

Jack of Sjöholm and the Gann-

Finn

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Advanced
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In the days of our forefathers, when there was nothing but wretched boats up in Nordland, and folks must needs buy fair winds by the sackful from the Gan-Finn, it was not safe to tack about in the open sea in wintry weather. In those days a fisherman never grew old. It was mostly womenfolk and children, and the lame and halt, who were buried ashore.

Now there was once a boat's crew from Thjöttö in Helgeland, which had put to sea, and worked its way right up to the East Lofotens.

But that winter the fish would not bite.

They lay to and waited week after week, till the month was out, and there was nothing for it but to turn home again with their fishing gear and empty boats.

But Jack of Sjöholm, who was with them, only laughed aloud, and said that, if there were no fish there, fish would certainly be found higher northwards. Surely they hadn't rowed out all this distance only to eat up all their victuals, said he.

He was quite a young chap, who had never been out fishing before. But there was some sense in what he said for all that, thought the head-fisherman.

And so they set their sails northwards.

On the next fishing-ground they fared no better than before, but they toiled away so long as their food held out.

And now they all insisted on giving it up and turning back.

“If there’s none here, there’s sure to be some still higher up towards the north,” opined Jack; “and if they had gone so far, they might surely go a little further still,” quoth he.

So they tempted fortune from fishing-ground to fishing-ground, till they had ventured right up to Finmark. But there a storm met them, and, try as they might to find shelter under the headlands, they were obliged at last to put out into the open sea again.

There they fared worse than ever. They had a hard time of it. Again and again the prow of the boat went under the heavy rollers, instead of over them, and later on in the day the boat foundered.

There they all sat helplessly on the keel in the midst of the raging sea, and they all complained bitterly against that fellow Jack, who had tempted them on, and led them into destruction. What would now become of their wives and children? They would starve now that they had none to care for them.

When it grew dark, their hands began to stiffen, and they were carried off by the sea one by one.

And Jack heard and saw everything, down to the last shriek and the last clutch; and to the very end they never ceased reproaching him for bringing them into such misery, and bewailing their sad lot.

“I must hold on tight now,” said Jack to himself, for he was better even where he was than in the sea.

And so he tightened his knees on the keel, and held on fast till he had no feeling left in either hand or foot.

In the coal-black gusty night he fancied he heard yells from one or other of the remaining boats’ crews.

“They, too, have wives and children,” thought he. “I wonder whether they have also a Jack to lay the blame upon!”

Now while he thus lay there and drifted and drifted, and it seemed to him to be drawing towards dawn, he suddenly felt that the boat was in the grip of a strong shoreward current; and, sure enough, Jack got at last ashore. But whichever way he looked, he saw nothing but black sea and white snow.

Now as he stood there, speering and spying about him, he saw, far away, the smoke of a Finn Gamme, which stood beneath a cliff, and he managed to scramble right up to it.

The Finn was so old that he could scarcely move. He was sitting in the midst of the warm ashes, and mumbling into a big sack, and neither spoke nor answered. Large yellow humble-bees were humming about all over the snow, as if it were Midsummer; and there was only a young lass there to keep the fire alight, and give the old man his food. His grandsons and grand-daughters were with the reindeer, far far away on the *Fjeld*.

Here Jack got his clothes well dried, and the rest he so much wanted. The Finn girl, Seimke, couldn't make too much of him; she fed him with reindeer milk and marrow-bones, and he lay down to sleep on silver fox-skins.

Cosy and comfortable it was in the smoke there. But as he thus lay there, 'twixt sleep and wake, it seemed to him as if many odd things were going on round about him.



“The Gann-Finn.” Illustration by Laurence Housman, published in *Weird Tales from Northern Seas* by Robert Lisbet Bain (1893), Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.

There stood the Finn in the doorway talking to his reindeer, although they were far away in the mountains. He barred the wolf's way, and threatened the bear with spells; and then he opened his skin sack, so that the storm howled and piped, and there was a swirl of ashes into the hut. And when all grew quiet again, the air was thick with yellow humble-bees, which settled inside his furs, whilst he gabbled and mumbled and wagged his skull-like head.

But Jack had something else to think about besides marvelling at the old Finn. No sooner did the heaviness of slumber quit his eyes than he strolled down to his boat.

