

THE R-FACTOR

(Excerpt)

“Nora McFarlane settled herself on a log, kicked off her clogs and dug her toes into the sand. She'd made it a practice to walk along Barnacle Beach in front of her home at least once every day for more than fifty years.

From a plastic bread bag in her pocket Nora extracted a crust for the birds. She scanned the sea and sky, searching for a particular Herring gull with a beak the colour of butter. She had tamed the bird to the point of settling just a foot or so away from her. When she tore the crusts to bits and pitched them skyward, the gull would flap up and catch them, a feathered airborne retriever.

Nora noted the ferry making its way toward the Mainland and the large number of passengers on deck. Perhaps not too unusual, given a day so sunny. Then, there he was, winging toward her. She could see something in his beak, something black. Maybe if she threw a crust – a cell phone landed right between Nora's sand-buried feet. Unfamiliar with mobile communication, she eyed it with suspicion. Could it be some kind of explosive?

"Hello. Hel-lo! Am I on hold or what?"

Nora left the 'phone on the sand. "Yes?"

"What's going on?" The voice sounded nettled.

"A seagull dropped you at my feet."

"Who is this? Where's Patrick?" The voice was, no question, upset.

"To whom am I speaking?" Nora lifted the 'phone and held it at arm's length. It smelled of fish.”

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