongues overboard. It took a couple of months for the ships to fill their holds—the fish was either dried or, later, kept on ice—and then they’d head back to port. Some captains, on a run of fish, couldn’t help themselves from loading their ship down until her decks were almost underwater. This was called deep-loading, and such a ship was in extreme peril if the weather turned ugly. The trip home took a couple of weeks, and the fish would compress under its own weight and squeeze all the excess fluid out of the flesh. The crew pumped the water over the sides, and deep-loaded Grand Bankers would gradually emerge from the sea as they sailed for port.

By the 1760s Gloucester had seventy-five fishing schooners in the water, about one-sixth of the New England fleet. Cod was so important to the economy that in 1784 a wooden effigy—the “Sacred Cod”—was hung in the Massachusetts State House by a wealthy statesman named John Rowe. Revenue from the New England codfishery alone was worth over a million dollars a year at the time of the Revolution, and John Adams refused to sign the Treaty of Paris until the British granted American fishing rights to the Grand Banks. The final agreement held that American schooners could fish in Canada’s territorial waters unhindered and come ashore on deserted parts of Nova Scotia and Labrador to salt-dry their catch.

Cod was divided into three categories. The best, known as “dun fish,” was caught in the spring and shipped to Portugal and Spain, where it fetched the highest prices. (Lisbon restaurants still offer *bacalao*, dried codfish.) The next grade of fish was sold domestically, and the worst grade—“refuse fish”—was used to feed slaves in the West Indian canefields. Gloucester merchants left for the Caribbean with holdsfull of salt cod and returned with rum, molasses, and cane sugar; when this lucrative trade was impeded by the British during the War of 1812, local captains simply left port on moonless nights and sailed smaller boats. When Georges Bank opened up in the 1830s, the first railway spur reached Gloucester in 1848, and

the first ice companies were established that same year. By the 1880s—the heyday of the fishing schooner—Gloucester had a fleet of four or five hundred sail in her harbor. It was said you could walk clear across to Rocky Neck without getting your feet wet.

Cod was a blessing but could not, alone, have accounted for such riches. In 1816, a Cape Ann fisherman named Abraham Lurvey invented the mackerel jig by attaching a steel hook to a drop-shaped piece of cast lead. Not only did the lead act as a sinker, but, jiggled up and down, it became irresistible to mackerel. After two centuries of watching these elusive fish swim past in schools so dense they discolored the sea, New England fishermen suddenly had a way to catch them. Gloucester captains ignored a federal bounty on cod and sailed for Sable Island with men in the cross-trees looking for the tell-tale darkening of mackerel in the water. “School-O!” they would shout, the ship would come around into the wind, and ground-up baitfish—“chum”—would be thrown out into the water. The riper the chum was, the better it attracted the fish; rotting chum on the breeze meant a mackerel schooner was somewhere upwind.

Jigging for mackerel worked well, but it was inevitable that the Yankee mind would come up with something more efficient. In 1855 the purse seine was invented, a 1,300-foot net of tarred twine with lead weights at the bottom and cork floats at the top. It was stowed in a dory that was towed behind the schooner, and when the fish were sighted, the dory quickly encircled them and cinched the net up tight. It was hauled aboard and the fish were split, gutted, beheaded, and thrown into barrels with salt. Sometimes the school escaped before the net was tightened and the crew drew up what was called a “water haul”; other times the net was so full that they could hardly winch it aboard.

Purse-seining passed for a glamorous occupation at the time, and it wasn’t long before codfishermen came up with their own version of it. It was called tub trawling and if it was more efficient at killing fish, it was also more efficient at killing men. No longer did groundfishermen work from the relative safety of a schooner; now they were setting out from the mother ship in sixteen-foot wooden dories. Each dory carried half a dozen 300-foot trawl lines that were coiled in tubs and hung with baited hooks. The crews rowed out in the morning, paid out their trawls, and then hauled them back every few hours. There were 1,800 hooks to a dory, ten dories to a schooner, and several hundred ships in the fleet. Groundfish had several million chances a day to die.

Pulling a third of a mile’s worth of trawl off the ocean floor was back-breaking work, though, and unspeakably dangerous in bad weather. In November of 1880, two fishermen named Lee and Devine rowed out from the schooner *Deep Water* in their dory. November was a hell of a time to be on the Grand Banks in any kind of vessel, and in a dory it was sheer insanity. They took a wave broadside while hauling their trawl and both men were thrown into the water. Devine managed to clamber back into the boat, but Lee, weighed down by boots and winter clothing, started to sink. He was several fathoms under when his hands touched the trawl line that led back up to the surface. He started to pull.

