

by the same author

DRIFT

EBB AND FLOOD

CAPTAIN BOTTELL

THE FURYS

STOKER BUSH

THE SECRET JOURNEY

BROKEN WATER

GREY CHILDREN



HALF AN EYE

SEA STORIES

JAMES HANLEY



LONDON

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD

over him, an ache shot through his body, he closed his eyes. A man held his head, another his feet. They carried him away.

'Swam nearly three miles,' said one in awed tones. 'In that.'

'Amazing,' said the other. 'Terrific, by God.'

They were lost in admiration.

'What a man,' they said. 'What a man.'

The lights faded away, and the men with their burden passed out of sight.

THE LAST VOYAGE

THE eight to twelve watch had just come up. The fo'c'sle was full. The four to eight crowd were awake now. Some were already getting out of bed.

'Where is she now?' asked a man named Brady.

'She's home, mate. Look through the bloody port-hole. Why, she's past the Rock-Light.'

And more of the four to eight watch began climbing out of bed. They commenced packing their bags. The air was full of smoke from cigarettes and black shag. A greaser came in.

'Reilly here?' he asked gruffly.

A chorus of voices shouted: 'Reilly! Reilly! Come on, you bloody old sod.'

A figure emerged from a bottom bunk in the darkest corner of the fo'c'sle.

'Who wants me?' he growled.

'Second wants you right away. Put a bloody move on.'

The man put on his dungaree jacket, a sweat-rag round his neck, and went out of the fo'c'sle.

'His goose is cooked, anyhow,' said a voice.

'Nearly time too,' said another.

'These old sods think they rule the roost,' said another.

'He's just too old for Rag-Annie,' said yet another.

And suddenly a voice, louder than the others, ex-

claimed: 'What the hell's wrong with him, anyhow? If some of you bastards knew your work as well as he does you'd be all right. Who says his goose is cooked?'

'The doctor.'

'The second.'

'Everybody knows it.'

'That fall down the ladder fixed him all right.'

'The old fool'll get gaol. D'you know he's sailin' under false colours?'

'False colours?'

'Yes. False colours. The b—'s sixty-six, and he's altered his birth-date. They've got him down on the papers as fifty-six.'

'Has he been found out?'

'I don't know.'

'Some lousy sucker must have cribbed.'

'Give us a rest, for Christ's sake,' shouted a Black Pan man. 'You'd think it was sailin' day to hear you talkin'. Don't you know it's dockin' day? We'll all be home for dinner.'

'And a pint of the best, eh?'

The packing of the bags continued, whilst the flow of conversation seemed unceasing.

'This ship is the hottest and louisiest I ever sailed in,' growled a trimmer. 'A real furnace, by hell.'

'Oh, listen to that,' said a voice. 'You want to sail on the *Tautonic* if you like the heat.'

Suddenly the man Reilly appeared in the fo'c'sle. He walked back to his bunk past the crowd of men, who were now so occupied with bag-packing that they hardly noticed his return. Suddenly a voice exclaimed:

'Well, Christ! Here he is back again.'

'Who?'

'Old Reilly.'

All the faces turned then. All the eyes were focussed upon the man Reilly.

'Did you get your ticket, mate?' asked one.

'Did he kiss you behind the boiler?' asked another.

'Are you sacked then?' asked another.

Everybody laughed.

'He went down to kiss the second's —,' growled one.

The man Reilly was tall and thin. His eyes, once blue, were black. Heavy rings formed beneath them. His skin was pasty looking, his hair was grey. He was very thin indeed. When he took off his singlet, they shouted:

'His fifth rib's like a lady's.'

'His arms would make good furnace slices.'

'He's like a bloody rake.'

'The soft old b—. Why doesn't he go in the blasted workhouse.'

Suddenly Reilly said: 'Go to hell.'

Then he commenced to roll up his dirty clothes.

'Here, you! Shut your bloody mouth and leave Reilly alone,' exclaimed a man named John Duffy. 'If half you suckers knew your job as well as he does, you'd get on a lot better.'

'He's an insolent old sod, anyhow,' said a deep voice in the corner.

'I've been twenty years in this ship,' said Reilly.

'Aye. And by Christ, the ship knows it too. I'll bet you must have been growlin' for that twenty years.'

'Who's growlin'?' shouted Reilly. 'You young fellers

think you can do as you like,' he went on. 'Half of you don't know your damn job, but you can come up to us old b—— and get the information though. Who the hell told you I was sacked? Don't you believe it. You'll have me here next trip whether you like it or not.'

'Oh Christ!'

'By God! I'll look for another packet, anyhow.'

'So will I.'

'Why in the name of Jesus don't they let you take the ship home with you? Anyhow we don't all kiss the second's—'

'That's enough,' shouted Duffy.

A silence fell amongst the group in the fo'c'sle. Reilly, having packed his bag, went out on deck. He sat down on number 1 hatch. The ship already had the tugs, and was being pulled through the lock. He walked across to the rails and leaned over. He glared into the dark muddy waters of the river. He thought:

'Good God! All my life's been like that. Muddy.'

Duffy came out and joined him. He spoke to him.

'Hello, Johnny,' he said. 'How did you get on with Finch?'

Finch was the second engineer, a huge man with black hair and blue eyes, and a chin with determination written all over it. It was known that he was the only second engineer who had ever tamed a Glasgow gang from the Govan road.

'This next trip,' said Reilly, 'is my last. It's no use. I tried to kid them all along. But it wouldn't come off. I just come up from the second's room now.'

'What did he say?'

'"Reilly," he said, "I'm afraid you've got to make one more trip, and one only. You'll have to retire."

'"Retire, Mr. Finch," I said.

'"Yes. You're too old. I'll admit I like you, for I think you're a good worker, a steady man. You know your job. What I have always liked about you is your honesty and your punctuality. I have never known you fail a job yet. That's why I've hung on to you all this time. You're a man who can always be trusted to be on the job. I'm sorry, but you know, Reilly, I'm not God Almighty. The Superintendent Engineer had you fixed last trip. But I asked him a favour and he did me one."

'"D'you mean that, Mr. Finch?" I asked him.

'"Yes, I do. Look here, Reilly. What have you been doing with that book of yours? You're down as being ten years younger than you are."

'"Can't I do my job?" I asked him.

'"Of course you can, Reilly, but that's not the point. You're turned the age now. Once you become sixty-five the company expect you to retire."

'"On ten shillings a week," I said to him.

'"That's not my business, Reilly," he said: "I repeat that I'm sorry, very sorry, but I'm not very much higher than you, and if I disobeyed the Super, I wouldn't be here five minutes."

'"By Christ!" I said.

'"Look here, Reilly," he said, "it's your last trip this time. I can't stand here talking to you all day. I'm sorry, very sorry. It might have been worse. You ran a chance of getting gaol, altering the age in your book. Here. Take this."

'He gave me a pound note,' said Reilly to Duffy.

'He did? Duffy wiped his mouth with his sweat-rag. 'He's not a bad sort himself, isn't the second. Not bad at all.'