There it lay stuck fast on the beach and tilted right over like a trough, while the sea rubbed and rippled against its keel. He drew it far enough ashore to be beyond the reach of the sea-wash.

But the longer he walked around and examined it, the more it seemed to him as if folks built boats rather for the sake of letting the sea in than for the sake of keeping the sea out. The prow was little better than a hog's snout for burrowing under the water, and the planking by the keel-piece was as flat as the bottom of a chest. Everything, he thought, must be arranged very differently if boats were to be really seaworthy. The prow must be raised one or two planks higher at the very least, and made both sharp and supple, so as to bend before and cut through the waves at the same time, and then a fellow would have a chance of steering a boat smartly.

He thought of this day and night. The only relaxation he had was a chat with the Finn girl of an evening.

He couldn't help remarking that this Seimke had fallen in love with him. She strolled after him wherever he went, and her eyes always became so mournful when he went down towards the sea; she understood well enough that all his thoughts were bent upon going away.

And the Finn sat and mumbled among the ashes till his fur jacket regularly steamed and smoked.

But Seimke coaxed and wheedled Jack with her brown eyes, and gave him honeyed words as fast as her tongue could wag, till she drew him right into the smoke where the old Finn couldn't hear them.

The Gan-Finn turned his head right round.

"My eyes are stupid, and the smoke makes 'em run," said he; "what has Jack got hold of there?"

"Say it is the white ptarmigan you caught in the snare," whispered she.

And Jack felt that she was huddling up against him and trembling all over.

Then she told him so softly that he thought it was his own thoughts speaking to him, that the Finn was angry and muttering mischief, and *jökking*, against the boat which Jack wanted to build. If Jack were to complete it, said she, the Gan-Finn would no longer have any sale for his fair-winds in all Nordland. And then she warned him to look to himself and never get between the Finn and the Gan-flies.

Then Jack felt that his boat might be the undoing of him. But the worse things looked, the more he tried to make the best of them.

In the grey dawn, before the Finn was up, he made his way towards the sea-shore.

But there was something very odd about the snow-hills. They were so many and so long that there was really no end to them, and he kept on trampling in deep and deeper snow and never got to the sea-shore at all. Never before had he seen the northern lights last so long into the day. They blazed and sparkled, and long tongues of fire licked and hissed after him. He was unable to find either the beach or the boat, nor had he the least idea in the world where he really was.

At last he discovered that he had gone quite astray inland instead of down to the sea. But now, when he turned round, the sea-fog came close up against him, so dense and grey that he could see neither hand nor foot before him.

By the evening he was well-nigh worn out with weariness, and was at his wits' end what to do.

Night fell, and the snowdrifts increased.

As now he sat him down on a stone and fell a brooding and pondering how he should escape with his life, a pair

of snow-shoes came gliding so smoothly towards him out of the sea-fog and stood still just in front of his feet.

“As you have found me, you may as well find the way back also,” said he.

So he put them on, and let the snow-shoes go their own way over hillside and steep cliff. He let not his own eyes guide him or his own feet carry him, and the swifter he went the denser the snowflakes and the driving sea-spray came up against him, and the blast very nearly blew him off the snow-shoes.

Up hill and down dale he went over all the places where he had fared during the daytime, and it sometimes seemed as if he had nothing solid beneath him at all, but was flying in the air.

Suddenly the snow-shoes stood stock still, and he was standing just outside the entrance of the Gan-Finn’s hut.

There stood Seimke. She was looking for him.

“I sent my snow-shoes after thee,” said she, “for I marked that the Finn had bewitched the land so that thou should’st not find the boat. Thy *life* is safe, for he has given thee shelter in his house, but it were not well for thee to see him this evening.”

Then she smuggled him in, so that the Finn did not perceive it in the thick smoke, and she gave him meat and a place to rest upon.

But when he awoke in the night, he heard an odd sound, and there was a buzzing and a singing far away in the air:

“The Finn the boat can never bind,
The Fly the boatman cannot find,
But round in aimless whirls doth wind.”

The Finn was sitting among the ashes and *jöjking*, and muttering till the ground quite shook, while Seimke lay with her forehead to the floor and her hands clasped tightly round the back of her neck, praying against him to the Finn God. Then Jack understood that the Gan-Finn was still seeking after him amidst the snowflakes and sea-fog, and that his life was in danger from magic spells.

