

"We're on our way to hell, mate!"

Two men leaned over the deck railing, their bent bodies resembling the humps of snails, and gazed toward the town of Hakodate which stretched before them embracing the sea. One of the men—a fisherman—spat out the cigarette he had reduced to a stub. The butt tumbled down awkwardly, hitting the steep side of the ship. The man reeked of wine.

Some of the ships in the harbor lay idle, generous expanses of their broad red bottoms exposed. Others, in the process of taking on cargo, leaned precariously to one side, as though some force from the sea were tugging at them. They all had large yellow funnels. Red, bell-shaped buoys bobbed on cold dark waves covered with swirls of black, oily soot, scraps of bread, and rotten fruit that formed a fabric-like pattern, while launches darted busily in and out among the large ships like water bugs. Whipped by a capricious wind, smoke pouring out of the funnels skimmed over the waves carrying the acrid smell of burning coal. Now and then the sound of rattling winches traveled over the waves.

Immediately in front of the factory ship *Hakkō Maru*, a sailing vessel, its paint peeling, was lowering its anchor chains through the holes at its bow which flared like the nostrils of an ox. Two foreigners, smoking pipes, paced the deck, marching back and forth like mechanical dolls. It looked like a Russian ship. It was there, no doubt, to observe the activities of the Japanese factory ships. "Shit, I'm flat broke," said one of the men, moving closer to the other. "Feel." He took the other man's hand and pressed it against the pocket of his corduroy pants under his jacket. The second man, feeling what seemed to be a small wad, looked puzzled but said nothing.

"Heh, heh, heh," chuckled the first man. "Those are cards."

On the port deck of the *Hakkō Maru*, the captain strolled about with the air of a shogun, smoking a cigarette. The smoke from his nose broke off at a sharp angle and quickly disappeared in the air. Busy crewmen, clattering about on their wooden clogs, scurried in and out of the cabins above

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the deck with buckets of food. Everything was in readiness; it remained only to weigh anchor.

Below deck two fishermen peered into the dimly lit quarters of the factory hands who were all young boys of fourteen or fifteen. They were yelling and shouting and poking their heads from their darkened bunks like birds.

"Where you from?"

The boy named a district in Hakodate. His group was from the slum area of the city.

"What about them in the bunks over there?"

"From Nanbu."

"And them?"

"Akita."

The groups occupied different areas of the quarters.

"What part of Akita?"

"North Akita," replied a boy whose nose dripped thick puslike mucous and whose eyes were red and festering, as though infected with sties.

"Farmers?"

"Yeah."

The air, permeated with the sour smell of rotting fruit, was stifling. Located in the hold, the quarters were next to the storeroom where several dozen pickle barrels were kept, and the pickles' feces-like stench mingled with the other foul odors.

"Just wait," the fisherman laughed with a leer. "Daddy will come by and put you to bed one of these nights."

The mother of one of the boys was peeling apples for her son, who was lying on his stomach in his bunk. In her jacket and leggings, a bandana on her head, she looked like a laborer. She kept her eyes fixed on the boy and munched on the skins she had peeled from the apples in spirals. As she spoke to the boy, she repeatedly tied and untied a bundle wrapped in cloth lying on the bunk near him. There were about seven or eight mothers in the hold. The boys from the main island whom no one had come to see off frequently stole envious glances at the boys with their mothers.

A woman who was covered from head to toe with cement dust distributed two caramels to each of the boys around her. "Look after my Kenkichi on the job, won't you?" she said.

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She had large, rough, gnarled hands shaped like knobby roots. One mother was wiping the snot from her son's nose, another was cleaning her son's face with a towel, and several were speaking in low voices to each other.

"Your boy looks sturdy, doesn't he?" said one mother to another.

"I guess he does."

"Mine is sickly. I wish I could do something for him, but you know how it is."

"Sure, it's the same with all of us."

The two fishermen felt somehow relieved when they climbed out of the hands' quarters onto the deck. They returned to their own cramped quarters in the hold nearer to the bow feeling irritable and sullen. During dropping or weighing of the anchor, the men in the toward hold were tossed about like gravel in a concrete mixer. The quarters were dark and gloomy, and the fishermen were sprawled about like pigs in a pigsty. A foul, nauseating smell pervaded the room.

"What a stinking smell!"

"What do you expect? It's our rotting corpses that you smell. Go ahead, take a good whiff."

A fisherman with a red face caved in like a mortar was pouring wine from a quart bottle into a chipped rice bowl. Between gulps, he chewed noisily on dried cuttlefish. Next to him a man lay on his back eating an apple and reading a pulp magazine whose covers were falling apart.

Four men had been drinking in a tight little group. A fifth man, who had been drinking elsewhere but who hadn't yet had enough, wedged himself into the group.

"I figured we were going to be away for four months and wouldn't be having a chance at a woman, so . . ." The man had a powerful, stocky build. From time to time he would lick his thick lower lip. Narrowing his eyes he spoke again. "Look at my wallet." He waved the flat wallet, sticky as a dried persimmon, in front of the others. "That whore was tiny, but she sure did know her business!"

"Hey, cut it out! Cut it out!"

"No! Go ahead, go ahead! Tell us more!" But the man only chuckled.

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One of the other men looked with bleary eyes at the bunk opposite him. Jerking his head toward it he said, "Look. Over there. There's a man for you, eh?" A fisherman was giving some money to his wife. "Look, look at them!" The couple had spread some crumpled bills and silver coins on top of a small box and were counting them. The man was writing something in a small notebook, licking the tip of his pencil each time he made an entry. "Look at that!"

"You may not believe me, but I've got an old lady and kids, too!" The fisherman who had mentioned the prostitute suddenly spoke up as though he was annoyed by the sight.

From a bunk a short distance away, a young fisherman with a gray face puffed and bloated from a hangover, his long hair combed back, shouted, "I told myself I'd never come back to this ship. But the agent hoodwinked me and there I was—penniless. Now I'm in for a long, killing stretch again." A man standing with his back to the others whispered something to the young one. They seemed to be from the same village.

Just then a figure appeared at the entrance to the hold, only his bowed legs visible. He came down the ladder swinging a large duffel bag. Reaching the bottom, the man stood looking about him till he discovered an unoccupied bunk, which he promptly climbed into. "Hello," he said to the man next to him, nodding his head. His face was oily and dark, as though it had been dyed. "I'm joining you, mates." They learned later that this man had been a coal miner for seven years at Yūbari before he signed up. He had narrowly escaped being killed in the last mine explosion. Explosions were nothing new to him—he had been in several—but the horror of this one had made him quit. At the time of the explosion he had been pushing a coal car through a tunnel. He had just filled it up and pushed it to the next station when suddenly a brilliant light flashed before his eyes. Almost simultaneously he had felt himself being lifted like a scrap of paper. The pressure of the gas tossed several coal cars into the air like so many empty matchboxes. That was all he remembered. He had no idea how long he had been unconscious when he came to, listening to the sound of his own groaning. The foreman and some miners

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were walling up the tunnel to prevent other explosions being touched off. It was then that he clearly heard a miner on the other side of the wall crying for help. If the men on this side had wanted to, they could have saved him. It was a cry which, once heard, would echo in the man's brain forever. He picked himself up, pushed his way into the group and, like a man gone mad, shouted, "No! No!" Then he stopped and thought for a moment. What's come over me? I've helped wall off tunnels like this before—it was nothing to me then.

"You idiot!" someone yelled at him. "What do you think will happen if the fire spreads? There'll be hell to pay."

But he could hear the voice gradually growing faint, and he couldn't stand still. Without knowing what had come over him, waving his arms and shouting, he dashed wildly back through the tunnel. Stumbling time and again, he knocked his head against the trusses till he was covered with blood. Halfway out, he tripped on a railway tie and crashed against the rails as though slammed to the ground in a wrestling bout. Then he lost consciousness again.

A young fisherman who had been listening to the miner's story interrupted him. "Well, you're not going to find this place much different."

The miner stared at him with the squinting, yellowish, lusterless eyes peculiar to coal miners and fell silent.

Among the group of farmers-turned-fishermen from Akita, Aomori, and Iwate, some sat glumly, cross-legged with their hands wedged between opposite thighs and calves. Others, hugging their knees and leaning against posts, watched the men swigging wine and listened intently to the hubbub of voices. All were farmers who used to get up while it was still dark to work in the fields. But, hard as they worked, they could not provide for their families, so they had been forced to sign up, leaving their eldest sons in charge of the farm. Still there was not enough food, so their daughters had gone to work in the factories; their second and third sons would have to find work elsewhere. The shortage of food forced superfluous members of the large families out of their native homes into the cities.

Every one of these farmers had intended to return to his

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village with money saved up from a hitch aboard the factory ship. But once ashore in Hakodate and Otaru, they had gone on drunken rampages. They were like innocent sparrows trapped in birdlime. When their money ran out, they were callously thrown out on their ears with no more to their names than the day they were born. There would be no going home for them. In order to survive the winter in snowbound Hokkaido, where they had no relatives to turn to, they had to hire themselves out, again, for next to nothing. And no matter how often this vicious cycle was repeated, the men, like a group of dull-witted children, never seemed to learn their lesson; it was the same year after year.

A female peddler with a box of sweets strapped to her back, and two male peddlers, one with patent medicines and the other with items for daily use, came down into the hold and spread out their wares in the open area between the bunks. Leaning out of their bunks on all sides, the men teased and joked with the woman.

"Your sweets any good, sister?"

"Oh! You dirty old man," the woman screamed as she jumped away from the man's outstretched hand. "Keep your hands off!" The man, his mouth full of sweets, realizing that he had become the center of attention, first looked sheepish, then broke into a raucous laugh.

A drunk, returning from the head, staggered by, supporting himself against the bulkhead. "Hello, sister, you're just my type," he said, poking a finger into one of the woman's plump, ruddy cheeks.

"Hey! What do you think you're doing?"

"Don't get sore. Let me show you a good time in bed," he said, making a comical gesture. The men all laughed.

"How about a bun? I'd like a bun!" someone shouted from a corner.

"Coming!" The woman's voice rang clearly and loud through the hold. "How many do you want?"

"How many? How many have you got down there? I'm talking about your bun! Your bun!" A roar of laughter filled the cramped quarters.

"The last time she was here Takeda dragged her off to a

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secluded corner," said a young man who was obviously drunk. "Let me tell you, she wouldn't give in, no matter what he did. She had these drawers on, see. Takeda grabbed them and ripped them off, but she had another pair on. She had on three pairs!" The young man leaned back and laughed.

He worked in a rubber factory in the winter. In the spring, during the slack season, he would ship out to Kamchatka. Both were seasonal jobs (most of the work in Hokkaido was seasonal) so that at the height of the season he had to work around the clock. "I'll be thankful if I live three more years," he once remarked. His skin was the gray, lifeless color of crude rubber.

col. Some of the men aboard the factory ship had worked as laborers in construction gangs, opening up new land and laying down railroad beds in the interior of Hokkaido. Others were drifters who had reached the end of the line, and alcoholics who worked only to make enough to satisfy their craving. But some were also simple, scrupulously honest farmers who had been recommended by their village heads in Aomori. A crew made up of such a motley, diverse bunch suited the purposes of the recruiters well, especially with the labor unions in Hakodate trying desperately to place organizers among workers shipping out to Kamchatka, and particularly among the fishermen on the factory ships that processed crabs. The union men had contacts in the unions in Aomori and Akita. The employers feared the attempts by the unions to organize the men more than anything else.

A young steward in a starched white jacket hurried in and out of the salon carrying beer, fruit, and glasses to an impressive group of functionaries: the captain, the superintendent of factory operations, the captain of a destroyer assigned to surveillance duty in Kamchatka, the chief of the local marine police force, and an official of the seamen's union.

"That bunch can really drink," remarked the steward sullenly. "The bastards!"

The light illuminating the fishermen's quarters was no bigger than a briar berry. Cigarette smoke and the stench

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from human bodies clogged the stale air. The hold itself was like a vast cesspool and the men in the bunks resembled maggots.

With the superintendent in the lead, the captain, the factory representative, and the foreman of the factory hands came down the ladder. The captain, proud of his mustache, which curled up at the ends, kept pressing his upper lip with a handkerchief. The passageway was littered with discarded apple peels and banana skins, wet, soggy rubber-soled socks and straw sandals, and lunch wrappers dotted with grains of rice. It looked like a stopped-up gutter. The superintendent, taking it all in at a glance, spat unceremoniously. The visitors' faces were flushed with drink.

"I have something to say to all of you," he announced as he rested one foot on a partition between two bunks. He was a large brawny man who looked like a construction gang foreman. As he spoke he picked his teeth, occasionally dislodging a food particle with a flick. "Some of you may know this, so I don't have to tell you. But the rest of you—don't get the idea that this is just a money-making operation run by the corporation. We're involved in a serious international problem. It boils down to this: who's stronger—we, the people of the Japanese empire, or the Russkies? It's a crucial, man-to-man battle. If we lose—and I don't think it will ever happen—every one of you sons of Japan with balls swinging from your crotch must be prepared to slit open your belly and dump yourself in the Kamchatka Sea. We're small, but I'll be damned if we'll go down before those big stupid Russkies. Our Kamchatka operations involve canning sardines and salmon as well as crabs. From the international standpoint, we're way ahead of the other nations in this area. And this ship also has an important role in the problems of overpopulation and food in Japan. I don't know if what I'm saying makes sense to you. Anyway, just remember that we are going to fight our way through the northern seas for this mission even at the risk of our lives. That's why arrangements were made for the imperial navy to protect us every minute while we're there. Let me warn you, any of you who acts like a Russky, the way so many are doing, trying to pull tricks on us, is

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no better than a traitor to our country. I don't think any of you will do anything like that, but remember what I told you." The superintendent sobered up as he spoke. For some reason, he sneezed repeatedly.

The captain of the destroyer climbed down the gangway ladder over the side to board a waiting launch. He descended clumsily, lowering his feet like a wind-up toy. Two seamen, one above and one below, struggled to steady the drunken officer, who was rolling from side to side like a sack of gravel. The captain, shouting incoherently, flailed his arms and kicked. After each shout he spat on the seamen.

"He gives us all that hot air in public about being brave sons of Japan, but look at him now," muttered one of the seamen, glancing back at the captain who was now safely ensconced in the launch. The seamen was undoing the rope from the gangway landing.

"Do you want to let him have it?" asked the other seaman. Both men, momentarily shocked at what they had been thinking, began to laugh out loud.

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In the distance the lighthouse at Shukutsu flared brightly with each rotation of its beam. The brilliant flashes were visible far to the right, cutting through the gray miasma of sea gases. As the light revolved, it trailed a long, cerise, silvery afterglow.

A thin uncomfortable drizzle began to fall off Rumoi. The fishermen and the factory hands tried to warm themselves by sticking their hands, raw and red as crab claws, inside their jackets, or by cupping them over their mouths and blowing. The dreary gray drizzle fell ceaselessly into the gray opaque sea. As the ship approached Wakkanai, the rain began to fall in drops and the sea, its surface breaking into a flurry of smaller waves, began to roll like a flag slowly billowing in the wind. As the wind lashed out, the masts creaked ominously and the ship groaned as though its rivets were being pried loose from their sockets. The ship moved its three thousand tons into the Sōya Strait creaking and roaring like a giant with hiccups. Some tremendous force would lift it suddenly and it would seem to sail

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momentarily in space. Then it would come down again heavily and the men would experience the peculiarly ticklish, unpleasant feeling that precedes urination. The faces of the factory hands turned green and, with a wild look in their eyes—that sure sign of seasickness—they vomited. Through the spray-spattered glass of the portholes, the hard lines of the snow-capped mountain range of Karafuto were intermittently visible. Every so often they would be hidden from view by the swells that towered over them like icy alpine peaks, only to be replaced in a moment by deep, desolate valleys that rushed toward the ship and crashed against its portholes, shattering and foaming with a seething roar. Then, tamed momentarily, the waves would slide past the portholes and be left behind to form part of the flowing panorama. The ship shuddered and rolled like a convulsive child, its lurches accompanied by the sounds of objects crashing off shelves, of parts straining under tension, and of waves dashing against the ship's sides. Through it all the engines churned, their vibrations loud and clear. From time to time the ship would crest a rolling wave. Then the screws would spin in air and the stabilizers would slap the surface of the water.

The winds increased. The two masts, whistling loudly, curved away, bent like fishing rods. Fiercely, like some irresistible force, the waves would assault the ship, overtopping the masts as they swept from one side of the decks to the other, turning doorways into waterfalls. Sometimes the ship would rest, no bigger than a toy, on the towering side of a cliff that suddenly loomed up. Then, like a doomed thing, the ship would plunge down into a trough. Surely it was going to the bottom! But another wave would immediately rise from the depths of the trough to crash against the side of the ship.