'Not much consolation to me though,' said Reilly, 'after thirty-nine years at sea. By Jesus! I tell you straight I don't know how to face home this time. It's awful. I've been expecting it, of course, but not all of a sudden like this. But d'you know what I think caused it?'

'What?' asked Duffy, and he spat a quid of tobacco juice into the river.

'Falling down the engine-room ladder three trips ago.'

'But that was an accident,' remarked Duffy.

'Accident. Yes,' said Reilly. 'But don't you see, if I'd been a younger man I'd have been all right in a few days. But I'm not young, though I can do my work with the best of them. I was laid up in the ship's hospital all the run home.'

'Ah, well. Never mind,' said Duffy.

'S'help me,' exclaimed Reilly, 'but those young fellers fairly have an easy time. Nothing to do only part their hair in the middle, and go off to French Annie's or some other place. By God! They should have sailed in the old ships. D'you remember the *Luccinia*?'

'Yes.'

'And the *Etruria*?'

'Yes.'

'D'you remember that trip in the big ship when she set out to capture the Liverpool to York speed record?'

'Aye.'

'D'you remember Kenny?'

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'I do,' said Duffy. 'The bloody sod! All he thought about was his medal and money gift from the bosses, but us poor b—! Every time we stuck out faces up to the fiddley grating to get a breath of air, there he was standing with a spanner, knocking you down again: "Get down there. Get down there."'

'Half boozed too,' said Reilly. 'I'll swear he was.'

'He was that,' remarked Duffy. 'All in all, nobody gives a damn for us. Work, work, work, and then——'

'You're a sack of rubbish,' said Reilly. 'And by Christ I know it. I know it. All my life. All my life. I've worked, worked, worked, and now——'

'Will you have a pint at Higgenson's when we get ashore,' asked Duffy.

'No. I won't. Thanks all the same,' said Reilly, and he suddenly turned and walked away towards the alley-way amidships.

'It's hard lines,' said Duffy to himself, as he returned to the fo'c'sle. All the men were now dressed in their go-ashore clothes. Duffy began to dress.

'Where's the old boy?' they asked in chorus.

'I don't know,' replied Duffy, and he put on his coat and cap. Overhead they could hear the first officer shouting orders through the megaphone; the roar of the winches as they took the ropes; the shouts of the boat-swain as he gave orders to the port watch on the fo'c'sle-head. The men went out on to the deck.

'She's in at last. Thank God.'

She was made fast now. The shore-gang were running the long gangway down the shed. A crowd of people stood in the shed, waiting. Customs officers, relatives of

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the crew, the dockers waiting to strip the hatches off and get the cargo out. All kinds of people. The gangway was up. The crew began to file down with their bags upon their backs.

'There he is!' shouted a woman. 'Hello, Andy!'
'Here's Teddy!' shouted a boy excitedly.

And as each member of the crew stepped on to dry land once more, some relative or other embraced him. The men commenced handing in their bags to a boy who gave each man a receipt for it. He placed each one in his cart. Now all the crew were ashore. The shore-gang went on board. An old woman stood at the bottom of the gangway. She questioned an engineer coming down the gangway.

'Has Mr. Reilly come off yet, sir?' she asked.

'All the crew are ashore,' he replied gruffly.

But they were not. For Reilly was in the fo'c'sle. He was sitting at the table, his head in his hands. His eyes were full of tears.

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'What a time you've been Johnny,' exclaimed Mrs. Reilly, when eventually her husband made his appearance. 'The others came down long ago.'

'I had something to do,' said Reilly, and there was a huskiness in his voice. Near the end of the shed he suddenly stopped and put his bag down. 'Have all those fellers cleared?' he asked. 'I wanted to send this bag home with Daly.'

'I'll carry it, Johnny,' said his wife.

'How the hell can you carry it?' he said angrily. 'I'll

carry it myself. Only for this here rheumatism. I've never been the same since that there fall down the stokehole.'

He picked up the bag and put it on his shoulder. They walked on. At the dock gates they had to stop again, whilst the policeman examined his pass.

'I haven't got it,' exclaimed Reilly, all of a flutter now for he suddenly remembered that he had left it on the table in the fo'c'sle.

'You're a caution,' said his wife. 'Indeed you are.'

'If you haven't a pass, mister, I'll have to search your bag. Are you off the *Orianian*?'

'Yes. I am. You ought to know me, anyhow. I've been on her for years.'

'I don't know you,' said the policeman gruffly: 'let's have a look at it.' He picked the bag up and took it into the hut.

'Good heavens,' said Mrs. Reilly. 'How long will he be in there? I'm perished with the cold.'

'Serve you right,' said her husband angrily. 'Haven't I told you time after time not to come down here, meetin' me? It's not a place for a woman at all.'

'There were other women here as well as me,' said Mrs. Reilly.

'The other women are not you,' said Reilly, more angry than ever. 'Anyhow, here's the bloody bag.'

The policeman said: 'Everything's all right. Good-night.'

Mrs. and Mr. Reilly walked away without replying. They passed through the dock gates. The road was deserted. Suddenly the woman exclaimed: 'Did you take

those Bland's pills while you were away, Johnny? I've been wondering. How d'you feel now?"

'Rotten,' he replied.

They walked on in silence.

'Shall I get you a glass of beer for your supper?' asked his wife.

'No.'

Again silence.

'Mary's husband got washed overboard,' said Mrs. Reilly quite casually. 'Of course, I wrote to you about it.'

'Jesus Christ! Andy? Andy gone?'

'Yes. Poor feller. He was coming down the rigging after making the ratlines fast.'

'My God!'

They reached the end of the road. Turned up Juniper Street. Reilly spoke. 'How's Harry? Did he get any compensation?'

Mrs. Reilly looked at her husband.

'He got twenty pounds. Lovely, isn't it? And him with his jaw gone.'

'Poor Andy, poor Andy,' Reilly kept saying to himself. 'Poor Andy.' And then suddenly he said aloud: 'Holy Christ! What a life! What a lousy bloody life!'

'It's God's Holy will,' said his wife. 'You shouldn't swear like that, Johnny.'

'I dare say I shouldn't,' he said, and he stopped to spit savagely into the road. They reached the house. The three children, twelve, fifteen, and sixteen, all embraced him.

To the boy, Anthony, who was sixteen, he said: 'Well, are you workin' yet, Anthony?'

'No, dad. Not yet.'

The father sighed. He turned to Clara, twelve years of age, and took her upon his knee. 'How's Clara?' he asked her.

She smiled up at him, and he smothered her in a passionate embrace.

When the children had gone to bed, Mrs. Reilly made the supper. They both sat down.

'Eileen has to go into hospital on Wednesday,' said Mrs. Reilly.

'What for?'

'Remember her gettin' her arm caught in the tobacco cutting machine?'

'Yes. But I thought it healed up?'

Mrs. Reilly leaned across and whispered into his ear: 'Don't say anything, John.'

'I'm sorry I came home. By God, I am. Coming and going. Coming and going. Always the same, trouble, trouble, trouble.'

