

## The Day No Fish Was Made

**A**bout six o'clock on that July night when the turmoil in Ishton all came to a head I stopped by Sniff's door. I called out. He was in his room listening to the radio and came out to tell me he was listening to the city station and not to the Boston States, anyway you can't get the foreign stations in the daytime too well.

Sniff said, the radio news said Inspector Case was going to arrest old Peyton if he tried to give a speech and the city station VOXM said there would be about a thousand people there and forty-five Constabulary were sent from St. John's to help Ranger Goodyear and Sparkes and three other Rangers from along the coast. There would be more people than law and how could fifty policemen handle a thousand people. The people in the city worry about their men, like Castleman who stays at your home. They worry about Inspector Case and Lethbridge and Hillier and Ranger Goodyear.

I asked Sniff if we should mix in with the crowd or stay on the outskirts by the bridge and he said, First, let's go and find Castleman and see what he says.

So it 'twas back along Church Road and walk past the parsonage, Garretty's, Linehan's shop and Igger's place and on down to the Ranger's Quarters. It was hardly room enough for all of them inside and many of the blueshirts were outside standing around, some lit up the pipe, some leaned against the fence and talked.

I said to Sniff, See the tall one with the black hair and the curled up moustache, that's him, that's Castleman that stays at our house.

When Castleman saw us he spoke and nodded to the policeman next to him and he came over and shook his head. I could see on this day a lot of the gleam was gone from his eye. Sad, he said, Sad and dangerous for this town and innocent people.

Castleman has a far away look as if he's not talking to us at all. I know from his talk at our house, he believes that if the forming up of a council was handled right with proper promotion and with keeping the people well informed, things might have turned out different. Too late now for the horse is let out of the barn and in a few minutes Inspector Case will order us to march to the bridge to break up a racket and a strike that should never have been.

Sir, said Sniff, I hear on the radio Peyton is going to be arrested when he gives his speech against the council and that's when the Ishton people will rise up and defy the orders of Case and the Constables from the city.

And 'twas easy to see Castleman likes Ishton and wants to tell somebody he feels a good feeling for everyone in it.

He said to Sniff and me, Peyton is already arrested. Case got him early in hopes that putting him behind bars for awhile would keep a crowd from gathering at the bridge or anywhere else in Ishton. Old Peyton is a trouble maker, but he is also a community leader. He has a lot of land, two shops, and many people work at his Southwest Export Company. He will be taxed heavily and that's why he's so vocal and he chews the fat alot over all this council bit. Everyone who comes into his shop, he lays down the reasons why council would be an extra burden and therefore wrong.

I want to ask Castleman what does vocal mean and perhaps what burden means, but the Constable continued on to say that Peyton promised to deliver an anti-council speech on the Ishton Bridge about seven o'clock, but he's cooling his heels in the basement cell in the quarters here now. Planned to stand on the concrete railing and rant and rave about taxes and burdens of the poor and how it would make the people who already got nothing deeper in debt, in poverty. Then of course he would get the rest of the people all steamed up, in a fierce mood and that would only make the problem worse.

Castleman says that Inspector Case is a man of action, he sees what needs to be done, makes a plan and finishes the job so he nipped Peyton when he came out of his house. If the crowd goes home from the bridge there'll be no trouble. Boys, the Inspector will be coming out of the Quarters soon to get us ready so you two wait over there in the lee of Linehan's shop and just keep out of the way if things get hot.

When the Police Inspector came out, the Constables and the four or five Rangers with them all snapped to attention, all in blue shirts on account of the warm evening and with their great coats hung on hooks in the Quarters. Their bodies were not moving and all eyes fixed on Case and 'twas no problem to see the billies and cuffs with the great coats off.

We listened. Sniff and I stood by Mrs. Linehan's shop where I had gone many times for Ma's potatoes and sugar and flour and now I was here at a time when the people didn't want to pay taxes and didn't want council men to lord over them like Garretty tries to lord over me. I believed I would always remember the time I stood in the lee of Linehan's and looked at the police in the days when they had to be called into Ishton to put an end to the strife.

Case stood heels together, chin up and said, Fall in, and they all lined up in five rows of five and in two groups.