As the ship entered the Okhotsk Sea, the water became noticeably darker. The damp cold penetrated the clothing of the factory hands and turned their lips blue. As it grew colder, a snow, as fine as dry salt, came lashing down. Whipped by the wind, it stung the faces and hands of the fishermen and factory hands on deck like millions of tiny glass fragments. The wet decks refroze after each wave and

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became dangerously slippery. The crew stretched ropes from one side of the deck to the other and went about their tasks clinging to them like so much wet laundry. The superintendent, holding a club used for killing salmon, bellowed orders at the men.

The other factory ships that had left Hakodate at the same time had gone off out of sight in different directions, but when the *Hakkō Maru* was lifted high atop a watery peak, the twin masts of the other ships could be seen, teetering wildly, like the frantic gestures of someone going under. Fumes, no thicker than cigarette smoke, whipped by in wisps. Intermittently, above the pounding of the waves and the shouts of the men, the whistles of the other ships could be heard, but in the next second, the *Hakkō Maru* would plunge downward again, as though waterlogged, and the other ships would be lost.

The factory ship had eight trawlers aboard. The crew and factory hands took their lives in their hands as they tried to secure these boats against the waves which came at them like a thousand sharks with teeth bared.

The superintendent's sentiments were unmistakably clear. "What's a man or two to me? But lose one trawler and there will be hell to pay."

The Kamchatka Sea seemed to be lying in wait for the ship, marveling at its audacity. It roared and lunged at its prey like a hungry lion. The ship, like a hare before a lion, was no match for it. The snowstorm rippled like a huge white flag with every change in the direction of the wind. Night approached, but the storm showed no signs of abating.

Work over, the men descended into the hold, arms and legs frozen stiff and merely dangling from their torsos; they had no more feeling in them than giant turnips. Each man crawled into his bunk as into a cocoon. No one spoke. Flat on their backs, they clung to the metal poles of their bunks. The ship reared and plunged furiously, like a stallion shaking a stubborn horsefly off its back. The fishermen let their eyes wander aimlessly over the yellowed ceiling, or the greenish-black portholes, now almost below sea level. Some lay dully with their mouths hanging open. No one thought of

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anything. A vague uneasiness silenced them with a feeling of irritation. One of them was gulping whisky from a bottle. The corners of the square bottle glinted for a moment in the dirty orange light. Then the empty bottle came hurtling through the air, bouncing off the wall as it fell in the aisle. The men followed its path with their eyes, moving only their heads. From a corner someone growled angrily. His incoherent mumbling was drowned out by the sounds of the storm.

"We're outside Japanese waters, you know," a man said, wiping the porthole with his elbow.

The stove in the cesspool sputtered but gave off no heat. The men, who lived in this cooler like so many salmon, shook with the cold. Each wave that crashed over the canvas-battened hatches reverberated deafeningly along the steel bulkheads of the cesspool. They were trapped inside a steel drum. From time to time a loud thud—like that made by a muscled giant charging into something with his shoulders—would sound just outside where the men slept. The ship was literally a whale in its death throes, thrashing panic-stricken through the wild billows.

"Chow!" shouted the mess hand, leaning halfway down into the hold and cupping his hands around his mouth. "No soup tonight on account of the gale!"

"How's that?"

"All you get is stinking salted salmon!" The hand vanished. The men got up. Like prisoners, they were obsessed with food. They were famished. Fitting their dishes of salted salmon in the hollow of their crotches as they sat with legs folded under them, the men stuffed hot rice into their mouths from one side, blowing steam out of the other at the same time, and busily shifted the mounds of rice here and there on their tongues. They were eating hot food for the first time in a long while. Their noses ran, the drippings threatening to season their rice.

The superintendent came in. "You greedy pigs—go easy on the chow! What makes you think you deserve a full stomach on days you don't work?" He glared briefly at the men in their bunks, then swaggered out.

"What makes that bastard think he's got a right to talk to

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us like that?" said a scrawny university student, reduced to skin and bones from seasickness and exhaustion.

"He's so notorious, when you hear his name—Asakawa—you automatically think of factory ships that can crabs. It's as simple as that."

"The emperor is so far above us, he doesn't mean a thing to me. But this Asakawa, now—he's something else again."

"The tight bastard. What's a bowl or two of rice to him? Let's get him!" Taut lips formed the words.

"I take my hat off to you—I'll eat it if you say that to his face!" Despite their anger, the men laughed at this remark.

Late that night, the superintendent, wrapped in a slicker, came down into the hold where the factory hands slept. He walked around, steadying himself against the roll of the ship by holding onto the sides of the bunks, and thrust a lantern into each bunk. Roughly, as if inspecting pumpkins, he twisted the heads of the sleeping factory hands toward him and checked their faces. The boys were all dead to the world; he could step on them and they'd never know it. When he had finished his rounds the superintendent clucked in irritation as if to say, "What's next?" Then he headed for the mess hall, down the corridor. Casting a pale blue flickering light, the lantern picked out a section of a crowded shelf, some rubber hip boots, aprons, work jackets, and suitcases. The light, trembling over the superintendent's legs, came to a halt. Then as he held up the lantern, it cast a circle of light on the mess hall door like a spotlight. The next morning the men learned that the superintendent had been searching for one of the hands who had disappeared.

Recalling the terrifyingly dangerous conditions on deck the day before, the men thought he must have been washed overboard. They felt depressed at the news but were so busy from the moment the sun rose that they had no chance to talk over the matter among themselves.

"The water's cold as ice. Don't tell me anyone would want to jump into that. He's hiding somewhere, I know it. And when I find the bastard, I'll really let him have it!" The superintendent searched the ship, twirling his club like a toy.

The storm had passed its peak, but as the ship plowed through the waves, the forward deck was still constantly

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awash. Bruised by its twenty-four-hour struggle, the ship now sailed with a crippled sound, as though it bore grievous wounds along its entire length. Thin smokelike clouds, just overhead, whipped into the masts and flew away at a sharp angle. The chilling rain continued. The raindrops could be seen clearly as they struck the surface of the waves rising up around the ship. The sight was eerie to the men, like being caught in the rain in a primeval forest into which they had stumbled—or worse.

The hemp rope was cold and stiff to the touch, like an iron pipe. The student, hanging on to it, was crossing the deck, taking care not to slip, when he ran into the young steward, who came charging up the gangway two steps at a time. "Hey, come here! You want to hear something interesting?" The steward drew the student into a sheltered corner and began to whisper. It had happened at about two o'clock that morning. The waves were sweeping over the port deck, each one followed, after a brief interval, by the loud dashing sounds of cascading water. In the dark of the night, the waves gleamed as they bared their fangs. Everyone was awake because of the storm. It was then that it had happened. The radio operator had rushed wild-eyed into the captain's quarters. "Captain! It's an emergency—an SOS!"

"An SOS? What ship?"

"The *Chichibu Maru*! It's sailing on the same course as ours."

"She's an old tub." Asakawa, wearing a slicker, was sitting in a chair in a corner, his legs spread wide apart. He laughed, wiggling the toe of a boot as though to say that the whole thing was a trifling matter. "Come to think of it, there's not one ship out here that isn't a tub."

"There's not a second to lose!" said the operator.

"I agree," said the captain. "It's an emergency." Swiftly, without stopping to put on a raincoat, the captain headed for the door to the wireless room, but before he got there, Asakawa had seized him by the shoulders.

"Who gave you orders to make an unnecessary course change?"

Who indeed? The captain himself, of course. Still, the

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question stopped him for an instant; a vacant, stupid expression crossed his face. Then he recovered.

"I did—as captain of this ship."

"As captain, eh?" The superintendent, blocking the captain's way, crushed him with his mocking voice. "Look, you. Whose ship do you think this is? The company chartered it and the company paid for it. The only ones who carry any weight around here are Mr. Suda, the company representative, and me. You're acting high and mighty, calling yourself captain, but you're no more than toilet paper to me. Get that through your head. You know what would happen if we bothered about that ship—we'd lose a week's work. A whole week! Well I'll be damned if we lose even one day. Anyway, the *Chichibu* is insured for more than she's worth—she's an old tub. If she goes down, the company won't lose a thing. In fact, they'll profit from it!"

We're in for a hell of a fight now! the steward had thought. But to his amazement nothing happened. He was stunned. It simply wasn't possible that it could end like that. But it had—the captain just stood there, speechless, as though his throat were stuffed with cotton. The boy had never before seen the captain in a predicament like this. The captain's orders countermanded? It couldn't be! But there it was. The boy didn't know what to make of it.

"You think that by showing humaneness—and you're a fine one to do that—we can win in a showdown between our country and theirs?" The superintendent spat, twisting his lips.

In the radio room the receiver clicked ceaselessly, occasionally touching off blue sparks. The men had made their way there to await the outcome. "Look, the operator on the other ship is signaling us! He's getting frantic." The operator explained to the captain and the supervisor, who were peering over his shoulders. Their eyes were fastened to the operator's fingertips as they moved deftly over the switches and buttons of the complicated equipment. The men stood stock still, their shoulders and jaw muscles tense.

With each lurch of the ship, the light bulbs that stuck out of the bulkhead like blisters alternately brightened and

captain
countermanded

ship sinks

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dimmed. The sound of the waves crashing against the ship's sides and the constant eerie warning whistle could be heard faintly in the distance or overhead, or just beyond the steel doors, depending on the wind. Then, with a long-drawn-out buzzing sound and a flash of electrical sparks, the radio set suddenly went dead. One great shudder passed through them all; then the operator flew into action, busily flipping switches and adjusting other parts of the equipment, but nothing more was heard. The other ship had stopped sending messages. The operator swung around in his chair.

"It's gone down." He removed his headset and spoke in a low voice. "Their last message was 'Crew of four hundred and twenty-five. Last call. No hope of rescue. SOS. SOS.' They sent this two or three times, and that was the end."

On hearing this, the captain thrust a finger between his collar and neck and threw his head back as if he were choking. He shook his head, looked restlessly around him, then turned toward the door, his hand pressed against the knot of his tie. The men averted their eyes in shame.

"So, that's what happened," said the student, who had been listening to the steward, utterly absorbed in his story. Suddenly he was overcome by a terrible emotion, and he turned his gaze toward the still turbulent sea. The horizon appeared for a split second before the ship was dragged down again, and the two found themselves looking up at the sky through a narrow valley.

"I wonder if it really went down." The student spoke as if to himself. The uncertainty weighed on his mind. He was painfully aware that, after all, he was on the same kind of tub.

The factory ships were all decrepit vessels. The death of laborers in the Okhotsk Sea was a matter of small concern to the executives in the central offices of the Marunouchi Building in Tokyo. When profits could no longer be made through the regular channels, the capitalists, finding interest rates low and money plentiful, would try anything to improve their situation. Some firms had earned hundreds of thousands of yen on a single factory ship. The other companies could hardly be blamed for going wild. The boats were factory ships, not sailing vessels: the navigation laws

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therefore did not apply to them. Ancient ships that had been heaven knew where for twenty years and were now fit only for a watery grave would be given a new coat of paint. Then, like women ravaged by syphilis, the ships would shamelessly set out for Hakodate. Hospital ships and troop transports that had seen honorable action in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 and then had been cast away like fish guts now reappeared in battered condition in the northern port. Their steam pipes would burst when the pressure was raised, and when they picked up speed to elude Russian patrol boats (which was often) they would rattle in pain as though only a step away from total disintegration. But the owners could not have cared less. And why not? Because it was a time when everybody acted (and everything was done) in the name of the Japanese empire. Besides, the floating canneries were really factories, even though they were not subject to factory laws. Nothing could have given the capitalists a freer hand.

The wily executives quickly tied their business to "the cause of the empire." Unbelievable amounts of money poured into their pockets. And while they sat in their chauffeur-driven cars, they would toy with the idea of becoming Diet members to enhance their positions. It was perhaps at just such a moment that the workers of the *Chichibu Maru* had been waging their battle to the death in the northern ocean a thousand miles away—a foredoomed struggle against winds and waves that cut as viciously as the jagged edges of broken glass.

We're all involved in this, not just the men on that ship! thought the student as he descended the ladder into the cesspool. At the bottom he saw a notice stuck on the wall, the sticky grains of rice used for paste raising bumps under the paper. The spelling was far from perfect:

To the person discovering the factory hand Miyaguchi—
a reward of 2 packs of Bat cigarettes and 1 towel
Superintendent Asakawa

3

The drizzle continued for days. The Kamchatka shoreline,

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dimmed by the rain, slithered by like a lamprey. Four miles offshore, the *Hakkō Maru* dropped anchor. It could get no closer because of the agreement that Russian territory extended three miles from shore. The nets were cast and preparations were made so they could be hauled up at any time. As dawn broke in Kamchatka at about 2 a.m., the fishermen were all up and dressed before then. Wearing rubber boots that reached their crotches, they lay dozing in the wooden bins on deck. A former student from Tokyo, who had been tricked by an employment bureau into signing up, was grumbling that this was not what he had expected.

"They said I'd sleep in my own cabin. Was I gullible!"

"Sure, we're all sleeping by ourselves. It's every man for himself."

Student
There were about seventeen or eighteen students. In signing up, they had each received an advance of sixty yen, but they found when they got to the ship that after they had paid for their train fare, lodging, blankets, and cushions, and after they had paid the fee demanded by the employment bureau, they were already about seven or eight yen in debt. When this fact dawned on them, they were more stunned than if the bills they clutched in their hands had turned to dry leaves. At first they huddled together in a group apart from the fishermen, like dead souls surrounded on all sides by red and blue devils.

The students grew ill on the fare—skinny servings of rice and the same soup daily since the fourth day out of Hakodate. After climbing into their bunks at night, they would sit with their knees drawn up and poke each other's shins for signs of beriberi. They did this constantly, their faces reflecting happiness or gloom depending on whether or not their flesh showed resilience. Two or three of them felt prickles, like those caused by low-voltage electricity, whenever they passed their hands over their shins. Some dangled their legs over the sides of their bunks and tapped their kneecaps with a knife to test their reflexes. Some, moreover, had been constipated for four or five days. One of them had gone to the doctor for a laxative, but had returned quickly, pale with anger.

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"He said laxatives were a luxury he didn't have!"

"Sure he'd say that. He's like all ship doctors," said an old fisherman who overheard him.

"They're all alike, these doctors. The doctor at the mine I came from was the same too," said the miner-turned-fisherman.

When the men were in their bunks that night, the superintendent came in. "Hey, all of you! Asleep? Listen. We just got word that the *Chichibu Maru* sank. No mention of survivors." He twisted his lips and spat. It was a habit of his.

The student recalled what the steward had told him. Why, this man is talking, as cool as you please, about four or five hundred laborers he as good as killed with his own hands, he thought. Dumping him into the sea would be too good for the bastard. The men sullenly lifted their heads and began to talk noisily among themselves. Having made his announcement, Asakawa swaggered out.

The factory hand who disappeared had been caught two days earlier as he stepped out from behind a boiler. He had hidden safely for two days but finally, overcome by hunger, had given himself up. The man who had "captured" him was a fisherman past middle age. The younger fishermen had flared up at the older man and threatened to beat him up.

"Shut up, you bastards!" Unrepentant, the old fisherman, who had received his reward, sucked contentedly on a cigarette. "You don't smoke, so what do you know about the lure of cigarettes?"

The factory hand had been stripped to his undershirt by the superintendent and shoved into one of the two toilets, the door locked behind him. At first no one wanted to go into the other toilet. The screaming was unbearable. On the second day, the sobbing grew husky and the breathing labored. Then the sobs came only at intervals. Toward the end of the second day, a fisherman, off duty, became worried and went to investigate. The pounding on the door had stopped, and there was no response to the fisherman's knocks. Late that night, Miyaguchi, the factory hand, was brought out. He had been found with one arm wrapped around the urinal, his head stuck in the toilet paper container.

Miyaguchi
killed

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His lips looked as though they had been daubed with blue ink. He was obviously dead.

The morning was cold. It was already bright, though it was only 3 a.m. The men rose, bracing themselves against the cold, their hands thrust into their pockets. The superintendent was making his rounds, inspecting the quarters of the factory hands, the fishermen, and even those of the sailors and firemen. It made no difference to him whether some of the men had colds or were ill; he hauled them out of their bunks anyway. There was no wind, but as the men worked on deck the tips of their fingers and toes lost all sensation. Cursing, the foreman herded about fifteen hands into the factory. The bamboo stick he carried had a leather-covered tip. He used this to reach over the machinery and prod workers who were idling.

