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The Day the Men Went to Town A Story Written by Tessie Gillis, Inverness County
Tessie Gillis is one of the finest writers that the Cape Breton experience has ever produced. It is as simple as that. And our job is to keep her name and work in front of our readers. Here is a story that has not been published before. There is nothing to say except "Read it." We think you'll find it indelible. The Day the Men Went to Town WINTER WAS ANGRY even by Island standards. Ever since the first flurry of snowflakes in November, the winds had been busy shifting the drifts into strange shapes and forms, but it wasn't until after Christmas that winter really began. I hardly took the time to tie my shoes in the morning before rushing to the window to see what new pictures the night winds had drawn. It was hardly dawn and already Jim had shovelled his way out of the house, cut a path to the barn, the chicken house, the toilet and to the spring. In places the drifts had been higher than a man's head. Jim sat now, taking long draughts of tea and staring at the list of groceries I had left on the table. "Best get your pencil and start cutting," he said. There was no trace of resentment in his voice. "The Beatons and Laughie must be out o' groceries, and your list will fill a whole sleigh." "I can't cut much," I said, picking up the pencil. "We'll have to have flour • a hundred pounds, then with the potatoes and vegetables I canned we won't go hungry • as long as the meat holds out...we're out of baking powder...I can cut the rolled oats...lard? I suppose I could render some of the fat off the salt pork...matches...both kinds of soap...the dry beans can be halved, macaroni too. Ten pounds of sugar won't last for long, but I suppose it will have to do...salt...I can't cut any more. Heaven alone knows when you'll get out again. I'd better put tobacco and the papers down too, or you'll forget them." I pencilled in "one bag of candy," Jim could put that in his pocket. Jim never forgot to bring candy for the children, still it wouldn't do any harm to remind him. "Bells!" said Jim jumping up from the table. "They're coming. On this of all days they have to come early. Must've started at midnight." "Why are you in such a dither? Don't they always come early?" "Yeh! But I ain't got that end of the road open yet." "So what! They're early, you're late. There's no harm done." "That ain't the point! I DIDN'T GET THE ROAD OPEN YESTER? DAY!" Jim's face was flushed with anger. "Time I got through with that whore of a shovel it was milking time." "But there was a storm • you had a good excuse. They didn't come down on account of the storm." "Cut it out, Mary, will ye: Yesterday had been a bad day. The blizzard had lasted for nearly two days. The temperature had fallen to five below zero. Jim had managed to cut a path to the spring to water the animals when the trouble started. The first bit of the shovel went deep into four feet of snow that covered the spring, but when he tried to pull it out heaped with snow, the handle broke just where it joined the spoon. Frost had made the wood brittle. By the time he had taken the stub out, taped the handle and set it back in the spoon, it had been time to feed the animals and clean the stables. It was too late to start opening the road. Jim had been ferocious. His hands had been stiff with cold, his frozen mitts had stuck to the metal shovel. "Jim! Look! Harold's mare is in a drift," I shouted from the window. "They're



all around him." "Jesus! Jesus!" said Jim, fumbling with his jacket. "The only day in a month I missed opening the road, they have to come early. I'll be the shit of the Glen after this." "Cut it out, Jim. A person would think the world was coming to Dagmar's Health & Specialty Foods • Spices • Herbs • Baking Supplies • Seeds, Flours & Grains • A Complete Line of Food Supplements • All Natural Cosmetics Located in The Walkway 539-2213 ' Cape Breton Shopping Plaza • Sydney River A.J.K. AGENCIES LIMITED 54 Ferry St., P.O. Box 1703, Sydney, NS B1P 6T7 Distribution & Courier Real Estate & Insurance "If you're thinking of selling your home, give us a call." Serving Industrial Cape Breton and North Victoria R. Hickey & Co. p. O. Box 96, North Sydney B2A 3M1 Gerald Brennan, Mgr. Residence: 794-4564 "And remember: No sale, no charge." 794-3119