

Scottish ways; and fitted with engines stamped "Sweden." The origins of her captain were as varied. He and his ship had the same streaks of colour; for thirty years they set their courses by the same stars; and Fate was to deal each of them a blow as bitter as the curses which were all they had for each other.

They lived their lives together, and for each other they had neither love nor respect—maybe something of stormy hate which could not be let loose when their existences, the reasons for their living, were bound so closely together. For the owners, knowing nothing of the sea and its incalculable moods of storm and fog, rocky coast-lines and unknown ports, all the rest—owners not knowing and not caring demanded certain standards, set schedules that were always hard and often dangerous. Non-acceptance of those standards, deviation from the schedules—it would have meant the scrap-heap for the two of them. "Get her there, we've got our costs to consider—and, anyway, she's well insured. Get her there, but if there's an accident we don't want survivors with tales of negligence and long claims of damages."

That's what the owners said; they didn't use those words, but that is what they meant. With quiet satisfied smiles they let the captain know what they wanted; and how well he understood his nicely-worded instructions could best be realized had the story been told of a freighter run down in fog, hanging thick and still, off the coast of northern Ireland. The "Skaanen" at the time was driving full speed ahead. But the story was never told. Of the freighter's crew there was no man to tell it. Only cries in the darkness, and they might have been, but they weren't, sea-birds calling. There was no chance of lowering a boat from the "Skaanen" in that fog—and there was no purpose. Tightened lips and throbbing hearts, but there was no purpose . . .

So I had the captain's approval. My apprehension was not necessary. The ship was known to every one but me. A vacancy in the crew was hard to fill. I was to find out why.

Each trip I made I swore would be the last—and with our speed too slow for convoy escort and with submarines eager for such targets, I wonder now the first trip wasn't the last. But we lived. We were lucky. For a time we were lucky. We steamed into ports, hours later we steamed out again. A tanker's cargo takes little time to clear. Three weeks of sea; if we were lucky, eighteen hours in port; and with a hundred things to do it didn't mean eighteen hours of freedom. So little time ashore has the crew of a tanker that conditions aboard, compared with other types of cargo ships, generally are of a higher standard. What must necessarily be their home is made more attractive. It wasn't like that on the "Skaanen." And the men were not the sort that minded, or appeared to mind. Perhaps they had never known a home—that was how it seemed to me—or perhaps their homes were of a happiness that made them prefer the conditions of this ship.

Twenty-five of them there were; and I think from their speech that they represented the squalor and filth of the slums of twenty-five cities. In every way they were of a dirtiness that I could hardly believe and had not before thought possible. It was true enough. I felt I had to stand clear of them and their ways of life.

I suppose it all sounds rather grim and dreary. It was; but she was no hell-ship—nobody starved, and if ulcerated stomachs were common it was probably the booze as much as the food; wages were earned and paid and spent; and if the work was hard and madly monotonous, there was always time for sleep if you were tired of looking at the sea. The men were hard, I wasn't used to them, and they wouldn't have joined such a ship if their papers had been in order, if the conditions they were prepared to accept had not been easier than those they wished to leave behind. Even now I'm not sentimental when I think of them, I never felt much love for them, but I do say that ultimately, underneath their appearance, their speech, their ways of life, they were decent and simple enough. They had their humour and they weren't bitter. I think they