He put down his knife and fork. He could not eat any more, he said, in reply to his wife's question. He drew a chair to the fire and sat down. Mrs. Reilly began clearing the table. She talked as she gathered up the dishes.

'Trouble. God love us, you don't know what trouble is, man. How could you know? Sure you're all right, aren't you? Away from it all. You have your work to do. And when you've done it you can go to bed and sleep comfortable. You have your papers and your pipe. You

have your food and your bed. Trouble. God bless me, Johnny, but you don't know what the word means. The rent's gone up, and then Anthony not working, and Eileen's costing me money all the while. And she'll end up by being a drag on me. How can the poor girl work? I get on all right for a while and then something happens. You see nothing. Nothing at all.'

Reilly jumped up and almost flew at his wife. She dropped her hands to her side. She looked full into his face.

'See nothing! Jesus Christ Almighty! You don't know what I see. You don't know what I have to do. What worry I have. You don't know what I think, how I feel. No. No. God's truth, you don't. Me! ME! An old man. And I have to hop, skip, and jump just like the young men, and if I don't, I'm kicked out. And where would you be then? And all the children. In the bloody work-house. I have to put up with insults, humiliations, everything. I have to kiss the engineer's behind to keep my job. By heavens, you're talking through your hat, woman!'

'Am I? How do you know I'm talking through my hat? Was I talking through my hat that time you fell twenty-five feet down the iron ladder into the engine-room? Was I? Was I? Was I talking through my hat when I made you come away from the doctor who examined you? Was I daft? You with a piece of your skull sticking in you brain, and no jaw, and all your teeth knocked out, and three ribs broken. And you actually wanted to take a lousy twenty-three pounds from the shipping company's compensation doctor. The dirty

blackguards! You tried to kiss *his* behind. That I do know.'

'Look here, woman. I'll cut your throat if you torment me much longer. You don't know what I have on my mind. God! you don't. Kiss his backside? I had to. Supposing I had done as you say. Asked for a hundred pounds compensation. I know it would have been all right if we had got it, but we didn't get it, did we? And I knew we couldn't. So I took what they offered—twenty-three pounds, and my job back.'

'Did that pay the doctor's bill and rent and food, for all the eleven weeks you were ill in bed on me? Did it? No. You had a right to ask for the hundred pounds. It's too late now.'

'I had no right.'

'You had. Good God! You know you had.'

'Damn and blast you, I tell you I had no right. I could never have got it. Didn't the union try? Didn't everybody try? It was no use. I got off lucky. I got my job back anyhow, didn't I?'

'Your job,' said Mrs Reilly, sarcastically.

'My job! My job! My job! he screamed down the woman's ear. 'My job.'

'The people next door are in bed,' she said.

'I don't care a damn where they are.'

'I do,' said his wife.

'Christ, you'd aggravate a saint out of heaven. I feel like chokin' you.'

'Go ahead then. You hard-faced pig. That's what you are.'

'Oh, go to hell,' said Reilly. He walked out of the

kitchen. Went upstairs. He undressed and got into bed. He lay for a while. Suddenly he got up again. He went into the children's room. They were sleeping. He went up to each one. He kissed them upon the forehead and upon the lips. He kissed Clara, murmuring: 'Oh, dear little Clara. Dear little Clara. I wonder what you'll do. I wonder how you'll manage.' Then he kissed Eileen.

'Poor Eileen. Poor darlin'! Losing your little arm. Your poor little arm. And nothing—NOTHING can save it.'

He kissed Anthony and murmured: 'Poor lad. God help you. I don't know how you'll face life. No, I do not know. Poor boy.'

Then he tip-toed out of the room and returned to his bed. All was silent in that house now. Below, Mrs. Reilly was sitting in the chair just vacated by her husband. She was weeping into her apron. Above—he lay.

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He thought. 'First night home. Good Lord. Always trouble. Always something. And me—me defending my job, and I haven't got one after this trip. Finished now. All ended now.'

Mrs. Reilly came up to bed. Neither spoke. She got into bed. Lay silent. No stir in that room. All dark outside. Roars of winches and shouting of men they could hear through the window. Mrs. Reilly slept. The husband could not sleep. He got out of bed again, and went into the children's room. Anthony was in one bed. Clara and Eileen in the other. He lay down on the edge of the boy's bed.

'Nothing. Nothing now,' he said. 'Things I've done. All these years. Nothing now. How useless I am. Poor children. If only I had been all right. Oh, I wonder where you'll all be this time next year. I wonder.' He closed his eyes but could not sleep. Was nothing now, he felt. Nuisance. And young men coming along all the time. Young men from same street. Street that was narrow, and at the back, high walls so that sun could not come in. 'No sun in one's life,' he thought.

Mrs. Reilly woke. Felt for her husband. Not there. 'O Lord!' she exclaimed. 'Where is he? Surely he hasn't gone.'

She called. And her voice was thin and cracked and outraged silence of that room. 'Johnny, are you there?' she called.

He heard. He would not reply. Was crying quietly, and one long arm like piece of dried stick was across Anthony's neck. She called again.

'Oh my God! Where are you, Johnny?'

He did not answer. Were now strange feelings in him. Heart was not there. Was an engine in its place. Ship's engine. Huge pistons rose and fell. He was beneath these pistons. His body was being hammered by them. All his inside was gone now and was only wind there. Wind seemed to blow round and round all through his frame. Gusts of wind. Were smothering him. Many figures were tramping in him. Voices. All shouting. All talking together. He could hear them. They were walking through him. Third engineer was one.

'You soft old bastard. Didn't I tell you to watch the gauge?'

Chief engineer was another.

'Watch yourself, Reilly. You're getting old now. Be careful. We'll do what we can for you. We won't forget you.'

Was another. And him a greaser. His name was Farrell.

'You sucker. Working longer than anybody else in port. Go and get me some cotton waste. And shift your bloody old legs.'

'I have to keep my job.'

All voices spoke as one now. He could not understand their words. And always this engine was moving, these pistons crushing him. Three o'clock in the morning and no sleep yet.

Mrs. Reilly was out of bed. She was downstairs. She looked in the back-kitchen, in the yard and closet. Her husband was not there.

'What a worry he is,' she said, and came upstairs again. And there he was in the bed. He looked up at her. She smiled. He did not smile, but closed his eyes. She spoke to him.

'Where were you, Johnny? I thought you had gone down to the yard. Didn't you hear me calling you?'

'No. Was with children,' he said.

'Are you hungry? Would you like that glass of bitter? You had no supper?' she said, and there was a kindness in her voice, and in the tired eyes.

'Not now. Am tired,' he replied.

'Oh, Johnny. If only you'd stuck out for the hundred pounds. It would have been lovely. I was only thinking just now. We could have opened that greengrocer's shop.'

An' Eileen could have served in it. It would have been grand. We could have got her an artificial arm. They're so wonderful now, these doctors. Artificial arms just like ordinary ones. You can use a knife and fork with them. If only you'd stuck out, Johnny. And Anthony could have taken out the orders.'