"They brought Miyaguchi out last night and he hasn't said a single word since then, but the superintendent's been kicking him, saying he's going to put him back to work this morning." A sickly looking factory hand who was on good terms with the students was reporting to the foreman, looking steadily at him. "He finally gave up though, when Miyaguchi didn't move." At that moment, the superintendent himself arrived, pushing a shivering factory hand along before him. This man had caught cold while working in the freezing rain, and he was also suffering from pleurisy. Even when it wasn't cold he shivered constantly. Deep lines between his brows robbed his face of its normal youthful look. His colorless lips were queerly twisted, and his eyes darted nervously here and there. Unable to stand the cold, he had been loitering in the boiler room when the superintendent found him. The fishermen who were lowering the boats in preparation for setting out after the morning catch looked silently at the two. One fisherman who was about forty turned away, as though he could not bear the sight, and shook his head slowly two or three times.

"You think we pay good money so guys like you can catch cold or stay in bed on some pretext or other?" The superintendent shouted at the hand, then turned to the other workers. "You fools! This is none of your business!" he bellowed, striking the deck with his stick.

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"If there's a prison worse than this, I've yet to see it," muttered a fisherman.

"When I tell the folks at home about this, no one will believe me," said another.

"Of course they won't. Who else has seen anything like it?"

The winches began to rattle and turn under steam. The fishing boats were lowering simultaneously, rocking in space. The sailors and firemen were rounded up for duty. Taking care not to slip on the glassy surface of the deck, they ran about busily. The superintendent stood among the workers and surveyed them like a proud peacock.

In a slack moment, the students sat down behind a pile of cargo to avoid the wind. The fisherman who had left the mines turned the corner, cupping his hands around his mouth and blowing into them. "We're taking our lives into our hands!" The depth of feeling in his voice—he obviously spoke straight from his heart—struck the students. "This is no different from the mines. What a way to make a living—laying our very lives on the line! I was afraid of the gas in the mines, but I'm just as scared of the sea."

Beginning around noon, there was a subtle change in the weather. A veil of sea gases—so thin it was barely discernible—settled on the surface of the sea. Then the sea grew choppy, and waves began to leap up here and there. The wind, now strong, twanged the masts and flapped the edges of the canvas cargo covers against the deck.

"The 'rabbits' are going to jump! The 'rabbits'!" Someone was running along the starboard side, shouting. His words were whipped away by the violent wind, reduced to an unintelligible shout. The entire surface of the ocean was now peaked with flying whitecaps, leaping like rabbits in a vast prairie. This was the harbinger of a Kamchatka squall. The current suddenly began to flow faster and the ship veered off to one side. Before the men knew it, Kamchatka, which had been visible to starboard just a moment ago, suddenly popped into view on the port side. The fishermen and the sailors on duty grew alarmed.

As a shrill warning whistle sounded just above the men's heads, they stopped in their tracks and looked up. The

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smokestack curved outward over their heads, unexpectedly large but foreshortened, like a bucket, and shaking visibly. The sound of the whistle which protruded like a homburg from the belly of the smokestack was heartbreaking in the wild storm: the fishing boats, far from the mother ship, were to guide themselves home through the storm using only these shrill repeated signals.

A group of fishermen and seamen huddled tensely at the bottom of the dimly lit ladder leading to the engine room. With each roll of the ship a faint light fell across their excited faces, lighting them momentarily before they disappeared again into the shadows.

"What's happened?" said the miner, pushing his way into the group.

"We're going to beat that bastard Asakawa to death." The men were ready to take matters into their own hands. It seemed that the superintendent had received a squall warning from another ship anchored about ten miles away, saying that if any trawlers were out they should be recalled immediately. But Asakawa had said, "What's the good of coming all the way to Kamchatka if we're going to turn tail and run every time something happens?" The radio operator had told the men all this.

The first fisherman who heard the story had turned on him as though he was Asakawa himself. "What do you take a man's life for?"

"A man's life?"

"That's what I said."

"Look, fundamentally, Asakawa doesn't think of any of you as human beings."

The fisherman had opened his mouth to speak, spluttered, and stopped. Then, red with anger, he ran off to relay the news to the other men. The men stood about with gloomy expressions, their faces showing unmistakable signs of mounting indignation. A factory hand whose father was out in one of the trawlers paced nervously on the edge of a group of fellow workers. The fishermen felt their very hearts being torn out as they listened to the incessant whistling above their heads.

Close to evening, there was a shout from up on the bridge.

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The men in the hold bounded up the ladder two steps at a time. Two of the trawlers were approaching the ship, tied to each other with a rope. The boats were almost alongside the ship now, but huge waves lifted the ship and the boats alternately in a seesaw motion. Groundswells rose one after another. The boats were only a few feet away but could come no closer. Frustration grew. A line was thrown from the deck of the ship but it fell short of the trawler, splashing into the sea and sending up still more spray. Twisting like a sea serpent, the line was hauled in. Several more attempts were made, without success. The men on deck called out to the fishermen in the trawlers, but there was no reply. The expressions on their faces were impassive; they stared straight ahead, their eyes glazed, as though stunned by something they had seen. Their whole demeanor was so ominous that it left a lasting impression on those who saw it.

The line was thrown once more. Tightly wound at first, it uncoiled like a snake. As the end snapped against the neck of the fisherman who had reached out to catch it, the men on deck cried out in dismay. The man in the boat fell on his side but miraculously he held on. As it was hauled in, the rope grew taut, dripping. The men on the ship involuntarily let out a gasp of relief.

The whistling continued, loud or faint depending on the direction of the wind. By nightfall all but two of the trawlers had made their way back. The fishermen were close to collapse when they finally climbed aboard the ship. One of the missing trawlers had been swamped, so the men on board had dropped anchor and waited till they were picked up by another trawler. The other missing boat had disappeared with its crew. The superintendent was fuming.

Time and again he went down into the fishermen's hold to berate them. Each time he left the men's faces changed into looks of undisguised hatred.

The next day it was decided that the mother ship would sail to a new position to search for the lost trawler and, incidentally, to locate new crab beds. There seemed to be more concern about the lost trawler than about the four or five men in it.

The engine crew was busy from early morning. When

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the anchor was raised, the vibrations shook the fishermen sleeping next to the anchor room out of their bunks and dislodged flakes of corroded steel from the bulkheads.

The *Hakkō Maru* set out in search of trawler No. 1, ^{real} which had dropped anchor at 51.5 degrees latitude. Chunks of ice, bobbing up and down like lively sea animals, floated past between the gentle swells. But further on, the fragments of icebergs formed an almost solid mass, stretching as far as the eye could see. Foaming, they had surrounded the ship in an instant. The ice sent up a kind of steam. Then, as though a wind machine had been turned on, a cold gale began to blow. Every part of the ship creaked and ice formed almost instantly on the deck and railings. The belly of the ship glistened with crystals of frost, as though a fine powder had been sprinkled on it. Pressing their hands against their cheeks, the crew and fishermen ran about on deck. The ship plowed on, leaving behind it a long wake like a single ribbonlike road in a prairie. But the trawler was not to be found. Finally, close to nine o'clock, a trawler was sighted from the bridge. Hearing the news, the superintendent began to pace the deck elatedly. "Goddamit, we've finally found it!" A motor launch was immediately lowered and sent out to meet the trawler, but it was not the No. 1. It was a newer one, with the number 36 stenciled on it. A metal buoy clearly identifying the boat as belonging to the *X Maru* floated near it. It seemed that the *X Maru* had left the boat to mark its former position when it moved on to another location. Asakawa tapped the side of the boat with his forefinger. "What a stroke of luck this is!" He grinned. "We'll take it along with us." The boat was hoisted by the winches onto the bridge of the *Hakkō Maru* where it swung in the air, showering the decks. Looking up at the boat with satisfaction, as though he had done a good day's work, the superintendent repeated to himself, "A real stroke of luck!" The fishermen who were working on the nets watched him.

"The thieving rat!" one of them said. "What wouldn't I give to see those chains snap and the boat land on him." The superintendent looked down at the men, as though trying to read their minds, and passed by. Then he sent for the carpenter. The sharpness in his voice betrayed his impatience.

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Unexpectedly, the carpenter stuck his head out from a nearby hatch. "What do you want?"

Taken by surprise, the superintendent turned on him and growled, "What do you mean 'What do you want?' You fool! Put a new number on the boat! Get a plane, a plane!" The carpenter looked puzzled. "You idiot! Come with me."

The undersized carpenter, plane in hand and a small folding handsaw stuck in his belt, walked gingerly after the burly superintendent. In short order, the number 3 was planed off and the boat became the No. 6 trawler of the *Hakkō Maru*.

"Fine, fine! Hah, that'll teach them to leave a boat around like that!" His lips twisted nastily, the superintendent reared back and let out a triumphant laugh.

There was little hope of locating the lost trawler farther north. The ship, which had remained stationary while the new boat was taken on board, now moved into a wide, sweeping arc that would return it to its earlier position. The sky was cloudless, as if freshly washed. Against this clear background, the mountain range of Kamchatka stood out clearly in relief like the mountains on a picture postcard from Switzerland.

irony

The lost trawler did not return. The fishermen on the ship collected the belongings of the lost men from their bunks, so suddenly deserted, and looked up their addresses in case they had to take immediate action. It was not a pleasant task. As they worked a sharp pang went through them, as though they had suffered a blow. In each of the bundles, which the men planned to put aboard the supply ship when it arrived, was a collection of small packages and letters, addressed to the wives of the missing men. One letter, full of smudges and painstakingly written in pencil in a mixture of two alphabets, slipped out of a packet. Passing it eagerly from one gnarled pair of hands to another, the men read the letter avidly, carefully picking their way over the words. As he finished it, each fisherman shook his head slowly, wishing he had not read it. The letter was from a fisherman's child. A barrel-chested man who had tried his hand at various dubious enterprises in the interior of Hokkaido before com-

ing on board looked up from the letter, cleared his throat, and said in a harsh whisper, "It's all on account of that Asakawa. If the men are really dead, we'll avenge them." An even lower growl came from a young fisherman with bulging shoulder muscles: "Save him for me."

"I wish I hadn't read that letter. It makes me think of home."

"Listen," the first speaker said. "If we aren't careful, Asakawa will see that it's our turn next. Remember, we're all in this together."

A voice came from the corner where one man had been sitting silently, hugging his knees and biting on a thumbnail, glancing up from time to time at the speakers. "When the time comes, leave everything to me. I'll slit his throat."

Everyone fell silent, but the silence held a comforting sense of solidarity.

Three days after the *Hakkō Maru* returned to its old position, the lost trawler suddenly appeared, its crew in surprisingly good spirits. When they left the captain's quarters after reporting to him and came down into the cesspool, they were engulfed by an excited mob. They told how they had drifted helplessly in the furious rainstorm. They could no more defy the elements than a child caught by the scruff of the neck. Their boat had been farthest away from the mother ship, and the wind was against them. The men had resigned themselves to the fact that this might be the end. (The fishermen had by then conditioned themselves to accepting death calmly at any moment.) But miraculously the trawler, half swamped, had washed up the next morning on the shores of Kamchatka, where the men were taken in by some Russians living near the shore.

It was a family of four. The fishermen, starved for a family atmosphere, for the sight of women and children, were fascinated. The Russians had been kind and went out of their way to make the men comfortable. Even so, the men were at first apprehensive about being among foreigners who spoke a language they did not understand and whose hair and eyes were of a different color. But they soon realized that the Russians were, after all, human beings. When word of the plight of the shipwrecked men spread, a crowd of

villagers formed around them. The fishermen had stayed in the village, which was quite far from the Japanese fishing grounds, for two days. After they had rested, they returned to the mother ship. They did not want to return; who in his right mind would to this hell on earth? But there was more to tell. The men began slowly to divulge a number of other interesting bits of news. On the day of their departure, as they were getting ready to leave and stood talking around the stove, four or five men had come into the hut. One was a Chinese. Another of them, a slightly stooped man with a large head and a stubble of red beard, began suddenly to orate and gesticulate. Immediately, the head fisherman had waved his hand sideways in front of his face to indicate that they did not understand Russian. Then the Russian paused after a sentence, and the Chinese, who had been watching him, suddenly began to interpret in Japanese. It was such awkward Japanese that it thoroughly confused the listeners as they tried to follow the line of thought. Communication almost foundered as the words came forth, familiar yet strange.

"You people, you must have no money," said the Chinese.

"That's right," replied the head fisherman.

"You—poor people."

"That's right."

"So you—proletariat. Understand?"

"Yes."

The Russian laughed and then began to pace the floor. After every few steps he stopped in his tracks and looked toward the Japanese. Then he said, "The rich—they do this to you." He pantomimed the wringing of a neck. "The rich get fatter." He clasped his outstretched hands in front of him. "But you—you can do nothing. You become poorer. Understand? Japan—hopeless. Workers—like this." He screwed up his face and played a sick man. "But people who don't work are like this. Ahem! Ahem!" He strutted about.

"You're right! That's it!" said the young fishermen, and began to laugh, highly amused.

"Workers—like this. People who don't work—like this." The man did an encore. "Not right. Workers—like this." Now he stuck out his chest and stood proudly. "But people

who don't work—like this." He stooped and held a hand out like an old beggar. "The way it should be. Understand? Russia like that. Only people who work. In Russia—only workers. Like this." He strutted about again. "In Russia, no people who don't work. No dishonest people. No one to squeeze us. Understand? Russia not a fearful country. Everyone—everyone tells lies about us."

The fishermen wondered vaguely if this was the terrifying communist propaganda they had been warned against. If so, it was nothing extraordinary, they realized with some surprise. The men were infected by the enthusiasm of the speaker. "We understand. Really. We understand."

Then two other Russians began to shout. The Chinese listened, and when they stopped, began to speak, carefully choosing his words, like a man with a stutter. "Many people get rich without working. Proletariat always like this." He put his hands around his neck. "Hopeless! You proletariat—one, two, three persons, a hundred, a thousand, fifty thousand, one hundred thousand people—all like this." He pantomimed joining hands. "Then we become strong. Nothing to fear." He slapped his arm. "We will not lose. Understand?"

"Yes, yes!"

"People who do not work run away." He ran in place. "Nothing to fear. I speak truth. Working people—proletariat—hold their heads high." He paraded about with great dignity. "Proletariat—they are the most important people. Without proletariat nobody has bread. Everybody die. Understand?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Japan still far from goal. Hopeless! Workers—like this." He crouched and cringed. "People who do not work—like this." He puffed himself up and swung his fist threateningly. "This—all bad! Workers—like this!" With a fierce expression, he stood up as though to take on an adversary. He struck down the imaginary foe and trampled him. "Then people who do not work—like this." Again he ran in place. "Japan will be a good country if it has only workers—a proletarian country. Understand?"

"Yes, we understand."

Suddenly the Russian shouted something in a strange tone of voice and began to jump about as though dancing. "In Japan—you workers will do it." He stood as though resisting something. "In Russia, we are all glad. Banzai! You will return to your ship. On your ship, the men who do not work are like this." He strutted about. "You—proletariat—do this!" He shadow-boxed, clasped his hands, and stood defiantly. "Nothing to worry about. You will win. Understand?"

"We understand!" One young fisherman, unable to suppress his excitement, suddenly grabbed the Chinese by the hand. "We'll do it. I promise you we will!"

The head fisherman was aware all along that this was Red propaganda. What sinister ideas his men were being filled with! With this propaganda plot, Russia could take over all of Japan.

When the Russians finally stopped speaking, the villagers let out a shout and grasped the fishermen's hands. Hugging the men, they pressed their hairy cheeks against the cheeks of the Japanese. The flustered Japanese stiffened and reared back, not knowing how to respond.

The men listening to the story glanced nervously from time to time toward the entrance to the cesspool and begged the fishermen to tell them more. When the stranded fishermen spoke about the Russians they had seen, they listened, fascinated, until a voice interrupted the narrative.

"All right, you, that's enough!" The head fisherman, who had noticed how dangerously curious the men were, gave a shove to the young fisherman who was talking so enthusiastically.