So he dressed himself before it was light, went out, and came tramping in again all covered with snow, and said he had been after bears in their winter retreats. But never had he been in such a sea-fog before; he had

groped about far and wide before he found his way back into the hut again, though he stood just outside it.

The Finn sat there with his skin-wrappings as full of yellow flies as a beehive. He had sent them out searching in every direction, but back they had all come, and were humming and buzzing about him.

When he saw Jack in the doorway, and perceived that the flies had pointed truly, he grew somewhat milder, and laughed till he regularly shook within his skin-wrappings, and mumbled, "The bear we'll bind fast beneath the scullery-sink, and his eyes I've turned all awry,⁵ so that he can't see his boat,⁶ and I'll stick a sleeping-peg in front of him till springtime."

But the same day the Finn stood in the doorway, and was busy making magic signs and strange strokes in the air.

Then he sent forth two hideous Gan-flies, which flitted off on their errands, and scorched black patches beneath them in the snow wherever they went. They were to bring pain and sickness to a cottage down in the swamps, and spread abroad the Finn disease, which was to strike down a young bride at Bodö with consumption.

But Jack thought of nothing else night and day but how he could get the better of the Gan-Finn.

The lass Seimke wheedled him and wept and begged him, as he valued his life, not to try to get down to his boat again. At last, however, she saw it was no use—he had made up his mind to be off.

Then she kissed his hands and wept bitterly. At least he must promise to wait till the Gan-Finn had gone right away to Jokmok in Sweden.

On the day of his departure, the Finn went all round his hut with a torch and took stock.

Far away as they were, there stood the mountain pastures, with the reindeer and the dogs, and the Finn's people all drew near. The Finn took the tale of the beasts, and bade his grandsons not let the reindeer stray too far while he was away, and could not guard them from wolves and bears. Then he took a sleeping potion and began to dance and turn round and round till his breath quite failed him, and he sank moaning to the ground. His furs were all that remained behind of him. His spirit had gone—gone all the way over to Jokmok.

There the magicians were all sitting together in the dark sea-fog beneath the shelter of the high mountain, and whispering about all manner of secret and hidden things, and blowing spirits into the novices of the black art.

But the Gan-flies, humming and buzzing, went round and round the empty furs of the Gan-Finn like a yellow ring and kept watch.

In the night Jack was awakened by something pulling and tugging at him as if from far away. There was as it were a current of air, and something threatened and called to him from the midst of the snowflakes outside—

“Until thou canst swim like the duck or the drake,
The egg thou’dst be hatching no progress shall make;
The Finn shall ne’er let thee go southwards with sail,
For he’ll screw off the wind and imprison the gale.”

At the end of it the Gan-Finn was standing there, and bending right over him. The skin of his face hung down long and loose, and full of wrinkles, like an old reindeer skin, and there was a dizzying smoke in his eyes. Then Jack began to shiver and stiffen in all his limbs, and he knew that the Finn was bent upon bewitching him.

Then he set his face rigidly against it, so that the magic spells should not get at him; and thus they struggled with one another till the Gan-Finn grew green in the face, and was very near choking.

After that the sorcerers of Jokmok sent magic shots after Jack, and clouded his wits. He felt so odd; and whenever he was busy with his boat, and had put something to rights in it, something else would immediately go wrong, till at last he felt as if his head were full of pins and needles.

Then deep sorrow fell upon him. Try as he would, he couldn’t put his boat together as he would have it; and it looked very much as if he would never be able to cross the sea again.

But in the summer time Jack and Seimke sat together on the headland in the warm evenings, and the gnats buzzed and the fishes spouted close ashore in the stillness, and the eider-duck swam about.

“If only some one would build me a boat as swift and nimble as a fish, and able to ride upon the billows like a sea-mew!” sighed and lamented Jack, “then I could be off.”

“Would you like me to guide you to Thjöttö?” said a voice up from the sea-shore.

There stood a fellow in a flat turned-down skin cap, whose face they couldn't see.

And right outside the boulders there, just where they had seen the eider-duck, lay a long and narrow boat, with high prow and stern; and the tar-boards were mirrored plainly in the clear water below; there was not so much as a single knot in the wood.

“I would be thankful for any such guidance,” said Jack.

