

NOROUA

(For H. C. S. and L. E.)

Alfred G. Bailey

He was paddling a punt and
 scores of small craft, some sailing, others propelled by outboard motors,
 raised wakes in the glassy surface of the inlet,
 darting from one traffic lane to another,
 except that
 a succession of blunt capes receded sideways,
 each with an off-white lighthouse poised on its front.
 A thin fog formed. The lighthouses were seals, standing on their tails.
 At an unheard signal they dove, leaving the
 capes untenanted and bare, like a
 room without furniture.
 The watchers began to cry with unendurable loneliness.
 Suddenly seven quick blasts of a steam whistle are heard
 as S.S. Old Carolina (the fog having thickened further up the estuary)
 runs onto a submerged crag at Passe Pierre.
 The fog flicks away like a finger snapped by the Noroua.
 Huge waves race like galloping horses
 past my friend Lieutenant Herbert
 Arlington-Jones doing the crawl.
 Arm over arm he speeds towards Dead Man's Current.
 "He'll never get through", shriek the girls on the point,
 waving handkerchiefs, but he does.
 A shoal of porpoise following get through too.
 Cork life-belts, egg-crates, passengers,
 laundry baskets, deck chairs, and grape-fruit skins
 are loosed from the wreck
 and sweep towards open water.
 My friend and neighbour (Blenis Evington)
 calls frantically to the tennis players,
 "There's no time to lose, form crews!
 Catch them in a net. Throw a line to Lark Island."
 He gets across. Nobody else does.
 Fleets of beluga rise from the churning sea,
 like balloons, and are carried away by the wind.