4

A haze enfolded the ship. The ventilators, the funnels, the winch arms, the dangling boats, the railings—these objects that normally had only a functional interest for the men—blurred in outline, becoming softer and friendlier than usual. A balmy air caressed the men's faces. It was a most unusual night. The area around the hold at the stern stank of crabs' innards. Two figures, one tall and the other short, were visible between the piles of nets. Unable to sleep because of

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the pounding of his heart, a fisherman with a bad heart and puffy grayish skin had come up on deck. Leaning against the rail he looked idly at the sea, now thick as glue, and fell to worrying about his condition. I'm going to die, he thought. But to die in Kamchatka, on the sea far from home—the thought was unbearable. Just at that moment he became aware of the presence of others between the stacks of nets. The occasional crunch of a crab shell underfoot gave away their presence. He heard low whispers. When his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, he made out two figures. A fisherman was talking to a factory hand of about fourteen or fifteen. He couldn't hear what they were saying. The hand, his back to the man, shook his head and turned away like a stubborn, sulky child. The fisherman shifted his position in response. This went on for a while. Then the fisherman involuntarily (or so it seemed) raised his voice. Lowering it again quickly, he spoke in a rapid whisper. Suddenly he seemed to be grappling with the hand. A fight, I'll bet, thought the other fisherman. A muffled sound came from the hand. A piece of his clothing was being pressed against his mouth. Then he ceased to struggle. At that moment the watching fisherman caught sight of the white, exposed legs of the hand, glowing like two candles in the soft haze. The lower half of his body was naked. Suddenly the boy knelt forward on the deck, and the fisherman mounted him. All this happened in a short, breathtaking instant before the other fisherman's eyes. Instinctively, he turned away. His chest heaved, as though he were drunk or had been struck sharply on the head.

The fishermen began to be tormented by the sexual tension that welled up inside them. It was unnatural for robust men like these to be separated from women for four to five months at a stretch. Invariably, at night, the men would tell stories about the women they had visited in Hakodate, making lewd references to the female anatomy. A pornographic picture the men never tired of made the rounds. One of the men entertained the others with this song:

It's "Lay the bedding out."
It's "Face this way."

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It's "Kiss me."

It's "Wrap your legs around me."

It's "Now come!"

I tell you, a whore's life is a hard one.

The words were quickly absorbed, the way water is soaked up by a sponge. The men sang the song whenever they had a chance, but when they finished singing it, they would curse in frustration. "Damn!" Their eyes glittered.

After crawling into their bunks at night, the fishermen would toss about and grumble. "Damn it, what the hell am I going to do? I can't get to sleep no matter what I do. I've got a hard-on."

"What am I going to do?" In the end, one of them stepped out of his bunk, a hand grasping the shaft of his erect penis. The sight of a strapping fisherman in this state charged the atmosphere with tension. The students watched in amazement from their corner.

Many found relief in wet dreams. Driven by an irresistible urge, some masturbated when no one was around. Wet, spotted, rancid-smelling drawers and loincloths were stuffed back in shelf corners. Sometimes they fell to the floor, and the students stepped on them with disgust, as if they were dogs' droppings.

Then began the evening sorties to the quarters of the factory hands. The men would exchange cigarettes for caramels and, with two or three in their pockets, leave the hold. When the cook opened the door to the storeroom, stacked with pickle barrels and reeking like a privy, he would be greeted by a shout that cut through the oppressive gloom like a slap in the face. "Shut the door! You come in now and I'll kill you, you bastard!"

The radio operator intercepted messages exchanged between the other ships and relayed to the superintendent any information about the catch of other ships. From this news, it soon became apparent that the *Hakkō Maru* was falling behind the other ships. The superintendent, panicking, immediately began to take it out with increased intensity on the fishermen and factory hands. It was ultimately these men who always and in everything bore the brunt of his

hard
on



hard
on

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abuse. To increase output, the superintendent and the foreman of the factory hands deliberately provoked a sense of rivalry between the crew on the one hand and the fishermen and factory hands on the other. They were all engaged in the same overall task of processing crabs, but when the crew bested them in some way, the fishermen and the hands vowed that they were not going to get away with it, though they had nothing to gain by this attitude. Meanwhile, the superintendent gloated. One side won one day and the other the next; the losing side would then resolve not to lose the following day.

In this way, several days of back-breaking toil went by in a blur of exhaustion. A single day witnessed a record fifty to sixty percent increase in catch and production. But after five or six days of this grueling labor, volume plummeted again as the men grew listless. Some of them slumped at their stations from fatigue, only to be struck without warning by the superintendent. Caught unawares, the men involuntarily cried out. Soon they were working as though surrounded by foes—silently, as if they had forgotten speech. For they had no strength even to talk. Next the superintendent began to offer prizes to the winning side and the smoldering rivalry was rekindled.

"It's like stealing candy from babies," said the superintendent, who was drinking beer with the captain in the latter's quarters. The captain's hands were dimpled like a plump woman's. He tapped his gold-tipped cigarette casually on the table and replied, a stupid grin on his face. The captain was sharply annoyed at the superintendent's constant interference, overt and covert, in his activities. In fact, he hoped that the fishermen would mutiny and dump the bastard into the Kamchatka Sea.

The superintendent's next step was to post a notice about a prize of quite another kind—a branding—for the least productive member on the ship. He promised to take a red hot poker and apply it to the man's body. With this terrifying threat looming ominously over them, the men dug in, and the sagging work levels again rose noticeably. The superintendent knew even better than the men themselves the limits of endurance of the human body.

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Falling into their bunks after work like felled trees, the men groaned involuntarily with exhaustion. One of the students recalled a painting of the Buddhist hell that he had seen once in the murky gloom of a temple to which his grandmother had taken him as a little boy. He felt as though he were now living the horror of that scene. The impression left on the small boy was of slimy creatures like pythons writhing about in a bog. His life was no different from what he had pictured hell to be then.

Ironically, fatigue prevented the men from falling asleep. After midnight, there suddenly arose, in the dark cesspool, the haunting sounds of teeth grinding—sharp and piercing like the sound of glass being scratched—of muttering, and the hair-raising shrieks of a man in the grips of a nightmare. Unable to sleep, some would whisper to themselves in surprise, "To think that I am still alive!" To think that they were alive—this is what they told themselves.

It was one of the former students who was in the worst condition. "Take Dostoevski's *Dead Souls*, now. The situation in the book was nothing compared to ours." The boy had been constipated for several days and could not go to sleep without a towel wrapped tightly around his head.

"Of course it wasn't." The man the student was talking to licked at the whisky he had brought from Hakodate as though it were medicine. "One thing is certain—they're running a huge enterprise. They're opening up rich virgin territory, you know. It's a tough job. Take our ship, now. I understand it's much better than it used to be. When they first started in the business no one knew much about changes in weather or currents, and no one really knew the geography of this area. They tell me they've lost count of the ships that went down. And other ships would be sunk by the Russians and the men taken prisoners and killed. But all these riches are ours because the men didn't give up. They came back for more despite the heavy odds. We've got no gripes."

That may be so, the student thought. Anyway, that's the way it's written in our history books. But this did nothing to soften the resentment that rankled in his heart. Silently he rubbed his belly, now hard as a board. He felt an un-

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pleasant prickling sensation in his index finger, like a low-voltage electric shock. Holding the finger up to eye level, he rubbed it with his other hand.

After dinner, the men congregated around the single ancient stove in the center of the cesspool. Cracks ran down its sides like lines on a map. Bodies began to steam as they warmed up. Everywhere, there was the pungent smell of crab.

"I don't follow you, but the one thing I do know is this—I don't want them to kill me."

"You can say that again!"

An almost palpable air of gloom settled heavily on the group. The realization suddenly hit each man that he was looking death in the face! The mood was sullen, though there was no clear focal point for their irritability.

"I'll be damned if I'll die for s-something that d-doesn't b-benefit me at all!" a stuttering fisherman suddenly burst out, chafing under his handicap, veins standing out on his red face. The other men fell silent, feeling a sudden painful stab in their hearts.

"The last thing I want to do is to die in Kamchatka."

"I hear the supply ship has left Hakodate. The radio operator said so."

"I want to go home."

"Forget it."

"I hear a lot of men stow away on the supply ship bound for home."

"Is that true? I envy them."

"Someone told me about some fishermen who went out as usual and then escaped to Kamchatka and joined the Russkies to do propaganda work."

"We're working for the Japanese empire—that's what the higher-ups tell us. They couldn't have thought of a better catchword." The student unbuttoned his shirt, revealing a rib cage barely covered with skin. He yawned, scratching vigorously. Encrusted dirt flaked off in a thin powdery cloud.

"Sure. The rich men in the c-company g-grab everything."

An older fisherman, staring dully at the stove, his heavy

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cyclids striated like oyster shells, spat. When the spittle hit the stove, it formed a ball and leaped up, sizzling, like a toasting bean. Then it disappeared in a twinkling, leaving behind it a darkened spot like lampblack. The others watched it in a torpor.

"I think you're right."

But the head boatman said, "Listen, you—no treasonous talk, you hear?" He was holding his split-toed rubber-soled boots over the stove, their red felt lining exposed.

"We have a right to talk. Shit!" It was the stutterer who spoke, his lips pursed like an octopus.

The acrid smell of burning rubber permeated the air.

"Hey, Grandpa, your boots!"

"Hmm? Ah, they're burning!"

Waves seemed to have come up. The faint sound of water splashing against the ship's sides could be heard. The ship itself began to rock gently. The shadows of the men clustered around the stove—cast by a five-watt bulb darkened like a bruised winter cherry—shifted and changed shapes with the rocking. It was a quiet night. The red flames that flickered at the mouth of the stove cast their glow on the men's legs. On this strangely silent night each man found himself suddenly looking back, though only for an instant, on his unhappy past.

"Anybody got a cigarette?"

"Not me."

"What about you?"

"Nope."

"Shit!"

"Hey, send the whisky around here, too, will you?"

The man spoken to turned the square bottle upside down and shook it.

"Hey, careful you don't waste any!"

The man with the bottle laughed.

"What a hell of a place I chose to come to!" The fisherman who spoke had once worked at a factory in the Shibaura district in Tokyo. In the wake of his outburst, talk shifted to life in the factories. To the laborers from Hokkaido, who could scarcely imagine what a factory was like, it sounded like a fine place. The man said, "If even one of the hundred

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things we put up with here had happened where I used to work, there would have been a strike."

As if this were a cue, the men began one after another to tell about what they had done before. Construction work on national highways. Irrigation work. Railway construction work. Harbor construction and land reclamation. Opening up of new mines. Clearing wasteland. Loading and unloading ships. Sardine fishing. The men had all done a hitch at one of these jobs before signing up on the ship.

In the eyes of the capitalists, the laborers on Honshu had become arrogant and recalcitrant. Besides, the market was pretty thoroughly exploited and the entrepreneurs had reached an impasse. So they had begun to extend their rapacious claws into Hokkaido and Sakhalin. There, as in the colonies of Korea and Taiwan, they could exploit brutally with an absolutely free hand, knowing full well that they were above censure. In the barracks of workers recruited for the construction of national highways and railways, men were beaten to death, their lives valued no more than those of lice. Some, unable to take the abuse, fled. When they were caught, they were tied to posts in the backyards of the barracks, where they were kicked to death by horses or torn apart by fierce Tosa dogs. All this took place in full view of the other men. Even construction workers, as tough and inhuman as they were, would hide their faces in their hands when they heard the muffled cracking of a man's ribs. If the man fainted, he was doused with water until he revived; then the torture was resumed. Death would finally come to him as he was being jerked about like a rag doll in the powerful jaws of the dogs, but even after the body had been thrown into a corner of the yard and abandoned, some part would twitch. It was also a common practice to apply hot tongs to the buttocks, or to club a man so hard that he could no longer stand up. Sometimes, when the men were at their meal, the air would suddenly be pierced by a scream from outside. Then the raw smell of burning flesh would penetrate the air.

"Lost my appetite. How the hell can I eat?" The men would throw their chopsticks down and exchange gloomy, knowing looks.

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Many men in the construction gangs died of a combination of beriberi and overwork, but, since there was no time to dispose of their corpses, they were left lying about for several days. In the dusky areas behind their shacks, the men could see, sticking out from under straw mat coverings flung over the bodies, pairs of dull-looking yellowish-gray legs that had shrunk in some strange way so that they looked like those of children.

"Their faces were covered with flies. When I passed by, they all flew up in a cloud!" A worker coming into the barracks spoke in disbelief.

The workers started in on their jobs while it was still dark and continued until they could see nothing but the silvery flashes of their picks. So miserable were they that they envied the prisoners working in a nearby jail. But the Koreans suffered most. They were maltreated by everybody—the foremen, the section, and even their own fellow workers, the Japanese.

A policeman stationed in a village about four or five miles from the construction site would occasionally trudge the full distance, notebook in hand, just to check up on the men. He sometimes stayed until evening, sometimes overnight. But he never once showed up at the men's quarters. As he finally turned homeward his face would be flushed, and, muttering incoherently, he would urinate in the middle of the road, spraying here and there like a fireman fighting a brush-fire.

In Hokkaido, each railway tie literally represented the clay-colored corpse of one worker. And in harbor reclamation work, each piling was the body of a worker claimed by beriberi. They might have been the human pillars buried alive in ancient times. In Hokkaido, workers were referred to as "octopuses" since, to keep itself alive, the octopus will eat its own tentacles, if it must. What real difference was there basically between the workers and this sea creature? They could be exploited in the most primitive way without a moment's concern for public opinion. Enormous profits accrued in this way. The maltreatment of workers was justified under such catch phrases as "Development of National Resources." Oh, they were shrewd all right!

discuss me

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Workers starved and were beaten to death for the sake of the nation.

"It's a miracle I got away from that place alive! I'm thankful for that. But if they work me to death on this ship, it'll be the same thing, won't it? What a joke!" The man laughed, his voice unnaturally loud, then he stopped and turned to one side with a look of anguish.

It was the same at the mines. To open a new mine, the capitalists used wave after wave of laborers (who were, after all, as expendable as guinea pigs) to determine the existence of gas accumulations or other risks. (This was the same method the military hero General Nogi had used in capturing Port Arthur from the Russians.)* There was no more concern for the men than for used paper tissues. The walls of the mines were literally strengthened, layer upon layer, by flesh torn from the workers' bodies like filets of fish. Here, too, the isolation from the cities permitted conditions that made the skin crawl. Sometimes a crushed thumb or little finger would be seen among the lumps of coal being trundled out in a handcar, but the women and children who saw it were trained not to make a fuss over that sort of thing. Their faces expressionless, they would merely push the car on to the next station. This was the coal that moved gigantic machines for the profit of the capitalists.

All the miners had puffy, lusterless yellow skin and the vacant stare characteristic of men long shut up in prison. It was obvious that their health was being ruined by the lack of sunshine, the poisonous air with its coal dust and toxic gases, and the unnatural temperature and pressure levels.

"If you've worked in the mines for seven or eight years, that means you've spent the equivalent of at least four or five full years underground without seeing the sun. Think of it—four or five years!"

But this was of little concern to the capitalists, who could mobilize any number of replacements despite the appalling

* Maresuke Nogi (1849–1912) was the commander of the Third Army, which captured Port Arthur with a fearful toll of lives in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05. The sacrifice weighed on his mind, and when the Meiji emperor died in 1912, Nogi and his wife disemboweled themselves to follow him in death.

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conditions. When winter came, there was no dearth of laborers who flocked to the mines.

Then there were the "frontier farmers"—peasants who had migrated to Hokkaido. The poor farmers on the main island who were about to lose their land were stirred up by skillful propaganda films with titles like "The Opening Up of Hokkaido," "A Solution to the Population and Food Problems: The Encouragement of Immigration," and (here was something spun out of the phantasies of boyhood) "The Immigrant Millionaire." But in contrast to the rosy picture painted for them, the farmers found, when they finally got to their destination, that they were herded onto land that, under its four- or five-inch cover of loam, was clay. Around the plots of richer arable land were posted notices of ownership. Isolated in their cabins without even potatoes to eat, families starved to death, and their bodies lay undiscovered until after the spring thaw. There were many such cases—a neighbor living two miles away might come by when the snow was melting and discover the entire family dead, half-chewed bits of straw sticking out of their mouths.

In the rare case where a farmer managed to fight off starvation and cultivate the wilderness for ten years, the land would be taken away from him just when he had transformed it into a productive farm, and it was hard for him not to believe that this had not all been prearranged. The capitalists, that is to say, the moneylenders, the banks, the aristocracy, and the rich, knew that when they made their paltry loans to the farmers—so small that the money was hardly missed—they were certain of its returning to them in the form of fertile land, as black as the fur on a plump cat. Recognizing a good thing when they saw it, sharp-eyed operators, out for quick profits, flocked to Hokkaido. So the farmers found their land being carved up by both groups. In the end, they were reduced to what they had been in Japan proper—tenant farmers. It was only then that the truth finally sank in—they had been taken in. All of them had crossed the Tsugaru Strait into snowbound Hokkaido intending to make some money and then return to their birthplaces. Among the workers on the factory ship there

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were many such disillusioned farmers who had been driven off their land by others.

The dockhands on board the ship had had experiences much like those of the fishermen. While idling away their time in Otaru at boarding houses that were under surveillance by the entrepreneurs, they had suddenly been shanghaied and taken into the interiors of Sakhalin and Hokkaido, where they were worked cruelly. If one of the dockhands lost his footing while working, he would be crushed flat in an instant under a roaring avalanche of lumber. Many a man was flicked into the ocean, as lightly as though he were a flea, his skull cracked when a log being lifted by rattling winches, its bark loosened by water, veered and swung against his head.

