

**THE COLLECTED
GEORGE GARRETT**
GEORGE GARRETT

Edited, with an introduction and notes, by Michael Murphy



TRENT EDITIONS

This book is dedicated to Chapman William Hough
*Lo que no sospechaste
vive y tiembla en el aire*

Federico García Lorca

Cuff, not daring to look behind, clattered down the long room and flew through the door. Halfway along the yard he stopped; there was a crash of broken windows, for the boys were still battling. He started around him in confusion. High walls towered above him. For the moment he was undecided what to do. If he ran into the front street, somebody was bound to bring him back. He thought of the canal. Dashing to the end wall, he tried in vain to climb a spout, and slid down to the ground because the clogs would not grip. Taking them off, he searched frantically for a piece of string to tie them together, intending to hang them around his neck. The string he had broke as he knotted it.

Down the yard came the furious, blustering priest, waving the ebony ruler. Cuff hesitated, took careful aim with one clog, dropped the other, and shinning up the spout, soon reached the top of the brick wall. As he looked over the other side, and saw the twelve-foot drop to the towing-path below, it worried him. Not even a hat-man was in sight who might help him with a ladder. There was no other way of lessening the drop. Cuff glanced over his shoulder. The priest's angry demands for him to come back had now been changed to moderated appeals. Cuff ignored them. Kneeling on the wall, he threw the allies out of his pocket on to the towing-path, to a spot where he was not likely to fall on them. Then, swinging his legs over the wall, he lowered himself gradually, as his toes scraped the bricks. He hung suspended for a moment or two, and then let go, landing with a bump on the clinkery towing-path, shaken and a little bruised.

Hastily grabbing some of his rolling allies, he ran to the water's edge and dived in. And as he swam towards the opposite bank three marbles were tightly clutched in his fingers.

FISHMEAL

A morning mist darkened the grey churning ocean, but the little tramp steamer pushed stubbornly ahead. Up and down she pitched in the hissing foam of a storm-roused sea. As her bow dipped under water one tumbling wave bashed against it in full force, shook the suspended anchors, and entirely swamped the forecastle head. With a quivering heave it rose again to send a wash of cascading streams pouring below to the well-deck. Then down plunged the bow once more as another sheet of water, rushing inboard, swept the cowl of a ventilator clattering along the deck, excited the bridge-officer's whistle, and jerked a cursing sailor out of his forecastle daydream.

Yet none of these threats of the rising storm could quieten any of the half-a-dozen stokers arguing noisily in the opposite side of the poky dismal forecastle. And almost in pitch darkness too, for no daylight could enter through the tightly-screwed iron lids that blinded the three small portholes. That was why the singing oil-lamp still remained lit, throwing a yellow glimmer on the men's bobbing faces as their voices rose higher and higher unmindful of Costain, the languid detached listener lying sick in a low bunk. Even Big Roache in his excitement had forgotten his watchmate.

Now Roache was not altogether to blame for this forgetfulness. Awkward circumstances made it unavoidable, for in the confined space of the small forecastle, men had to eat, drink, smoke, talk, joke, argue, quarrel, sleep, and lie sick. And sickness, unlike the effects of an accident which at all times is easy to see, was so much open to suspicion that a sensitive man seldom complained of his ailment for fear of the charge

of malingering. The men had to sense from their knowledge of each other when one of their number was sick, and it was always a dependable sign if a man whose clean habits were a byword crawled into his bunk without washing himself. That's what Costain had done that morning, coming off watch at four o'clock. There was no separate place for him to lie, and nowhere else for the men to sit, so he could not escape their noisy din as their faces twisted in anger.

They were interrupted by the ringing of ten o'clock on deck, and the surprise entry of long-fingered Maxwell, a young coal-passer, who came bounding through the open doorway bursting with information. Straightaway he gained the men's attention with startling news of a wild black cat. He swore it had sprung at him a few minutes previously off a heap of coal in the bunkers' tween deck. Asked to describe it, he went on with a rapid stream of details:

'It's nearly as big as a Newfoundland dog; has a rough coat like a porcupine; two great big eyes like electrical bulbs —'

a Bactrian camel.'

In a bantering way he ridiculed young Maxwell's statement, and coarsely reminded him that there were enough romancers in the forecastle already. But Maxwell in blushing defiance stuck to his story and loudly retorted he was not dreaming.

During this fresh uproar, the sickly Costain twisted restlessly in his bunk. With the exception of himself and Roache, the remainder of the men were apparently convinced that Maxwell was telling the truth. A couple of them, though not having actually seen the cat, swore they had heard its hideous miaowing on several occasions. In their opinion, its presence abroad was a warning of some kind of trouble. Others said so too, and the atmosphere gradually quietened down to a low murmuring pessimism.

Cockney Dyson had to have his say. 'It seems like a Jownah to me,' he muttered. Young Maxwell was more emphatic: 'I'm sure it is,' he declared.

After gathering the empty breakfast tins, he was about to leave the forecastle and return to his bunker work when Duffy, the tall middle-aged Irishman, with a note of concern in his voice called him back. 'Hould on a minute, young feller,' he said. 'Let me see thim hands of yours.'

Maxwell held his badly blistered hands up, had them tenderly examined, and promised to go along to the chief steward's room for a lint dressing.

'See yer do,' advised Duffy. 'If yer get septic poisoning and it runs through yer system, yer'll soon know all about it. There's no doctors aboard here to save yer arms, or yer life either. So you run along and get thim hands seen to.'

As Maxwell left the forecastle, the tall Irishman turned a grave face to the others: 'I think,' he said, 'I honestly think, the ould hooker's cursed. That cat's a sure sign of something; believe me.'

The majority of the men gloomily nodded their heads. Roache was the smiling exception, and his scoffing tongue soon provoked another rumpus during which Costain was still forgotten.

The sick man stirred uneasily in his bunk, his moody condition worsened by the quarrelsome group around him.

