



DESPERATION

THE QUEEN OF SWANSEA

INSPIRED BY
TRUE EVENTS



GARY COLLINS

PRAISE FOR GARY COLLINS

Cabot Island

“Collins’ focus on an ordinary event taking place under extraordinary circumstances sheds a tender, respectful light on how strength of character can be forged at the anguished intersection of isolation and bereavement.”

DOWNHOME

“The story is intriguing . . .”

THE CHRONICLE HERALD

The Last Farewell

“The writing here is at its best when the danger and beauty of the sea is subtly described.” — ATLANTIC BOOKS TODAY

“*The Last Farewell* tells a true story, but Collins’ vivid description and well-realized characters make it read like a novel.” — THE CHRONICLE HERALD

“Read *The Last Farewell* not only because it is a moving historical tale of needless tragedy but also because it’s a book enriched with abundant details of Newfoundland life not so widespread anymore.” — THE PILOT

“[*The Last Farewell*:] *The Loss of the Collett* is informative and intriguing, and not merely for experienced sailors or Newfoundlanders.” — THE NORTHERN MARINER

What Colour is the Ocean?

“Delightful rhyming story.”

RESOURCE LINKS

“Scott Keating’s illustrations are an asset to the book. The double page illustrations revealing the colour of the ocean are particularly successful in conveying the moods of the ocean and the land.” — CM: CANADIAN REVIEW OF MATERIALS

“This tale, set by the sea in Newfoundland, is told in a simple repetitive refrain that will capture the imagination of young readers. . . . Illustrations by Scott Keating, award-winning artist and illustrator, capture the beauty of Newfoundland and the many seasons and moods of the ocean.” — ATLANTIC BOOKS TODAY

Soulis Joe’s Lost Mine

“There is a magic in the interior of this island that few will write about or speak of to others—an endless fascination with the land. Gary Collins is entranced in the same way that the allure of rock, tree, and bog seized the indomitable Allan Keats, and before him, his ancestor, the Mi’kmaq Soulis Joe. This book gives voice not only to these men but to the great and wonderful wilderness of Newfoundland. Read it and be prepared for the wonder and love of the wild places. It will grab and hold on to you, too.” — J.A. RICKETTS, AUTHOR OF *THE BADGER RIOT*

“Soulis Joe’s Lost Mine is a number of stories in one: it’s a great mystery-adventure; it’s a fascinating look at prospecting for precious metals; and it’s a heart-warming story about the importance of family pride.”

THE CHRONICLE HERALD

“This tale also serves to cement Collins’ status as one of the region’s better storytellers; he has a journalist’s eye for detail, his writing is crisp and lean and the narrative arc runs smooth and seamless and is well-peppered with shakes of home-spun humour.” — ATLANTIC BOOKS TODAY

Where Eagles Lie Fallen

“Some truly breathtaking stories of tragedy . . .”

THE NORTHEAST AVALON TIMES

*“A gripping story,
which cuts to the true heart of tragedy.”*

DOWNHOME

Mattie Mitchell: Newfoundland’s Greatest Frontiersman

“[Gary Collins] weaves the various threads of the story into a marvellous yarn—all the more marvellous because it is true.”

THE NORTHEAST AVALON TIMES

A Day on the Ridge

“The 22 pieces in [*A Day on the Ridge*] vary considerably: a serious accident to a man canoeing with a friend down a remote and dangerous river; the life and death of a big bull moose; coming home from the woods for Christmas; the New Year’s Day Orange Parade and getting caught in an otter trap—and escaping from it. Every one of these pieces is exciting and well worth reading; each is well-written, too. This may be Collins’ best book, though his other six rank high, too.”

THE PEI GUARDIAN

The Gale of 1929

“This book is gripping . . .”

THE PEI GUARDIAN

“Not unlike the seasoned schoonermen battling the famous gale, Collins manages to navigate his way around each story as seen through the eyes of the characters involved. It may be that I, myself, had an affinity for the characters, having been through a similar situation on a 115-foot schooner. But, it felt to me like Collins took me up and down each wave, and let me inside each heroic task of survival.” — ARTS EAST

A Time That Was

“Collins’s gift is that of capturing real people and real lives.” — THE NORTHEAST AVALON TIMES

“A book to re-read every Christmas.”