On the main island, the laborers who refused to die banded together and resisted the capitalists. But the laborers in the "colonies" were completely isolated from such movements. Their suffering was already unbearable, yet each time they stumbled they picked themselves up only to find that, like a snowball, they had added another layer onto their crushing load.

"What's going to happen to us?"

"They're going to kill us. That's clear enough."

A silence fell over the group, as words died in their throats.

Then the stutterer blurted out impulsively, "I'll g-get him before he gets me!"

Gentle swells slapped against the sides of the ship. Steam seemed to be escaping from a pipe somewhere on the upper deck; there was a soft, ceaseless whistling sound as of an iron kettle boiling over.

Before going to bed, the fishermen removed their jersey or flannel undershirts, now stiff as dried cuttlefish with sweat and oil, and spread them over the stove. After the shirts had warmed, men standing near the stove would lift one, holding it by the edges, and shake it, showering lice and bedbugs onto the hot stove, where they sizzled, sending up a smell like burning human flesh. As the shirt grew warmer, the lice came poking out at the seams, wriggling their thin, innumerable legs. Their hard, oily bodies were unpleasant

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to the touch. Some were so bloated that the outlines of their ugly heads, which looked like those of praying mantises, were clearly discernible.

"Hey, hold that end for me, will you?" A fisherman got another man to take one end of a loincloth and, when it was spread out, began picking lice from it. The fisherman crushed the lice between his front teeth, making a squishy sound, or squeezed them between his thumbs until they were red with blood. Then like a child who will wipe his hands on the nearest thing at hand, the fisherman cleaned his nails on the hem of his jacket and began again. But despite this, the men still could not sleep in peace: an army of lice, fleas, and bedbugs marched out of their hiding places each night and tortured them until dawn. No matter how hard they tried, the men could not eliminate the pests entirely. When the men stood up in the dark dank hold, dozens of fleas would quickly swarm up their shins. The men began to wonder if some part of their body was not putrefying. They had a horrible suspicion that they were rotting, fly-covered corpses infested with maggots.

At first the men were allowed to bathe every other day, to remove the choking stench of sweat and fish. But after a week or so on the high seas, the baths were spaced at every three days and, after a month, once a week. Finally, it was down to twice a month. This was ordered as a means of conserving water. The captain and the superintendent, however, bathed every day, which was, apparently, not considered a waste of water. The men's bodies were stained with the juice of the crabs, and for days on end there was no way to get rid of it. No wonder the men were infested by lice and bedbugs. When the men undid their loincloths, black specks fell out of them, and the loincloths left a red band on the skin around the belly, maddeningly itchy. Lying in their bunks, the men heard everywhere the sounds of violent scratching. A small coiled spring would seem to move under their bodies, followed instantly by a sharp bite. Tossing and turning brought no relief from the agony, which lasted until it was time to get up. Their skin turned scaly as though with scabies.

"You look like a dead louse."

"That's just about what I am." The man couldn't help laughing.

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Several fishermen dashed along the deck. As they turned a corner, momentum made them lurch and they grabbed for the rail. A carpenter making repairs on the salon deck leaned over to look after the scurrying men. Tears stung his eyes in the cold, whipping wind, and his vision blurred. Then he turned to one side and vigorously blew his nose in the air. The mucus, tossed by the wind, danced away. The winch on the port side of the stern began to rattle. What could they be doing with the winch now, with the men all out after the catch? Something was dangling from the winch arm, swinging in the wind. The cable was slowly describing a circle. "What are they up to?" said the carpenter, feeling, at the same instant, a shiver run up his spine. Upset, he turned aside and below his nose again. This time the wind was against him and the snot splattered against his trousers. It was watery, drippy mucus. "They're doing it again." After wiping his eyes on his sleeves several times, he focused his eyes on the scene.

Against the silvery gray background of the sea from which the rain had lifted, the jutting arm of the winch and the tightly bound body of a factory hand stood out dark and clear. He was being hauled up to the end of the arm. For a long time—about twenty minutes—he dangled there like a scrap of Ioth. Then he was hauled down. The boy thrashed about, twisting. His legs twitched as if he were a fly in a spider web. Then the descending body disappeared behind the salon. Only the taut cable moved back and forth.

The carpenter's nose ran constantly, probably because of the tears that flowed into it. He blew his nose again. Then he took hold of the hammer that he had hooked into his pants pocket and began to work. Suddenly, a sound caught his ear and he looked back. The cable trembled as though someone were shaking it from below, and the horrible sound of dull thuds reached his ears. The factory hand, when the carpenter next caught sight of him, looked deathly pale. His lips were tightly compressed, like those of a corpse, but

bubbles were escaping at the corners. Descending from his perch, the carpenter saw the foreman of the factory hands urinating into the sea. He stood awkwardly, one shoulder lifted higher than the other, a piece of firewood under his arm. He must have beaten the boy with that, the carpenter thought, as he glanced at the log. The wind whipped the urine back toward the deck in a spray.

The fishermen, near prostration from endless days of toil, gradually found it harder and harder to get up in the morning. The superintendent came into the hold while the men were still asleep and banged on an empty oil drum. He kept this up relentlessly until all the men were up and dressed. A man suffering from beriberi lifted his head and said something, but the superintendent, pretending he had not heard the man, kept on drumming, drowning out the man's voice. Struggling to make himself heard, the sick fisherman looked like a fish soundlessly gulping air at the surface of the sea. When the superintendent finally stopped his infernal racket, he shouted to the man, "What's the matter with you? If you can't get up, I'll drag you out of bed myself! Your work is important to the country, and you know it. It's the same as being at war. You've got to carry on as though you were offering your life to your country! Idiot!"

He yanked the blankets away from the sick and herded them out onto the deck with the rest. The man with beriberi stumbled on the steps. Grabbing hold of the rail for support he climbed, lifting his legs with his body bent forward at an angle. With each step his heart pounded alarmingly.

Both the superintendent and the foreman of the factory hands needled the sick in small, mean ways, as a stepmother might needle her stepchildren. If they had been assigned earlier to packing crabmeat in cans, they would suddenly be shifted to another job, like cracking open the claws on deck. Then after a while they would be shifted to the labeling department. After a day of standing in the cold, dimly lit factory with its treacherously slippery floors, their legs became devoid of all feeling, like artificial limbs. They sometimes felt as though their knee joints had become unhinged and feared they might suddenly collapse in a heap.

One of the students put a hand dripping with crab juice

against his forehead for a moment. Then he lurched and fell backward, bumping against trays of empty cans stacked nearby, which clattered down on top of him and rolled, flashing, under machinery and between piles of cargo as the ship pitched. A fellow worker quickly picked him up to take him down into the hold. But they ran into the superintendent who was descending the ladder, whistling. He took in the situation at a glance.

"Who gave you permission to leave your post?"

"What do you mean 'who'?" The man helping the student spluttered in rage.

"Talk back to me, will you, you bastard? Say that again!"

The superintendent drew a pistol from his jacket pocket and fondled it like a toy. Then, his mouth twisting out of shape, he began to laugh raucously, rearing back, his whole body shaking.

"Bring me a bucket of water!" he shouted. When it was brought to him, he emptied it on the prostrate student. "There. What are you all gaping at? Get back to work!"

The next morning when the hands went down into the factory, they found the student strapped to a lathe shaft. His head had fallen forward on his chest, as limp as the head of a strangled cock. The end of his spinal column stuck out sharply at the base of his neck. A cardboard sign in the superintendent's hand hung from his neck like a bib: "This man is a traitorous malingerer. I forbid anyone to release him." Putting a hand to the student's forehead, the men found it cold as ice. The hands had been noisy when they came down into the factory, but now no one spoke. When they heard the voice of their foreman on his way down, they moved in two groups away from the machine the student was strapped to, and took up their stations.

When the catch was heavy and the whole ship hummed with activity, the superintendent and the foreman flared up constantly at the men. Some had their front teeth knocked out and spent the night spitting out blood. Some fainted at their jobs. Some bled from their eyes, the blood vessels rupturing from lack of vitamins. Some were temporarily deafened by heavy blows on the head. Fatigue made them

all reel like drunks. At quitting time, realizing that was all for the day, the men felt momentarily dazed.

Sometimes, however, when the men were cleaning up after work, the superintendent would walk in and bawl, "We're going on until nine tonight! You bastards are pretty fast on your feet when it's time to knock off, aren't you?" Then the men would drag themselves about in slow motion, finding it took all the energy they had just to return to their places.

Occasionally the superintendent would come down into the cesspool and give the men a pep talk. "Listen, men. You know we can't keep coming back to this area any time we want to, and even if we could, there's no guarantee that we'd have a good haul. So if we quit now just because you're supposed to work only ten or thirteen hours, there will be hell to pay. Our job's different from any other. Listen—when our catch is light, I'll let you have all the free time you want. Look at the Russkies. They didn't stay on the job one minute more than they had to, even with the fish running before their eyes. So look what happened to their country. We're Japanese. We can't let that happen to us!"

Don't give us that, you fraud! some thought, ignoring him. But the majority of the men were convinced by the superintendent that the Japanese were, after all, a superior people. Their savage suffering took on a heroic dimension, and this was their comfort, such as it was.

The men working on deck often saw a destroyer steaming south toward the horizon, a Japanese flag whipping in the breeze at its stern. In their excitement the men grabbed their hats and waved, tears springing to their eyes. They're our only allies here, they thought.

"Damn it, when I see it, tears come to my eyes." The men watched the destroyer until it became a speck on the horizon and disappeared in a faint cloud of smoke.

"Damn!" Returning to their quarters limp with fatigue, the men vented their frustration in obscenities. In the dark, their curses reverberated like the roars of angry bulls. The men were not quite sure at first who or what they were swearing at, but slowly, at a snail's pace and unknown even

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camp
to themselves, the blunt outbursts of the two hundred men began to express matters of common agreement as a result of their constant association in the quarters. Within this general drift, there were, of course, those who refused to change their ideas, while older fishermen shifted to opposing views. Each man had adopted a stand gradually, without realizing it, but in time the men found themselves clearly divided into opposing camps.

It was morning. The former miner climbed laboriously up the steps mumbling to himself, "I'm not going to last much longer." He had worked until nearly ten o'clock the night before, and his body felt out of joint—like a machine about to run down. Sometimes he caught himself dozing off as he climbed. It was only when someone behind him yelled at him that his legs and hands resumed their mechanical movement. Then he missed a step, stumbled forward, and landed, sprawling, on his stomach.

The men descended into the factory and assembled in a corner before work began. Their faces were uniformly dull and clay-colored.

"I'm going to slow down. I can't work." It was the miner who spoke.

The men looked at him. After a while someone said, "He'll get you with the red-hot poker."

"I'm going to slow down because I can't work, not because I want to get back at him." The miner rolled up his sleeves and waved his bony arms. "Look, I haven't got much longer to live. I'm not putting it on, I tell you."

"Well, we believe you."

That day the superintendent paced about in the factory like a fighting cock with its comb bristling. "What's the matter here, what's the matter?" he bawled. But as the men began one by one to slow down until almost all of them were involved, the superintendent could do nothing but walk about nervously. It was the first time that the fishermen and the crew had seen him in this state. The men could hear the rustling sounds of the mountain of crabs being dumped out of the nets onto the deck. Work in the factory slowly came to a halt, like water backing up in a clogged sewer. And,

amazingly, the superintendent's club for once had no effect whatever!

After work, the men streamed back into the hold, wiping their necks with steaming towels. They looked at each other and suddenly burst out laughing. For some reason the situation that day struck them as being so comical that they couldn't stop.

The slowdown tactics were eventually adopted by the crewmen as well. When it became clear to them that they had been played off against the fishermen to increase production and had been pretty thoroughly fooled, the crewmen began to slow down from time to time.

"We worked overtime yesterday, so we're going to slow down today." If one of the crew said something like this at the start of a day, the others all fell in line. What the men meant by a slowdown was simply working at a comfortable pace. All of them were ruining their health. Their backs were to the wall—there was nothing to do but to slow down. Either way—from overwork or from a beating—they were sure to die. But the men now were beyond caring.

"It's the supply ship! The supply ship!" Hearing the shouting on the upper deck, the men below leaped out of their bunks in their ragged clothes. The fishermen and crew awaited the coming of the supply ship more anxiously than they would have a woman. The ship did not smell of the sea; the smells of Hakodate still trailed behind it—the smell of the solid earth the men they had not set foot upon for months. The ship also brought numerous letters, fresh shirts and underwear, and magazines. Grabbing their packages with their gnarled, reeking hands, the men rushed down into the cesspool, jumped into their bunks, and, sitting cross-legged, tore open their packages. All sorts of things came out of the bundles—a child's painstakingly written letter dictated by its mother, towels, toothpaste, toothpicks, toilet paper, and clothing, from the folds of which appeared letters from the man's wife—letters so thick and heavy that they were pressed flat by their own weight. The men tried to catch the smells of home that clung to these articles—the milky smell of their children, the fleshy smell of their wives.

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I'm dying for a piece.
If a three-sen stamp could bring it to you
I'd send it in a jar.

The men roared out a bawdy folk song, their voices thick with false gaiety. Those who had received no packages from home paced the floor, their hands thrust in their pockets.

"Hey, your old woman's got herself another man while you've been gone!" These men became the butt of jokes.

One man turned away into a dark corner and, deaf to the lively chatter of the others, counted on his fingers over and over again. Then he sat brooding. He had just read a letter telling him of the death of one of his children. The child had died two months ago, and he had only now learned of it. His wife had had no money to send a telegram. The man remained moody and silent for such a long time that the others covertly cast worried glances at him.

Another man had happy news. He had found a photograph of a baby in his letter. It looked like a bloated octopus. "What, this thing?" The man burst out in a raucous laugh. Then, smiling broadly, he showed the picture to everyone. "Look at this—my wife tells me she had this thing."

The packages also held the kind of little gifts, odds and ends really, that only a wife would remember to include. Coming upon these trifles, the men felt a sudden flash of excitement and an unbearable longing to return home.

The supply ship also brought a movie projectionist, his assistant, and a narrator, who had been sent by the company. Movies were to be shown after the cases of canned crab had been transferred to the supply ship. Three young men dressed alike—flat cloth caps worn at a rakish angle, bow ties, and wide pants—boarded the ship carrying heavy suitcases.

"Whew, what a smell!" They removed their jackets and, whistling the whole time, began to set up the screen and the table for the projector, carefully measuring the distance between them. The fishermen were fascinated by these strangers, who were so completely different from them, almost a race apart. The crew and fishermen, in a sportive mood, decided to help these strangers. The oldest among the

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newcomers, a coarse-looking man with large, gold-rimmed glasses, stood apart from the others, wiping his neck with a handkerchief.

"Hey, Mr. Narrator, if you stand there, fleas will jump up your pants," a fisherman shouted. With a shrill scream, the man leaped away as though he had stepped barefooted on a sheet of hot metal. The fishermen who were watching him laughed uproariously.

"What a miserable place this is!" The man spoke in a harsh, raspy voice typical of a movie narrator. "I'm sure you don't have any idea, but how much profit do you think your company has to make before it can send this ship all the way out here? You'd be surprised. Five million in six months, ten million in a year. Ten million doesn't sound like much in words, but it's an enormous amount of money. And there aren't too many firms in Japan that pay their shareholders a 22.5 percent dividend. Incredible! I hear the president of the company is going to run for election as a Diet representative. What more could he want? Now I see how they make the profits roll in."

Night fell. The completion of the ten thousandth case was observed with a celebration. Rice wine, distilled liquor, dried cuttlefish, boiled vegetables, cigarettes, and caramels were distributed. The fishermen and crew fought over the young factory hands. "Hey, come here to your daddy. You can sit on my lap." "Watch out for him! You'd better come sit by me." This bantering went on for a while. Then four or five men in the front row suddenly began clapping. The others followed suit, not quite sure what was happening. The superintendent came forward and stood in front of the white screen, stretching himself up to his full height, his hands clasped behind him. He started out using the polite form of address to the men (something he didn't normally do), but soon he was haranguing them with such phrases as "sons of Japan" and "national resources." Most of the men, ignoring him, chewed on dried cuttlefish, moving their jaw and temple muscles rhythmically.

"Aw, cut it out, cut it out!" someone yelled from the back.

kenshi
as
'witness'

"Why don't you step down? We don't need you—there's the narrator right there."

"You look more natural with a club in your hands!"

