

The Dead Ship of Harpswell

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North American

Advanced
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At times the fisher-folk of Maine are startled to see the form of a ship, with gaunt timbers showing through the planks, like lean limbs through rents in a pauper's garb, float shoreward in the sunset. She is a ship of ancient build, with tall masts and sails of majestic spread, all torn; but what is her name, her port, her flag, what harbor she is trying to make, no man can tell, for on her deck no sailor has ever been seen to run up colors or heard to answer a hail. Be it in calm or storm, in-come or ebb of tide, the ship holds her way until she almost touches shore.

There is no creak of spars or whine of cordage, no spray at the bow, no ripple at the stern—no voice, and no figure to utter one. As she nears the rocks she pauses, then, as if impelled by a contrary current, floats rudder foremost off to sea, and vanishes in twilight. Harpswell is her favorite cruising-ground, and her appearance there sets many heads to shaking, for while it is not inevitable that ill luck follows her visits, it has been seen that burial-boats have sometimes had occasion to cross the harbor soon after them, and that they were obliged by wind or tide or current to follow her course on leaving the wharf.

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