

What a Waste

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A Sour Introduction

We had had enough customers lately but that was not the problem. What we needed was challenges. What costumers experienced of personal crises was enough for a living but not what my chief needed to nourish his brain. In consequence, Mr. Smith was being more sour and unjust than usually and he was already the sourest and most unjust person, one could imagine. He was even intolerable towards Juanita, who confidentially told me that she was considering a new job. I knew that she received a very good salary, as I did myself. That should include compensation for both of us being treated sourly and criticized unjustified, and it would definitely imply a solid loss of income to her if she would really quit. Moreover, it would be difficult for me to find replacement, to find anyone who for whatever salary could adapt to Mr. Smith's peculiarities, produce an acceptable cooking for his craving taste and deal with his medical demands, keeping this extremely fat walrus clean and helping various unspoken demands.

On the morning of her confession, I therefore decided to let in the first, the best client, in order to let Mr. Smith utilize his brain for other purposes than persecuting his most loyal servants. So it happened that Mr. Cordone was given the occasion to join us in the Central Room, undoubtedly the most lousily dressed person ever given audience to His Excellency. Moreover, there was no indication that there was anything to gain in having Mr. Cordone as our client. Under other circumstances, I would never have let such a person meet Mr. Smith or even enter his house. Call me a snob, if you want, but I would prefer that such people would even be prevented from entering our small street in Hellerup, North of Copenhagen, and I had definitely no illusion that he might be our client. I simply wanted to give Mr. Smith the chance to see other humans, thereby regaining appreciation of those, who was his daily surroundings.

When Mr. Cordone first rang the doorbell at 8:30 a.m., I had just heard Juanita's complaints in the kitchen while Mr. Smith was still in bed. I listened patiently to his problem at the door but did not invite him in. I felt the occasion had come for an unusual plot, in which Mr. Cordone would rather himself be the victim, and asked him to come back at 10 a.m. sharp. With a satiric grin, I instructed Juanita to let this dubious person into the music room when he returned.

The breakfast was held in a tense atmosphere, as usual in the last weeks. Mr. Smith insists of not discussing business matters but found enough to criticize on the two persons present and the menu of the last two days. A quarter past nine already, the doorbell rang and Juanita hurried to answer it, utilizing the occasion then to stay away. Mr. Smith's speech focused on my incompetence, stimulating my planning. As usual, we moved to the office at this time, whereby the ban of business-talk was removed.

Since we had no cases running, the mail was soon presented. "We expect a new customer at ten – he is probably already waiting in the music-room. It is a man with links to the Underworld, and as I have understood, two fractions are fighting there," I began.

"I am not dealing with the mafia, whatever fraction may be concerned," the fat man concluded.

"I know, but this may be an occasion to do something useful and simultaneously earn a fee." I knew, of course, that only the fee was of his interest.

"OK, let him in," he snored. Did I sense a fraction of energy in his grunt, as if he was longing to start 'working' again? If so, then only because I had been in this position so long that I noted even the tiniest differences – or maybe I was just fooling myself. As

I went to the music-room to get hold of the stranger, I was almost regretting the game I now played with my chief.

Mr. Cordone was unsatisfied with that we (since recently) did not offer any possibility to smoke. He was completely uninterested in the classical music, so richly offered there since Mr. Smith thought people might appreciate it, as he did himself. In this matter, Mr. Cordone was with the majority; hardly anybody would enjoy music in the tense mood while waiting for an audience in a mostly criminal case, but this was a fact the host refused to understand.

The guest had also refused the usual cup of coffee. Juanita had offered him a beer, which was exceptional but could possibly be explained by her gratitude of the possibility to get away from Mr. Smith. I wondered where she had got it, since she did not return to the kitchen while we 'enjoyed' our breakfast. But of course, she must have gone directly to the cellar. It was the first client who received a beer in the music room and the first alcoholic brewage offered anybody so early in the day (except Mr. Smith's Fernet Branca, which he claims is medicine and does not believe contains alcohol). That explains the smell from our guest's mouth, which quite suited his visual appearance.

