



# CHAPTER ONE



SHORTLY before his seventeenth birthday, Davey Haskell caught his first glimpse of unimaginable wealth. Not just the fancy clothes and automobiles, but the sick-making, absolute, Astor-Rockefeller-Vanderbilt sort of wealth.

It happened on a warm evening in the late summer of 1913. The Atlantic horizon was dotted with sails. With a fading sea breeze behind them, the shabby Deer Isle fishing fleet were heading back in to Stonington Harbor from rocky coves and inlets all around Penobscot Bay. It had been another dreadful day for Davey and his brother—the latest of many. Their lobster pots were empty. A few pathetic flounders and one or two sardines flapped in the bilges of their leaky fishing sloop<sup>1</sup>.

Davey sat cross-legged in the bows, sifting through his gill nets, humming to himself. To hide the acne on his forehead, he'd let his tousled fair hair grow until he could hardly see out. His skinny forearms were criss-crossed with scars from hauling up the barnacle-covered traps. His brother Jacob, at twenty-one, was more rugged, with deep-set eyes and a square chin. Jake was perched on the sloop's stern, a rolled-up smoke between his lips, trimming the mainsheet with one leathery hand and steering with the other.

Jacob grunted: "Here's trouble."

A gaff-rigged catboat was rounding the iron marker buoy off Sam

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<sup>1</sup> There is a Glossary of Sailing Terms and sail plan diagrams at the end of this book

Stick Ledge. It wasn't hard to make out Bill Otley at the tiller, with his lank black hair and weathered sea coat. He was from the West Bay fleet—their sworn enemies.

Jacob said under his breath: “The other lot ain't fared much better, by the look of things.”

“Who's the ginger bloke with the sour puss?” Davey whispered.

“I'll tell you later.”

Otley's mate on the foredeck was a grisly older lobsterman with a high, sun-baked forehead, and stringy reddish hair pushed back into a wool cap. He tipped a bucket of undersized lobsters off the bow with a plop. When he spotted the brothers watching him, he scowled and spat a gob of sputum over the side.

“Billy Otley!” Jacob shouted across the water, “anything feedin'?”

Otley just fixed his gaze straight ahead, his arm draped over the tiller.

Jacob steered a little closer, close enough to see the pockmarks on Otley's craggy face, and hailed him again. “Hey Bill, race you back to the harbor? I'll wager your catch against ours.”

*Bad idea*, Davey thought. Otley's hull number was DW63—his catboat was nearly new. Their own clinker sloop, DE14, was twenty years older, with a mainsail like a yellowing tearag. Their Pa built her by hand before Davey was born.

But they'd got Otley's attention. He flicked a glance their way. “What've you got there, Haskell?”

Jacob reached down into the bottom of the boat and rattled an empty lobster pot. “Five red fatties,” he said, with a sly wink to Davey, “couple of keepers, and a bucket of cod. You up for it?”

Davey was trying to stifle a laugh. “You're a lying sod, Jake,” he muttered through the side of his mouth. “What happens when he susses us out?”

They were only a boat-length apart now, and Otley's mate leaned forward, his grizzled hands gripping the gunwale. He had a grating, adenoidal whine: “We could lick you sailing *backwards*, Jake Haskell—you and that weird little brother of yours.”

Jacob shrugged. “Come on then, you old buggers! We'll race you *backwards*.”

“—and we’ll beat the shite out of you, an’ all!” Davey yelled, pulling himself up to his full height. He wished his voice was deeper, more like his brother’s.

The freckled one bared a single gold tooth, hissing with laughter. “Backwards, eh?” He grinned at Otley who nodded his head. “You’re on. But you fuckers ain’t got no chance. Last boat to Powder House Island hands over the whole day’s catch.” Otley threw the tiller over, and the catboat jibed away in a sheet of foam.

Both crews jumped to it. It was a routine they were used to—they often had to sail backwards to pick up a string of lobster traps. “You steer, titch,” Jacob said, and he made his way forward shoving pots, oars, anchor and tarpaulin into the bows. Then he planted his feet with his back to the mast. “Bring her up nice and slow.”

Taking the helm, Davey hauled in the mainsheet and carved a smooth turn into the eye of the wind. The sloop came to a near standstill, sail flapping, bobbing in the chop. Jacob leaned his broad muscular arms back against the boom, forcing it steadily out until it touched the shroud. At first the sail just acted as a brake; but as it filled with wind from the wrong side, their sloop started to move through the water in reverse, slowly at first, then picking up speed. Davey could feel the fragile balance of forces acting on his rudder. It took a few moments to find the sweet spot; he leaned his weight one way or the other to help steer, careful not to over-correct. It came naturally to him. It was just physics.

Otley’s catboat was on a parallel course, fifty feet away. The two fishing boats were neck-and-neck now, ploughing stern first through the foamy water. The West Bay boat should have been faster, with her newer sail and cleaner bottom; but Bill yanked awkwardly on the tiller, and his freckly mate at the boom was slighter and punier than Jacob. A stone’s throw from Powder House Island, it was plain that Davey and Jacob were in the lead. Pulling away, they led past the tip of the island by three clear boat-lengths. Jacob was grinning ear to ear; he started singing *Spanish Ladies*, as if to rub salt in the wound. The West Bay pair looked dejected.

Davey spun the little sloop beam-on and let his mainsail flog. When

Bill Otley pulled the catboat alongside with a bump, his face was grave. “Reckon you’ve earned this, you lads, fair and square,” his ginger-haired mate said, and he dumped the entire contents of a metal bait pail over the side of the brothers’ sloop: herring heads, fish guts in seawater, and a few anemic-looking black eels.