THE PEI GUARDIAN

“Readers disheartened by the panic shopping and often forced conviviality of the holiday season will rejoice in the sagas of family, community, triumph and travail that native Newfoundland writer Gary Collins delivers in A Time That Was.” — THE CHRONICLE HERALD

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T H E Q U E E N O F S W A N S E A

BY GARY COLLINS

DESPERATION

A TIME THAT WAS

LEFT TO DIE

THE GALE OF 1929

A DAY ON THE RIDGE

MATTIE MITCHELL

WHERE EAGLES LIE FALLEN

SOULIS JOE'S LOST MINE

WHAT COLOUR IS THE OCEAN?

THE LAST FAREWELL

CABOT ISLAND

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T H E Q U E E N O F S W A N S E A

Gary Collins

FLANKER PRESS LIMITED
ST. JOHN'S

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Collins, Gary, 1949-, author

Desperation : The Queen of Swansea / Gary Collins.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-77117-551-7 (paperback).--ISBN 978-1-77117-552-4

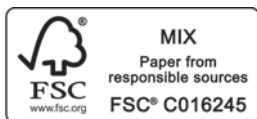
(epub).--ISBN 978-1-77117-553-1 (kindle).--ISBN 978-1-77117-554-8 (pdf)

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from Library and Archives Canada.

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PRINTED IN CANADA



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Cover Design by Graham Blair

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ST. JOHN'S, NL
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WWW.FLANKERPRESS.COM

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Newfoundland
Labrador

We acknowledge the [financial] support of the Government of Canada. *Nous reconnaissons l'appui [financier] du gouvernement du Canada.* We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country. *Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 153 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.* We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation for our publishing activities.

I dedicate the entirety of this work to my wonderful daughter Nicole, who saw in my scribbling what I did not. Without her tenacity I would not be on anyone's bookshelf, nor would I have experienced the pure joy of writing. Her recognition is ten books overdue.

THE *QUEEN* OF SWANSEA

CREW

John Owens — Captain
Thomas Morgan — First Mate
Edward Price — Bosun
John Herrickson — Seaman
Charles Fert — Seaman
Otto Luhrus — Seaman
Domingo Talbot — Seaman
John Russell — Cook
John Duggan — Pilot

PASSENGERS

Dr. Felix Dowsley
William Hoskins
Grenalda Hoskins
Thomas Power
Caroline Stitson
William Kennedy

Introduction

Out to Gull Island, Cape St. John

To begin the research for the tale you are about to read, I decided to start where it had all so brutally ended—on Gull Island, Cape St. John, just a few miles to the east of Cape St. John in the most northerly reach of Green Bay, which is in the largest of all Newfoundland bays, the far-reaching Notre Dame Bay. Getting to the island was problematic for me. I lived close to a five-hour drive away—by road, not by sea—and knew no one in the area. Then I remembered a relative of mine and discovered one of my cousins, Beryl Brown (née Collins) had a daughter, Yvonne, who was married to Carl Bath, a fisherman in La Scie. And just like that one of the surprising connections we find all over this wonderful island was made. Problem solved.

Carl and I left for Gull Island on an August day in 2015. The day was overcast and dull but pleasant enough, with a light southwest wind blowing. With our scant gear stowed aboard,

the twin outboard engines were fired up. The lines were slipped fore and aft, and our twenty-six-foot fishing skiff slipped smoothly away from the Bath family wharf in La Scie harbour, grey and calm.

The U-shaped La Scie harbour, steeped in French history, did not offer a natural safe harbour to seagoing vessels for its first inhabitants long past. But the riches swimming free and for the taking, barely outside the rote of the sea, would not be denied. For generations fishermen have clung to the way of the sea in this bowl-like cove below the mountain ridges open to the wiles of the North Atlantic Sea.

The term “La Scie” in the French language means “saw.” And the French fishermen of the past *saw* good reason to inhabit this cove just inside the sea grounds abounding with many species of fish, and especially the king of all saltwater fishes—the codfish. There is evidence that the French occupied the north shore of the Baie Verte Peninsula as early as 1713, immediately following the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht between several European countries, including France and England. Among the terms agreed to in the Dutch city of Utrecht was the ceding, by France to England, of all its land claims in Rupert’s Land, in Canada’s north, as well as its claims to the island of Newfoundland. France did, however, hold on to its fishing rights all along what was to be forever known as the French Shore of Newfoundland.