'Tsch, tsch, tsch,' he mumbled to himself, 'such foolish twaddle. What awful rubbish from grown-up men. Men! They're more like a drivelling collection of big, soft children. And just as ignorant, too. Yapping about their silly signs! They haven't enough brains to recognize real signs.'

For what the other men seemingly ignored was quite plain to Costain, lying there and taking in all that was happening: wave after wave bumping continually like a heavy tom-tom on the ship's side; one booming thud following another. From time to time one would almost succeed in bursting open the porthole. Squish-sh-sh went the water as it forced its way past the rubber joint of the brass rim, and trickled down the ship's side from river to river. Costain gazed in despair at the ever-flowing streamlets, knowing eventually they would swell the pool under his bunk. As if there wasn't enough sniffy dampness to

contend with from the dripping leakages above his head!

Worst of all to him were the torturing noises that never seemed to stop. The long continuous banging of the anchor chains in the shut by his elbow reminded him of a jail where drag-shackles were part of the punishment. A jail, he reflected. No, not as good as a jail! In a jail, a really sick man could obtain proper medical attention, be put under the care of a qualified doctor, and sent to hospital if necessary. But here, in this squalid musty forecabin there were no advantages of that kind; no decent accommodation for a man in his predicament. Instead, everything added to his discomfort. The pitching movement of the ship kept constantly jerking his persecuted body from side to side of the low cramping bunk. Grating on his nerves too, was the irregular slamming of unfastened locker doors as they swung open and shut. Costain stared agonisingly in their direction.

'What an infernal racket,' he mumbled. 'Why the hell can't someone jamb those damned doors tight with a paper or a piece of rag? What's the matter with all those fellows? Have they gone stone deaf?'

In disgust he glanced at his squabbling shipmates. Then his eyes wandered around the forecabin and rested on the oil-lamp swinging to and fro as it scraped against the side of the stanchion. A black curly tail was lengthening on the jumpy flame. The sick man kept staring at it and sighed weakly.

'Wouldn't that give anybody the creeps,' he muttered wearily. 'Look at the stinking thing. Do they call that a light?'

The uneven jaundiced flame puked miserably inside its sooty globe. Yet, bad as the light was, Costain preferred it to absolute darkness. He knew that daylight was out of the question, for the portholes dare not be opened with the heavy sea that was running.

Again he stretched his aching limbs for relief. One vexing thought brought on another:

'What a dreadful hellhole to be in,' he reflected. 'To think that a man can't get a simple bottle of medicine no matter how badly he needs it. It's against the rules! Their rules! Blast the 'midship gang and their rules! Making a man wait until daytime, their time. And for what?'

Pills! That was all they could think about. Just pills! Pills!! Pills!!! Poulitces! Fox medicines! And their detestable black draught! Ugh! The taste of it. Ugh! What a horrible concoction to bring anybody; bloody gripping purgatives for a man suffering in every bone of his body.

He rolled over on to his side, but being unable to settle in that position twisted on to his back again. He groaned in spite of himself. 'Oh my poor back. Oh, I wish I was home out of this. Ann could fix me up right away, and with less ceremony. She would guess the trouble in half-a-tick and know exactly what to do.'

Seven bells struck on deck. Immediately afterwards, young Maxwell the coal-passer, stepped quietly into the forecabin carrying a couple of dixies containing a frugal dinner for two men. 'Twenty minutes past eleven,' he announced in a cautious undertone, and noiselessly laid the food dixies on the narrow table. He took a sly peep at Costain whose eyes were shut, and then whispered close into Roache's ears:

'I've been told not to call him. Bennett has offered to stay below at noon and work on until two o'clock. He said you would get one of the others to relieve him by then.'

Roache put a hushing finger to his lips for he had quickly anticipated the rest of Maxwell's message. Duffy, near at hand, overhearing what had been said, was also anxious to do his share. Ordinarily, he was not due to go on duty until four o'clock. Under the present circumstances however, he was willing to start two hours earlier and whispered so to Roache who nodded in agreement.

'It's the best plan, Paddy,' he said, 'getting him lie for a watch or two. It will give him a good chance of pulling round. The rest of us can work the job between us somehow.'

'No trouble at all,' answered Duffy, and motioned young Maxwell along to his side. 'Everything's all fixed up, son,' he whispered. 'Now run over to the galley and tell the cook to kape Bennett's dinner in the oven. And here,' he continued, 'hold on a bit. I thought I would yet to get something on them hands of yours.'

'I did,' replied Maxwell, holding his iodined palms up for closer inspection. 'See for yourself. The chief steward painted that on before.'

The skin's broken now. Those blinkin' blisters burst half-an-hour ago. They're smarting like the dickens, too. The tips of my fingers are the worst. You know; constant stinging.

Duffy turned the youth's hands over with a sympathetic touch. "They look damned ugly to me, son; he said. You be very careful the dirt doesn't get into them, that's all." Then with a further peep at Costain's bunk he lowered his voice a shade. "You'd better slip below again; he whispered. "And whatever yer do, don't forget Bennett's dinner." With an understanding nod Maxwell quickly hurried out of the forecabin.

As he did so, Costain twisted peevishly, opened his eyes, and gazed beyond the now quietly conversing men seated near him to the corner where the half-naked Roache was changing into a stokehold singlet, and Duffy was packing his clay pipe with tobacco. In his heart he felt intensely bitter towards these two. So they thought he had not been listening! He had heard every word that was said. They had been discussing him and his sickness, and what they intended to do; making a song of it; hinging it in his face!

He wearily dragged his tortured body into a sitting position, and half-leaned out of the side of his bunk. His bloodshot eyes seemed unusually wild and big in the smallness of his sallowed face as he gazed disdainfully at those about him, but particularly at Roache and Duffy. His sudden emergence had made all the men uncomfortable, tongue-tied, and fidgety. One of them did try to hide his embarrassment in a clumsy attempt to fasten the locker doors. His back was towards Costain who searchingly kept him under observation for a few minutes and then looked round the forecabin again, stretching his body farther out of the bunk to do so. Roache, fearing that he might fall, crossed to him and inquired in a kindly apprehensive tone:

"Do you want anything, Marty?"