Almost immediately his right hand sunk into a hook. He jerked it away, leaving part of his finger on the barbed steel like a piece of herringbait, and kept pulling upwards towards the light. He finally broke the surface and heaved himself back into the dory. It was almost awash and Devine, who was bailing like mad, could do nothing to help him. Lee passed out

from the pain and when he came to, he grabbed a bucket and started bailing as well. They had to empty the boat before they were hit by another freak wave. Twenty minutes later they were out of danger and Devine asked Lee if he needed to go back to the schooner. Lee shook his head and said that they should finish hauling the trawls. For the next hour he pulled gear out of the water with his mangled hand. That was dory-fishing in its heyday.

There are worse deaths than the one Lee almost suffered, though. Warm Gulf Stream water meets the Labrador Current over the Grand Banks, and the result is a wall of fog that can sweep in with no warning at all. Dory crews hauling their gear have been caught by the fog and simply never seen again. In 1883, a fisherman named Howard Blackburn—still a hero in town, Gloucester's answer to Paul Bunyan—was separated from his ship and endured three days at sea during a January gale. His dory-mate died of exposure, and Blackburn had to freeze his own hands around the oar handles to continue rowing for Newfoundland. In the end he lost all his fingers to frostbite. He made land on a deserted part of the coast and staggered around for several days before finally being rescued.

Every year brought a story of survival nearly as horrific as Blackburn's. A year earlier, two men had been picked up by a South American trader after eight days adrift. They wound up in Pernambuco, Brazil, and it took them two months to get back to Gloucester. From time to time dory crews were even blown across the Atlantic, drifting helplessly with the trade winds and surviving on raw fish and dew. These men had no way to notify their families when they finally made shore; they simply shipped home and came walking back up Rogers Street several months later like men returning from the dead.

For the families back home, dory-fishing gave rise to a new kind of hell. No longer was there just the grief of losing men at sea; now there was the agony of not knowing, as well. Missing dory crews could turn up at any time, and so there was never a point at which the families knew for sure they could grieve and get on with their lives. "We saw a father go morning and evening to the hill-top which overlooked the ocean," recorded the *Provincetown Advocate* after a terrible gale in 1841. "And there seating himself, would watch for hours scanning the distant horizon ... for some speck on which to build a hope."

And they prayed. They walked up Prospect Street to the top of a steep rise called Portage Hill and stood beneath the twin bell towers of Our Lady of Good Voyage church. The bell towers are one of the highest points in Gloucester and can be seen for miles by incoming ships. Between the towers is a sculpture of the Virgin Mary, who gazes down with love and concern at a bundle in her arms. This is the Virgin who has been charged with the safety of the local fishermen. The bundle in her arms is not the infant Jesus; it's a Gloucester schooner.

AFTER Mary Anne leaves the Green Tavern, Chris and Bobby finish up their drinks and they tell Bugsy that they're going out for a while. They step out of the barroom darkness into the soft grey light of Gloucester in the rain and walk across the street to Bill's. Bobby orders a couple of Budweisers while Chris fishes a dime out of her pocket and calls her friend Thea from a pay-phone. She and Thea used to be neighbors in a housing project, and Chris thinks she might be able to borrow Thea's apartment for a while to give Bobby a proper goodbye. She wants to be alone with him for a while, and she wants to help Bugsy out if she can. It's possible Thea might be interested in him—he's leaving in a few hours for the Grand Bank

but you never know.

Thea says come by any time, and Chris hangs up and goes back to the bar. Bobby's hangover has alchemized into a huge empty hunger, and they finish off their beers and leave a buck on the bartop and head back outside. They drive across town to a lunch place called Sammy J's and order two more beers and fishcakes and beans. Fishcakes are Bobby's favorite food and he probably won't see them again until he's back on shore. The last thing fishermen want to eat at sea is more fish. They eat fast and pick up Buggy and then drive over to Ethel's. Chris has had a falling out with Ethel's boyfriend, and Chris is going to move everything she has stored there. It's still raining a little, everything seems dark and oppressive, and they carry boxes of her belongings down one flight of stairs and pack it into the Volvo. They fill the car with lamps and clothes and house plants and then squeeze themselves in and drive across town to the projects on Arthur Street.