And Case waited for a minute and said in a voice that was clear as Mahar's Brook on spring morning,

Now we will march to the bridge at six forty-five, shoulder to shoulder. Each man must have handcuffs and batons at the ready and of course as you know we have no other weapons or side arms. Don't do anything rash unless I give the orders. If I give the command to push the crowd back, then put your batons at combat position but don't take them out unless attacked or given orders.

We have all been instructed on how to manage a mob scene and we'll follow strict procedure. Peyton is in custody for instigating a riot and for not paying back taxes, the two truckers are in jail and perhaps the rest of the people will see the error of their ways and can be persuaded to go home peacefully.

There isn't a flicker of the eyes only straight at the Inspector and each man stands straight and tall and with a determined set of the jaw and face.

Case waited for another minute and said, If we can dissolve this dispute quietly, perhaps the people will attend to their work at the flakes tomorrow and we can get back to our own homes in the city a bit quicker than expected. I'll talk to the crowd. I'm counting on you men to work this out as a team.

Sniff, I said, Let's try to get down to the bridge before the Constables.

I explain to Sniff I have to keep to the outskirts for if Ma sees me there'll be a clash of another kind that'll take place under the kitchen table in my house tonight. Worse, perhaps have to stay in all summer. So what say we slip up along the fence near Star Hall Hill where nobody will be and from there we can see everything.

Sniff agrees and said, Yes, and we'll couchy down behind the fence and look out between the pickets just in case.

Come on, we can get there before the police do and see what kind of a crowd is gathered at the bridge. Sniff, why is everything happening at the bridge and not in front of the Ranger's Quarters or on the flakes or on the wharf?

He didn't say much as we hurried down the lane and along the brook. On this day we didn't see anyone in their yards tending the backyard vegetable plots or cutting up wood or cleaning up around the houses. If there was man in the field he was old and not able to get to the bridge. In that way it was kind of a strange walk Sniff and I took that July evening and I feel that it is so curious around, not even a dog is barking.

I ask him again, Sniff, is it because the bridge kind of separates the town in two halves with the lower class and fish workers on the far side and the kind of

another class on the other side. The fish stores are on one side and the flakes are on the other.

Sniff said, You're thinking like me and that's nothing to be ashamed of. Sure enough and if the bridge is occupied by the lower class what lives along the shore and near the flakes, then no one can get to the flakes to make the fish. Ach, yes. Then there's no business, the whole town is shut down and the few who wants a council will keep quiet.

**M**ost every day in July I think God is good and because there's no school I think God must be better than good and the sun shines and 'tis warm enough to wear the plaid shirt only and not the mackinaw. Then there are days when it rains and I'm stuck indoors, perhaps the whole summer is wasted.

Although it was warm and sunny, I don't think it was happy times that July in Ishton and I don't want to think of the evening when all the crowd gathered on the bridge and there was a lot of shouting, We'll burn down the post office, Saw off the council light poles, There'll be taxes on our land, our barns, our horses and carts and our bikes, We'll not be paying taxes, The frigging higher-ups brought this on us and we're not going to stand for it.

The crowd of men and women around the western end of the bridge where it runs into Lower King Street are excited. Boo, they yell, Constables go home, and I'm afraid they would do damage to the fine young man like Castleman if they found him alone in the street at night but the Constables always walk together in twos.

All the Constables from the city are careful. Ranger Goodyear and Sparkes who are stationed in Ishton and know the people stay in the background and bring up the rear in the line of marching men slowly walking toward the bridge and Sniff said, 'Tis a slow march what gives the people time to change their mind and worse 'tis to put a fear of God in 'em, to frighten people and perhaps they go home.

I'd like to be down near Castleman to tell him to be careful, but if my mother sees me she'll shout, Fer the love of the Holy Blessed Mary, go home you savage and stay in till this is over.

I don't want to turn red as a beet with the embarrassed look in front of the Garretty boys and Sniff so I wait on the hill by the Star Hall.

Besides being near the hall gives me a good feeling in my head when I think of the fall soup suppers, the auctions and winter concerts and my friend Igger Malone reciting The Face on the Bar Room Floor or The Cremation of Sam McGee

and his song he says is from the old country. He sings about twenty parts and always repeats the verse,  
 I fer Johnny Cross  
 You fer stony bladder  
 Keep yer wife at home  
 Or else I will get at her.