The sick man stared quizzingly before designing to reply: "Who? he granted. "Me? Me want anything? No. I don't want anything." He curtly waved Roache aside: "Mind, will yer. Get out of the way."

Lifting his thin wobbly legs over the side of the bunk, he struggled into his working pants as all the other men sat slyly watching him.

After buckling his waistbelt, he stared accusingly from Roache to the rest in turn and blurted out between gasps:

"What's the matter with all of you? Eh? Sitting there like a crowd of dummies! You're not bawling the place down now, are you? Raving about your bloody champions and your black cats. It's babies' rattles you ought to have, all of yer. Something to play with! Yes, that's what you want; something to play with."

None of the men answered him, considering it much wiser to ignore Costain in his present cantankerous condition.

He poked his chest assertively as he turned on Roache again. "I suppose you thought I wouldn't go down this watch?" he said. "Well, I am going down." He coughed to clear his throat. "I'm more than twenty years at this sea-game, savvy! Nobody ever did two hours' work for me yet. And; he added in a hoarse shout, "they're not starting now." As he bent over to grope on the floor for his boots he suddenly lifted his head in a pointed challenge to everybody: "Do you think I'd be beholden to any of you rotten gang? I'd watch it!"

Roache, ignoring this deliberate taunt, again tried in a gentle persuasive tone to change Costain's obstinate intention. "Get back into your bunk for your own benefit; he entreated. "You're not fit, Marty, and you know it. Last night you staggered around the stokehold like a drunken man."

He carefully restrained from hinting at the extra exertion it had meant for him having to do most of Costain's work as well as his own. In an earnest intimate approach he sat down on the form alongside his shipmate whose trembling fingers were knotting a boobyacc.

"Marty; he pleaded, "what's the use of carrying on this way when you know you're unfit. Come on, there's a good chap. Get back into your bunk. You're not fit to go below!"

Costain straightened up, gazed in return, edged away from Roache and barked jerkily in return: "Not fit? Who's not fit? Worrayer talking about? The steam was there all the watch, wasn't it? The gauge pointer was on the red mark all the watch, wasn't it? A hundred and eighty pounds full pressure, barring when we cleaned the fires. Even then, it

'Twelve o'clock rang. Costain having planted himself nearest the top of the deep iron ladder was first to descend. Roache followed a few rungs behind him. To protect their flesh from the hot sloping handrails they carried torn pieces of sacking. Rivulets of perspiration ran down their faces as they descended lower and lower in a stuffy sweltering atmosphere.

On reaching the stokehold flooring, Costain strode briskly to his boiler and busied himself around the three huge roasting fires with his customary bustle and proficiency. Bennett, who had volunteered to do two hours' extra work, stood gaping in amazement, then catching Roache's significant glance, winked understandingly, and without any comment trudge up the long ladder.

Left to themselves in the stokehold, the other two began their work together as the circumstances demanded. Not a single word passed between them. Selecting the necessary heavy tools, long hoes and slice bars, they laid them down in convenient rows by the fires marked for cleaning. As the furnace doors swung open, bright red glows illuminated the high black steel walls of the stokehold, while yellow gleams danced fantastically in the shadowy corners.

Then began the most wearing of their tasks which brought all the heavy tools into use. Flaming gaseous clinkers were loosened, pulled, and eventually wrestled on to the iron flooring, to the accompaniment of their struggling grunts and gasps. The blinding flow of salty perspiration filled the men's eyes as they toiled in front of the open furnaces. There was the blistering exposure to scorching flames; the clattered dropping of heat-bent tools; and the inescapable choking mixture of steam, red-hot ashes, and the fumes of smouldering char. The dirty fires had to be scraped clean to the bars and re-lit. Shovelfuls of blazing coals were hurriedly carried across from the other fires, fresh coals were piled on from the black heaps close at hand, and after a back-aching spell of continuous bending the last of the furnace doors was slammed to. One of the hardest jobs was over after an hour's steady molling. Breathing heavily, the energy-drained men gladly retired to the valve boxes on opposite sides of the stokehold for a sit-down.

He paused to feel for the leather tongue didn't drop so very much.' He paused to feel for the leather tongue doubled up inside his boot, and finished up by talking to himself. 'Such a crowd of gabbags! All you can do is yap, yap, yap. Think you know everything, eh? Treating me like a first tipper!' He turned upon all of them once more, and snapped his fingers. 'Yet can't teach me that much about boilers, none of yer; he almost shieked. No, not that much! Thought I wouldn't go down, eh? Huh?'

When Duffy good-naturedly tried coaxing him to take Roache's advice he was sharply told to mind his own business. 'I don't want you or anybody else; Costain snapped back, 'to tell me what to do.' Then looking directly at Big Roache he added, 'And that goes for you too!' Roache patiently controlled his rising anger and decided to yield. 'Just as you like, mate,' he said indulgently. 'Please yourself; and went on rolling a few cigarettes. As the quarrel had robbed both himself and Costain of an appetite, the food dixies containing their dinner were left untouched.

One bell struck on deck; a quarter to twelve. Instantly the two men jumped to their feet, buttoned their dungaree jackets up, and strode huffily apart out of the forecaste on to the deck, taking but a cursory glance up at the bridge where the officers with sextants cocked were measuring the midday sun. Costain, his head held erect, showed no signs of lagging behind. Pride tingered his gait and kept him within short distance of Roache. Their tiff forbade one friendly word as they hurried together along the open deck, nimbly dodging the sprays and sprinkling spindrift that showered around them. Soon they entered an opening under the saloon and by way of a long closed-in alleyway reached the fiddle, where the tall paint-peeled funnel rose high above their heads.'

