

RED JACK

~ A NOVEL ~



Gary Collins

PRAISE FOR GARY COLLINS

Cabot Island

“Collins’s 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’s 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*] 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’s 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’s 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

Left to Die

“Gary Collins has written a powerful, gut-wrenching book that, at least, deserves a place on the same bookshelf as *Death on the Ice*, if not on a shelf above.”

THE SOUTHERN GAZETTE

“Gary Collins delivers a powerful reminder that the 1914 sealing disaster shouldn’t be dismissed as an act of God or a freak tragedy. The men on the SS *Newfoundland*, and their fathers and grandfathers before them, faced treacherous working conditions and risked their lives every year just to get by. *Left to Die* helps to ensure that their struggle and stories will be remembered.”

CANADA’S HISTORY

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 of 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

Desperation: The Queen of Swansea

“I loved this book, I could find no fault with it, no low points, no extraneous material and, certainly, no boring passages or ramblings. Mr. Collins is clearly at the top of his storytelling game.” — THE MIRAMICHI READER

“*Desperation: The Queen of Swansea* is a must-read.”

EDWARDS BOOK CLUB

The Last Beothuk

“*The Last Beothuk*, which includes some photos, a bibliography outlining [Gary Collins’s] research, and a select glossary of Beothuk words, is a novel addition to the subject.” — THE TELEGRAM

“Gary Collins has given life to the saga of Kop and his family. Their search for others of their dwindling tribe, and the losses Kop faces at the hands of encroaching white settlers, makes a gripping story. Collins has obviously done his research, and I learned a great deal about Beothuk life, culture, and language as I read of Kop’s heartbreaking struggle. The author’s knowledge of his native Newfoundland—the geography, flora, and fauna—provides a rich and detailed backdrop to this moving tale.” — HISTORICAL NOVELS REVIEW

“*The Last Beothuk* has come to us, not only from the pages of history but from the brilliant mind of Mr. Collins, as he tells yet another forgotten story of Newfoundland. The record of relations between Europeans and any of Canada’s Indigenous peoples is definitely not a pleasant one, so the reader may be left somewhat disheartened after finishing *The Last Beothuk*. Nevertheless, we can take eminent satisfaction in the certainty that the now extinct Beothuk’s story has been well-told by one of Canada’s master storytellers.” — THE MIRAMICHI READER

The Crackie

“If you’ve never read a Gary Collins book, *The Crackie* would make an excellent introduction to his storytelling and writing ability. Another five-star gem from Mr. Collins! As such, I’ve added it to the 2019 long list for a ‘Very Best!’ Book Award for Fiction.” — THE MIRAMICHI READER

The Place

“Mr. Collins’s writing style and storytelling abilities are spellbinding and I read this cover to cover in a few hours. All in all, *The Place* is another well-executed Newfoundland novel from one of my favourite living authors.”

THE MIRAMICHI READER

“*The Place* is worthy of a read, combining as it does [Gary Collins’s] usual meticulous research with his undeniably strong storytelling.” — THE NORTHEAST AVALON TIMES

RED JACK

BY GARY COLLINS

NON-FICTION

Cabot Island
The Last Farewell
Soulis Joe's Lost Mine
Where Eagles Lie Fallen
Mattie Mitchell
A Day on the Ridge
The Gale of 1929
Left to Die
A Time That Was
Desperation

FICTION

The Last Beothuk

The Crackie
The Place
Redjack

CHILDREN'S ILLUSTRATED

What Colour is the Ocean?

RED JACK

A NOVEL

G a r y C o l l i n s

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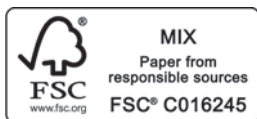
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TELEPHONE: (709) 739-4477 FAX: (709) 739-4420 TOLL-FREE: 1-866-739-4420

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*To my daughter Robin I dedicate all the thoughts within.
She will understand.*

For with the rising of each new sun
comes the chance for redemption.

Prologue

The man everyone called Redjack came to sluggish consciousness lying in the bottom of a heaving punt. His nose was broken, one of his nostrils was caked with dried blood, and his breathing was ragged. His right ribs were sore, and he ached all over. A sly rain seeped out of a steely sky. He was soaked, shivering, and thirsty. He crawled to peer over the punt's gunnel and could see nothing but grey, undulating swells coming at him. The sky was dull, lacklustre, so that he could not guess the time of day. The punt lurched with his movement and pitched sideways on the swells. Every bone in his body was in agony.

He was adrift on the open Atlantic Sea somewhere off the northeast coast of Newfoundland—he was not sure where—after taking a severe beating from his only son. A lone seagull hovered silently above him like a vulture. The seagull, when he moved, and seeing he was still alive, plopped into the sea near the punt and swam alongside, waiting. Suddenly very thirsty, he crawled forward to the cuddy.

GARY COLLINS

The water Redjack tipped into his mouth from the earthen jug, lodged in the makeshift cuddy of the punt, was as brown as English tea. Drawn from the island well, it was tepid but slaked his thirst. He could see no land in any direction. He was tossing in heavy swell, and the punt was leaking. Pressing his left forefinger against his left nostril, he blew out of his right, dislodging flakes of dried blood. He breathed better and stumbled to his feet for a look around.

Redjack could see nothing but an endless expanse of rolling sea breaching with white flecks. There was no sun to give him direction, just a blind, mindless, unfeeling sky. The wind was brisk, damp, and cold. An east wind, the fisherman in him figured. The punt was drifting broadside to the wind, tipping on the crests and rolling in the troughs like a child on a tottering swing.

