

fathoms of water and reached the deck they were dead, hardly a flip to their tails.

We chugged forward, circling towards the next buoy, the second line. And then the same performance all over again. To haul in all the lines took hours. By four o'clock waves were breaking over the bow. We crouched in the doorway of the engine-room: the choice was between foul fumes from the engine or spray and waves over the deck. Suddenly I realized I didn't feel hungry any more. I didn't care whether I was wet. I had forgotten about the bite of the wind. I threw away a cigarette. If only the sky, the sea, the deck, the men would stop moving. If only for a minute. If only that pile of fish, those eyes, the blood from their cleaning would stop slithering. Something was upsetting me, something was troubling my system—or what used to be my system. Sea sickness. We jiggered and joggled, slapped and banged through the seas. And dived. Then soared into the skies. This couldn't go on. But it did. It went on for hours.

By six o'clock I looked like one of those fish on the deck. By seven I knew how they felt. My hands, knuckles clenched, white, clutched the rail. On the deck the heap of fish grew bigger, still they slithered. A crate of fish heads glared uncaringly at me and my misery, heads kept to be used as bait for the crayfish pots. Beside them was a crate for the fish livers, another was brimful of proper throats. The scene was not calculated to help sea sickness. An offer of a cheese sandwich, the last, I refused. Never again



would I touch food. A moment later I gave up smoking for life. No more hotel bars. Never again. And while I was at it, horse racing, too.

Round me the fishermen worked busily. They looked well enough, even cheerful. The swaying, heaving, slipping deck seemed to mean nothing to them. One of them lit his pipe. It was, I reckoned, sheer bravado. In sou-westers, oilskins, and seaboots they looked more like an advertisement for cod-liver oil than the crew of this thrusting, throbbing buck-jumper of a launch. I considered they earned their money hard; it would be better to be on relief than this; one day was bad enough, but imagine every day in these straits. I imagined, clutched the rail again. By seven o'clock I had reached the conclusion that all fishermen, including Izaak Walton, Tom Sawyer, Zane Grey, and the crew of the "Wild Duck," were far from normal human beings. I doubted whether they were either normal or human.

The trip back was spent untangling the hooks, coiling the lines, cleaning the fish. Two hundred groper, dozens of ling and bass; the sharks and other fish were thrown back minus heads and livers (livers these days provide a profitable sideline: the "Wild Duck" the previous month had sold £40 worth to a factory at Island Bay which processes fish-oil products). Slowly we chugged to the shelter of the coast. The sea was quieter now. Huge gulls heavy from a day's fishing, sleepy from fighting each other for titbits, rested on the water: the crew called them albatrosses, and certainly they were large enough. Heavy birds they were, four or five times the size of the common seagull; their heads were without life or expression, giving the impression of strange wood carvings. Curious specimens. Some of them resembled Donald Duck so closely as to be a certain breach of Hollywood copyright.