When Seimke heard this, she began to cry and take on terribly. She fell upon his neck, and wouldn't let go, and raved and shrieked. She promised him her snow-shoes, which would carry him through everything, and said she would steal for him the bone-stick from the Gan-Finn, so that he might find all the old lucky dollars that ever were buried, and would teach him how to make salmon-catching knots in the fishing lines, and how to entice the reindeer from afar. He should become as rich as the Gan-Finn, if only he wouldn't forsake her.

But Jack had only eyes for the boat down there. Then she sprang up, and tore down her black locks, and bound them round his feet, so that he had to wrench them off before he could get quit of her.

“If I stay here and play with you and the young reindeer, many a poor fellow will have to cling with broken nails to the keel of a boat,” said he. “If you like to make it up, give me a kiss and a parting hug, or shall I go without them?”

Then she threw herself into his arms like a young wild cat, and looked straight into his eyes through her tears, and shivered and laughed, and was quite beside herself.

But when she saw she could do nothing with him, she rushed away, and waved her hands above her head in the direction of the Gamme.

Then Jack understood that she was going to take counsel of the Gan-Finn, and that he had better take refuge in his boat before the way was closed to him. And, in fact, the boat had come so close up to the boulders, that he had only to step down upon the thwarts. The rudder glided into his hand, and aslant behind the mast sat some one at the prow, and hoisted and stretched the sail: but his face Jack could not see.

Away they went.

And such a boat for running before the wind Jack had never seen before. The sea stood up round about them like a deep snow-drift, although it was almost calm. But they hadn't gone very far before a nasty piping began in the air. The birds shrieked and made for land, and the sea rose like a black wall behind them.

It was the Gan-Finn who had opened his wind-sack, and sent a storm after them.

"One needs a full sail in the Finn-cauldron here," said something from behind the mast.

The fellow who had the boat in hand took such little heed of the weather that he did not so much as take in a single clew.

Then the Gan-Finn sent double knots¹¹ after them.

They sped along in a wild dance right over the firth, and the sea whirled up in white columns of foam, reaching to the very clouds.

Unless the boat could fly as quick and quicker than a bird, it was lost.

Then a hideous laugh was heard to larboard—

"Anfinn Ganfinn gives mouth,
And blows us right south;
There's a crack in the sack,
With three clews we must tack."

And heeling right over, with three clews in the sail, and the heavy foremost fellow astride on the sheer-strake, with his huge sea-boots dangling in the sea-foam, away they scudded through the blinding spray right into the open sea, amidst the howling and roaring of the wind.

The billowy walls were so vast and heavy that Jack couldn't even see the light of day across the yards, nor could he exactly make out whether they were going under or over the sea-trough.

The boat shook the sea aside as lightly and easily as if its prow were the slippery fin of a fish, and its planking was as smooth and fine as the shell of a tern's egg; but, look as he would, Jack couldn't see where these planks

ended; it was just as if there was only half a boat and no more; and at last it seemed to him as if the whole of the front part came off in the sea-foam, and they were scudding along under sail in half a boat.

When night fell, they went through the sea-fire, which glowed like hot embers, and there was a prolonged and hideous howling up in the air to windward.

And cries of distress and howls of mortal agony answered the wind from all the upturned boat keels they sped by, and many hideously pale-looking folks clutched hold of their thwarts. The gleam of the sea-fire cast a blue glare on their faces, and they sat, and gaped, and glared, and yelled at the blast.

Suddenly he awoke, and something cried, "Now thou art at home at Thjöttö, Jack!"

And when he had come to himself a bit, he recognised where he was. He was lying over against the boulders near his boathouse at home. The tide had come so far inland that a border of foam gleamed right up in the potato-field, and he could scarcely keep his feet for the blast. He sat him down in the boathouse, and began scratching and marking out the shape of the Draugboat in the black darkness till sleep overtook him.

When it was light in the morning, his sister came down to him with a meat-basket. She didn't greet him as if he were a stranger, but behaved as if it were the usual thing for her to come thus every morning. But when he began telling her all about his voyage to Finmark, and the Gan-Finn, and the Draugboat he had come home in at night, he perceived that she only grinned and let him chatter. And all that day he talked about it to his sister and his brothers and his mother, until he arrived at the conclusion that they thought him a little out of his wits. When he mentioned the Draugboat they smiled amongst themselves, and evidently went out of their way to humour him. But they might believe what they liked, if only he could carry out what he wanted to do, and be left to himself in the out-of-the-way old boathouse.