'Shut your mouth, for Christ's sake!' he growled.

Was a silence. Reilly breathed heavily. Light of candle fell upon his face. Was thin and worn. Yellow like colour of fly-paper. Hands were hard. White like coral.

'Johnny, what's the matter, darlin'? Aren't you well?'

'I'm all right,' he said. 'It's this rheumatism, and then I'm thinking of Andy. Lord have mercy on him.'

'Poor Andy,' she said, 'was a lovely lad, wasn't he?'

'It's awful about Eileen,' said Reilly. 'Does she get no compo?'

'Not yet. Company said it was her own fault. If comb fell out of her hair and on to machine she had no right to put out her hand for it. Was an accident, they said. Would give her light job just now brushing rooms.'

'And her with her arm off. The soft sons of bitches,' he growled.

'I had an idea,' she said to him, and stroked his forehead.

'Idea,' he said, and sighed.

'Yes. Couldn't you get Anthony away with you as a trimmer?'

'What for?' he asked. And was a strange look in his eyes.

'To help us, of course,' she said; 'we have to get money somehow or other. We have to live.'

'Don't you get mine!'

'Yes. But it's not enough, Johnny,' she pleaded. 'You know Anthony is a strong lad. He would be all right as a trimmer.'

'I don't want any of my children to go to sea,' he said. 'You're very particular in your old age,' she said, with sarcasm.

'In my old age! Particular! Christ! Shut it!'

'Anyhow he wants to go,' she said. 'Is tired being at home. No work for him. Poor lad. Other lads working and money for cigarettes and pictures. None for him.'

'We're a lucky bloody family,' said Reilly angrily.

'Won't you try?' she asked. 'Will help us all this getting him away as a trimmer. Will make a man of him. He wants to go.'

'Make a man of him,' said Reilly, and he laughed.

'Yes. Will make a man of him,' she said, and was angry, for colour had come into her cheeks that looked like taut drum-skins. 'How bloody funny you are.'

'Me funny. Don't kid yourself, woman. I have to see the doctor in the morning. Nothing funny in that. For the love of Jesus shut up about Anthony and everybody else. Why don't you go to sleep?'

He was angry too, for eyes were burning with strange fire. He turned over on his side. Mrs. Reilly mumbled to herself. They both lay on their sides with their backs to each other. He thought:

Bring Anthony with him? No. How funny. What made her suggest that? Especially this next trip. No. He would not.

'Are you awake, Johnny?' she asked him.

'I am,' he replied.

'Are you all right? I'm worried about you. Won't you have that glass of bitter that's downstairs?'

'No.'

Of a sudden were strange sounds in that house. And silence was like a fast revolving wheel that has just stopped.

'What's that?' asked her husband.

'It's Eileen. Poor child. In the night her arm pains awful.'

'Go to her.'

His wife got up and went in to Eileen. The girl was sitting up in bed. All dark there for though moon shone, light could not get in through high wall that faced window. It had a crack in it.

'What's the matter, child?'

'Oh, mother!' she said. 'Oh, mother!' Mrs. Reilly held her child to her. And in her heart a great fear arose. Could feel now tiny heart of child pulsating against her own, whose tick was slow, like little hammer taps, or like dying tick of clock that is worn out.

'Oh my arm!' sighed Eileen.

'There, there,' said the mother. 'Don't cry, darlin'. God's good.'

Was nothing but heavy breathing of mother and little sobs of Eileen in that darkness.

Mrs. Reilly shuddered. Eileen clung to her. In the other bed Anthony snored. His curly hair was a dark mass on the pillow.

Mr. Reilly turned and lay on his back. He was muttering to himself.

'To-morrow. Pay off. Go away. Pay off. Finish.'
Was not much in life, and we are only like dirt, he felt in his heart. He fell asleep. Was morning when he woke. Nine o'clock.

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'I've fried you an egg,' said Mrs. Reilly.

'Can't eat anything now,' said Mr. Reilly. 'Just make a cup of tea. Have to pass doctor and sign on at half-past ten. Where's Eileen?'

'Gone over to the chemist's.'

'What for?'

'Well, I thought you'd want those pills again. For next trip.'

'Pills. Oh yes,' he said, and his voice seemed to be far away. He sat down and drank the tea hurriedly. Then he went into the back-kitchen. As he was closing the door he said: 'Don't let anybody come in here. I'm washing all over.'

He stripped. Was very thin. And he looked at himself in the glass. Ran hands over his body. He said to himself: 'Forty years at the one job. By God! And now finish. Well, many's the stokehole and engine-room as has drawn sweat out of you, and you're alive yet. Many a time was ill with eyes bulgin' out of bloody head, and yet I took my rake and slice like a man and fired up. Many places I've been to. Saw many things. Not much in life.' He began to scrub himself.

'Don't splash all over the place,' shouted Mrs. Reilly.

'I only scrubbed that place out last night.'

'All right,' he replied.

Was washed now. He dried himself with table-cloth that had been on table once and Anthony had spilt tea on it. Was not much of a towel, he said. Again he looked at himself in the glass.

'These varicose veins,' he murmured. 'That's what it is.' And putting on the truss, he added: 'And this. This bloody rupture.'

Remembered fifteen years ago. Was young and strong and worked hard on *Lucania* when her engines broke down in the Western ocean. Heavy shafting to be lifted and he was strong. Was no thought for himself then, only for ship that had to be in New York by Wednesday, ten fifteen p.m. Company were anxious to get passengers for Advertisers' Convention in England, before Red Star liner got them. Remembered that. And Chief Engineer said to second: 'Call the men for'ard, and tell the steward to give each man a tot of rum.' Good job that.

Remembered that. Had the rum. Forgot all about strain on body. Six years later the rupture came. It was bad too. He dressed and went into the kitchen.

'You look all right now,' said Mrs. Reilly, and helped him to tie his boots, and fasten his collar on. He put his coat and blue serge cap on. Then he crossed to the door.

'Kiss me,' she said.

He kissed her on cheek. The door banged. Mrs. Reilly was thinking:

'God help him! He does look bad this trip.'

Reilly walked down the street. There were some people standing on their doorsteps, and children in gutters. Some women were speaking.

'There's owld Reilly home again.'

'He looks bad, doesn't he?'

'Sure that owld devil's as hard as leather.'

Reilly passed a pub where men were standing outside.

Were old seamen out of work and they were talking.

'Hello, Johnny! How are you keepin', old timer?'

'Not bad,' Reilly said.

'See you coming back,' he added, and they smiled.

One man was small and had a face like a bird. He

smacked his lips for Reilly coming back meant two

rounds of drinks at 'Hangmans.'

'He's a tough old devil, all right,' said this man.

Reilly had turned the corner. He had nearly been

knocked down by a car. He had jumped smartly out of

the way. A man who was young and very tall laughed.

He said to the girl who was with him: 'Can't beat that,

can you? An old sod like that trying to appear like a

schoolboy.'