On the narrow cased-in grating they sat a few feet apart, glancing resentfully at each other while waiting for twelve o'clock to strike. In the close heat their bodies soon warmed to a sticky sweat. Mixed clouds of rising smoke, gaseous fumes, and hissing steam irritated their lungs, compelling them both to hawk and spit frequently. But their tempers in no way softened and their spits became grunts of contempt.

Their clothes were soaked in sweat from their steaming bodies. After a few minutes' rest, Roache walked to the centre of the stokehold, tapped the steam gauge to note its slow climb, then returned to his seat again. While smoking a cigarette, he cast a discreet wary eye on his watchmate sitting almost doubled up at the other end of the stokehold.

For Costain, in utter exhaustion, had hopped helplessly on the valve-box. A long swig of water from the drinking can did not improve his condition. His bulging red-streaky eyes stared at the crackling sparks. The fires were burning up but so was he! With an effort he bent over, unted his sloppy bluchers, dragged them off, and poured from them a stream of accumulated sweat that had run down off his body and legs. Removing his socks, he stood up to rinse them in a bucket of salt-water drawn from the sea cock. He felt he wanted to tear all the wet clothing from his body. He dragged his singlet off, and wringing it out as tight as he was able, hung it on a wire line to dry. Staggering back to the valve-box again, he sat there, gasping for breath. From the waist up he was naked, yet he could still feel the strangling weight of his heavily soaked singlet sticking to his throat and body. His straying hands rubbed feverishly against his forehead and his throat, and in occasional spasms stroked the back of his neck. Something was catching his breath. 'Phew?' he gasped. 'The heat Phew!! Oh, sufferin' Jes. It's terrible. It's terrible.

Casually slipping his boots on again, he shuffled across to the dusty thermometer, using his wet sweatcloth to wipe its face. He tried in vain to mop his own. Moving lower, he almost pressed his nose against the mercury glass. 'Christ,' he muttered. 'That temperature! Who would believe it? 145 - 46 - 47 - 48. One hundred and forty-eight degrees. It's awful! O Jesus! It's awful!! O-oh; that's worse than ever.

He staggered back to the valve-box once more and hopped down. His body was in torment, his mind too. If he could only manage to last out the remainder of the four hours, just to finish his watch! The thought worried him. Glancing slyly across to the other side of the stokehold, he saw Roache alternately poking, raking, and shovelling

goals into the furnaces. 'He *was* busy! Maybe his fires were not burning properly! Calls himself a fireman too. A fireman! Huh?'

He lolled back once more against the bulkhead, gazed downwards at his thin naked sweating body, and wearily rubbed the back of his arm along his forehead. The flesh felt as if it were taut. His skull was expanding, and to his disordered mind was almost big enough to burst. His face seemed to be bloated like a monster carnival mask. The terrible thought struck him that it might explode. Could such a thing happen, he wondered. There seemed to be a tremendous weight on his head also, some horrid unbearable load that was crushing down on him all the time, as if his skull had been trapped in the jaws of a monstrous vice; yes, a tightening vice that was squeezing his overstrained eyes from their sockets. He felt positive they were already on a level with his mouth. The breath, too, was leaving his lungs, being driven out of his body. He was choking, going dizzy and blind. Everything around him was dim and blurred. It was nearly black, and he dreaded the darkness. He began to moan and grunt to himself. 'Oh,' he said. 'Oh, I must get out of this stokehold quick, if only for a few minutes. I must have some fresh air.' Rising unsteadily to his feet, he groped in front of him and stumbled instinctively in the direction of the long ladder.

Roache, on the alert, promptly hurried across, and seized his arm: 'Hey! Come back here! Where do you think you're off to?' he demanded. Costain struggled to pull his arm free as he showed traces of his old belligerency. 'Let go of me,' he said. 'Go on! Hands off! GOING?'

'On deck for a cooler. Anything else you'd like to know?'

Roache's bulky form blocked the bottom of the ladder. His tone became entreatingly mild. 'Listen to me, Marty,' he said. 'Please; like a good chap. Go and sit in the bunker pass, just by the recess. There's a slight breeze coming through. I'll run up and turn the ventilators on to the wind.'

Costain's brain cleared a bit. The bunker pass, eh! Where it was pitch dark, and this other fellow might have a chance to do him in!

He insisted on the removal of Roache's slackening grip, and struggled to free himself as he kept repeating: 'Let go. Hands off. Go on. Hands off.'

Roache stared hard at him, and losing patience, raised his voice: 'I've already said that I'll go up and turn the ventilators.'

Costain's sallowed face twisted into a sneer as he jerked it sideways in the direction of the boilers. 'You'd better give your fires a bit of a turn,' he growled. 'The ship will be stopping in a minute.' In his frenzied efforts to mount the ladder he tried to push his watchmate away.

Roache was tempted to knock him down. There was a limit to everything! In the past few days besides doing two men's work, he had borne more insults from Costain than from any other individual he had ever sailed with. Yet, he reasoned to himself, what was the use of hitting a man who was sick, and bad-tempered as a consequence. And it was only a waste of breath to argue with him. Roache sighed as he stood there, undecided what to do next, then glancing in alarm at the dropping steam-pointer he dashed back to the boilers to work his fires.

The sudden release caused Costain to topple forward against the ladder. Clutching anxiously at the handrails, he slowly intoned a one, two, three, and after a slithering attempt succeeded in firmly placing his lagging feet on the bottom rung, while his arms hugged the rungs on a level with his shoulders. He raised his eyes, and slowly began to climb. The long, upward, swaying tudge was at first tedious and disheartening, compelled as he was to rest after each step by leaning his body on the ladder. As he panted in distress, the quickened hammering of his heart shook his breast. Though each rung produced an unavoidable grunt, his eyes gazed hopefully aloft. He continued in his upward struggle; climbing, resting, and panting. Another rung, and another little rest, and then another rung. By and by, he saw there were not many more, and murmured, 'Oh, thank goodness.'