"One should go with the stream," thought Jack; and if they thought him crazy and out of his wits, he ought to behave so that they might beware of interfering with him, and disturbing him in his work.

So he took a bed of skins with him down to the boathouse, and slept there at night; but in the daytime he perched himself on a pole on the roof, and bellowed out that now he was sailing. Sometimes he rode astraddle on the roof ridge, and dug his sheath-knife deep into the rafters, so that people might think he fancied himself at sea, holding fast on to the keel of a boat.

Whenever folks passed by, he stood in the doorway, and turned up the whites of his eyes so hideously, that

every one who saw him was quite scared. As for the people at home, it was as much as they dared to stick his meat-basket into the boathouse for him. So they sent it to him by his youngest sister, merry little Malfri, who would sit and talk with him, and thought it such fun when he made toys and playthings for her, and talked about the boat which should go like a bird, and sail as no other boat had ever sailed.

If any one chanced to come upon him unexpectedly, and tried to peep and see what he was about in the boathouse there, he would creep up into the timber-loft and bang and pitch the boards and planks about, so that they didn't know exactly where to find him, and were glad enough to be off. But one and all made haste to climb over the hill again when they heard him fling himself down at full length and send peal after peal of laughter after them.

So that was how Jack got folks to leave him at peace.

He worked best at night when the storm tore and tugged at the stones and birchbark of the turf roof, and the sea-wrack came right up to the boathouse door.

When it piped and whined through the fissured walls, and the fine snowflakes flitted through the cracks, the model of the Draugboat stood plainest before him. The winter days were short, and the wick of the train-oil lamp, which hung over him as he worked, cast deep shadows, so that the darkness came soon and lasted a long way into the morning, when he sought sleep in his bed of skins with a heap of shavings for his pillow.

He spared no pains or trouble. If there was a board which would not run into the right groove with the others, though never so little, he would take out a whole row of them and plane them all round again and again.

Now, one night, just before Christmas, he had finished all but the uppermost planking and the gabs. He was working so hard to finish up that he took no count of time.

The plane was sending the shavings flying their briskest when he came to a dead stop at something black which was moving along the plank.

It was a large and hideous fly which was crawling about and feeling and poking all the planks in the boat. When it reached the lowest keel-board it whirred with its wings and buzzed. Then it rose and swept above it in the air till, all at once, it swerved away into the darkness.

Jack's heart sank within him. Such doubt and anguish came upon him. He knew well enough that no good

errand had brought the Gan-fly buzzing over the boat like that.

So he took the train-oil lamp and a wooden club, and began to test the prow and light up the boarding, and thump it well, and go over the planks one by one. And in this way he went over every bit of the boat from stem to stern, both above and below. There was not a nail or a rivet that he really believed in now.

But now neither the shape nor the proportions of the boat pleased him any more. The prow was too big, and the whole cut of the boat all the way down the gunwale had something of a twist and a bend and a swerve about it, so that it looked like the halves of two different boats put together, and the half in front didn't fit in with the half behind. As he was about to look into the matter still further (and he felt the cold sweat bursting out of the roots of his hair), the train-oil lamp went out and left him in blank darkness.

Then he could contain himself no longer. He lifted his club and burst open the boathouse door, and, snatching up a big cow-bell, he began to swing it about him and ring and ring with it through the black night.

"Art chiming for me, Jack?" something asked. There was a sound behind him like the surf sucking at the shore, and a cold blast blew into the boathouse.

There on the keel-stick sat some one in a sloppy grey sea-jacket, and with a print cap drawn down over its ears, so that its skull looked like a low tassel.

Jack gave a great start. This was the very being he had been thinking of in his wild rage. Then he took the large baling can and flung it at the Draug.

But right through the Draug it went, and rattled against the wall behind, and back again it came whizzing about Jack's ears, and if it had struck him he would never have got up again.

The old fellow, however, only blinked his eyes a little savagely.

"Fie!" cried Jack, and spat at the uncanny thing—and back into his face again he got as good as he gave.

"There you have your wet clout back again!" cried a laughing voice.

But the same instant Jack's eyes were opened and he saw a whole boat-building establishment on the sea-shore.

And, there, ready and rigged out on the bright water, lay an *Ottring*, so long and shapely and shining that his eyes could not feast on it enough.