Gripping the punt's short mast, Redjack laboriously hauled his aching body upright. It hurt like hell. His nose dripped new blood. He remembered the instant his son's fist had slammed into his nose like a bung hammer. Redjack remembered the blood, the cursing between father and son, the anger in his son's eyes as Redjack collapsed upon the lungers of the stagehead. He remembered clambering down aboard his punt and settling, stunned, upon its floorboards. His son had untied the punt's painter and thrown it aboard. The leaving tide had taken him out of the harbour and out to the open sea.

Except for the saddleback gull swimming abaft the punt and eyeing him askance, the sea was bereft of life and land. In his duffle underneath the punt's makeshift cuddy, Redjack had one piece of salt-dried cod, one cake of hardtack bread, and less than half a jug of water. But he wasn't afraid. He was seldom afraid of anything. Still figuring the wind was from

REDJACK

the east, and knowing the land had to be somewhere west, he hauled the sheep's leg aloft and tied the sheet fast to the dildo. The punt reeled in the wind, her stern released bubbles of way, and with tiller in hand, Redjack pointed her bluff bows west. The lone seagull, now soaring soundlessly above and glaring down into the punt, followed. Feeling weak, Redjack lay down under the canvas roof of the cuddy as the punt skipped along and the waves hissed by her shallow hull. The lone sail luffed, and Redjack either went to sleep or lost consciousness again.

* * * * *

He was awakened by the cessation of the same motions that had put him to sleep. There was no rain, and the wind had died. The sail had spent its thrust, and the punt was barely moving forward. Two gulls now swam alongside the boat. Redjack, feeling stronger, lurched to his feet. His hand went to his aching nose. It hurt like hell at his touch, but though sitting askew to his face, it seemed to be attached. He blew more dried, black blood out of his nostrils and looked around. He had been right about the wind direction. There was a brilliant, horizon-wide band of gloaming just below a sombre sky, and leaning against the twilight to the west was the silhouette of the island from which he had been cast.

Cowardly east wind, Redjack thought. 'Twas no more than an evenin's puff. Lasted another hour and I would have been well up the bight. Now I'll have to row.

He moved to the middle thwart just abaft the cuddy door flaps, shipped the oars over the gunnels, and settled the withes over the thole-pins. Redjack's hands and arms were strong, had

GARY COLLINS

always been. He dug the oars deep into the evening water, pulled hard, and screamed in pain. Several of his right ribs felt like a razor blade had been drawn across them. In misery, he shipped the oars back aboard, where they clattered across the thwarts. Then he noticed the two gulls following the punt were not swimming yet kept abreast the punt. The tide was in its flood stage, pouring like a mighty river up the bays and carrying the punt with it.

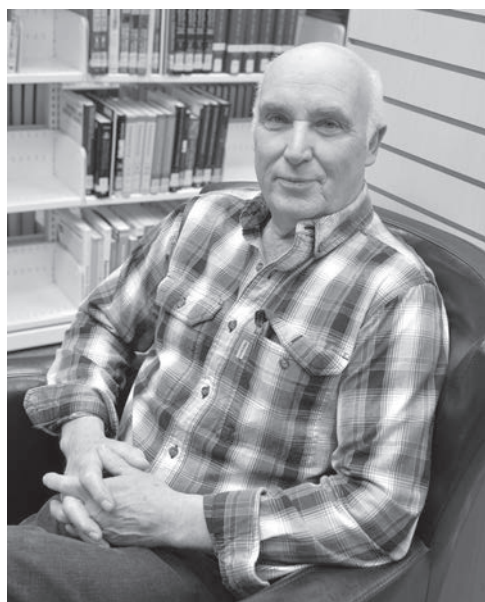
Redjack snagged the sail sheet tight as a drum to catch the flood tide and the remaining breeze. Then he clawed his way aft and shipped the sculling oar out through the oval scull hole. He knew he had only a couple of hours before the tide ebbed out of the bay just as fast as it was now flowing in. He steered southwest, away from the island where his son had beaten and humiliated him, and moved instead up the shadowy reach to whatever fate had reserved for him.

1

His name was Jacob, and he went by Jake. Everyone called him the Crackie behind his back. He came by the name at an early age. As he grew, he was pretty good at shooting seabirds and seals. And during the war, he was lance corporal and sniper in the battle over Suvla Bay in the Dardanelles. He became pretty good at that, too. Jake was a real crack shot, they said. The nickname Crackie persisted. After a while, he didn't mind the use of it as much as he had when he was younger. It was a curse to him then. It was more like an endearment now.

Jake would know the roar of ships' cannons anywhere. And what he was hearing now, though far away south over the sea, was the sound of cannon fire. Naval cannon. He was sure of it. With the endless barrage of Suvla Bay still haunting his nights, he would know the sound anywhere. But this was a beautiful sunny July day in 1919, on his small island home off the north-east coast of Newfoundland, where the war had not come.

The greatest of wars, deemed the war to end all wars, was long over. It had ended last year on November 11, though it was



Gary Collins was born in Hare Bay, Bonavista North. He spent fifty 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 has written fifteen 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's first novel, *The Last Beothuk*, won the inaugural NL Reads literary competition, administered by the CBC, and was long-listed for the International Dublin Literary Award.

Gary Collins is Newfoundland and Labrador's favourite storyteller, and today he is known all over the province as the Story Man. He lives in Hare Bay with his wife, the former Rose Gill. They have three children and seven grandchildren.

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