Thea doesn't go for Buggy, as it turns out, she's already got a boyfriend. The four of them sit around talking and drinking beer for a while, and then the men have a terrible realization. They've forgotten the hotdogs. Murph, who is charged with buying food for the trip, won't get hotdogs on his own, so if they want any they'll have to get them on their own. They drive to Cape Ann Market and Bobby and Buggy run into the store and come back a few minutes later with fifty dollars' worth of hotdogs. It's midafternoon now; it's getting close. Chris drives them back down Rogers Street, past Walgreen's and Americold and Gorton's, and turns down into the gravel lot behind Rose's Marine. Bobby and Buggy get out with their hotdogs and jump from the pier to the deck of the *Andrea Gail*.

Watching the men move around the boat Chris thinks: this winter Bobby'll be down in Bradenton, next summer he'll be back up here but gone a month at a time, and that's just how it is; Bobby's a swordfisherman and owes a lot of money. At least they have a plan, though Bobby signed a statement directing Bob Brown to give his settlement check from the last trial to Chris, and she's going to use the money—almost \$3,000—to pay off some of his debts and get an apartment in Lanesville, on the north shore of Cape Ann. Maybe living out there they'll spend a little less time at the Nest. And she's got two jobs lined up, one at the Ocean Farm Inn in Rockport, and another taking care of the retarded son of a friend. They'll get by. Bobby might be away a lot, but they'll get by.

Suddenly there are shouts coming from the boat: Buggy and Bobby are standing toe to toe on the wharf in the rain, wrenching a jug of bleach back and forth. Fists are coming up and the bleach is going first one way, then another, and at any moment it looks like one of them is going to roundhouse the other. It doesn't happen; Bobby finally turns away, spitting swear words and goes back to work. Out of the corner of her eye Chris sees another fisherman named Sully angling across the gravel lot toward her car. He walks up and leans in the window.

I just got a site on the boat, he says, I'm replacin' some guy who backed out. He looks over at Bobby and Buggy. Can you believe this shit? Thirty days together and it's startin' already?

THE Andrea Gail, in the language, is a raked-stem, hard-chined western-rig swordfisherman. That means her bow has a lot of angle to it, she has a nearly-square cross-section, and her pilothouse is up front rather than in the stern, atop an elevated deck called the whaleback. She's 72 feet long, has a hull of continuously-welded steel plate, and was built in Panama City, Florida, in 1978. She has a 365-horsepower, turbo-charged diesel engine, which

capable of speeds up to twelve knots. There are seven type-one life preservers on board, six Imperial survival suits, a 406-megahertz Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB), a 121.5-megahertz EPIRB, and a Givens auto-inflating life raft. There are forty miles of 700-pound test monofilament line on her, thousands of hooks, and room for five tons of baitfish. An ice machine that can make three tons of ice a day sits on her whaleback deck, and state-of-the-art electronics fill her pilothouse: radar, loran, single-sideband, VHF, weather track satellite receiver. There's a washer/dryer on board, and the galley has fake wood veneer and a four-burner stove.

The *Andrea Gail* is one of the biggest moneymakers in Gloucester harbor, and Billy Tyne and Buggy Moran have driven all the way from Florida to grab sites onboard. The only other sword boat in the harbor that might be able to out fish her is the *Hannah Boden*, skippered by a Colby College graduate named Linda Green law. Not only is Green law one of the only women in the business, she's one of the best captains, period, on the entire East Coast. Year after year, trip after trip, she makes more money than almost anyone else. Both the *Andrea Gail* and the *Hannah Boden* are owned by Bob Brown, and they can take so much fish from the ocean that Ethel's son Ricky has been known to call in from Hawaii to find out if either one is in port. When the *Hannah Boden* unloads her catch in Gloucester, swordfish prices plummet halfway across the world.

So far, though, Billy's second trip on the *Andrea Gail* is off to a bad start. The boys have been drinking hard all week and everyone's in a foul mood. No one wants to go back out. For the past several days almost every attempt to work on the boat has degenerated either into a fight or an occasion to walk across the street to the bar. Now it's September 20th, late in the season to be heading out, and Tyne can barely round up a full crew. Alfred Pierre—a handsome, kind Jamaican from New York City—is holed up with his girl-friend in one of the upstairs rooms at the Nest. One minute he says he's going, the next minute he's not—it's been like that all day long. Bobby's somewhere across town with a black eye and a hangover. Buggy's in an ugly mood because he hasn't met a woman. Murph is complaining about money and misses his kid, and—the last straw—a new crew member walked off this morning without any explanation at all.