The top grating was now only a few rungs above his head. Soon he would be up there, sitting near the fiddley door, away from the funnel, where the air was cool and sympathetic. He moved a step higher. Only one more rung to go. Already there was a slight breeze!

he could feel the wonderful difference. Thrusting his head and shoulders through the hole in the grating, he dragged his body halfway towards the open door, and dropping into a sitting position, rested his back against the bulkhead. He breathed a sigh of relief. That was much better, he thought. To be able to sit down for a while was a boon! Head in hands, he pondered the next move. He must get to the open deck somehow!

It was no easy job to rise to his feet. His legs were weak and the motion of the ship unsteady. Finally, on standing up, he lurched across the fiddley towards the alleyway door. The cold draught that caught his face was refreshing. His starved body craved for more; lots of cool air, as much as possible. Though he felt a little better, his feet would not act as he wanted them to. He tried repeatedly to lift them over the doorstep and failed each time. The iron-step was but eighteen inches high, yet his foot would not lift that far up. He tried again. Between awkward hesitations he mumbled over each attempt. 'Oh! Nearly. Oh! Next time.' While balancing feebly on one leg, a sudden roll of the ship hung him through the open door into the alleyway.

For a few moments he lay sprawling on his stomach. He was dazed and gasping. With difficulty he dragged his aching body to a sitting position, and longingly gazed down the alleyway at the clear light of day. The open deck! That was the place he wanted to reach for real relief. But there was yet a fatish distance to go.

Rolling over on his hands and knees, he started ahead of him as if hypnotized and began crawling towards the daylight. That indeed was a godsend! And the wind! What a relief it meant to his overheated body. He must have more of it! He held his mouth wide open, to swallow the wind; to gorge it into his throat and stomach; to enjoy its refreshing coolness right through his system.

He crawled on; nearer and nearer to the open deck. Out there was the water! Out there were unlimited quantities of everything; light, wind, and water. He was so thirsty, hellish thirsty; not his lips alone, but all of him, every pore. 'A plunge in the ocean would be heavenly,' he thought. One good plunge, then back to the ship! He would show these so-called firemen how to steam her.

In need of another rest, he stopped crawling and raised himself high enough to squat on the unguarded doorstep of somebody's cabin. He took a squint around. There were a few books on a rack; framed photographs on the small wooden bureau; and snaps of some women, a bungalow, and the ship. 'Hat' he muttered. 'A postcard view of this dirty cow; on paper water. Ha, ha!' he smiled grimly. Out there was real water, miles and miles of it, that could easily rock this tiny ship about like a single pea in a gigantic dixie of soup!

He decided to move on. Grasping the doorknob in an attempt to raise himself, he swayed precariously. Retaining his slipping grip, he clawed desperately at the lintel, and gradually worked himself upright. The wind seemed much stronger. 'Um-rr,' he exclaimed. That one breath itself was worth bags of money!

More confident now, he limped a few steps farther on, then warily looking in front of him, halted, and pressed his body against the bulkhead. A big sea was coming. He heard its approach and saw its gathering momentum. 'Boom!' it went as it struck the ship.

In sheer delight he watched the deluge of water pour inboard. Part of it flowed along the alleyway and lapped his sockless ankles.

'God! That was a beauty.' He felt invigorated. As he lingered to paddle, his eyes were fixed on the open deck, and the unlimited stretch of water beyond. Very soon he would be out there, he reflected, and splashing up to the neck. Aye, only a couple of yards more to go, then he would be right in the water. But how? That was the question. How? The bulwark was a bit too high. He must look for some place lower. He could worm his way through the hawse pipe! Well - wasn't that a silly idea? He chuckled inwardly. Imagine anyone pinching a dip in the ocean. There were no forbidding trespass boards out there. No, he would dive in, in the ordinary way. Just stand on the bits, then climb onto the bulwark. He had done it many a time in port. Sure of himself, he limped eagerly to the ship's side.

The grinning mess room boy passed by, balancing cups of tea. Costain glanced after him and grunted: 'Tsch, tsch, tsch! Tea, hot tea; when a man is thirsty, hellish thirsty. Tea! What good's that?' He gazed longingly at the sea; so vast, so fascinating, and so inviting.

(Clutching the bulwarks, he steadied himself for a minute, then almost sprang on to the stumpy mooring bits. The nearness of the water acted as a stimulant. By availing himself of convenient rings and cleats, he was soon level with the ship's rail. Another foot or so was all he had to climb, then he could dive in. Yes, dive in; take a proper header! To his ears came the jumbled shouting of men. There was a lot of commotion, the stamp of running feet, and a bellowing that was directed at him.

'What the blazes are you doing, man? Get back on deck!'

Costain turned his head confusedly and on one of the men fast approaching vaguely distinguished the gold-braided sleeve of a blue serge uniform. 'Must be the second officer,' he thought. 'Thinks himself smart, coming to spoil me of a decent cooler. It's alright for him posted up on the bridge for his four hours. He doesn't know what it's like yet, to be roasted in a hot-box below.'

The startled officer made a grab: 'Come back this minute,' he ordered. 'Come back!'

But Costain leered devilishly, waved his hand, and stepped overboard to oblivion.

At that moment the tantrum wind goaded the sea into a damaging activity. A succession of truculent waves swooped aboard, spattering masts and funnel in flying foam. The trembling vessel strained, reeled, and groaned. Below in the engine-room, harassed men dashed wildly about as tons of rotating metal raced around in a nerve-straining racket of deafening noises. A breakdown of machinery seemed imminent each time the propeller was lifted out of the water and plunged in deeper again.

On the bridge, too, all was bustle and excitement. The siren blazed out its raucous danger call. All hands dashed on deck.

'Man overboard,' was the re-echoing cry. 'Man overboard! Stand by, everybody!'