The old 'un blinked with satisfaction. His eyes became more and more glowing.

"If I could guide you back to Helgeland," said he, "I could put you in the way of gaining your bread too. But you must pay me a little tax for it. In every seventh boat you build 'tis *I* who must put in the keel-board."

Jack felt as if he were choking. He felt that the boat was dragging him into the very jaws of an abomination.

"Or do you fancy you'll worm the trick out of me for nothing?" said the gaping grinning Draug.

Then there was a whirring sound, as if something heavy was hovering about the boathouse, and there was a laugh: "If you want the *seaman's* boat you must take the *dead man's* boat along with it. If you knock three times to-night on the keel-piece with the club, you shall have such help in building boats that the like of them will not be found in all Nordland."

Twice did Jack raise his club that night, and twice he laid it aside again.

But the *Ottring* lay and frisked and sported in the sea before his eyes, just as he had seen it, all bright and new with fresh tar, and with the ropes and fishing gear just put in. He kicked and shook the fine slim boat with his foot just to see how light and high she could rise on the waves above the water-line.

And once, twice, thrice, the club smote against the keel-piece.

So that was how the first boat was built at Sjöholm.

Thick as birds together stood a countless number of people on the headland in the autumn, watching Jack and his brothers putting out in the new *Ottring*.

It glided through the strong current so that the foam was like a foss all round it.

Now it was gone, and now it ducked up again like a sea-mew, and past skerries and capes it whizzed like a dart.

Out in the fishing grounds the folks rested upon their oars and gaped. Such a boat they had never seen before.

But if in the first year it was an *Ottring*, next year it was a broad heavy *Femböring* for winter fishing which made

the folks open their eyes.

And every boat that Jack turned out was lighter to row and swifter to sail than the one before it.

But the largest and finest of all was the last that stood on the stocks on the shore.

This was the *seventh*.

Jack walked to and fro, and thought about it a good deal; but when he came down to see it in the morning, it seemed to him, oddly enough, to have grown in the night and, what is more, was such a wondrous beauty that he was struck dumb with astonishment. There it lay ready at last, and folks were never tired of talking about it.

Now, the Bailiff who ruled over all Helgeland in those days was an unjust man who laid heavy taxes upon the people, taking double weight and tale both of fish and of eider-down, nor was he less grasping with the tithes and grain dues. Wherever his fellows came they fleeced and flayed. No sooner, then, did the rumour of the new boats reach him than he sent his people out to see what truth was in it, for he himself used to go fishing in the fishing grounds with large crews. When thus his fellows came back and told him what they had seen, the Bailiff was so taken with it that he drove straightway over to Sjöholm, and one fine day down he came swooping on Jack like a hawk. "Neither tithe nor tax hast thou paid for thy livelihood, so now thou shalt be fined as many half-marks of silver as thou hast made boats," said he.

Ever louder and fiercer grew his rage. Jack should be put in chains and irons and be transported northwards to the fortress of Skraar, and be kept so close that he should never see sun or moon more.

But when the Bailiff had rowed round the *Femböring*, and feasted his eyes upon it, and seen how smart and shapely it was, he agreed at last to let Mercy go before Justice, and was content to take the *Femböring* in lieu of a fine.

Then Jack took off his cap and said that if there was one man more than another to whom he would like to give the boat, it was his honour the Bailiff.

So off the magistrate sailed with it.

Jack's mother and sister and brothers cried bitterly at the loss of the beautiful *Femböring*; but Jack stood on the roof of the boat-house and laughed fit to split.

And towards autumn the news spread that the Bailiff with his eight men had gone down with the *Femböring* in the West-fjord.

But in those days there was quite a changing about of boats all over Nordland, and Jack was unable to build a tenth part of the boats required of him. Folks from near and far hung about the walls of his boat-house, and it was quite a favour on his part to take orders, and agree to carry them out. A whole score of boats soon stood beneath the pent-house on the strand.

He no longer troubled his head about every *seventh* boat, or cared to know which it was or what befell it. If a boat foundered now and then, so many the more got off and did well, so that, on the whole, he made a very good thing indeed out of it. Besides, surely folks could pick and choose their own boats, and take which they liked best.

But Jack got so great and mighty that it was not advisable for any one to thwart him, or interfere where he ruled and reigned.

Whole rows of silver dollars stood in the barrels in the loft, and his boat-building establishment stretched over all the islands of Sjöholm.