The crowd will all laugh. But Igger is not in the crowd and he's laid up home with the sickness in his ear.

The bridge was black with people. Seems like every woman who turns and cures the fish for the Southwest Export Company is there, Kessie Sullivan's sisters, Aunt Kate Barry and even Bridget O'Reilly and two older Garretty girls, Mab and Lav whose name is Lavender, but no one calls her that for 'tis too long a name and too hard to say. If Ma is there in the outskirts behind the crowd of men I don't see her.

Ma best keep her distance for she boards a Constable on the United Church end of town and will get good government money for it. People will see she's a traitor to the anti-council crowd and perhaps turn their heads from her when they meet on the street or go down another street or hold their head up in the air as if to say they weren't traitors to the cause, like Ma.

All the men on the bridge are those who don't go to sea, but the men and boys who bring the cured fish to the Export Company sheds by horse and long cart, the ones who cull the fish, pack it in barrels for export and load it aboard the foreign going ships.

I said, Sniff, that's the Garretty sisters there, so no doubt Billy and Paddy Garretty and all the other Garrettys big and small are mixed in with the men up near the bridge. Can you see them?

And Sniff doesn't say anything so I know he would rather be down there in the thick of the action than up on Star Hall Hill with me where we can only look. The men are at the front near the bridge, muttering, talking in small groups, looking around for a sign of old man Peyton. I said to Sniff there's nothing happening so we might as well go down.

We don't for at that minute we hear the thump, thump, thump of the Constable's boots on the dirt road and they round the corner by Lower King Street. The Constables march in formation and say at every step, Move, Move, Move, but the crowd near the bridge won't move.

From the way they march and move makes it seem like more than forty-five Constables and the five local Rangers. There's Castleman in his blue shirt striding side by side with the next man and they're all saying in unison, *Move, Move, Move*, and have an odd way of clicking their night sticks in beat with the words. But they don't take the night sticks out.

Sniff said that with the slow, proud erect way they walk and say *Move, Move*, will make it look like there's more than fifty policemen.

One constable strides with his chest puffed out to the middle of the bridge and everybody knows he is Inspector Case for he has the stripes on his sleeve and more than enough brass buttons down the front. Stripes or no stripes the crowd won't move and Case jumps upon the railing of the concrete bridge. Case waits.

I looked at the angry crowd in a stand-off and the law waiting and trying to reason with them and it makes me think of the evening I carried soup for the sick into Igger. I remember he told me about the years Ishton has been curing fish for Europe and all his talk about the Dirty Thirties, but the people of Ishton never had to go on the dole.

'Twas no six cents a day, he said, Or brown flour or working for the government on the roads then. Anybody in Ishton who wanted to work there was work for them. Now all the pride's trampled by one or two men who helped bring in a council in December and how last May and June the people were all upset when they got a notice in the mail about back taxes not paid.

Sniff elbowed me in the side and said, Look at Inspector Case standing up there on the bridge and he's going to wait until the muttering and grumbling and God-damning stops before he speaks.

When Case starts he speaks like he's giving orders and 'tis no trouble at all to hear him. His eyes are like steel and his face is dead set like rock and everybody knows he means business.

When I was growing up in Ishton, manys the time I'd been over the high concrete bridge over Ishton Brook that runs almost through the middle of Ishton. Engraved on the concrete is the number 1927 and that shows when the bridge was put there. 'Tis wide enough for two horse and carts to pass and they did pass there every day, spring, summer and fall, when dry fish was moved by the long cart to the packing sheds. The fish drying flakes and beaches and one class of people are on one side of the bridge and the wharves, sheds, cooper shop and forges and another class of people who live in tall houses are on the other side.

The concrete railing is wide enough for a man to stand on to give a speech although most speeches I ever knew about were given in the Star Hall or in the Sons of Temperance Hall. As far as I know Inspector Case was the only one who ever did speak to a crowd standing on Ishton Brook Bridge and that was in the dark days and times of trouble for Ishton.

When he gave the speech 'twas in a clear voice, sure and reasonable at first, but loud and angry after and 'twas a dressing down nobody wanted to hear. No, the crowd had gathered to lap up the words of old man Peyton who was anti-council and who would rather heave the Inspector and his constables over the head of wharf if they could. Peyton never showed up.