The guy's name was Adam Randall, and he was supposed to replace Doug Kosco, who crewed on the previous trip. Randall had driven up from East Bridgewater, Massachusetts with his father-in-law that morning to take the job; he pulled into the dirt parking lot behind Rose's and got out to look the boat over. Randall was a lithe, intensely handsome 30-year-old man with a shag of blond rock-star hair and cold blue eyes. He was a welder, an engineer, a scuba diver, and had fished his whole life. He knew an unsafe boat when he saw one—he called them "slabs"—and the *Andrea Gail* was anything but. She looked like she could take an aircraft carrier broadside. Moreover, he knew most of her crew, and his girlfriend had practically told him not to bother coming home if he didn't take the job. He hadn't worked three months. He walked back across the lot, told his father-in-law that he had a funny feeling, and the two of them drove off together to a bar.

People often get premonitions when they do jobs that could get them killed, and commercial fishing—still one of the most dangerous pursuits in the country—people get premonitions all the time. The trick is knowing when to listen to them. In 1871, a coo

named James Nelson shipped aboard the schooner *Sachem* for a fishing trip to Georges Bank. One night he was awakened by a recurring dream and ran aft to tell the captain. For God's sake get clear of the Banks, he begged, I've had my dream again. I've been shipwrecked twice after this dream.

The captain was an old salt named Wenzell. He asked what the dream was. I see women dressed in white, standing in the rain, Nelson replied.

There was hardly a breath of wind and Wenzell was not impressed. He told Nelson to get back to bed. A while later a little breeze sprang up. Within an hour it was blowing hard and the *Sachem* was hove-to under close-reefed foresail. The hull started to open up and the crew manned the pumps. They couldn't keep up with the leak, and Wenzell desperately signalled to a nearby Gloucester schooner, the *Pescador*. The *Pescador* put dories over the side and managed to save the *Sachem's* crew. Within half an hour the *Sachem* rolled over, settled bow down into the sea, and sank.

Even today, instincts are heeded and fears are listened to. Randall walked off and suddenly Tyne had another site to fill. He called around and finally got 28-year-old David Sullivan. Sully, as he's known, was mildly famous in town for having saved his entire crew one frigid January night. His boat, the *Harmony*, was tied to another boat when she began to take on water out at sea. Her crew started screaming for help but couldn't wake up the men on the other boat, so Sully jumped overboard and pulled himself across on a rope, legs dragging through the icy North Atlantic. Sullivan, in other words, was a good man to have on board.

Tyne said he'd be over to pick him up in half an hour. Sully packed a bag and made a few phone calls to tell people he'd be away for a while. Suddenly his plans for that evening were off; his life was on hold for the next month. Billy showed up around two o'clock and they drove back to Rose's just in time to see Bobby and Bugsy going at it. Wonderful, Sully thought. He stopped to say hello to Chris and then Billy sent him off to the Cape Ann Market to get the food for the trip. Murph went with him. Bulging in Sully's pocket was four thousand dollars cash.

One of the things about commercial fishing is that everything seems to be extreme. Fishermen don't work in any normal sense of the word, they're at sea for a month and then home celebrating for a week straight. They don't earn the same kind of money most other people do, they come home either busted or with a quarter million dollar's worth of fish in their hold. And when they buy food for the month, it's not something any normal person would recognize as shopping; it's a retail catastrophe of Biblical proportions.

Murph and Sully drive to the Cape Ann Market out on Route 127 and begin stalking up and down the aisles throwing food into their carts by the armful. They grab fifty loaves of bread enough to fill two carts. They take a hundred pounds of potatoes, thirty pounds of onions, twenty-five gallons of milk, eighty-dollar racks of steak. Every time they fill a cart they push it to the back of the store and get another one. The herd of carts starts to grow—ten, fifteen, twenty carts—and people stare nervously and get out of the way. Murph and Sully grab anything they want and lots of it: ice cream sandwiches, Hostess cupcakes, bacon and egg creamy peanut butter, porterhouse steaks, chocolate-coated cereal, spaghetti, lasagna, frozen pizza. They get top-of-the-line food and the only thing they don't get is fish. Finally they grab thirty cartons of cigarettes—enough to fill a whole cart—and round their carts up like s

many stainless steel cattle. The store opens two cash registers especially for them, and takes half an hour to ring them through. The total nearly cleans Sully out; he pays while Murph backs the truck up to a loading dock, and they heave the food on and then drive down to Rose's wharf. Bag by bag, they carry four thousand dollars' worth of groceries down into the fish hold of the *Andrea Gail*.