The hostile sea glowered a 'Come in, if you dare,' as the sailors rushed to business at the curved davits. Out swung a boat for lowering. The second officer was first in: 'Who's coming?' he asked. Spontaneously the volunteers clambered after him until their elbows

of the sea. There was a grim satisfaction in his face as the oarsmen rallied to each order shouted above the grinding creaks and clattery-clacks of the rust-clogged rowlocks.

'Give her all you've got, boys. Together now,' he roared enthusiastically. Their reeking backs bent to the order, and a rhythmic chanty established unity of movement in the scratch crew. Each pull of the oars was perfectly timed.

'Hey, hey, Stroke,' sang out the mate.

'Waww Ohh,' chorused the sopping men.

'Hey, hey, Stroke; ... 'Waww Ohh,' ... 'Hey, hey, Stroke; ... 'Waww Ohh;'

And so the crowded boat bounced onwards. Up and down, up and down; rising obliquely on the crest of a watery hillock, and being precipitated the next moment to the depths of a trough whose foam-tipped waves reared skyward. So the positions alternated; up and down, up and down.

During it all, Maxxwell was unusually quiet. He sat almost motionless and uncomplaining although in terrible agony. In sheer desperation he longed to wrench his swollen smarting hand clear, or scream aloud. The intense pain caused him to bite harder than ever on his lips. A half-suppressed groan escaped him. In a guilty ashamed way, he struggled to make his face smile again.

Bennett glanced at him uneasily: 'Merciful Jesus,' he whispered. 'Don't shift your hand, Tom. Hold on a bit longer.'

Maxxwell's forced grin and nodding head answered reassuringly. His tongue continued to moisten the ends of his parched lips. 'Oh for a decent smoke,' he sighed. 'I'd give anything for a cigarette.' On raising his eyes he spotted one wedged behind Roache's ear. The latter, as odd man, was perched in the forward end of the boat keeping a sharp look-out. In turning his head around he caught sight of Maxxwell's face, interpreted his grimacing, and immediately aimed the cigarette over the bending heads of the oarsman. A gust of wind whirled it into the sea.

were knocking together. In the confusion, Maxxwell and Roache were separated. There was no time for anybody to grab lifebelts. The guy-blocks screeched as the slackening rope falls jerked the lowering boat at a dangerous slant down the ship's side. Sturdy hands, by pushing with all their might, prevented it from being bashed to pieces as each tossing wave swept by.

Oars were picked and set. Determinedly the men shoved off against a molesting wind. They had not rowed far when Bennett, in groping about his feet to account for a big inflow of water, discovered that the plug for the bottom of the boat was missing. He became terror-sickened by this new danger; so did the others as the icy water crept up their dithering shins inch by inch.

The second mate, almost frantic, but unable to move from the tiller, yelled despairingly: 'Don't gape, men. Keep searching. The plug must be somewhere.'

The search was futile. In the crowded condition of the boat there was hardly enough space for anyone to budge more than a foot or so. Those who could, desperately handled the tin dippers but the inflow of water gained rapidly.

Maxxwell's brain was in a fever. Suddenly he ribboned the tail of his shirt, wrapped the blistered fingers of his right hand close together, bent down in the middle of the boat, thrust his arm elbow-deep in the rising water, and on feeling the plughole, screwed his bandaged fingers tightly into it.

'That's fixed it, fellers,' he shouted cheerfully. 'Go ahead. Pull away.' The men around him gave immediate signs of relief. Over their heads the second mate called encouragingly: 'Good boy, Maxxwell.' To the others he shouted: 'That's the spirit chaps. Bale her out.' Those whose hands were convenient to do so, used the dippers to good effect, until the water gradually sank from their shins, and only swirling puddles splashed about their feet.

As the boat lightened, the spirits of the men did likewise. The second mate was particularly at ease. Guiding the tiller with an expert's hand, he outwitted the mischievous wind, and skilfully met the tossing jolts

Roache, returning his attention to the lookout, reclaimed a drifting lifebelt. While scanning the water surface, his keen eyes had been misled occasionally by floating bunches of seaweed. Finally, he identified a bobbing head.

'There he is,' he roared, and pointed with his finger.

Instantly the boat was steered in that direction, the men pulling hard. Skilful manoeuvring fetched them close to Costain's floating body; naked, except for the short pants which crudely draped the hips. Roache dragged it in over the gunwale. Though hampered by lack of space, he worked vigorously to induce respiration until his own arms were cramped and aching.

The boat had nearly capsized in turning about. The second mate, aware of many threatening possibilities, sighed unconsciously. His face was lined with worry, for the most risky part of the journey had yet to be gone through. In the distance he saw the ship heel over dangerously, fully exposing all the red paint which covered her bottom from plimsoll mark to keel. On the reverse roll, her masts came almost parallel with the water.

He caught a glimpse of Maxwell. Those withering features told their own story. If he could only manage to hold out until the ship was reached! The worried officer pushed the tiller hard over and with a loud steady voice brought the oarsmen into time again.

'Come on, boys. Put your muscles into it. Now then, altogether. Hey, hey. Stroke.'

'Waww Ohh,' came the surging response.

With not a minute to lose, back they turned, rowing frenziedly. Up and down, up and down; arms extending, backs re-bending. Onward they rowed towards the heavily rolling ship.

Maxwell was undoubtedly in agony. Tormenting twinges had chased the smile from his face. But the temptation to release his pain-racked arm was again stoically dismissed. Despite a willed endeavour to sit still, his body seemed incapable of remaining upright. He was feeling dangerously queer. It required a terrible strain merely to keep his eyes open. There was froth on his lips, too. Then as everything went black

about him, his body slumped forward, and lay half-huddled in the bottom of the boat.