La Scie was the first French fishing station north of the southern boundary of the French Shore agreed to in 1763. Relations between France and England were never good. And in 1883, after more than one hundred years of using La Scie as its migratory fishing premises (they were not allowed to set up permanent residence there), the French vacated La Scie for

good. However, the following year, a French man-of-war, her French flag fluttering proud on her main trucks, sailed into the harbour, her sides heaving from the pitch of the Atlantic. Her sails came clattering down the masts as she hove to without releasing her anchor. Then, without further warning, the ship opened up with a deafening broadside of cannon fire. The first two rounds were rangefinders and did little damage except for sending puffs of gravel into the air well above the destitute French hovels. After many angry curses aboard the vessel, the gunners took better aim and finally destroyed all of their countrymen's belongings in La Scie. The ship was promptly turned about, and as it slipped down harbour, its sails were hauled aloft with much creaking of blocks and yelling of foreign orders. Presently the ship sailed away, heading north, until it was hull down in the sea. It did not return. And soon the rich fishing grounds as well as the lands around La Scie were occupied by English-speaking fishermen.

Today the heave of the ocean is held back by two great breakwaters of tumbled boulders to the starboard and port entrances of the harbour. Tucked neatly and safe inside the port breakwater is the pride of La Scie, the largest fleet of northern fishing vessels on the coast. They are equipped to fish hundreds of miles to sea from this harbour for shrimp, crab, turbot, halibut, seals, and everything else the wild sea has to offer to fishers who are enterprising. Carl pointed all of this and more out to me as we sailed by.

Outside the breakwaters we met the first of the rollers that came floating like soft grey hills toward us. The day being overcast, the sea had a dull grey colour with glints of steely, almost molten light upon it as our skiff sped down into the leaden troughs and

eagerly rose over the hillocks of water. The land to our left gave way to the infinite, open ocean. The land to starboard reached high and mighty out of the sea where only the birds could scale. Beyond the clifftops the land, hilly and forested, reached into the distance. In places the face of the cliffs rose sheer so that we might as well have been riding across the grey, undulating floor of a one-sided walled canyon.

I was fascinated by the rock strata we were passing. It looked granitoid or possibly gabbro to me. I thought I could see diorite intrusions and ultramafic phases in many places. I was pretty sure there was also evidence of felsic volcanic rock as well as some kind of sandstone. The colours were a mix of grey and black with hemetic hues suggesting hidden minerals. There was evidence of the earth's long-ago bending, folding, and awesome upheaval everywhere. My years of prospecting for minerals put me in good stead as I studied the rocks we were passing.

In fact, Al Keats and I had explored this very area some years ago, farther inland, and had discovered rocks supporting high levels of uranium. My musing about distant rocks and minerals was pleasantly jolted back aboard our skiff by Carl's voice, loud over the roar of the engine and the wash of the waves against the hull.

"Out there is where I was born! On Horse Islands. The best place in the world, I thought it was! Still do, in a way. No one lives there anymore, of course. Joey Smallwood and his government crowd took care of that long ago," Carl said. He was pointing off to the north, where two low-lying islands appeared etched in the summer haze. Horse Islands was just one of many islands that the people had been forced to vacate by the Smallwood administration in the 1950s and 1960s. It was widely known as the

resettlement program. I always referred to it as the desettlement program. No one who had been forced to leave their island home has ever disagreed with me.

"Some fine trap berths along here, I'll tell ya—well, used to be," said Carl. "None of them big old cod traps with their twine doors and walls fathoms deep used anymore. B'y, it was something to see. Trap skiffs with the cod flicking over the gunnels of the boats, they were so full." Carl's eyes gleamed with the memory.

"Right there!" He pointed eagerly with an outstretched arm. "That place is still known among us fishermen as *the golden-cup berth!*"

The *golden cup*? My God! The name conjured up scenes of plenty and a bounty from the sea worthy of Jason and Odysseus of old and of the stalwart Newfoundland fishermen of not so long ago. With no prompting from me, Carl described landmarks with great pride. I could tell he was proud to be a part of it. He described them so well I could almost see the patina drip from the iron bolts which had been driven into the cliff crevices to secure the cod traps. There were steep gulches and deep shadowy caves everywhere.

"And up there just coming abeam of us, atop that highest cliff, is *the man behind the gun!* Nothing to do with fishing, though, other than being a fine mark for the fishing grounds." Carl smiled easily at me as he pointed upward. I looked up. And sure enough, on the very edge of the cliff stood a rock formation which did indeed resemble a man crouched behind a pointing gun. And not just any gun, but a huge cannon aiming for a phantom ship below the cliffs. Carl explained that during the last war the fishermen used to call it *the German behind the gun*.