Reilly walked on. He was near the docks now. He

walked down the shed. Were many men in this shed

who knew him. They halloed him. Waved hands.

'Hello there?'

'Hello?'

'How goes it, Jack?'

'How do?'

Reilly smiled and shouted: 'Fine.' 'Middlin'.' 'Not so

bad.' 'In the pink.' He was walking up the gangway

now. A large number of men were standing about in the

alleyway, waiting to pass the doctor.

'Hello there?'

'How do?'

'Christ, he's back again!'

'Bloody old sucker.'

'How do, Reilly, old lad?'

All the men shouting and joking with him. He stood

by the wall. He had his book in his hand.

'Whose — will you kiss this time?'

'How's your arm?'

'Did you have a bite this time home?'

All men taunting him. Were young men. Could not

protest. Must hang on to his job.

'Leave the old fellow alone.'

'He's all right.'

'A wet dream is more correct.'

Reilly's heart was almost bursting. Could do nothing.

Was tragic for him. 'I feel like a piece of dirt,' he said to

himself. He was nearly in tears through anger, humilia-

tion, threats, taunts.

'Doctor.'

All the men commenced to move down the alleyway.

Reilly was last. He shivered. Was afraid. He drove his

nails into the palms of his hands but hands were hard

and horny through much gripping of steel slice. He bit

his lip until some blood came.

'Jesus, help me!' he said in his heart. 'Don't shiver.

Don't be afraid. Be like the others. Remember now. All

at home waiting for you. Waiting. Waiting for money.

Little children expecting something. Wife expecting to

go to the pictures. Keep cool.' The thoughts careered

round and round his brain. He felt he was in a kind of

whirlpool. 'Keep calm.'

The file moved along and it came Reilly's turn. He

was in the doctor's room now. The doctor was young, and whilst Reilly dropped his trousers down, he cast look of appeal at doctor, whose cheeks were rosy, and his teeth beautifully white. Very clean he was. 'Like those men from University with white soft hands,' thought Reilly as he looked him in the face. Terribly clean. And strong too. The doctor spoke to him.

Reilly looked up at him with the eyes of a dying dog. 'Tell the truth now,' he said to himself. 'Anyhow it's your last trip.'

'How old are you?'

'Sixty-four, sir,' replied Reilly. 'I've been in this ship since she was built.'

'That doesn't mean that you can stay in her for ever,' said the doctor. Was cruel. Was like a stab in the heart. Was bitter, Reilly thought.

'Step over,' he said to Reilly.

The man stepped across and stood before the doctor. He was a head above Reilly. He examined his chest.

Then he looked lower down. He stroked his hair with his hand. He placed his hand on Reilly, and he felt how soft it was. Like silk. Beautiful hands. And his own were like steel. 'How long have you had this rupture, Reilly?'

'About six years, sir. I think I got it in the *Lucania*.'

'You didn't happen to get it anywhere else,' said the doctor.

'Again he is sarcastic,' thought Reilly.

'Oh,' exclaimed the doctor. 'Who's been passing you with these varicose veins?'

There was a bitter taste in Reilly's mouth. Like gall.

'On and off, sir,' he said. 'Dr. Hunter always passed

me. I can do my work well. Second engineer will tell you that, sir.'

The doctor smiled. 'I don't want to know anything about that,' he said. 'I am quite capable of handling you, thank you.'

'Christ!' muttered Reilly: 'how bitter he can be. Bitter as hell.'

'Bend down,' said the doctor.

Reilly bent down. Doctor looked hard at him. Felt him. All over. Legs, thighs, heels.

'All right,' said the doctor. 'But I won't pass you again after this. Next.'

The blood stirred in Reilly's heart. He was angry.

He did not, he could not, make any reply to the doctor.

He seemed to fly from that room.

'Did you get tickled?'

'Did you cough?'

'Did you do it?'

Again were voices in his ears as he walked down the alleyway. Again were many men waiting to pass through to the pay table. Suddenly a voice of a master-at-arms shouted: 'Pass through as your names are called.'

Pay table was in grand saloon where rich carpets are deep and feet sink into them. Was beautiful and rich. Very quiet. Warm. Beautiful pictures on walls. Great marble pillars stretching up to ceiling. Was a place where first-class passengers dined on trips to America, but crew were not allowed to go there, for crew must stay forward in fo'c'sle. Crew must eat off wooden table through which iron poles were pushed up to deck-head, to hold table and prevent food from upsetting

when weather was rough. Was well for'ard, the men's fo'c'sle. Where, when ship was up against heavy head swell, fo'c'sle seemed to pitch and toss, and often when she pitched badly food would be flung from table into men's bunks. And was dark too, for port-holes were down near water-line, and must have dead-lights screwed over them, for fear waters poured in, drowning men in their bunks. Men fled past the pay table.

'Reilly.'

His name now. And he stood whilst another man said: 'Five pounds, eighteen and threepence.' Was handed the notes, and they were new and crackled in his horny hand.

'Your book.' And another man handed him his book. 'John Reilly, ship's fireman.' He passed through another room, where he signed on. He handed his book to the officer. He passed out to the other side, and walked along saloon deck, which crew were not allowed to stand on during voyage, descended the companion ladder, walked along well-deck, and then down gangway. Again many men in the dock shed. 'Union,' one said, and that was seventeen shillings.

'Help the blind!' said a voice, and that was one shilling.

'Here y'are,' and it was a bill for carrying the bag to and fro from ship to house for four trips, and that was eleven shillings.

Near gates were Salvation Army women with boxes, and these rattled, for were full of poor men's pennies, that kept hostels open for poor men. Was also a man holding a large box for collection. A card read: 'For

widow of Bernard Dollin. Scalded to death on the *Europa*. No compensation. Please help.' More shillings. Reilly hung desperately on to his money now. He put two shillings in the box for Dollin's widow. On dock road was a woman selling flags that were made of yellow rag. Was for homes for tired horses at Broadgreen.

'Jesus Christ! For tired horses!' exclaimed Reilly, and laughed aloud. He turned up Juniper Street. At 'Hangmans' he stopped and went in with men who had been waiting for him.

'Have a drink on me, mates,' he said.

The bar-lady served seven pints of bitter. 'Good health, Johnny. Best of luck next trip.'

All wished him good health and good luck. He said 'same to you,' and drank his pint quickly, like a thirsty horse drinking at a trough.

'Same again,' he said to the bar-lady. 'I must go now, lads,' he said. 'See you again. Good luck.'

'Good luck, Johnny,' all said in chorus, and he went out.

He came up the street and again were women talking on steps as he passed. Also children like pigeons in gutters.

'Good day, Mr. Reilly.'

'Good day,' he said.

'Hello, Johnny, how are you?'

'Not so bad,' he said.

People were nice in one's face, and some people had cursed him when he had gone up the street. Was at his home now. Mother had clean table-cloth on the table and children were waiting for him.