I have picked up many guests from the music-room, generally very elegant ones, until this day with the lowest dressing standard met in representatives of the law. Mr. Cordone opened a new dimension in this regard: I am sure he was our first guest with a hole in his trouser, worn-out and dirty jeans. His shirt was not much better. Now, in springtime, he was expected to wear a coat or jacket; instead, he had a vest. The upper two buttons were open, exposing an equally dirty sweat-shirt. Also the shoes were worn out. His personal appearance matched his clothes. He had definitely passed the age of forty though he could also be somewhat older; his brown hair, which was retracted considerably from his forehead, was not discoloured, but some of the bald hairs were – he had not shaved for some days. His face was full of wrinkles and his skin sun-tanned, which at this time of the year was impossible to gain in Denmark. He was a rather small person and just a little bit fat, as I have been told that men develop in middle age, while others, as Mr. Smith, even long before. This same Mr. Smith later told me, that he had been smelling of beer, not knowing that it was from his own cellar, and I did not tell him either.

He behaved well initially, as if the person's appearance did not matter to him. It certainly did, as he had proven on several occasions, but probably he instantly considered this as an act of revenge from me (which it indeed was), and then he did not want to let me notice any reaction. In the meantime, he thought out something different, something more malicious.

After a brief presentation followed the question: "And what prompts you to ask for my service, Mr. Cordone?"

I had talked Danish to him and had not noticed anything particular about his language; he talked as a native Dane. Now, however, he answered Mr. Smith in rather fluent English, but with a distinct Italian accent, as suited his name. "I am a sailor, and I haven't been paid for my last job."

"Then why are you not presenting your case to the police?"

"It is very confidential; it includes secrets which are certainly not for the ears of any police officer."

Normally, Mr. Smith would react with the mention that I was subject to the same discretion as he himself and that it would be impossible for him to solve any tasks without my intervention. Today, everything was different. "Eric, will you please leave us alone?"

I was not so good in concealing my surprise as he had been, and undoubtedly it pleased him. However, with a few seconds delay I raised and said, "I shall be if my office if you need me."

"We shall try not to disturb you."

I went straight to my office and turned on the surveillance microphone to the central office, for the first and only time without having gotten confirmation on this measure by Mr. Smith. He would, however, see a red lamp light up under his table, and with a button there he could disrupt the connection – which he then immediately did. I gathered that it could not be very important what the old sailor had to tell, but it left a disturbing feeling to be held in the dark.

About 11 o'clock, I heard that Juanita escorted our guest out. Would I go first or would he call me? I decided to occupy myself privately if he did not need me but at 12:30 sharp enter the morning-room for lunch. I entered the room from my office as I heard him open the door from his.

"I guess that we shall soon see the Swedish coast, provided the fog raises," I started, bearing in mind that it was forbidden to discuss business matters during the lunchtime and just before Mr. Smith's siesta at 1 p.m.

"I have always greeted the fog which concealed the power-plant at Barsebäck," he replied. "Now that it is out of function, we can look over the Sea again. Do you know that worldwide, there is not a single deposit for nuclear waste?"

"Yes, I knew, but I had no idea that you knew. We never discussed it." Somehow, this information had come to him recently. "The Americans are getting rid of part of their problem through implementation in armour-breaking munitions. The Iraqi people already received a load many times greater than the Japanese in Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined. And they are also presenting it to the Israelis for their regular war-fares."

"Eric, you are an anti-Semite!" Last week, I had said the same about him. It is an eternal subject, as when the British are discussing their ever changing weather.

"Yes, if it is anti-Semitic to oppose the Israeli genocide, then I am proud to be an anti-Zionist. However, if you analyze the word, you come to a different conclusion."