Waterfalls, with earth-coloured torrents, narrow of girth but of heights which would dwarf Niagara, came down from

the cliff edges and fell into the rolling sea at their bases. On we steamed. I was enjoying the trip immensely. We were nearing a headland which jutted out with great prominence from the surrounding cliffs. "Northern Bill," said Carl as we came up to the headland.

"Cape St. John?" I queried.

"What? Oh—yeah. We call it the Northern Bill 'round here," he said. Seeing as there was a Northern Bill, I naturally assumed there must be a Southern Bill. "Oh yes there is," exclaimed an energetic Carl. "And not only that! There is a Middle Bill, too." And so there was—plainly seen after Carl had pointed it out to me—where the three serrated promontories known as the North, Middle, and Southern Bills which dominate the south end of the Baie Verte Peninsula.

We rounded the Northern Bill— or Cape St. John, call it what you will. And then! There, rising unexpectedly and state-ly out of the sea, five or so miles eastward and looking like a huge black and foreboding triangular island jutting up from the ocean, was the object of my research: Gull Island, Cape St. John.

The seas were rougher here beyond the Northern Bill. There was a brisk southwest wind blowing out of the maw of Green Bay and there were wind lops blowing across the swells rushing into the bay. All of it had to be taken into consideration. Carl, with sure hand and wise in the way of the sea, altered course for the island. Manoeuvring our boat to take the pitch of the wind on her starboard quarter, we sailed out over the huge expanse of the bounding sea. I loved it all: the bite of the wind, the roll of the sea and the pitch of the board, the sting and the salty taste of the spray that at times came over the windward gunnel.

I had often wondered where my love and my complete lack of fear of the open sea came from. My grandfather was a Labrador schooner man from Greenspond who was said to be fearless. Maybe his gene was still alive and coursing through the veins of his “woodsman” grandson!

My first impression of Gull Island as we approached was a weird feeling that this island should not be there. There were no foaming breakers. No white swells breaking over hidden reefs or shoals. There were no rocky islets around which seabirds circled. There was nothing but that looming island to break that great plain of water: just the endless sea reaching to the humped horizon and the black, unmoving island upon the sea before our eyes. The island was right in the way of ships coming up out of the sea and sailing into the north side of Notre Dame Bay. I knew there was a solar-powered light on it now, but at the time of the incident I was researching—in 1867—there was no light at all. We rode out over the rise and fall of the sea as softly as if we were on a magic carpet.

Suddenly, something was cutting through the top of the roller ahead of us with terrific speed! As suddenly as it had appeared, it disappeared. “Squid hounds!” cried Carl, though their appearance to me had been so quick as to defy recognition. Then they appeared again, several of them, flashing and glancing at the cutwater level of the boat. They were as swift as bluefin tuna. Their dorsal fins twisted and their sleek bodies sent them weaving with great speed, sheering through the water alongside and just ahead of our boat. Their grey forms, just for an instant, glinted below the surface as they appeared. Then with a frothy flash at the surface just enough to show off, they were gone again. Far ahead of us we could see a school of them bursting in and out of the water as they raced away. They were a delight to behold. They



Gary Collins was born in a small, two-storey house by the sea in the town of Hare Bay, Bonavista North. He finished school at Brown Memorial High in the same town. He spent forty years in the logging and sawmilling business with his father, Theophilus, and son Clint. Gary was once Newfoundland's youngest fisheries guardian. He managed log drives down spring rivers for years, spent seven seasons driving tractor-trailers over ice roads and the Beaufort Sea of Canada's Western Arctic, and has been involved in the crab, lobster, and cod commercial fisheries. In 2016, he joined the Canadian Rangers.

Gary's writing career began when he was asked to write eulogies for deceased friends and family. Now a critically acclaimed author, he has written eleven books, including the children's illustrated book *What Colour is the Ocean?*, which he co-wrote with his granddaughter, Maggie Rose Parsons. That book won an Atlantic Book Award: The Lillian Shepherd Memorial Award for Excellence in Illustration. His book *Mattie Mitchell: Newfoundland's Greatest Frontiersman* has been adapted for film.

Gary Collins is Newfoundland and Labrador's favourite storyteller, and today he is known all over the province as "the Story Man." His favourite pastimes are reading, writing, and playing guitar at his log cabin. He lives in Hare Bay, Newfoundland, with his wife, the former Rose Gill. They have three children and three grandchildren.

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