'Hello, dad,' said Clara, and then Anthony said, 'Hello, dad,' and Eileen too. 'Hello, dad,' she said. He kissed them all. He sat down in the chair by the fire. Looked in the flames for a long time. Children looked up into eyes of father who had come to them out of great ocean and dark night and was wonder in their eyes. Mother came in from back-kitchen and said: 'Dinner is ready, Johnny.'

He said he was ready too and sat down. Children were seated now. Wild freshness of youth on their faces was a feast for his eyes, and his dinner was going cold through watching them. He looked at them longingly and blood stirred in him when he remembered humiliations of last trip.

'Lovely children. God help them,' he said in his heart. The children were finished dinner so they got up and went out.

'Here,' he said, and gave each of them sixpence, and they smiled. He kissed them all. 'How happy they are,' he thought. They went out then.

Mrs. Reilly said: 'Did you sign, Johnny?' and he said: 'Yes.'

He pushed back his plate and put his hand in his pocket. Gave her four pounds.

'Is that all?' she asked, and was a sadness in her voice.

'That's all,' he said. 'Had to give seventeen shillings to union, and coppers here and there. Was going to buy a pair of drawers this trip, but can't afford it.'

'Good God!' she said. 'That's terrible, Johnny.'

'Good Jesus!' he said. 'Can't do any more, can I? You get my allotment money. You can't have it both

ways, woman. If you hadn't drawn thirty shillings a week from my wages I could have given you about eight pounds.'

'God! I don't know,' she said, and sighed deeply.

'Can't do any more,' he said. 'Will you go to the pictures to-night?' He stood up and put his hands on her shoulders.

'I don't know,' she said.

'Heavens above,' he said. 'Always something wrong. What would you do if I hadn't signed?' He became suddenly silent. No use to talk like that. Forget all that. Try and be happy.

'Come on, old girl,' he said, 'get cleaned up. We'll go to the theatre or somewhere.'

'All right,' she said. 'You go and have a lie down.'

Reilly went upstairs to bed. He was not long with his head on the pillow before he snored. Below Mrs. Reilly cleaned up. When she was finished she washed herself. Changed. Was all ready now and sitting by the fire. Kettle was boiling on the hob. At five Johnny came down. Was feeling a little better after his sleep. He said: 'Good. I see you're ready. Where'll we go, old girl?'

'Anywhere you like,' she replied.

'Righto,' he said, and went to get a wash in the back-kitchen.

When the children came in she said to them: 'Your father and me are going out to the pictures. Now please be good and look after the place.' And to Eileen she said: 'Look after them, Eileen. To-morrow me and you will go somewhere.'

Were gone now and children all alone in house. Mrs.

Reilly and her husband got on a tram and it took them to the picture-house. Was dark in there but band played nice music and Mrs. Reilly said she liked it. He said nothing at all. When picture came it was a story of a man and two women. Mrs. Reilly said last time she was at the pictures story was about two men and one woman. Johnny laughed. 'Story was very nice,' he said. Always the people in the pictures were nice looking, and always plenty of stuff on the tables and no trouble for them to get whisky. She said women wore lovely dresses. Interval then and lights went up. Band played music again.

'Come on,' he said, and they got up and went outside. They went to a pub, and he said: 'What'll you have, old woman?'

She said: 'A bottle of stout.'

'All right,' he said.

He drank a lemon dash himself. Was all smoke and spit and sawdust in the pub. Many men and women were drinking there. He said: 'It's cosy here.'

'Have another?' said Reilly, and she said: 'No. Not now.'

'I'm having another dash,' he said. When it came he drank it quickly. Back to pictures. All was dark again. In the next seat to them they could hear the giggling of a girl.

'Gettin' her bloody leg felt,' he said and lighted his pipe.

'Ought to be ashamed of herself,' she said, and was looking at a picture of a comic man throwing pies when she said this. He laughed, and she thought he was laughing at the picture and she said: 'He's a corker, isn't he?'

He said: 'I should think so,' and was thinking of the man who was with the girl who his wife said should be ashamed of herself.

'I'm tired,' he said. 'Shall we go?'

'Near the end now,' she said. 'Wait, Johnny.'

Comic man had just been chased by a policeman. He knew it was near the end of the picture. Did not want to stand when 'God save the King' was played by band.

He said: 'Come on,' and pulled her arm. They went out. They hurried home in the tram through dark roads where pale light of gas lamps made all people's faces look yellow as if everybody had yellow jaundice.

'I feel so tired,' he said.

'Will you have a glass of bitter?' she asked him as they were walking up the street.

'No,' he said. 'I'm going to bed now. Too tired for anything.' When they got in he went upstairs. As he was closing the kitchen door, he said: 'Don't be long now.'

Mrs. Reilly made herself a drink of tea before she went up herself. She ate some bread that the children had left. 'Poor Johnny,' she said. 'Gets tired quickly these days. Is not the man he used to be: God help him.'

She put out the light and went upstairs. Undressed and got into bed. Candle was burning on table at his side of the bed and light fell on her husband's face. His eyes were closed.

'He is asleep,' she said. Looked at his face. Was very thin, she thought. 'Good God!' she whispered. 'I hope he doesn't catch consumption.' She kissed him on the fore-

head where many furrows were. She fell asleep watching him.

* * * * *

Morning for going away had come and he was up early. Mrs. Reilly and the children were up. Bag was packed and was standing in the corner by the door. Was beautiful and clean for his wife had scrubbed it well. Was hard work for it was made of canvas. All were at the table having their breakfast. Egg each and some bacon. It was the same each sailing day. An egg each and a slice of bacon for the children. Mr. Reilly was shaving in the back. Was sadness in his eyes and he did not like looking at himself in the glass whilst he was shaving. He tried to look downward just where razor was scraping. He finished and washed himself. Came into the kitchen. Were two eggs and a piece of bacon for him. He could not eat all that, he said. Wasn't hungry, he told his wife. But she said, 'Try, because you haven't ate much this trip,' and children were looking from father to mother and to his plate, and each was thinking: 'He will give me the egg that's over.' Mr. Reilly started to have his breakfast. His wife said: 'Won't you eat any more?' and he said: 'No.' Children looked only at the mother now, but were disappointed for she said: 'I'll have the odd egg myself.'

Children had gone out into yard. Was quiet now and clock could be heard ticking. Was five past seven by it.

'Must go now,' he said, and voice was soft.

'Now, Johnny,' she said, and got up from the table. Whilst she crossed to the back door to call in the children to say good-bye to their father, she wiped pieces of

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egg from her mouth, for her husband always kissed her on the lips on sailing day. Children came in. He embraced each one, saying: 'Good-bye. God bless you.' Now his wife. She clung to him.

Nearly in tears he was, for was much in his mind, and 'the heart is a terrible prison,' he said to himself.

'Good-bye, Johnny,' she said. She hung tightly to him.

'God bless you. Take care of yourself now. Don't forget to take the Bland's pills. Good-bye. God bless you.'

'Good-bye,' he said, and bag was on his back and he was through the door. She closed it and went up to the window, where children were trying to look out into dark street and with their noses pressed flat against the window pane.