One Sunday his brothers and merry little Malfri had gone to church in the *Femböring*. When evening came, and they hadn't come home, the boatman came in and said that some one had better sail out and look after them, as a gale was blowing up.

Jack was sitting with a plumb-line in his hand, taking the measurements of a new boat, which was to be bigger and statelier than any of the others, so that it was not well to disturb him.

"Do you fancy they're gone out in a rotten old tub, then?" bellowed he. And the boatman was driven out as quickly as he had come.

But at night Jack lay awake and listened. The wind whined outside and shook the walls, and there were cries from the sea far away. And just then there came a knocking at the door, and some one called him by name.

"Go back whence you came," cried he, and nestled more snugly in his bed.

Shortly afterwards there came the fumbling and the scratching of tiny fingers at the door.

“Can’t you leave me at peace o’ nights?” he bawled, “or must I build me another bedroom?”

But the knocking and the fumbling for the latch outside continued, and there was a sweeping sound at the door, as of some one who could not open it. And there was a stretching of hands towards the latch ever higher and higher.

But Jack only lay there and laughed. “The *Fembörings* that are built at Sjöholm don’t go down before the first blast that blows,” mocked he.

Then the latch chopped and hopped till the door flew wide open, and in the doorway stood pretty Malfri and her mother and brothers. The sea-fire shone about them, and they were dripping with water.

Their faces were pale and blue, and pinched about the corners of the mouth, as if they had just gone through their death agony. Malfri had one stiff arm round her mother’s neck; it was all torn and bleeding, just as when she had gripped her for the last time. She railed and lamented, and begged back her young life from him.

So now he knew what had befallen them.

Out into the dark night and the darker weather he went straightway to search for them, with as many boats and folk as he could get together. They sailed and searched in every direction, and it was in vain.

But towards day the *Femböring* came drifting homewards bottom upwards, and with a large hole in the keel-board.

Then he knew who had done the deed.

But since the night when the whole of Jack’s family went down, things were very different at Sjöholm.

In the daytime, so long as the hammering and the banging and the planing and the clinching rang about his ears, things went along swimmingly, and the frames of boat after boat rose thick as sea fowl on an *Æggevær*.

But no sooner was it quiet of an evening than he had company. His mother bustled and banged about the house, and opened and shut drawers and cupboards, and the stairs creaked with the heavy tread of his brothers going up to their bedrooms.

At night no sleep visited his eyes, and sure enough pretty Malfri came to his door and sighed and groaned.

Then he would lie awake there and think, and reckon up how many boats with false keel-boards he might have sent to sea. And the longer he reckoned the more draug-boats he made of it.

Then he would plump out of bed and creep through the dark night down to the boathouse. There he held a light beneath the boats, and banged and tested all the keel-boards with a club to see if he couldn't hit upon the *seventh*. But he neither heard nor felt a single board give way. One was just like another. They were all hard and supple, and the wood, when he scraped off the tar, was white and fresh.

One night he was so tormented by an uneasiness about the new *Sekstring*, which lay down by the bridge ready to set off next morning, that he had no peace till he went down and tested its keel-board with his club.

But while he sat in the boat, and was bending over the thwart with a light, there was a gulping sound out at sea, and then came such a vile stench of rotteness. The same instant he heard a wading sound, as of many people coming ashore, and then up over the headland he saw a boat's crew coming along.

They were all crooked-looking creatures, and they all leaned right forward and stretched out their arms before them. Whatever came in their way, both stone and stour, they went right through it, and there was neither sound nor shriek.

Behind them came another boat's crew, big and little, grown men and little children, rattling and creaking.

And crew after crew came ashore and took the path leading to the headland.

When the moon peeped forth Jack could see right into their skeletons. Their faces glared, and their mouths gaped open with glistening teeth, as if they had been swallowing water. They came in heaps and shoals, one after the other: the place quite swarmed with them.

Then Jack perceived that here were all they whom he had tried to count and reckon up as he lay in bed, and a fit of fury came upon him.

He rose in the boat and spanked his leather breeches behind and cried: "You would have been even more than you are already if Jack hadn't built his boats!"

But now like an icy whizzing blast they all came down upon him, staring at him with their hollow eyes.

They gnashed their teeth, and each one of them sighed and groaned for his lost life.