The *Andrea Gail* has a small refrigerator in the galley and twenty tons of ice in the hold. The ice keeps the baitfish and groceries from spoiling on the way out and the swordfish from spoiling on the way home. (In a pinch it can even be used to keep a dead crew member fresh—once a desperately-alcoholic old fisherman died on the *Hannah Boden*, and Linda Greenlaw had to put him down the hole because the Coast Guard refused to fly him out.) Commercial fishing simply wouldn't be possible without ice. Without diesel engines, maybe; without lorax, weather faxes, or hydraulic winches; but not without ice. There is simply no other way to get fresh fish to market. In the old days, Grand Banks fishermen used to run from Newfoundland to salt-dry their catch before heading home, but the coming of the railroads in the 1840s changed all that. Suddenly food could be moved faster than it would spoil and ice companies sprang up practically overnight to accommodate the new market. They cut ice from ponds in the winter, packed it in sawdust and then sold it to schooners in the summer months. Properly-packed ice lasted so long—and was so valuable—that traders could ship it to India and still make a profit.

The market for fresh fish changed fishing forever. No longer could schooner captains return home at their leisure with a hold full of salt cod; now it was all one big race. Several fishing schooners pulling into port at once could saturate the market and ruin the efforts of anyone following. In the 1890s, one schooner had to dump 200 tons of halibut into Gloucester harbor because she'd been beaten into port by six other vessels. Overloaded schooners built like racing sloops dashed home through fall gales with every inch of canvas showing and the decks practically awash. Bad weather sank these elegant craft by the dozen, but a lot of people made a lot of money. And in cities like Boston and New York, people were suddenly eating fresh Atlantic cod.

Little has changed. Fishing boats still make the same mad dashes for shore they were making 150 years ago, and the smaller boats—the ones that don't have ice machines—are still buying it in bulk from Cape Pond Ice, located in a low brick building between Felicia Oil and Parisi Sea foods. In the old days, Cape Pond used to hire men to carve up a local pond with huge ice-saws, but now the ice is made in row upon row of 350-pound blocks, called "cans." The cans look like huge versions of the trays in people's refrigerators. They're extracted from freezers in the floor, skidded onto elevators, hoisted to the third floor, and dragged down a runway by men wielding huge steel hooks; the men work in a building-sized refrigerator and wear shirts that say, "Cape Pond Ice—The Coolest Guys Around." The ice blocks are shoved down a chute into a steel cutting drum, where they jump and rattle in terrible spasms until a 350 pounds have been eaten down to little chips and sprayed through a hose into the hold of a commercial boat outside.

Cape Pond is one of hundreds of businesses jammed into the Gloucester waterfront. Boats come into port, offload their catch, and then spend the next week making repairs and gearing up for the next trip. A good-sized wave can bury a sword boat underwater for a few seconds.

—“It just gets real dark in here,” is how Linda Green law describes the experience—undoing the effects of a drubbing like that can take days, even weeks. (One boat came into port *twisted*.) Most boats are repaired at Gloucester Marine Railways, a haul-out place that has been in business since 1856. It consists of a massive wooden frame that rides steel rollers along two lengths of railroad track up out of the water. Six-hundred-ton boats are blocked up, lashed down, and hauled ashore by a double-shot of one-inch chain worked off a series of huge steel reduction gears. The gears were machined a hundred years ago and haven’t been touched since. There are three railways in all, one in the Inner Harbor and two out on Rocky Neck. The harbor railway is the least robust of the three and terminates in a greasy little basement, which sports a pair of strangely Moorish-looking brick arches. The other two railways are surrounded by the famous galleries and piano bars of Rocky Neck. Tourists blithely wander past machinery that could rip their summer homes right off their foundations.

The *Andrea Gail* had been touched up at the Railways, but most of her major work was done in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1987. Almost three feet were added to her stern to accommodate two 1,900-gallon fuel tanks; the whaleback deck was extended aft nine feet and a steel bulwark on the port side was raised and extended eighteen feet. In addition, 20 fuel-oil drums, seven water drums, and the ice machine were stored on the whaleback.

In all, perhaps about ten tons of steel, fuel, and machinery were added to the whaleback. The weight had been added high up, eight feet or so above the deck and perhaps twice that high above the waterline. The boat’s center of gravity had been changed just a little. The *Andrea Gail* would now sit more deeply in the water, recover from rolls a bit more slowly.

On the other hand, she could now put to sea for six weeks at a time. That, after all, was the point; and no man on the boat would have disagreed.

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