'Poor Johnny,' she said in her heart. 'Didn't eat much this trip, was looking very bad, poor fellow. Ah, well!'

'Draw the blind down again,' she said to Eileen, for it was still dark and gas was lighted yet. Dark until eight o'clock. The children came away from the window. Mother's eyes were misty and they were looking at her. Reilly walked down the street in the direction of the dock where his ship lay. Was dark, and all silent. Streets were terribly quiet. Everything seemed gloomy and sad. Raining too. Turned the corner now. Argus Street, Welland Street, Darby Street. Good-bye. Good-bye. Juniper Street, Derby Road. Good-bye. Good-bye. Was near the docks now. Some men were coming out of the gate. They knew him for he was just walking under the lamp when they came out.

'Good-bye, Johnny. Good luck,' they said.

'Good-bye. Good-bye,' and his voice was a murmur

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low in their ears. Ship was there. Like a huge beast, sleeping. Was a light from an electric cluster hanging over number 2 hatch. Was like huge beast's eye. Some steam was coming out of the pipe near the funnel. Was like hot breath coming out of huge beast's nostrils. Was slowly waking. And from funnel itself was much smoke coming. It came out in clouds, then in the air became scarf-shaped. All was very silent except for low moaning. Steady whirr, whirr within ship. It came from forward where beef-engine was running. Was never stopped for place where food is kept for passengers must be always cool. The morning was very cold. At the gangway the watchman shivered. As Reilly ascended the gangway, the watchman took his nose between his fingers and blew hard into dock.

'Mornin', he said dryly as Reilly passed him. Reilly made no reply. Was on his ship now. Going forward. In some hours to come he would be right down inside this beast. Down inside huge belly. Sweating. Half-past seven. Suddenly many noises filled the air. Ship was full of action. Ship was like great hippopotamus where all ticks were feeding on body. Decks were alive with men. Derricks were moving like long arms, and men seemed like pygmies on the great decks. Crew were now coming on board. All were hurrying towards fo'c'sles and glory-holes, for first there was best served. Last trip Reilly had to take a bottom bunk in firemen's room, where rats as big as bricks stood up defiant against the men when they tried to get them in the corner and kill them with big holy-stones. Reilly had a top bunk now. Was first man in. Another man came in. His name was Campbell.

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'Hello, cocky. You took my bloody bunk,' he said. Reilly did not reply. Thoughts in him were calm. He said in his heart: 'Your last trip. Keep calm. Remain silent. Stand things for sake of wife and children. When you go home you can get the old age pension.'

'Well, Holy Jesus!' said Farrell, coming in. 'The dozy swine's back again.'

Reilly remained silent. Calmly he unpacked his bag. Was something hard in it. Like a little box. 'Good God!' he murmured. 'Fancy that. Poor Eileen. Bought me a box of soap. God bless the darling child.' He fondled the box as if it were made of solid gold. Were many noises now for fo'c'sle was full. Again voices in his ears. He wished they were full of cotton-wool.

'Old Reilly's back.'

'Oh Christ! Is he?'

'Can't you see him?'

'Hello there. You old sucker.'

Was a message flashing through Reilly's brain. 'Keep calm.' Nine o'clock now. Second engineer came down the crew's alleyway. He crushed past a small trimmer. Said to him: 'Tell Farrell to pick his watch.' Trimmer went into fo'c'sle. Spoke to Farrell. Farrell shouted: 'Outside, men.' All the men went out on deck. Some were already wearing their dungarees. Some wore their best clothes. Many were drunk. Farrell looked at the men. His right forefinger was pointing. As if he were pointing a gun at them all. They watched him.

'Ryan. Duffy. Connelly. Hughes. Hurst. Thompson. Reilly. Simpson.'

Eight men stepped forward.

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'Eight to twelve watch,' he said. 'Stand by till twelve o'clock. Have your dinner. Then turn in.' He walked off amidships.

On the deck also were boatswain and his mate. They picked their port and starboard watches. Look-out men. Day men. Lamp trimmer. Storekeeper. Came a little man, bald, with a sandy moustache. He called eight firemen and they were for Black Pan watch. Then a man named Scully; he picked the 'gentleman's' watch.

Hatches were being put on. The chief engineer was coming along the deck. He was shouting and his face was as red as a turkey-cock. 'God damn you. Can't you hear five blasts on the whistle! Get these men up on the boat-deck.'

Was a terrible fuss now, for no watches should have been picked before boat muster. Boat drill first because that was most important. Was very important because men must be good sailors in case of ship striking iceberg, and helpless passengers to be saved. Was not right to pick watches before this had been done as it gave men a chance to pick mates and make other arrangements. Confusion. All the men diving into bags for jerseys and sailors' caps that made some look like monkeys. Was necessary company said even if they looked like monkeys to have ordered ones.

'Like the bloody navy,' said Duffy, whose hat would not fit him and he had just paid five and sixpence for it at the slop chest. 'Robbers,' he growled. 'Dirty robbers.'

The crew ran along all decks and on flush deck some tripped over hatch combings and falls from the drum

ends. Cargo men cursed them. Crew swore too. Reilly was one. Fell right over hatch cover.

'You dopy old bastard. Where were you last night?' growled a ganger. He did not hear the remainder of the sentence. He did not run up companion ladder to the saloon deck, rather he hopped up like a bird. 'I feel like a poor bloody sparrow,' he said in his mind.

All excitement.

'Lower away.'

'Slack your falls.'

'Hey! What the hell are you doin'!'

'Easy there.'

'Heave away.'

'God blast you! How can you lower away with your rollocks like that?'

'Get clear of chocks.'

The boats were ascending and descending. Then a whistle blew. The men dispersed. Reilly went along the deck with Duffy.

'How are you, old timer?' asked Duffy.

Reilly said: 'Not so bad.' They passed up the alleyway.

Reilly undressed and turned in. All the men looked at him.

'Oh hell. He's started again.'

'Who? Oh, him. How are youth, my pigeon?'

'Leave the old sucker alone.'

'He's all right.'

'Tickle his ribs.'

'To hell with him!'

Duffy's face went red for was fifty himself and remembered sailing with Reilly years ago when he was young

and strong and a good worker. Would not let him be put on, he said.

'You're as bad as him.'

'Who said that?'

'I said it.' Farrell was speaking. Was a glint in his eye.

'Come out on deck,' said Duffy.

Reilly was shivering in his bunk. Was cold. For ship's blankets were thin and iron laths of bed pierced through straw palliasso. Was in singlet but no drawers. 'Good Christ!' he said to himself. 'All this over me. All this fuss. All will hate me now.' Some men playing cards at the table were growling.

'Throw the old bastard over the side. Bunk and all.'

'There's always something wrong when he's here.'

'Awful,' said Reilly in his heart, 'and I wanted to keep calm. Say nothing.'

'Come on. Come on the bloody deck!'

'Put a sock in it.'

'Pipe down.'

Silence then for a moment.

'What time is it?'

'Nearly four o'clock.'

The cook, who was half drunk, came up the alleyway from galley and said did any of those b—'s want dinner. Was not going to wait there all day for them. Was going to kip.