This last comment brought a roar of laughter from the crowd. The men began to whistle and clap wildly. It would have been awkward for the superintendent to have lost his temper just then, so he simply flushed, said something that was drowned out by the jeers, and stepped down. Then the movie began. The first was a reel of documentary films. Views of famous scenic spots like the imperial palace, Matsushima, Enoshima, and Kyoto flickered past. At frequent intervals the film snapped in two, the images vanishing in a dizzying and jittery montage, and the light shining directly on the dazzling white of the screen.

Two feature films followed, one foreign and the other Japanese. Both were old, battered films with a great deal of "rain." The figures moved jerkily where the film had been spliced together, but this made little difference to the men. They were engrossed. Whenever a woman with a voluptuous figure appeared in the foreign film, the men whistled or snorted like pigs. From time to time the narrator lost his temper and refused to continue with the story. The foreign feature film was an American one which dealt with the opening of the West. It showed the pioneers being attacked by savages and overwhelmed by natural calamities; but after each disaster they would rise up again and, foot by foot, extend the railway toward the west. Along the way, towns would spring up overnight, like knots in the ribbon of the railroad. The railway moved on, more towns springing up in its wake. Interwoven with the scenes of the hardships that beset the enterprise was a love story involving a workman and the daughter of the company director. The two plots—the handships and the love story—took turns at the center of the stage. As the end of the film approached, the narrator raised his voice to a dramatic pitch. "This thousand-mile railroad, finally completed by the sacrifices of dedicated young men, stretched across the prairies and pierced the mountains. What was a wilderness only yesterday had been transformed into a national resource." The movie ended with the workman, who had himself been

diff
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film

transformed into a gentleman, clutching the young lady in an embrace.

This was followed by a short foreign slapstick comedy which made the men roar with laughter. The Japanese feature film was about a poor boy who started out as a peddler of fermented beans and bettered himself by becoming a newsboy and a shoeshine boy. Later he landed a job in a factory and became a model worker. He was singled out for his hard work and became a rich man. The narrator interpolated on his own. "Truly, if diligence is not the mother of success, what is?" At this, the factory hands applauded solemnly, but one of the fishermen yelled out boldly, "You're a liar! If that's true, I ought to be company president by now!" Again the men burst out laughing. Later, the narrator told the men that the company had instructed him to hammer this point home.

The last film showed scenes of the offices of the corporation and its affiliated factories. There were shots of groups of employees working diligently.

After the movies, the men all got drunk on their ration of wine. Intoxication came swiftly to the men, who had not had wine for a long time and who were exhausted besides. In the dim light of the hold, tobacco smoke drifted like clouds and the air grew stale and rank. The men began to argue in loud voices. Some were shirtless, others had towels wrapped around their foreheads. Some sat crosslegged with the hems of their cotton kimono pulled up above their knees for comfort. From time to time there were fistfights. The commotion continued until midnight. The fisherman from Hakodate who was bedridden with beriberi had his pillow raised a bit so he could watch the men carousing. Another fisherman from the same town leaned against a pole nearby and sucked at his teeth as he dislodged bits of cuttlefish from between them with a matchstick.

Some time later, a fisherman suddenly came tumbling down the ladder into the cesspool like a duffel bag. His kimono and right hand were stained with blood.

"A knife! A knife! Give me a knife!" he shouted, writhing about on the floor. "That bastard Asakawa! Where is he? I can't find him. I'm going to kill him." It was a fisherman

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who had once been beaten by the superintendent. He rushed out, his eyes flashing wildly and a poker in his hand. Nobody made a move to stop him.

"You see that?" said the Hakodate fisherman, looking up at his friend. "Even a fisherman can take only so much. We'll see what happens next."

The next morning, everything in the superintendent's quarters—from the windows to the equipment on the table—was found smashed to bits. The superintendent himself had hidden somewhere, escaping harm.

6

It was a softly overcast day. It had been raining steadily until the day before, but the rain was now about to lift. From time to time raindrops the color of the darkened sky fell, making gentle round patterns in the sea, whose color also mirrored the sky. In the afternoon, a destroyer pulled up alongside the factory ship. The fishermen and factory hands who were off duty leaned against the deck and, fascinated by the sight, chattered away about it. They were full of curiosity. A boat was lowered from the destroyer with some officers who were to board the ship. The captain, the factory representative, the superintendent, and the foreman of the factory hands waited on the lower landing of the gangway that had been let down. When the boat came alongside, they all saluted, and the party, led by the captain, came aboard. The superintendent looked up and saw the men watching. Frowning and tightening his lips, he waved the men away and barked, "What do you think you're watching? Go on about your business!"

"Get off your high horse, you bastard!" The men, muttering to themselves, streamed down into the factory. The smell of crab hung in the air about the deck after they left.

"It smells, doesn't it?" A handsome young officer with a neatly trimmed moustache frowned delicately in distaste. The superintendent, who had brought up the rear, came forward, obviously flustered. He spoke, bowing obsequiously to the officer. From a distance, the men watched the glittering sabers that hung at the officers' sides and jerked up against their buttocks at every step. Arguing earnestly about

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the ranks of the officers, they ended almost quarreling among themselves.

"Well, Asakawa certainly made an ass of himself, didn't he?" Someone mimicked the servile way in which the superintendent had bowed. The men burst out laughing. That day the men worked lightheartedly since neither the superintendent nor the foreman was in the factory. They sang songs and shouted to each other across the machinery. "Why don't they let us work like this all the time?" someone asked.

When work was over, the men came up on deck. As they passed under the salon, they could hear the sounds of a drunken brawl. The steward stepped out of the salon. Through the open door the men glimpsed a cloudlike pall of cigarette smoke hanging inside the salon. Beads of sweat stood out on the steward's flushed face. His hands full of empty beer bottles, he gestured toward his pants pocket with his jaw and said, "Wipe my face, will you?"

Complying with his request, one of the fisherman pulled the handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the boy's face. Then, looking toward the salon, he asked, "What are they doing?"

"It's a madhouse. They're drinking like fish. And what do you think they're talking about? A woman's—you know, each man putting in his nickel's worth. This is about the hundredth time I've been sent out to get something for them. When the official from the Agricultural and Forestry Ministry came the last time, he was so drunk he almost fell down the gangway."

"What did they come for?"

The steward made a face to indicate that he didn't know and hurried off to the mess.

The fishermen had their usual meal of rice so crumbly that they couldn't pick up a satisfying mouthful on their chopsticks and salty bean soup with thin shavings of something or other floating on top of it.

"The cooks took all kinds of foreign-style food to the salon. I've never seen or eaten anything like it."

"I hope they choke on it."

On the wall in the dining area of the mess were posters

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with the following admonitions written in a poor hand:

No one who complains about food will be a success.
Do not waste even a single grain of rice. It represents
the blood and sweat of the farmer.

Learn to put up with privation and hardship.

The space below the posters was filled in with obscene scribbles of the type found on latrine walls.

Dinner over, the men congregated around the stove before going to bed. From a discussion of the destroyer, the conversation moved around to the army. Many of the fishermen were farmers who had come from the northern prefectures of Akita, Aomori, and Iwate. When they talked about the army, they got carried away, though they really had no reason to. Many of them had served a hitch. Now they were full of nostalgic memories and missed what had actually been a brutal period in their lives.

The sounds of revelry in the salon carried into the hold in the sudden silence that ensued after the men crawled into their bunks. Later, men awakening in the middle of the night could hear the officers still carrying on. It must have been close to dawn when someone, probably the steward, was heard scurrying back and forth on deck. The men heard the sharp tapping of his heels. The party had gone on until daybreak, when the officers at last went back to the destroyer. The gangway had been left lowered. A thick, stewlike vomit of rice, crab meat, and some thick brown liquid was spewed over five or six steps of the gangway. From the mess rose the sour, nauseating stench of stale alcohol.

The destroyer rested on the sea, just barely rocking, like a gray waterbird floating with its wings folded under it. The impression it gave was one of somnolence. A thin column of smoke rose from her funnels straight up into the windless sky.

By noon neither the superintendent nor the foreman had awakened yet.

"Those bastards do as they please," muttered the men as they worked.

In one corner of the mess was a mound of half-empty cans

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of crab and beer bottles. Even the steward who had carted them away was astonished at the amount the party had consumed. The steward was in a position to observe (in a way that was not possible to the others) the intimate aspects of the private lives of the captain, the superintendent, and the factory representative. He saw clearly where the miserable fishermen stood in relation to their superiors (the superintendent was in the habit of referring to the men as "pigs" when he was drunk). He had to admit that the men at the top were insolent and would stop at nothing, not even the most blood-curdling act, for profit. The fishermen and the crew were their victims—animals being led to slaughter. It was painful to see. The steward, marveling at how ignorant he had once been, now felt that he could foresee what was going to happen—what had to happen.

At two that afternoon, the captain and the superintendent, dressed in badly rumpled clothes (they must have been put away very carelessly), got into a launch with two men carrying boxes of canned crab and headed for the destroyer. The fishermen and the hands who were on deck tearing the crabs apart gaped at the departing boat without slowing their pace.

"What do you suppose they're up to now?"

"Look at them, using up our precious cans like waste paper!"

"But look, men, that ship has come all this way just to protect us. I say why begrudge them a few cans?" A middle-aged fisherman who was missing two fingers on his left hand spoke.

When the men next saw the destroyer that evening, smoke had begun to billow out of its stacks, and sailors had started to scurry busily about on deck. Thirty minutes later, it sailed. The men heard the snapping sounds of the flag at the destroyer's stern as it moved off. Their captain leading them, the men of the factory ship shouted "Banzai!" at its departure.

After dinner, the steward came down into the cesspool. All of the men had gathered around the stove to talk. Some were standing under the faint light picking lice from their shirts. Each time a man cut across the light, a huge shadow

steward
is
with men
+
proprietor

crossed the sooty bulkhead. "I overheard the officers and our captain and the superintendent talking about it. As I understand it, we're going to slip into Russian waters for some illegal fishing. The destroyer is going to stand by all along to protect us. They're going to make a killing." The steward made a circle with his thumb and forefinger, indicating money. "To hear them tell it, Kamchatka and Sakhalin and this whole area will have to become Japanese territory some day. The place is richer than anybody dreams it is. They said this area is just as important as China or Manchuria. As a first step, our company has joined up with the Mitsubishi Company and together they're prodding the government in the right places. When our president becomes a Diet member, he'll be in a position to do more. So don't you believe it when they tell you that the destroyers are sent out only to protect the factory ships. That's not their only purpose—not by a long shot. There's a more important goal. They're making a careful survey of the sea and weather conditions in this area up to Sakhalin and near the Kuriles, getting ready for the day. This is supposed to be a secret, I think, but they're hauling big guns and oil on the sly to the last island in the Kuriles chain. I tell you, it almost knocked me off my feet when I first heard this, but every one of our wars, when you come right down to it, was maneuvered by two or three rich men (and I mean very rich men) and anything served for an excuse. The way I hear it, they're itching to get their hands on any place that shows even the smallest promise of a profit. They're playing with fire."

7

The winches rattled as a fishing launch was lowered. Directly beneath it were four fishermen, who pushed the boat against the side of the ship and eased it down into the water since one of the winch arms was too short. There were frequent near-accidents during this operation. The winches on the old tub were as flexible as arthritic joints. The pulley around which the cable was being wound might not work properly, or it might unwind only on one side, leaving the boat dangling in the air at an angle. At such times, a fisherman directly under the boat might be injured, if he were

meyer

caught off guard. That was precisely what happened on this particular morning.

"Hey, look out!" someone yelled, but too late. The man was slammed sharply from above, his head sinking into his shoulders like a pile being driven into the ground. The others carried the injured fisherman into the dispensary. The men, who now had no compunction about referring to the superintendent as a bastard when they thought of him, had decided to get the doctor to fill out a medical report. They were sure that the superintendent, who was no more to be trusted than a snake, would twist their arguments inside out and blame them for the accident. They would need a report when they lodged a protest, and they knew that the ship's doctor was somewhat sympathetic toward the fishermen and the crew. He had once told them in surprise, "On this ship there are more injuries and illnesses from beatings than from work accidents." He had also said that he felt duty-bound to keep a record so that it could be used later as evidence, and he had been kind to the sick and injured.

One of the men broached the matter. "We were wondering if you would fill out a medical report on this man." The doctor seemed surprised by the request.

"Well, I don't know. . . ."

"If you will fill it out just the way we've written it here . . ." The men were becoming impatient with his hesitation.

"It's against the rules of this ship. I know the rules were set up arbitrarily. . . . But they have to protect themselves from later charges."

The short-tempered stutterer swore under his breath.

The doctor continued. "Last time, a fisherman Asakawa had beaten deaf came to me and I signed the examination form without giving it a second thought. But when Asakawa heard about it he flew off the handle. I can see it from his point of view. After all, no one wants something like that on the record."

The men left the dispensary with the realization that, when the chips were down, even the doctor was no longer an ally.

Miraculously, the injured man survived, but for days the

men were forced to listen to him as he groaned in a dark corner of the hold. Then, when he was well on his way to recovery and his awful moaning no longer tormented the men, the fisherman who had been bedridden with beriberi died. He was twenty-seven years old. He had been recruited by an employment office in Nippori in Tokyo, and ten other men had come aboard with him. When it came to the wake, however, the superintendent allowed only those who were ill to participate, on the grounds that work would be delayed if the others attended.

When the men stripped the corpse to wash it, a nauseating smell rose from it. A host of lice—flat, white, and ugly—crawled about frantically. The body, scaly with grime, lay like a log. Each of the ribs stood out. When his condition had worsened, the man had been unable to move and had urinated and defecated in his bunk. The stench was awful. His undershirt and loincloth had turned gray, and when the men tried to remove them, they nearly disintegrated. They might have been dipped in sulphuric acid. His navel was hidden by grime and dirt, and dried feces clung like clay to his buttocks.

Someone said that the dying man's last words had been "I don't want to die in Kamchatka." But it was more than likely that there had been no one by the man's side to comfort him in his last moments. And after all, who would choose to die in Kamchatka? Imagining themselves in the dead man's place, some of the fishermen wept aloud.

Some of the men went to get the mess hall for hot water to wash the corpse and found even the cook sympathetic. "Poor devil," he said. "Go ahead, fill it up. I'll bet the body's filthy."

On their way back, the men ran into the superintendent.

"Where are you going with that?" he asked.

"To wash the corpse."

"Don't use too much water." He seemed about to add something more but hurried away instead.

"I almost dashed hot water on the bastard right then and there!" said a fisherman, trembling with rage, when they got back to the hold.

The superintendent came around with annoying regular-

finel

ity to check up on the men, but they had decided that no matter what happened on the job the next day—they might doze, drop with exhaustion, or carry out a slow-down—they would all attend the wake. All had agreed to this suggestion. By eight o'clock that night the necessary preparations had been made. Incense sticks and candles were lit, and the men took their places. The superintendent did not put in an appearance, but both the captain and the ship's doctor came and stayed for perhaps an hour. The men had persuaded a fisherman who knew the sutras to read the services. He protested that he could do it only haltingly, but the others reassured him. "What does it matter? He'll understand."

There was not a sound during the services except for some sniffing. Toward the end, several men wept openly. When the intoning of the sutra came to an end, the men went up individually to pay their last respects. Then they broke up into small groups, talking first about the man's death and then moving on to those who were alive—but how precariously! After the captain and the doctor left, the fisherman with the stutter went up to the table at the side of the corpse, and addressed the mourners.

"I am not familiar with the s-sutras. I c-cannot offer one to c-console Yamada's s-spirit. B-but I've b-been thinking about how d-desperately afraid he was of d-dying here. No, let me put it another way: how d-desperately afraid he was of being killed. There's n-no getting around it—Yamada was killed." An oppressive silence fell over the group. "Well, then, the question is: Who killed him? I d-don't think I have to tell you. I c-cannot c-console him with a sermon, but we can pacify his s-spirit by avenging his death. I think the time has come for us to s-swear this on his spirit."

It was one of the crew who responded first. "You're right!"

In the suffocating cesspool reeking of crab and men's bodies, the smell of the burning incense drifted delicately like a perfume. At nine o'clock, the factory hands went back to their quarters. Some of them, exhausted, had begun to doze and, their bodies feeling as heavy as sacks of gravel, could barely get to their feet. Even some of the fishermen,

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determined as they had been to remain awake, fell asleep. Waves came up. With each roll of the ship the candles dimmed and then flared again. The white cotton cloth placed over the face of the corpse shifted and slipped. The men felt chills running up their spine. The waves began to slap at the sides of the ship.

At eight o'clock the next morning, after the men had put in a stretch, four men designated from among the crew and fishermen by the superintendent went down into the hold. After another sutra was intoned by the same man, the four, assisted by three or four others in sick bay, stuffed the body into a hemp sack. Several new sacks were available, but the superintendent had refused to let the men have one; it was an extravagance, he said; it would only be dumped into the sea after a few minutes. And there were no more incense sticks available on the ship.