Then Jack, in his horror, put out from Sjöholm.

But the sail slackened, and he glided into dead water. There, in the midst of the still water, was a floating mass of rotten swollen planks. All of them had once been shaped and fashioned together, but were now burst and sprung, and slime and green mould and filth and nastiness hung about them.

Dead hands grabbed at the corners of them with their white knuckles and couldn't grip fast. They stretched themselves across the water and sank again.

Then Jack let out all his clews and sailed and sailed and tacked according as the wind blew.

He glared back at the rubbish behind him to see if those *things* were after him. Down in the sea all the dead hands were writhing, and tried to strike him with gaffs astern.

Then there came a gust of wind whining and howling, and the boat drove along betwixt white seething rollers.

The weather darkened, thick snowflakes filled the air, and the rubbish around him grew greener.

In the daytime he took the cormorants far away in the grey mist for his landmarks, and at night they screeched about his ears.

And the birds flitted and flitted continually, but Jack sat still and looked out upon the hideous cormorants.

At last the sea-fog lifted a little, and the air began to be alive with bright, black, buzzing flies. The sun burned, and far away inland the snowy plains blazed in its light.

He recognised very well the headland and shore where he was now able to lay to. The smoke came from the

Gamme up on the snow-hill there. In the doorway sat the Gan-Finn. He was lifting his pointed cap up and down, up and down, by means of a thread of sinew, which went right through him, so that his skin creaked.

And up there also sure enough was Seimke.

She looked old and angular as she bent over the reindeer-skin that she was spreading out in the sunny weather. But she peeped beneath her arm as quick and nimble as a cat with kittens, and the sun shone upon her, and lit up her face and pitch-black hair.

She leaped up so briskly, and shaded her eyes with her hand, and looked down at him. Her dog barked, but she quieted it so that the Gan-Finn should mark nothing.

Then a strange longing came over him, and he put ashore.

He stood beside her, and she threw her arms over her head, and laughed and shook and nestled close up to him, and cried and pleaded, and didn't know what to do with herself, and ducked down upon his bosom, and threw herself on his neck, and kissed and fondled him, and wouldn't let him go.

But the Gan-Finn had noticed that there was something amiss, and sat all the time in his furs, and mumbled and muttered to the Gan-flies, so that Jack dare not get between him and the doorway.

The Finn was angry.

Since there had been such a changing about of boats over all Nordland, and there was no more sale for his fair winds, he was quite ruined, he complained. He was now so poor that he would very soon have to go about and beg his bread. And of all his reindeer he had only a single doe left, who went about there by the house.

Then Seimke crept behind Jack, and whispered to him to bid for this doe. Then she put the reindeer-skin around her, and stood inside the Gamme door in the smoke, so that the Gan-Finn only saw the grey skin, and fancied it was the reindeer they were bringing in.

Then Jack laid his hand upon Seimke's neck, and began to bid.

The pointed cap ducked and nodded, and the Finn spat in the warm air; but sell his reindeer he would not.

Jack raised his price.

But the Finn heaved up the ashes all about him, and threatened and shrieked. The flies came as thick as snowflakes; the Finn's furry wrappings were alive with them.

Jack bid and bid till it reached a whole bushel load of silver, and the Finn was ready to jump out of his skins.

Then he stuck his head under his furs again, and mumbled and *jöked* till the amount rose to seven bushels of silver.

Then the Gan-Finn laughed till he nearly split. He thought the reindeer would cost the purchaser a pretty penny.

But Jack lifted Seimke up, and sprang down with her to his boat, and held the reindeer-skin behind him, against the Gan-Finn.

And they put off from land, and went to sea.

Seimke was so happy, and smote her hands together, and took her turn at the oars.

The northern light shot out like a comb, all greeny-red and fiery, and licked and played upon her face. She talked to it, and fought it with her hands, and her eyes sparkled. She used both tongue and mouth and rapid gestures as she exchanged words with it.

Then it grew dark, and she lay on his bosom, so that he could feel her warm breath. Her black hair lay right over him, and she was as soft and warm to the touch as a ptarmigan when it is frightened and its blood throbs.

Jack put the reindeer-skin over Seimke, and the boat rocked them to and fro on the heavy sea as if it were a cradle.

They sailed on and on till night-fall; they sailed on and on till they saw neither headland nor island nor sea-bird in the outer skerries more.

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