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I From "John R. & Son" • A Story in Tessie Gillis' book, The Promised Land
INTRODUCTION: During the Summer of 1965 the following letter appeared on Evelyn Garbary's desk at the Arts Service, Adult Education Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Education: July 31. 1965 I would like to know if there is some way I could get the lessons they will be giving at the adult course on writing. You see I am practically an invalid with my heart and it's resultant artery complications; I have been working as steadily as my health will permit on a novel these past three years. I find I could do with more than a few pointers on professionalism, I'm afraid I'm very much an amateur. I have contacted correspondence schools but there is the question of the high costs between us. A short course, such as you are offering, could be at least, a great boost--if we could find a way so I could take them by correspondence. Could anything at all be worked out and how much would it cost? Don't just say 'no chance' PLEASE without putting aside the fact the request is unorthodox and think it over instead. I guess I'm begging you--but I do want something like this so very badly. Sincerely, Tessie Gillis As it happened, Ms. Garbary did not say "No." Instead, she worked with Tessie while she lived, and she kept interest in Tessie's writing alive after her death in 1972. For instance, she got author Ernest Buckler to read the stories, and he praised Tessie's "very keen eye for the telling detail...a thorough knowledge of her subject, a lively sense of humour, and a talent for achieving striking lines and observations." In the end, Tessie saw none of her stories published. After Tessie's death in 1972, Evelyn Garbary struggled to keep interest alive • 21 years of commitment that has culminated in the recent Medicine Label Press publication of The Promised Land, a book of Tessie Gillis's stories. It is a rich, complex book worthy of re-reading and discussion. It affirms Tessie's place in the world of Cape Breton literature that must be considered. The following is an extract from that extraordinary book. A Selection from "John R. and Son" THE WHOLE COUNTRYSIDE got invitations to Margie Cameron's wedding. The moonshine business was good. After the festivities, Neil Duncan, the bride's second cousin • dry, sick, well hung over- pulled himself out of bed and walked two miles to John R.'s for the cure. John R. was at home, and after a couple of drinks Neil felt better and wanted to spend the day talking; but John R. wanted to get back to the fields. Sensing his host's inhospitality, Neil bought a bottle and shuffled down the road in search of more congenial company. Father Murphy had been at the wedding too. He'd officiated at the Mass and accepted the invitation to the reception for one reason alone. At dawn, Father changed his clothes and his boots and stepped across the road to waken the Mountie. Sleepy and disgusted with many failures, the Mountie threw himself behind the wheel of the car beside the waiting priest. They turned off the highway and followed the weed-grown road, little more than a path, that led to Neil's farm. They backed into an orchard where the house was visible, but they were hidden. The Mountie turned off the engine. They waited all morning, until nearly one o'clock; then their patience was rewarded. They saw Neil shuffling out the door. They saw him turn in the



direction of John R.'s place. Neil was walking slowly, taking many rests. They waited another half hour, then followed. They saw him going around the bend of John R.'s gravel pit. They chose, after consultation, not to enter John R.'s property; so they turned off the engine and waited. The wait was not long. Neil walked straight into the trap before he had even time to feel frightened. There was nothing he could say, with a quart in his pocket. Father Murphy took his arm and the bottle, and the Mountie ordered him into the car. Neil was booked, then turned loose to appear in court at a later date. He could have pleaded there and then, but in fairness to John R. he had to warn him. John R. wasn't too upset. He knew Neil would have to name his supplier when questioned under oath. Even John R. didn't expect anyone to commit his immortal soul to Hell by swearing falsely. He told Neil to plead guilty and give the Mountie his name. John R. was worried about nothing except the fine. He'd have to pay that. But as far as go- Ltd. Louisbourg Pharmacy

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