"I feel sorry for this poor devil. If he had known what would happen to him, he would have done everything he could to stay alive." The man was forcing the dead man's arms into an attitude of prayer when a tear rolled down his face and fell on the sack.

"Stop it now, no tears."

"Isn't there some way of taking the body back to Hako-date? Look at the poor devil's face. Can't you hear it crying out, begging us not to dump him in the wild Kamchatka? What a miserable fate—to be buried at sea."

"Yes, and the Kamchatka is the worst of all. After September it's winter. The sea freezes over and no ships come through. This is as far north as you can go."

One of the men nodded, weeping. "Can you tell me why, when there are three or four hundred men on board this ship, only six or seven of us are preparing him for burial?"

"I tell you, nothing good ever comes to us, even after we die!"

The men had put in a request for at least a half day off for the burial, but it was turned down. There had been a huge catch the day before. "Don't mix a private affair with business," the superintendent had told the men.

Now he poked his head in at the entrance to the cesspool and said, "You ready?"

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Resigned, the men called up to him, "We're ready."

"Well, bring it up."

"But the captain is supposed to read the eulogy."

"What? The captain read a eulogy?" His voice was tinged with sarcasm. "You fools! We have no time for that!" Time was precious—there were mounds of crabs rustling on the decks above. So the body was carried out unceremoniously and loaded like a sack of salmon or trout onto the motorboat at the stern.

"You ready?"

"All set!" The motor roared and churned the water.

"Well, then . . ." Someone yelled from the ship.

"Goodbye," called out another voice.

"You'll be all alone, but try to accept it as your fate," said someone under his breath.

"See that you do a decent job!" someone called out to the men in the motorboat.

"We will! We will!" The boat moved away.

"Well . . ."

"They're gone."

"I can almost see him fighting against being taken away in that jute bag."

When the fishermen returned from their job of setting the nets, they were told about the superintendent's high-handed decision. But even before their indignation could surface and boil over, the men felt a cold sensation as they imagined themselves dead, being dropped into the dark Kamchatka. Words stuck in their throat, and they filed silently into the hold. "We know him—you don't have to tell us," muttered a man as he removed his jacket, sticky with salt.

8

The men were to make no outward show, but they were to slow down imperceptibly at their jobs, and no matter how much abuse the superintendent hurled at them or how much he beat them, the men were to endure it without a word. They planned to do this every other day. (The first few days the men were terrified at their own daring.) This was the way they began a work slow-down.

After the burial of the fisherman at sea, more men joined

the movement. The volume of production fell drastically. The older fishermen were the only ones who were upset at the idea of the strike, even though it was they who suffered most on the job. They were secretly surprised when the things they feared failed to materialize, and when they saw that their plan, contrary to their expectations, was actually working, they began to listen to the younger fishermen and to move into their camp.

The men who remained adamant were the head fishermen of each of the net boats. All matters pertaining to these boats were their responsibility. These men stood between the fishermen under them and the superintendent, and if their volume of catch was low, they were the first to hear from him. They were caught, literally, between the devil and the deep. In the end, a third of them joined the other fishermen while the rest remained toadies of the superintendent.

"Look," one of them said, "we get tired on our jobs, too. Our work doesn't follow a schedule like that in the factory. We're after living things. Do you think the crabs are going to show up promptly on the hour for our benefit? What can we do about it? Nothing." These men simply parroted the line that the superintendent fed the men.

The conversation among the men, just before they went to bed, often led from one unexpected topic to another. One night one of the head fishermen casually made a pompous remark. It wasn't serious, and most of the men ignored it, but one of the ordinary fishermen took it badly, perhaps because he was a little drunk.

"What was that?" he suddenly shouted. "Who do you think you are? I wouldn't go shooting off my mouth so much if I were you. It wouldn't take much effort for five of us to pitch you into the ocean someday when we're out there. That would be the end of you—right in the Kamchatka Sea. And who would ever know how you died?" Nobody had ever said anything like that before. Here was a fisherman bawling at his superior in a voice like a bull's. A stunned silence fell over the group; conversations came abruptly to a halt. Everyone realized that the man had not spit out the words on the spur of the moment in a hollow show of bravado. They had been wrenched out of him, al-

most despite himself, by some maniacal force—the words of a man who had known nothing but humiliation. The man, driven involuntarily by this force, was himself bewildered and taken aback at first, unaware that what had made him speak was a hidden strength within him.

Could we do such a thing? The men thought about it. Then, suddenly, they realized that they could. When this fact dawned on them, the idea became irresistible, and their desire to resist grew intense. They found that the fact that they had been abused like slaves at back-breaking tasks provided them with the best fuel for generating resentment. The superintendent can go to hell! they thought, and were exhilarated by the idea. Once caught up in this mood, they could clearly see what their existence had been up to this point; it was as if a flashlight had suddenly been turned on a swarming mass of maggots.

Soon the expression "Don't talk big, you bastard!" began to circulate among the men. Whenever anything happened, the men would take up the cry. They used it in situations that had nothing to do with their new-found strength. But deep down, none of the fishermen was really sure enough of his own strength to begin throwing his weight around.

As incident after incident followed, the men found themselves uniting, and again and again the same three or four men automatically stepped forward to take charge of the discussions. No one had chosen them, and there was nothing formal about the arrangement, but it just happened that when something occurred or when something had to be done, the solutions proposed by these four were usually acceptable to the rest, who went along with them. This group consisted of two students, the fisherman with the stutter, and the man who had coined the "don't talk big" expression.

One of the students spent an entire night drawing a diagram, licking the point of his pencil as he worked. The diagram outlined the chain of responsibility and communication. The first echelon consisted of the students, the stutterer, and "Big Talk." The second was made up of a representative from among the factory hands, two men from among the fishermen, and one representative each from

△

spontaneity

among the crew and stokers. The third consisted of the leaders from the units among the factory hands who would be responsible to their representative in the second echelon (these leaders would be from the same hometowns as the hands); and two men each from the netting, sailing, and stoking crews. Information was to flow in either direction among these echelons—up or down. The student was proud of his proposal. He boasted that, with this set-up, no matter what happened in any of the echelons, whether in the first or the third, everyone would know about it in an instant. The men accepted most of the plan as it was outlined. In practice, though, it did not turn out to be quite that simple.

"Join us, those of you who don't want to be murdered!" This was the favorite slogan of the student. He illustrated his point by telling the story of how the feudal baron Moto-nari Mōri admonished his sons on his deathbed to remain united against their enemies and provided an example of solidarity by snapping a single arrow in two but failing to break a handful of arrows bunched together. The student also told the men about a tug-of-war scene on a propaganda poster put out by the Home Ministry to illustrate the need for national unity.

"If four or five of us band together, pitching one head fisherman into the sea will be child's play. Of course, we have to work up enough courage. One man alone can do nothing. It's too risky. But they have less than ten men on their side, including the captain. We're close to four hundred. If four hundred men unite, there is nothing we can't do. Ten against four hundred! I say, if they want to have a showdown, we're ready for them!" At the end he shouted again, "Join us, all of you who don't want to be murdered!"

Even the stupidest and the drunkest among them were well aware that they were viciously overworked, more dead than alive. (Hadn't one of them died only a few days before?) Moreover, their halfhearted attempts at work slow-downs, which had been carried out in sheer desperation, had unexpectedly produced results. For these reasons the men readily complied with whatever the students and the stut-terer proposed.

One of the launches had damaged its screw in a storm

during the past week. To repair it, the foreman and three or four fishermen went ashore. When they returned, one of the young fisherman had with him a stack of Red propaganda pamphlets and posters, all printed in Japanese. "A lot of Japanese are doing this sort of thing," he said. The pamphlets were full of facts about their low wages and long work hours, the excessive profits made by their company, and strikes. The men became engrossed in them and passed them around among themselves, asking questions. Some were repelled by what they read and wondered whether any Japanese in his right mind could have a hand in printing such foul lies, but others said, "I think what it says here is right," and went to the student, poster in hand, to ask more questions. "Sure, it's right," he said, "It might be a little exaggerated, though."

"But if we do nothing, do you think Asakawa's going to reform?" Someone laughed. "Asakawa's bosses are giving him a worse time than he's giving us, so this must be the right course."

As for the fishermen, they called the propaganda treacherous when they spoke about it, but secretly their curiosity about it was growing stronger.

To guide the boats back when heavy fog blanketed the sea, the mother ship sounded blasts on its foghorn continually, as it did during a storm. For hours on end, the horn sounded its deep, bull-like lowing through the thick pea-soup fog. But there were times when, despite these signals, a boat did not make it back. The truth in some of these cases was that the men, refusing to put up with back-breaking toil, pretended to be lost and drifted clandestinely ashore on Kamchatka. This was easy to do after the ship had illegally entered Russian waters and the men could estimate the distance to shore. Some of the men who did this were exposed to Red propaganda on shore before they returned to the ship.

The company was always very careful about the fishermen they signed up. They hired model youths selected by the village heads or the police chiefs of the areas canvassed. Among workers they chose those who had no interest in labor unions and who did as they were told. Shrewdly they saw to it that the cards were stacked in their favor. But now

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the situation aboard the factory ship was shaping up in ways that they had not foreseen: the workers were uniting and organizing. Even the shrewdest among the capitalists were unaware of this strange turn of events. Ironically, it was as if they had gone to all the trouble of assembling the unorganized and the unrehabilitable drunkards and were now teaching them how to unite.

9

The superintendent began to betray signs of panic. The catch was markedly less than at the same period in previous years. Worse still, he learned that other ships' records this year were better than last. Finally, when his ship had fallen two thousand cases behind, the superintendent said to himself that he was getting nowhere acting like a kind and patient Buddha. He decided that the ship would sail into another area. He constantly intercepted messages and shamelessly had the men systematically haul up the nets of other ships. The first net the men brought to the surface after the ship had sailed twenty miles south was heavy with crabs. The men were certain that the net belonged to the *Y Maru*.

"We're doing all right, thanks to you," said the superintendent, who, in a surprising reversal of his usual self, jovially slapped the radio operator on the shoulder.

Sometimes the men were discovered robbing nets; then they would beat a hasty retreat to the mother ship. After the men had begun to steal any net they found, their work load gradually increased.

A huge notice was posted at the entrance of the factory:

Anyone caught loafing will be branded.
Any group caught slacking will be made to do the
"Kamchatka calisthenics."
As punishment, pay will be docked.
Trouble-makers will be turned over to the police
upon return to Hakodate.
Any person daring to defy the superintendent can
expect to be shot.

It was signed by Asakawa and the foreman.

The superintendent carried a loaded pistol with him at all

times. To intimidate the men, he would aim at a seagull or some part of the ship and fire at unexpected moments while the men were working. Then, seeing the startled expression on the men's faces, he would grin. In the instant following the report, the men were filled with terror as they realized that they might be shot to death accidentally.

The crew and the stokers were completely mobilized by now. The leaders could count on them, and the captain could do nothing about it. The organizers expected nothing from the captain except that he serve as a "front." When the superintendent first decided that the ship was to slip into Russian waters, he had pressured the captain to agree to this step, but the captain had fallen back on his official position and had adamantly refused to break the law. The superintendent's response had been angry. "You can go to hell! I don't have to ask you anyway!" he shouted, ordering the ship to head into forbidden waters. But they had been spotted by a Russian patrol boat and had been pursued and caught. The usual interrogation followed. His back to the wall, the superintendent now took the coward's way out and said, "Of course, on matters of this sort, it is the captain's duty to reply. . . ." At that point, the matter was dropped in the captain's lap and there was nothing he could do about it. So this "front" was a necessary one, but that was all the captain was needed for.

After this incident, the captain had considered turning the ship back toward Hakodate a number of times. But another authority—the capitalists—overrode his personal desire. "This whole ship belongs to the company, and don't you forget it!" the superintendent had declared, laughing right in the captain's face.

Back in the cesspool, the stutterer had fallen heavily into his bunk, utterly dejected by his helplessness. The fishermen cast pitying glances toward him and the students, but they themselves were so discouraged by the recent turn of events that they could say nothing. The student's plan had come to nothing. The student himself was in relatively high spirits, though. "We've got to rally when the time comes. All we have to do is grab the chance when it comes," he said.

"You think we can rally them after this?" asked "Big Talk."

"What do you mean 'think we can'? You idiot! We're in the majority. There's nothing to be afraid of. The worse they treat us, the more they're going to make us hate them. We suppress our resentment now, but it'll have to explode some day, and that's what I'm counting on."

"Are you sure you can count on them?" "Big Talk" looked around at the men in the hold. "I don't think much of them. Every one of them is . . ." He sounded querulous.

"If we start complaining about our own men, we're finished!"

"Well, look around you. You're the only one with any kind of enthusiasm around here. You'd better watch out the next time anything happens—you'll be risking your neck."

The student frowned. "You're right," he said.

Every night the superintendent came around three times with his men. When he saw three or four men in a group, he yelled at them to disperse. But still he wasn't satisfied. He secretly planted one of his henchmen among the men in the cesspool.

The only thing the men were lacking was chains, but when they walked, they could feel a heavy weight dragging at their ankles.

"I'm sure they're going to kill me," someone said.

"Well, when we're really sure they're going to kill us, we'll do something about it."

The fisherman from Shibaura shouted, "You idiot! 'When we're sure they're going to kill us'? You fool! Aren't you sure now? Don't you realize you're dying—slowly? Oh, he's clever, that one up there. The bastard carries that pistol around as though he were going to let us have it, but you won't catch him making that mistake. That's just a trick. Just a trick—understand? If he kills us, he only stands to lose. His aims—his real aims—are to work us till we drop, wring the last drop of blood from us, and take in the profits. That's what he's forcing us to do every day. What do you think of it—this tyranny? We're sitting ducks to him."

"You think so?"

"You're damn right, I think so." He rolled the lighted

stub of the cigarette in the palm of his gnarled hand. "Just wait, though. We'll show him, the bastard!"

The ship had gone too far south; the nets brought up nothing but small female crabs, so it was decided to head north again. The men were ordered to clean up and, for the first time in a long while, ended work earlier than usual. They all went down into the hold.

"Not much pep, eh?" said the man from Shibaura to another fisherman.

"Look at my legs. I'm so shaky I can't make the ladder."

"Too bad. And you still mean to work your guts out for them?"

"Do you think I want to? I do it because there's nothing else I can do."

The Shibaura man snorted. "When they're taking your life away, is that all you can say—'There's nothing else I can do'? There was a silence. "Four or five more days of this, and you're a goner."

A pained expression crossed the man's face for an instant, twisting one puffy, yellowish cheek and an eyelid. Silently he went to his bunk, sat down with his legs dangling over the side, and tapped his knee joints with the edge of his palm. Below him, the Shibaura man, gesticulating, was holding forth. With gestures, the stutterer expressed agreement.

to

"All right, then, let's assume that a ship has been built on money put up by the rich. Could it move without a crew and stokers? There are hundreds of millions of crabs at the bottom of the sea. We'll assume that the rich have provided the money for the equipment and we come out here. Do you think a single crab would be brought to the surface without us? And listen—exactly how much do we get working here one summer? And what do the rich get? With this one ship they stand to make a clear net profit of between four and five hundred thousand yen. Now, then, where does this money come from? It doesn't just grow out of nothing. Get this now—it comes from *our* sweat and labor. What I am trying to tell you is don't take it lying down, as though you were just waiting to get to the crematorium. Hold your heads up high. When you come right down to it, they're

afraid of us. That's the truth. So don't go around jumping at your own shadows. The ship wouldn't move an inch without the crew and stokers. The rich wouldn't earn one measly cent without us laborers. The money to buy the ship and equipment and to hire the men was earned with the blood of other laborers and with ours! We're bound to the rich like children to their parents."

Just then the superintendent came in. The men were discomfited by his presence and fidgeted nervously.

10

The air was as cold as glass and free of the last speck of dust. It was two in the morning, but dawn had already broken. The Kamchatka range, running southward just two or three inches above the horizon, was bathed in gold and purple. Small waves rose, the surface of each glittering coldly in the early morning sun. One after another, new waves formed, only to run into the last one and break up, shimmering. The mewling of invisible seagulls could be heard. The weather was pleasantly brisk. The oil-soaked canvas draped over the cargo on deck flapped occasionally in the breeze. But soon the winds came.

A fisherman, his thin arms pushed through the sleeves of his jacket like a scarecrow, came up the ladder and stuck his head out of the hatch. Then, his head still in the open, he bellowed at the top of his lungs, "Hey, the rabbits are running! We're in for a storm!"