Seven bells. Four to eight watch were dressing. All had clean sweat-rags round their necks. Some smoked cigarettes, others black shag. They passed out of the fo'c'sle in silence. Down alleyway and along well-deck. Through starboard alleyway and along well-deck

number 2. Was a great stink now. Very warm. They could hear the thunder of the pistons pounding. Walked slowly. Some dragged their legs after them.

'Bloody steam up all day. Just to keep you workin'. Lousy bastards.' From the alleyway could see the entrance to the engine-room. The steel ladders glistened. All disappeared through the steel door between two high walls of steel, that were black. One wall was scaly with salt. In the fo'c'sle Reilly fell asleep. He dreamed. Was with the children in a park. Were playing with a rubber ball. All were jolly. Laughing. He bought them ice-cream sandwiches. He stroked their heads. They disappeared. He called after them. Could not find them. 'Hey! Hey!' he called aloud. 'Hey! Where are you all?'

'Where the hell are you? Shut your confounded trap. People here have to do their four hours below as well as you.'

Blood rushed to his head. He had been dreaming all right. Raised his head a little. Very quiet in the fo'c'sle now. Eight to twelve watch fast asleep. Suddenly he felt cold. Felt in the bed. Was nothing. Felt on top of blanket and his hand was wet. Greasy. Someone had thrown slops on top of him whilst he was sleeping. Was angry.

'Show a leg there! Show a leg there! Seven bells! Seven bells!'

Reilly sat up quickly.

'How soon the time passes,' he said.

Somebody laughed. 'Were you dreaming about her?'

Some were now climbing out of their bunks. Were sullen and silent. They had been drinking heavily and their heads were large and painful. All were ready now.

Five to eight.

'Righto.'

Eight to twelve watch left the fo'c'sle and towards amidships. Reilly stopped to tie his boot with a piece of string.

'Come on, dozy,' shouted Farrell, and to himself: 'I'll sweat that sucker this trip.'

Descended ladder now one at a time. Reilly was shaking. Each time he was on a ladder his whole body shook. Remembered that trip falling twenty-five feet on his head. They reached the engine-room. Passed through into stokehole. Was all heat and smell of water on ashes for men they were relieving had been emptying their bladders. Was much sweat on these men.

'Number 3, you,' said Farrell, and Reilly went to number 3.

A man said to him: 'What time did she pull out?'

'Half-past four.'

'Oh! Must be in the channel now.'

'Yes.'

'Farrell! Are you there?'

Farrell turned round. Reilly was standing there with singlet off and bare to waist. Ribs shone in red glare of furnace.

'What the hell do you want now?' asked Farrell.

Reilly was afraid. Was a sickness at the pit of his stomach. His blood was stirring. It was anxious for rest.

'Number 3. Who is he?' asked Reilly.

'What's that got to do with you?'

'A lot,' said Reilly. 'Isn't he the man I relieve this trip?'

'Well?'

'He wasn't here when I came down.'

'What about it?'

'He should be here. The lousy sod. Look at that.'

'Look at what?' said Farrell, and he smiled.

'You bastard,' said Reilly, but only in his heart.

'The mess he left,' said Reilly. 'The mess he left. What a worker. A pile of bloody ashes here and half the furnace raked out.'

'D'you know who you're relievin'?' asked Farrell.

He bent low towards Reilly, who shivered now.

'Who?'

'My wife's brother,' said Farrell. 'You get on your job, old cock. By Jesus! I'll watch you.'

Was a man stoking up hard at number 4 furnace. Also a little trimmer running to him from between boilers. Had come from bunkers with heavy steel barrow full of coal. Ship lurched and trimmer was pitched forward on to his face.

'You awkward bloody worm,' said Duffy.

'Come on. Christ! Look at him. Standing there,' said Farrell. 'D'you want me to use your slice for you? Hell. Sit down. I'll hold your hand for you.'

'O Jesus!' said the old man to himself. 'Be calm.'

Farrell walked away. Reilly looked towards number 4 furnace. Was a cloud of steam. Duffy had done it on ashes. He could not see him. He looked at his own furnace. Suddenly bent down. Looked right into it. A trimmer had shouted: 'Righto.' Had tipped his barrow for Reilly. Heat was terrible. Reilly took his shovel. Dug into coal and heaved a shovelful into the furnace. Flames roared. Flame licked out at him, scorching his

HALF AN EYE

face and thin chest. Reilly said: 'The mean bastard! Knew it would happen. Told trimmer to heave me a load of slack. God strike him dead!'

He shovelled again. Must get her going. Must watch gauge. Gauge going down. Must watch bloody boiler. Might burst. He heaved in again. Flames licked out at him like many little tongues. Suddenly he flung down his shovel. Folded his arms and stared into the roaring furnace. 'How tired I am. How sick and tired of it all. After forty years. O Jesus! How can I go to them? To see her face when I say: 'I'm sacked. Too old.' How can I? Poor children. Nothing for them. Nothing for them.' Was silent. Tears were running down his cheeks and drying on his chest. Saw in flames all his past life. Every thought. Every word. Every deed. All endeavours, trials, braveries of the flesh and spirit. Was now—nothing. All ended. Nothing more now. Nothing more now. 'What is it all for?' he said in his heart. 'Who cares? Nobody. Who feels? Nobody.' Saw all his life illuminated in those flames. 'Not much for us. Sweat, sweat. Pay off. Sign on. Sweat, sweat. Pay off. Finish. Ah, well!' Were voices in those flames now. Were speaking to him. He understood their language which was in sounds of hot air. And suddenly he said, half aloud: 'All to her. All to the sea.' He gripped his shovel. Then suddenly dropped it. He picked up the steel slice. And suddenly dropped that too. All to her. All his life, hopes, energies. Everything. The flames licked out at him.

'ALL,' he shouted, and leaped.

'Hey! Jesus Christ! HELP! HELP! Reilly's jumped in the furnace.'

SHADOWS BEFORE SUNSET

I

Two men were sitting in the snug of the 'Cable.' One could see at a glance that both were sailors (as indeed they were). One, tall and very fair, was in the middle forties. His ship, the *Cordova*, was at present lying in the Basin. His name was Harless. He was chief officer. The other was a short stoutish man about fifty, with iron-grey hair. His round red face seemed to shine with joviality, a striking contrast to the other who seemed unemotional and rather austere. But these contrasting expressions were at once a clue to their separate reflections. One was thinking, 'Rather silly,' the other went deeper and thought, 'Far from silly. 'Indeed tragic.' Their drinks lay before them, untouched. At last Harless said, 'Well, we'll drink Holmes's health anyhow. Alive or dead.' These two men had not seen each other for something like five years. Once they had sailed together, then the elder man, Dunfey, had been transferred to another ship. The younger sailed east, the elder west. Now they had suddenly met. And the first thing that Harless had said on shaking hands had been, 'I've seen Holmes.' And quite naturally he had expected to see some surprise register itself upon that round, fat face.