Cackling, Otley hauled in his sail and took off towards the western harbor. Davey was left staring down into the pool of fish guts around his bare ankles. The red-haired one hung back off a shroud, gave them the finger, and rasped: “Apple don’t fall far from the tree, eh lads?”

Davey plucked a string of cod viscera out of his rolled-up pant leg. He stared after the catboat, a foul taste in his mouth. “You know him, that ginger geezer?”

“Ayuh, his name’s Gardie Greene. Nasty piece of work. I’d give that sod a wide berth next time, kid.”

By the time the brothers reached the breakwater, the breeze had died to a balmy nothing. It was already half-dark, and spectral patches of fog settled on the water. They dropped the sail and took to their oars, slipping between a couple of rusty dredgers at anchor. The tide was out, and the sloop’s wake rippled along mudbanks that burped bad gases. The cranes and warehouses were deserted, with nets spread to dry on empty crates. A stench hung in the air. It was a Deer Isle evening, just like any other.

Davey Haskell had smelled that stench every day of his life. He was born here on the island, and he’d seldom ventured beyond the Penobscot Bay fishing grounds. He never had money or prospects. He wasn’t swarthy, or good at sweet-talking the ladies like his brother. The local Catholic school didn’t amount to much—Father Michael was more of a toucher than a teacher. But Stonington had a small public library, with all twenty-nine volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. He pored over them, any chance he could get, and made copious notes and drawings in his sketchbook. He mainly liked geography, boatbuilding, and navigation. Anything else he needed to know of the world, he could read in mystery magazines like *Argosy*, *The Thrill Book*, and *Top Notch*.

Plus he'd been to the motion picture house in Bangor—twice!

Ma said he had his Pa's eyes, pale like the dawn sky. But he could thread a course through that harbor in pitch darkness, or eyes closed. With his scrawny arms and narrow shoulders, he kept his oar in precise step with the sound of Jacob's, matching him stroke for stroke.

Jacob took a hand off his oar to squish a black-fly on the back of his neck. His dark hair was tied back with string, and he'd unbuttoned his checkered shirt to the belt. Jake didn't talk much when he was working, especially on a day like today, when the catch was crap. It really had been a day to forget. But that was all about to change.

Davey was the first to spot it. He stopped rowing and motioned with his chin. Jacob caught the line of his stare and swiveled round. There was a strange silhouette on the wharf that didn't belong.

Deer Isle's lowly fishing harbor had an unexpected visitor.

A white motor yacht lay alongside the landing pier, a trickle of steam still rising from her funnel. The glow from her oil lamps was mirrored in the slack water, showing her to be eighty, maybe ninety feet at the waterline. Even docked as she was now, her sleek lines gave a powerful impression of speed.

Davey mouthed the name emblazoned on the motor yacht's stern: *Nemesis*. She was the most luxurious vessel he'd ever seen. The mahogany wheelhouse had a spinning observation window in its windscreen, and some sort of radio antenna mounted above. At her mast's peak, lit by the anchor light, hung a single ensign, with a white star in the center of two red stripes. Her low afterdeck encircled a wide cockpit and canopy. The plump silk cushions on her bench seats were monogrammed with the letters *N.Y.C.*

The fog seemed to close in, deadening all sound. A flounder's tail flopped in the bilges. He was about to speak, but Jacob shushed him with a finger to his lips.

They glided through the oily water with their oars dripping. No one was on deck, but the yacht's interior shone with light. The angle blocked their view into the engine room, but he could make out several crewmen in their undershirts, playing cards around a table, smoking and laughing.

They let the sloop's momentum carry them on past the galley, where a dark-skinned man in a chef's hat was scrubbing pots; and beneath the picture windows of the brightly lit saloon. Inside, scratchy music was playing from a gramophone record. The curtains were tied back, and the beveled glass was steamed up, giving off an electric glow like the movie screen at the Gaumont.

Davey brushed the hair out of his eyes and stepped up onto the sloop's thwart. Balancing on tiptoes with a hand on the mast, he was just able to see in to the saloon, where a curious scenario was unfolding. Dinner was over, and a servant girl was scraping crumbs off the tablecloth. She cut a slender figure in her uniform, lace apron and cap. She poured two cups of coffee from a silver pot, and brought the tray to the gentlemen at the far end of the table.

He could see the two men's lips moving, but it was hard to make out their words. Were they quarreling? The older one had coiffed black hair and a Kaiser mustache that turned up at the tips, and his necktie was undone. He leaned heavily on the arm of his chair, swilling brandy in a crystal glass; with his free hand he made wild shapes in the air. His companion wore a quilted smoking jacket. In his mid to late twenties, he gave off a noble, well-bred air. He clutched a wooden pipe to his lips. Davey caught the faint aroma of his tobacco.

They drifted past the second window. Behind the gentlemen, on a stool facing the bar, a woman in a shimmering evening dress was touching up her lipstick in the mirror of her compact. The maid offered her coffee, but she waved it away. A jeweled necklace glinted green in the gaslight.

Mustache seemed upset. He stood up, red in the face, gesticulating as if to drive home a point. Pipe sat across the table from him, listening intently, occasionally shaking his head. He blew smoke and gave a curt response, which only seemed to make Mustache more flustered.

Lipstick swiveled on her bar stool. Her voice was shrill, and Davey was able to make out a few words: "Oh, do shut *up*, Cochran. Both of you! You're such a *bore*."

Davey turned to his brother in the stern of the sloop to see if he was