Choppy peaked waves had sprung up. The fishermen who were used to Kamchatka waters immediately saw what was in store for them. "It's too risky to go out. We're knocking off work." But an hour later, groups of seven or eight men were clustered under the winches, preparing to lower the netting boats. The boats were swinging in the air, only half lowered. The men were arguing, anger and apprehension in every gesture, as they looked out at the sea. There was a moment's silence, then a man shouted, "We're quitting! We're quitting!"

"Yeah, tell them to go to hell!" They seemed to have been waiting for someone to say this. The men drew close in tight knots and said, "Raise the boat up!" "Right!" But

Stokers

one man frowned, looked up at the boat, and hesitated. "But . . ." One of the men who had turned away to leave with the group shrugged his shoulders and spat out, "If you want to get killed, you're welcome to take it out yourself!" Then the group began to move off together. "Are you sure it's all right?" asked someone softly under his breath. Two or three men began to lag behind. Near the winches of the next boat stood another group of fishermen. When they saw the crew of the No. 2 fishing boat moving toward them, they understood. Four or five of them called out and waved.

"You walking off?"

"We are."

When the two groups combined, the men gained confidence. The three men who had wavered and lagged behind stopped and looked at the group quizzically. By now the group had moved on to converge with the men under boat No. 5. When they saw the group growing in size, the stragglers began to move toward it, muttering. The stuttermen looked back at them and called out, "Buck up!"

The group snowballed. The students and the stuttermen ran busily about at the head and the rear as monitors. "All right, men, remember: don't get separated—that's the most important thing. We'll make it. I can see it!" A crewman who had been sitting in a circle with some others at the base of a funnel mending rope leaned over and yelled, "Hey! What's going on?" The fishermen raised their fists and cheered. To the seamen looking down, the deck was a forest of raised arms.

"We're with you! All right, let's drop everything." The crewmen quickly began stowing the rope away. "We've been waiting for you!" The fishermen knew then that the crew was with them. They gave a second cheer.

"We'd better get back to the cesspool for the time being. That's our first move. That inhuman bastard! He knew damn well a storm was coming up and yet he insisted on our going out today. Murderer!"

"He'll have a helluva fight on his hands before he kills me!"

"He won't soon forget this!" Almost to a man, the strikers headed for the hold. Some, of course, came unwillingly. The

men in sick bay, lying in the gloom, sat bolt upright at the sight of the men pouring into the hold. When the situation was explained to them, tears welled up in their eyes, and they nodded over and over in agreement.

The stutterer and one of the students descended the ladder leading down into the stokehold. In a hurry and unaccustomed to the ladder, several times they missed a rung and found their legs dangling in the air. The hold was steamy with the heat of the boilers, and it was dark. They were soon soaked with sweat. They picked their way along the catwalk over the boilers and then went down another ladder. The voice of someone shouting below reverberated through the hold. An eerie feeling gripped the two strike leaders: they felt as though they were going down into an inferno-like pit several hundred feet deep.

"This is backbreaking work, too, isn't it?" said the student.

"Sure. S-say, what if Asakawa s-sends these m-men up to replace us handling crabs? Where will that leave us?"

"Don't worry—the stokers are with us."

"Of c-course. What am I worrying about?"

The two were coming down over the belly of a boiler.

"Whew, it's hot! How can they stand this? They must be turning out smoked and cured humans."

"This is nothing. They're not s-stoking now, but can you imagine what it must be like when they're g-going full blast?"

"You're right."

"On the Indian Ocean, the men work only thirty-minute shifts, but even so they g-get exhausted. I hear that one time when a first engineer shot off his m-mouth at the men, they beat him to a pulp with shovels and then incinerated him. . . . But who can blame the men for doing that?"

"Yeah."

A cloud of ashes hung in the air. Coal embers must have just been shaken out of the boilers and doused with water. Nearby, a group of half-naked stokers sat talking. Cigarettes dangled out of the corners of their mouths, and they were hugging their knees. In the dim light, they looked like squatting gorillas. The coal storage door hung half open, eerily exposing its chilly black interior.

"Hey!" shouted the stutterer.

"Who's that?" The stokers looked up. The question bounced around the hold three times. The two men came down. When the stokers saw them, one of them shouted, "You lost your way?"

"We're on strike."

"You're on what?"

"Strike—strike!"

"So, you've finally done it, eh?"

"Well, I'll be . . . Hey, how about us stoking this ship up full blast and heading back to Hakodate? Wouldn't we have the laugh on them!"

They're with us! thought the stutterer.

"Here's our plan: unite in one solid body, then lay it on the line for the bastards!"

"Go ahead! Go ahead!"

"You're in this, too, you know. You should be saying 'Let's do it! Let's do it!'" said the student.

"You're right, you're right. I apologize. Let's do it!" Embarrassed, the stoker scratched his ash-whitened head while the others laughed.

"We want you to start organizing your own men."

"All right. No trouble. Every one of us here has wanted to take a crack at them at one time or another."

That took care of the stokers.

The factory hands were placed under the fishermen. Within an hour the stokers and the crew joined them. They all assembled on the deck. The stutterer, the student, the man from Shibaura, and "Big Talk" had got together to draw up the demands. They had decided to thrust these demands at the superintendent in front of all of the men, but the superintendent and the others in his camp had disappeared the instant they realized that the men were going to create a ruckus.

"Funny."

"I don't like this."

"He may carry a pistol around with him, but he can't do a thing to us now."

The stuttering fisherman clambered to a spot where he could be seen. The men applauded. "M-men, we've finally

made it. We waited a long, long time for this. Even when we were m-more d-dead than alive, we waited for it. We wanted to show them. Well, the time has come at last. M-men, the first thing to remember is we have to stick together. No m-matter what happens, we m-must not betray our c-comrades. As long as we keep this in m-mind, it will be like child's play crushing them. And what's the second p-point? It's also to unite, m-men—to see to it that there is not a single straggler, not one scab. Remember that one scab endangers the lives of three hundred men. One scab . . .”

“We got it! We understand!” shouted one of the men.

“You can count on us!”

“Don't worry—we're behind you all the way.”

“Whether our negotiations will crush them—whether we, in fact, will be able to carry out our assignment satisfactorily—depends entirely on the strength of your unity.”

Then a representative of the stokers got up to speak, followed by a representative of the crewmen. The first man began to use words he had never used before in his life, and ended up thoroughly confused. As he fished for the right word, he turned red, tugged at the hem of his jacket, and stuck a finger in the holes in his work clothes, completely nonplussed. The men soon became aware of this and howled with laughter, stamping their feet on the deck. “That's all I've got to say,” the stoker finally said. “But before I stop, men, I say let's give it to them!” He jumped off the stand to a burst of exaggerated applause.

“That last part was the only good part of your speech,” someone said, poking fun at the stoker. At this the men burst out laughing again. The stoker realized he was sweating more than when he worked in midsummer wielding the long-handled shovel. His knees were shaking. When he jumped off the rostrum, he asked a friend, “What did I say?” The student slapped him on the back and said laughingly, “You did all right.”

“You're the one who got me into this fix. There were others better than me. Why did you have to choose me?”

Next, a factory hand of about fifteen got up on the

rostrum. “Gentlemen, we factory hands have been waiting for this day. You all know how mistreated my fellow workers are on this ship—how we're more dead than alive. At night when we get under our thin blankets we think of home and weep. Ask any of the hands here now. Not a night has passed that some of us haven't wept. And there is not one among us without an open wound somewhere on his body. Some of us will surely die within three days if these conditions continue. We are all so young that we should still be in school and playing like innocent children, if our families were only a little better off than they are. But here we are, far from . . .” His voice trailed off as he struggled for words. An oppressive silence fell over the men. “But that's all over now. We have hope. With the help of you grown-ups, we can avenge ourselves on those evil bastards.” The speech called forth a stormy show of approval. A grizzled old fisherman who had been clapping wildly furtively wiped the corners of his eyes with a thick finger.

The student and the stutterer circulated a petition and had each man affix his seal under his name. Afterward it was decided that the two students, the stutterer, “Big Talk,” the man from Shibaura, three stokers, and three crewmen would go to the captain's quarters with the demands and the petition, and that, simultaneously, the men would carry out a demonstration outside. Since all the men could be assembled in one area, without having to be called out from individual homes as on land, and since the preparations had been thorough, things moved rapidly. Decisions were arrived at with unbelievable speed.

“Funny. Why hasn't that devil shown his face?”

“I was sure he'd get excited and shoot off that damn pistol.”

“Long live the strike!” Three hundred men, led by the stutterer, shouted this three times in unison. The student said, laughing, “Now that he's heard us, I'll bet that damned superintendent is shaking in his boots.” Then, with the other representatives, he pushed his way into the captain's quarters. There the superintendent, pistol in hand, was waiting for them. The captain, the foreman of the factory

hands, and the factory representative all gazed at the strike leaders from poses that showed clearly that they had been in a conference when the intrusion occurred. The superintendent was calm. When the leaders came in, he said, grinning, "So, you've done it!" Outside, three hundred men milled about, shouting and stamping their feet. "The noisy bastards!" muttered the superintendent under his breath. But after he had heard out the excited representatives (the men were so tense that they heard neither the men outside nor the superintendent's muttered curse) and casually looked over the petition signed by the three hundred men, he spoke, but so calmly that the men felt a little deflated. "You sure you won't regret this?"

"You damned fool!" roared the stutterer into the superintendent's face.

"That's your answer, I take it. Very well—no regrets, eh?" Then, in a slightly different tone of voice, he said, "Well listen to this—and listen carefully. I'll give you an answer that'll satisfy you by tomorrow morning." No sooner had he said this than the man from Shibaura knocked the pistol out of the superintendent's hand and struck him on the cheek with his fist. The superintendent, momentarily stunned, covered his face with his hands. At that moment, the stutterer, wielding a round stool, knocked the superintendent's legs out from under him and sent him sprawling. The man's body wrapped around the leg of a table and went skidding across the room, overturning the table.

"An answer that'll satisfy us? You bastard! Cut out the joking! We're staking our lives on this!" The broad shoulders of the man from Shibaura were heaving violently. The crewmen, stokers, and students separated the two. Just then the windows of the captain's quarters shattered with a loud crash. The shouts of the men outside suddenly became louder and clearer.

"Kill him!"

"Beat him up good!"

"Beat him to a bloody pulp!"

During this time, the captain, the foreman, and the factory representative, unobserved, had moved off into a corner where they huddled stiff and tense, their faces pale. Then

the door was flung open and the men outside poured into the room.

* * * * *

That afternoon a furious storm raged over the sea. It gradually abated toward evening. Earlier in the day the men had doubted whether they could crush the superintendent. But look at what they had done! They had actually carried out their plan. Why, the man had not been able even to fire the pistol he had so often threatened them with. The men were wildly elated. The leaders came together and discussed their future course of action, each man thinking, if he doesn't give us a satisfactory answer, he'll live to regret it.

Just as dusk was falling, a fisherman who had been standing guard at the entrance to the hold saw a destroyer approaching. He dashed down into the cesspool with the news. "Damn!" A student leaped up as though he had been ejected by springs. The men saw him turn deathly pale.

"D-don't jump to the wrong c-conclusion," the stutterer laughed. "When we explain everything to the officers—our working c-conditions, our p-position, and our d-demands, we'll win the strike on our own terms. Wait and see."

"Sure, you must be right." The others agreed with him. "It's our own destroyer. It's got to take our side."

"No, no," the student said, waving aside the man's words. The shock had been too great; his lips were quivering. "Take our side? No, no." He stumbled over the words.

"What do you mean? A ship of the empire not side with us people? Where do you get that idea?"

Excited at the destroyer's arrival, the men talked down the student. They rushed out of the cesspool onto the deck and instinctively, as one man, shouted, "Hooray for our destroyer!"

At the upper landing of the gangway, the stutterer, the man from Shibaura, "Big Talk," the student, and representatives of the stokers and crew stood facing the captain and the superintendent, whose face and hands were bandaged. The men, peering into the dusk, managed to make out three launches leaving the destroyer. Soon they pulled alongside

the factory ship. From the launches about fifteen or sixteen sailors came dashing up the gangway in a body. To their dismay, the men saw that the sailors carried fixed bayonets and wore helmets secured with chin straps.

We're lost! the stutterer cried silently.

Fifteen sailors from the second launch and the same number from the third came aboard. All carried rifles with bayonets attached and wore helmets. When they clambered aboard (their demeanor was more suitable to men boarding a pirate ship) they surrounded the fishermen, the crew, and the stokers.

"Damn you, you pulled a fast one, you bastards!" shouted the man from Shibaura and the representatives, recovering from their shock.

"You got what was coming to you!" said the superintendent. The reason for his strange attitude to the strike was now clear. But it was too late.

There was not even an inquiry from the sailors. "Dogs!" "Turncoats!" "Russky-loving traitors!" Curses rained down on the nine leaders as, with rifles nudging them at their backs, they were transferred to the destroyer. All this happened in an instant while the other men stared stupidly, unable to take it in. There had been absolutely no attempt at an inquiry. Everything the men had worked for had gone up in smoke. It was all over in a matter of minutes.

* * * * *

"You know, it's just dawned on me—we've got no allies but ourselves!"

"An imperial warship. Sounds good, doesn't it? But it was nothing but a pawn of the rich. An ally of the people? Don't make me laugh. That's a lot of bunk!"

As a precaution, the sailors remained aboard for three days, during which time the senior officers got drunk with the superintendent and his group in the salon.

"So, that's the way it is," one of the fishermen said. Dense as the fishermen were, experience had finally made clear to them who their enemies were and how (and this was what

came as a bolt from the blue) their enemies were linked together.

It was the custom every year, when the fishing season was coming to an end, for the men to prepare voluntarily special cases of canned crab meat as an offering to the emperor. This did not mean, of course, that the men wasted any time observing special Shinto ritual abstention or cleansing ceremonies before they packed these cans. On previous occasions, the fishermen had been shocked at the superintendent's disrespectful attitude in dispensing with these rites. Now they no longer felt the same.

"We sweat blood to pack this stuff. I hope the emperor enjoys it. I hope he gets cramps on it!" These thoughts ran through the men's minds as they filled the cans.

"Put some gravel in the cans. What have we got to lose?"

"Nobody's on our side. There's only us."

This last thought seeped deeper and deeper into the men's consciousness.

"Just wait!" But what good was it for the men to repeat this phrase a hundred times or more? After the miserable failure of the strike, the work load had become even harsher, as though the superintendent was goading them, saying, "Have you learned your lesson, you bastards?" This vengeful, oppressive harshness was worse than before. It stretched the men to their breaking point.

They were now at a point where they could bear it no longer.

"We made a mistake. We had no right to do what we did—letting the nine speak for us. Didn't that expose our weak spot? We should all have united and put up a solid front. If we had done that, the superintendent couldn't have sent for the destroyer. He couldn't have turned *all* of us in. Work would have stopped if he did."

"You're right."

"Of course I'm right. No mistake about this, either—if we go on working this way, we're as good as dead. The thing to do is for all of us to stop working as a group so that there will be no individual sacrifices from among our men. We'll unite just as we did the last time. Didn't the stutterer say that

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joining forces was the most important thing? I don't have to tell you what we could have done if we had united then."

"If they send for the destroyer again, this time we'll all unite and get thrown into the brig together. It will be better for us that way."

"You may be right. What would happen if we carried out our plan? It'll throw the superintendent into a panic worrying about what the company will do to him. He won't have time to get a replacement crew from Hakodate. Our production will fall to almost nothing. You know, if we pull this off right, I think it'll work."

"Sure it will! The wonderful thing is that no one is afraid any more. They're all in a defiant mood."

"To tell you the truth, I'm not much interested in our future. The challenge facing me right now is just to stay alive."

"Right! One more time then!"

The men stood up. One more time! "

Postscript

These are several notes on what happened subsequently.

(1) The second coordinated mass strike succeeded beyond the men's wildest hopes. The superintendent, who had not dreamed that the men would carry out a second strike, was caught off guard. He dashed toward the radio room but faltered at the door, totally at a loss as to a course of action.

(2) When the season ended and the ships returned to Hakodate, the men discovered that the *Hakkō Maru* was not the only one on which work stoppages or strikes had taken place. Communist propaganda literature was discovered on three other ships. (3) On the grounds that they had permitted the inconceivable—a strike during the season and a drop in production—to happen, the superintendent and the foreman (those loyal dogs) were summarily dismissed without so much as a sen in severance pay, which was worse than the treatment the fishermen got. It was said that the superintendent, furious, had shouted, "Damn them! They had me fooled all the time!" (4) With the two principles they had learned from their great experience—organization and struggle—firmly fixed in their minds, the fishermen and the

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young factory hands made their way into various sectors of labor after their release from prison.

This story is a page from the history of the infiltration of capitalism into new territories.

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