Instead the people of Ishton saw a brass-buttoned blueshirt from the city take his place and he never flinched an inch. Sniff and I were all ears as Case started off.

I was sent here with the rest of my men to help you people understand that a council for Ishton is inevitable and what I mean is, it is the law and the law has been sanctioned and signed by the government. The council is in and law now whether you want it or not. The Amulree Report spoke about the deplorable conditions on this island recommended among other things local government. The time will come when all towns large and small on this island will have councils.

Now some of you will be wanting to blame the higher-ups as you call them like Commissioner Puddester who is not from England as some of you may think but a native born son just as you are. He understands conditions can only improve with local government. The Commission of Government was put in place to give decent government to this island which a few years ago was bankrupt and destitute. I know Ishton's Act of Incorporation was brought in a time of fear in these troubled war years, but life and government must continue. We can't stop improving our lives just because there's a war in Europe.

With local government there will be improvements of course, street lighting, better roads, improved health conditions when barns are situated outside town and cattle and other livestock are not allowed to roam free. No doubt regular garbage collection will be put in place so as people won't be throwing trash around their doors and breeding filth and rats and disease. A town with a council can ask for a hospital and doctors and the many cases of diphtheria and small pox and TB will be reduced.

There will be every other class of improvement for which you will have to pay little in taxes and for the little tax you pay you will gain twenty-fold. The

great burden of taxes will be shouldered by people like Mr. Hayward Peyton who owns acres of land and the Southwest Export Company anyway.

So I say once again a town council and the paying of local taxes is inevitable.

And the Inspector stopped for a minute to get his breath and I nudge Sniff and said, He's thinking about what to do next, but the crowd is not moving, Sniff.

No, but they're not shouting and uttering threats either.

When Inspector Case begins again his voice is louder and tougher like when he ordered his men to get in line near the Ranger's Quarters.

You workers have left the fish on the flakes and beaches for two days and not turned it over for the sun to cure nor have you covered it at night. You are very lucky there has been no rain for if it had rained hundreds of quintals of a good, well-made product would have been spoiled. You people make the best salt dried fish on this great island of ours. You have every right to be proud of your accomplishments.

Now, by not making fish on the flakes you are actually aiding the enemy. Our men in France and our men at sea fighting this war need food. Our Allies, England, France need this food you produce. So by not working and not curing fish you are, in effect, aiding the enemy. I know this is wrong; you know this wrong.

I appeal to your sense of patriotism to stop this foolish strike against not having a council. I appeal to you now to go home to your children and tomorrow go out to your place of work in peace.

And Sniff and I could see a shuffling of feet and a lowering of heads among the men at the front of crowd. Some whisper to the man standing next to them.

I know Inspector Case is unhappy and angry at the same time for his voice is trembling with rage and his chest is swelling from the deep breaths he takes. I want to say to Sniff, Inspector Case is trying to solve this without any more arrests or anyone getting hurt and he is like an old sea captain trying every tack in contrary winds.

Now, said Case, I will give you ten minutes to clear this bridge and to move away from Lower King Street leading up to it. The main road will be cleared over the bridge which runs between the fish stores and the flakes so the business of Ishton can be carried out. Then the economy of this fine town will not suffer.

Furthermore, this is an unlawful assembly and you are gathered for an unlawful purpose. You cannot gather in large numbers without a written and



expressed permit. This is more than civil unrest. It is a riot scene, an insurrection and that is against the laws of this great land of ours.

I quote the Criminal Code Section Sixty-four, Sub-section One A, that whenever three or more persons gather with common purpose to disturb the peace or to cause other people to disturb the peace this is considered an unlawful assembly and a breach of the laws of this country.

You have to move or you will be moved forcibly. Any person, man, woman or child, not vacating this bridge and road will end up where the two Kennedy truck drivers are, in the jail in Carbon Harbour or where Hayward Peyton is, in the holding cells here in Ishton. Furthermore you are committing a criminal act by not paying taxes for that too is the law of the land. I can quote the Criminal Code for this infraction should you wish it.

You have ten minutes to clear this bridge and road and the ten minutes start now.

And Case stops and the crowd is quiet and it was the evening in July when Ishton stood still.