The second mate saw what had happened but did not dare speak of it. He recognized the awkward plight they were all in. One false move would flood the boat. Wholly depending on the deadweight of Maxwell's body to keep the water out, his strategy diverted the attention of the others. Like a maddened slave-driver, he forced the pace of the oarsmen. They responded automatically while his active mind thought out each move. The ship drew closer. He ventured as near her side as the dashing seas permitted.

Being top-heavy, she rolled recklessly. Hanging davit-ropes wriggled about in tangled confusion as the oval blocks jumped up and down like rebounding parts of a giant sling-shot. The attempts to hook on proved futile. The bobbing boat crashed against the ship's side with tremendous violence.

Roache caught the end of a heaving line that was thrown down from the deck above. He tied it under the limp arms of Costain, and giving the signal to haul, guided the naked body clear of the boat. Bashing seas swung it about as it was jerked upwards; smack followed smack. Near the ship's rail, it hung awry with arms outstretched like a bloodstained Christ. Then it was dragged aboard.

The horrified second mate was determined that Maxwell should not undergo a similar experience. He ordered the men to get aboard ship as best they could, while the boat tossed and rocked erratically. It was every man for himself now. From the ship's rail dangled emergency rope-ends and a dirty, worn Jacob's ladder. The men, grabbing whatever was nearest, scrambled upwards hand over fist to the brusque commands of the officer, who, chary of causing a panic, was waiting to manage Maxwell in his own secretly conceived way.

In a few minutes only the two of them were left in the boat. As it bobbed and canted it threw Maxwell flat on his face. Quickly to the side of the unconscious figure scrambled the second mate. Gazing up the ship's side, he roared for another heaving line, and seeing Roache halfway up the Jacob's ladder shouted in exasperation: 'For God's sake, be a man.'

High above them, two planks nailed together had been converted into a platform, on which three incredulous sailors were stooping, ready to render assistance. As they helped the second mate on to the bulwarks, ready hands pulled him inboard, and speedily unted his unconscious burden.

Others waited for Roache who was swarming up a rope. Just after his feet touched the ship's deck the last of the flooded boat disappeared under the waves. Everybody being now aboard, the bridge telegraph rang, 'Full speed ahead,' the engines restarted, and the propeller resuming its churning pushed the ship once again on her way.

Maxwell had been gently placed on the hatch. A few yards away lay the body of Costain. All the efforts to revive him had failed, although every known method was tried by the men in relays. So with a certain amount of misgiving they tackled the unconscious coal-passer. The second mate, regardless of the water dripping from his clothes was an interested, patient onlooker.

Soon Maxwell's eyes began to blink. He squinted around him wondering, uncertain of his whereabouts. There must be something to do, he thought. It was strange for so many people to be generously smiling at him; also, talking nice, cheerfully nice. He could recognise Roache and Duffy, and some of the others. But the second mate! Why was he standing there gaping, his puffed face steaming like a fourpenny hot-pot? He was coming across, too. What did he want?

The drenched officer leant over the hatch, and asked in a pleasant tone: 'Well, kid. How do you feel?'

'With these,' answered Maxwell, intending to hold up his fingers for fun. But he could not budge on account of the extreme pain in his arm. His whole body seemed to be paralysed. His hand was thickly bandaged, and he suddenly became aware that whatever had happened to him had left him in an awkward helpless fix. And yet, he smiled at everybody. And they all smiled back together.

From the bridge overhead, the jowl-faced skipper peered down, and quite satisfied with Maxwell's light-heartedness, shouted to the men bunched around the hatch: 'You'd better carry him to the forecastle,

Roache looked down, understood in an instant, descended a few rungs, and awaiting an opportune surge, dropped back into the bobbing boat. His manner was humble and genuinely apologetic: 'Sorry, sir. It wasn't done deliberately. He never opened his mouth.'

But the second mate appeared not to be interested, for having caught the heaving line, he was busily measuring slack lengths against his body. When he did speak, his tone was subdued and forgiving:

'That's alright, Roache,' he said. 'It's up to us to get this kid on board. Now listen; you'll have to be very careful and quick. So, remember, save one hand for yourself. When I kneel down alongside him, lift him square onto my back and lash him to me —'

'Shut up! I'm doing this! Fetch the turns of the rope around my stomach, like so.'

'They bent down, and between them succeeded in unscrewing Maxwell's swollen hand from the plughole. As they did so, the water immediately flowed into the boat.

The second mate crouched lower until he was almost level with the unconscious body, and Roache placed Maxwell pick-a-back. Then kneeling down in the fast rising water, he gathered the heaving line and dextrously wound half-a-dozen loops around the two men as instructed. Rising quickly to his feet again he watched his chance, snatched at a dangling rope hanging from the ship's side, managed to get a tight grip, and pulling the drifting boat close to, held on with all his strength. Turning anxiously to the second mate he shouted: 'You'll have to watch yourself, mister.'

The officer, under his heavy handicap, struggled to stand upright, and maintain a balance. One scourging wave nearly tipped him into the sea. Despite the difficulties, he secured a footing on the wobbly Jacob's ladder, and began his perilous climb. Though often immersed by the rolling of the ship, he clung doggedly and rested to recover his breath. The climb seemed a hazardous uncertainty, yet each step he took was calculated and regular. As the water swept over him, his sopping head rose each time, shaking like a retriever's. The water poured down the full length of Maxwell's body.

now. Be careful how you put him in his bunk. And you, Mr. Thompson, if you stand there much longer, you'll freeze.

The second mate with an awakening 'Aye, aye, sir,' saw to it first that Costain's body was reverently covered, and then with a cheerful wave of the hand to Maxwell hip-flopped along to his room, leaving a watery trail behind him.

Maxwell had been lifted onto Duffy's back, who could not resist twitting him: 'Bejaises, you're having a fine time, son. Trying your superiors as hobby horses?'

The young coal-passer playfully used his heels as spurs. 'Giddap,' he said, and made several clicking noises with his mouth.

Thus he was taken to the forecaste accompanied by a patting escort of the crew who jollied him in horsey jargon about riding breeches, hunting crops, nosebags, and a lot of other things that fitted his humour for the moment.

