

pitch black, not the faintest glimmer of the moon could be discerned.

Through the interminable darkness McNaughton watched anxiously for the first suggestion of daylight. At last it came. Toward the east a long rift widened in the clouds, and behind the pale blue of the sky was visible. The gale slackened down for an hour or so, and there seemed to be almost a prospect of calm weather. Then the clouds closed together, and, as if making up for the temporary lull, the tornado hurled itself on again with greater force than before.

Lomass touched him on the arm.

"See there," he shouted, pointing. "Them's net stakes over yonder. We're about a mile off 'em, and anyhow we'd miss those even if we was swept in. But we're almost sure to hit the next ones lower down."

Away to the left, they could see the shore about two miles distant, and nearer by fully half that, the deadly net stakes. Once on them, the raft was as good as lost.

"If the Sarnia Bay's tugs don't show up soon, we're gone gooses," replied McNaughton. "Have the tugs pull straight out. All we can do is to hold off now."

The tugs swept round and headed directly out to sea. Their bows cut deep into the hollows of the waves and the icy spray dashed in torrents over their decks. For two hours they pulled, and, for a time, it looked as if they were gaining. Then they passed the next net. The stern of the raft cleared it by not more than fifty feet!

"We'll be half-way up the next line o' stakes," growled Currie; "an' then it'll be all hands to the tugs, an' cut loose quick if we don't want some holes punched in. A land on a net stake, or a big log head on into our hull, 'll sink us sure."

"Crowd on every pound of steam the boilers will hold," ordered McNaughton. "We must keep outside the next stakes at all costs; then, after we pass that, there isn't another for a mile."

All at once something jerked. The cable on the rear tug had snapped like a flash, every man on the raft was running for that end. The tug, suddenly released, had pulled away from the timbers, and was now doing her utmost to get back. By the time the

damage was repaired, over fifteen minutes of valuable time had been lost, and they were almost on the top of the stakes.

Then Long John made a wild jump for safety. The raft had struck! The stake came up through the timbers right where he had been standing. Two logs floated loose, and drifted off toward shore. But, after all, the net-stake proved their salvation; it held them fast.

For over three hours the net stake was all that stood between them and certain destruction on the beach. This way and that it swayed with the wild rushes of the water; but, despite the most frantic drives of the gale, it remained firm enough to hold them. Noon came around, and the men, gulping a bite to eat, hurried outside again to be ready for the crisis whenever it might come.

It was not until the hands of McNaughton's watch had passed two that relief arrived. Then Lacroix sighted two tugs in the west making through the water as fast as steam could drive them. It was a full hour later, however, before they were fast to the raft, and not a moment too soon either, for, as the last lashing was completed, and the first strain taken, the net stake, swayed by the tremendous load it had been supporting, gave way, and toppled over.

As evening fell, the lighthouse at the "Rapids" loomed up into view, and as dusk turned into darkness, the four tugs, two in front, and two behind, guiding the raft between them, went flying down into smooth water and the St. Clair.

McNaughton had made good his promise.

* * * * *

"McNaughton," said Haliburton, "we need a superintendent to look after this work who's got sense enough to see a little ahead of the game, the way you did when you ordered those tugs to meet you. The fellow with brains enough to see that things are done right is a better man for this kind of a job than the chap that tries to do it all himself. We'd like to have you take it. What do you say; will you?"

"Thanks!" replied McNaughton. "If you're willing to take chances on me, I'll tackle it. But I thought—"

"Yes," interjected Murphy, "that's just the reason we want you."