I nudge Sniff to look at the women at the back and they gather the children near their long black skirts and edge back. But no man at the front wants to be the first to move away for fear someone will say, You took back water, you would not hold the line and you were afraid. Even if the men feel they are wrong, not one wants to be first to go home for the shame. No one moves.

What will happen, Sniff?

They will not move. They don't care if the Constables tear the countenance from the front of their heads.

What would Igger do if he were here and he knows if he gives in he will not have Prince his horse any more.

Igger doesn't matter. He's not here is he and his days are numbered, council or no council.

The police are more determined, Sniff. Castleman told me he didn't care if the Holy Family rises up, he and the Constables from the city will clear up this mess supposing it takes a month of Sundays.

And I prepare myself to see strangest riot ever in Ishton and perhaps the strangest one on this great island.

**I**t was like Bill Joe's cat and the Tom eyeing each other for a fur fly with not even a twitch of the tail, only now 'twas two forces of people squared off looking at each other for a long time. I didn't have a

watch to judge ten minutes and it seemed like longer than that but then Case put his hand up and the police moved into the crowd standing along Ishton Bridge and Lower King Street. The would-be rioters and strikers broke their ranks. The crowd went everywhere, split into a dozen, no two dozen, small groups, for no man wanted to be arrested or clubbed or dragged along the street in handcuffs to the Ranger's Quarters and later to the Temperance Hall courthouse.

I could only look in amazement at the oddest sight there ever was or ever would be in Ishton. Off to my right I heard Sniff laughing and when I looked at him to speak I could see his lips were pulled back and all his teeth showing he laughed so hard. Soon he was holding his sides, the stomach buckled and then the knees buckled and he was on the ground laughing and rolling and wanting to get up to see more.

What Sniff and I saw in Ishton on that July evening during the council ructions could not be forgotten when a mob scene broke out and the people took to their heels in panic.

When the ten minutes went past Castleman and Lethbridge and Hillier and Goodyear and all the other Constables waded into the crowd while the Inspector stayed on the rail watching. They had their billies drawn and held in front of them like shields and I could see any person standing before them would be stepped on or dragged away and if there was any resistance he would get a snock on the head harder than what Ma would give me if I didn't get the wood box filled in time before she bakes bread. Any fool could see a roughing up by a Constable would be far worse.

People rushed everywhere and that's what Sniff found funny. When the police moved to a small group the crowd melted back and ducked down and tumbled over each other to get away. Grown men ran under clotheslines strung with blankets and underwear and scrawled across back yard vegetable gardens or jumped over picket fences not caring if they tore the arse out of their pants in the rush to get away. Women with small children hidden in their long black fish making skirts melted away like a snowball in the hot place and if they had no children slipped away on up the road to the beach with their heads down.

Dozens of men filled up a lane here and twenty or thirty filled an alley way there, but fell over each other trying to get away if the blueshirts turned toward them. A group standing innocent like by the other end of the bridge tripped up in their own feet in the surge when the Constables marched that way. The blueshirts had nobody to arrest for the people slipped away and disappeared and hid behind houses, coal sheds and wood piles until the coast was clear. It was said afterwards two men crawled into root cellar and stayed there for hours until dark.

When the rushing and tumbling and jumping was over, the blueshirts stood shoulder to shoulder along Ishton Bridge and along the merchant's side of Lower King Street so the people had no place to go only home. If they gathered anywhere in small groups the blueshirts ran there like their blood was boiling and broke up any crowd and the people faded away. Besides it was getting dark and if trouble makers couldn't stand on the bridge or the wharf or in the roadways talking and gossiping and swearing, then the only place to go was home.

I said to Sniff, There's no one left on the bridge or the street now only police and 'tis time for me to go for Ma will be home soon and if she catches me not in the house, she'll be roary-eyed and that's putting it mild.

We left Star Hall Hill. Sniff went down the lane to his house and I hurried up Church Road past Linehan's and the parsonage and into my own home.

Ma came home not long after but didn't stir around getting flour and bread baking pans ready or peeling vegetables for the next day's meal and she doesn't get a drop of tea. She stands at the window for a long time and looks out where she can see down the Church Road and I want to ask her what she is looking at and waiting for but I hold my piece.