But long after he had been tucked into his bunk he was still as hazy as to what had happened in the boat. He remembered going dizzy, but the rest was a blank. It was only by listening to the vague conversation of the men in the forecaste that piece by piece he learned of his rescue and the risky action of the second mate. It became much clearer as the men enthusiastically expressed what they felt.

'He's the finest officer I've been with,' said one.

'He's a genuine white man, alright,' said another.

'You bet! One of the best,' said a third.

Maxwell wanted to say so too, but when he tried to speak out a lump came in his throat and for some inexplicable reason, tears filled his eyes. Thinking Roache was looking at him he turned his face away. But Roache had casually lifted his head while opening his tobacco tin to roll some cigarettes. When a couple of these were gummed, he sidled over to Maxwell's bunk, peeped in, saw the trickling eyes, and without comment stuck a cigarette between the coal-passer's lips. He struck a match as Maxwell murmured a quivering 'Thanks.'

That evening, the hushed conversation of the men returned to Costain, and soon led on to the wild black cat. With the exception of

Roache, they blamed it for all the misfortunes of that day which were miserable reviewed in whispers; one dead man amidships, and here in the forecaste, Maxwell, lying badly disabled, and in danger of losing his arm from septic poisoning. The casualties had also left them short-handed, and caused a lengthening of the working watches from four hours to six; as if four hours were not already too many under the existing hard conditions. They talked on.

Night brought a sinister darkness and a slight downpour of rain.

Under the new working arrangement, Roache had gone on duty at ten p.m. At half-past eleven, he was ordered to call the midnight relief. Though he disliked the idea of leaving the consoling warmth and light of the stokehold, it was not policy for him to show it. To hint at somebody else going up on deck would immediately be construed as cowardice. He was no coward, but the vivid impressions remaining from the sequence of events that day had made him rather uneasy: the two tiffs with Costain, first in the forecaste, and then in the stokehold; later, dragging the body from the water, and mauling it in the boat; and worst of all, the ghastly picture of that blood-spattered face as the naked body hung awry on the ship's side. And now, alone, having to pass the corpse which still lay blanketed on the hatch.

With inward qualms Roache slowly mounted the stokehold ladder. His nervousness was undisguised on reaching the unlit alleyway. As he stared expectantly about him, the blood-spattered face of Costain appeared to be everywhere; in doorways, ventilator cowl, and leaning around corners. Roache timidly stepped out of the alleyway on to the open deck.

Horribly affected by his weird imaginings, he shuddered all the more as pelting sprays soaked him to the skin. The ship rolled heavily and as the straining rigging creaked louder and louder, the wind whined low in his ears. As he neared the spot where Costain's body lay covered a sudden gust loosened the white blanket. The ends flapped noisily on the hatch like the irregular clapping of two fat hands. The next ghoulish breeze entirely stripped the dead.

Roache, in a cold sweat, saw what had happened and casting a furtive glance at the hatch, quickened his pace. To his disturbed imagination, the deck was a glut of scurrying footfalls. Abreast of the hatch he missed his footing, and in his confusion tripped over and fell on the deck. Only the nearness of the corpse stayed a loud outbreak of obscenities. While groping for his cap, he put his hand on what he thought was a rush-mat. There was a harsh iterated spitting, and a repelling squeal pierced his ears as the wild cat leapt at his throat. Its eyes shone like two green electric bulbs in the dark.

Roache, in terror, blasphemed, swiped, kicked out savagely and ran. Completely unnerved, he dashed head-on into a ventilator, and fell stunned. There he lay for a while.

Recovering his senses, he sat up in frighthened weariness. As he sized the predicament he was in, he felt glad in a way that nobody had come to his assistance. Evidently the disturbance had not been heard. The third officer was probably in the wheelhouse, and the look-out man hindered by a bow wind, would miss any noises aft. For this, Roache felt doubly thankful.

He stood up, wiped his face, and hurried on to the forecaste to waken the relief men.

When he finished his own watch at four o'clock he washed himself and crawled quietly into his bunk. For a long time he lay there unable to sleep. Then half-past five struck. Drowsily, he trimmed the smoking lamp.

At daybreak the wind was far astern. The sea had smoothed itself out as if nothing had happened. The dead man had yet to be cast overboard. Preparations for the burial were being supervised by the boatswain, who early had his men afoot. The corpse was washed, then dressed in a suit of brown dungarees. Heavy firebars were splintered up the legs, the body sown in canvas, and laid on a spare hatch cover. At eight o'clock four sailors solemnly bore it aft to the poop. The feet end was rested on the ship's rail. All men off duty mustered for the burial service. Even Maxwell managed to limp along.

The ship stopped. All was dead silence except for the dull plashing of the water overside. The men stood dumb and meditative. Their heads were uncovered and bowed as the captain appeared, fumbling the leaves of a prayer-book. His sermon, though brief, was impressive. His final syllables were droned from the melancholy huskiness of a discarded chest: 'We-ec — there-fore — com-mit — his — bod-dy — to — the — dec-cep?'

The bulky canvas slid a couple of inches, and stuck. Two sailors tilted the head of the hatch-cover a little higher. The body slid a bit further, then stuck again.

The boatswain's fingers motioned upwards. 'A shade higher, boys,' he whispered. 'Easy now, she's on the move. Don't dump the hatch-cover. Up, the least bit more. Whoa-oa. Steady. Enough.'

The weighted canvas scraped jerkily along the hatch-cover and went hurtling overboard. Into the water it disappeared. Some ripples spread outward. The hungry gulls that darted low for crumbs screeched disappointedly.

Duffy sighed as he turned to Roache: 'The usual ending in these ships. Never sick until you're dead.'

A closing snap of the captain's prayer-book started the group out of their bitter mournful thoughts. The deck shook beneath their feet as the ship started slowly off again.