The ice was broken and we continued our conversation in the old style, carefully avoiding Mr. Cordone and all matters relating to his case.

At 3 p.m. that day, after Mr. Smith's siesta, the new challenge, whatever small it appeared, had softened my master's stiff character and I was allowed to work a bit, but still without knowing more about the case.

"Eric, find the telephone number of 'Frozen Line Ltd.' And connect me to the managing director, a certain Mr. Jensen." I obeyed.

"Frozen Line, Lone Rasmussen, how can I help you," a female said in Danish.

I answered in English "Smith Consulting, Eric Gusto speaking. Mr. Smith wants to talk to Mr. Jensen."

"Then please connect me to Mr. Smith," she said.

"He is sitting right beside me, waiting for Mr. Jensen."

"He is also sitting right beside me. Go ahead."

I gave up. After all, I had made the call. I connected to my chief.

"Smith," he growled, killing all lust for conversation in his counterpart.

She escaped with, "Hold the line, I'll connect to Mr. Jensen." I took over to save him from the telephone-version of Mozart's *'Eine Kleine Nachtmusik'*.

"Jensen."

"Hold the line, I connect to Mr. Smith." Since we had not then prepared our telephone-version of Wagner's *'Walkyrie'*, I did so right away.

"Mr. Jensen, I am representing the interests of Mr. Luciano Cordone, who recently sailed with 'Frozen Gulf' but has not been paid appropriately for his last travel."

"Has he told you why he has not been paid?

"He has told enough to damage your company seriously if his demands are not met."

"He already did damage us. It was his fault that 'Frozen Gulf' did not – eh – complete its mission"

"We talked about that, too. There should be a chance that this mission is completed now."

"Please understand, that the confidence in Mr. Cordone is not so big," Mr. Jensen argued.

"I may involve an assistance of my confidence. Think it over and call me within 24 hours on the telephone number ..."

"I have it here on the display. And if I don't call within 24 hours?"

"I am sure that you will. It is not in the interest of any of us to involve authorities in this little matter, that is why Mr. Cordone preferred to consult me," Mr. Smith said and ended the conversation without any formalities.

"Get hold of Sam," he barked after hanging up the telephone.

I obeyed with the attempt. The result was unsatisfactory. "He is in the hospital and got operated today."

"God gracious! Nothing serious, I hope?"

"His landlady only betrayed that it was a scheduled operation, nothing acute, but did not want to give further details."

"Could he then not have waited till ... – never mind. Get hold of Fred."

This time, I was more successful though, as it turned out, he was also not available the first few days.

"Who else have we got who may undertake a sea-travel of about two weeks, in case Mr. Jensen takes the bait?"

"How about Mr. Gusto?" I asked. "My doctor has recommended me a long sea-travel to restore my nerves."

"Yes, that would indeed solve some problems. I shall, of course, have to tell you, what it is all about, and since it is on the edge with the law, you may then be entitled to withdrawing your generous offer."

I thought that if I stayed much longer in this house, I might commit a serious crime which would not only be 'on the edge with the law,' but I kept that for myself and plainly said, "Go on."

Before he could do so, the telephone called. It was Mr. Jensen. "We need to act fast. Can you come to my office right away?"

"I am sorry. Being an invalid, I never leave my house here in Hellerup. You will have to come here. How soon can you be here?"

"Depends on the traffic, at least half an hour. What is the precise address?"

"My assistant will instruct you how to get here." He gave me the phone and I explained to Mr. Jensen, who only wanted the address; his navigator would take care of the rest.

In the meantime, while we were waiting for him, Mr. Smith gave me an instruction of what it was all about.

The traffic must have been merciful; barely half an hour after our call, the doorbell rang and Juanita let Mr. Jensen into the music room. I looked at our surveillance monitor and saw a slim bespectacled person walking up and down like a lion in a cage, the usual reaction of a first visitor. He was perhaps thirty years old – I had imagined him older, both from his talk in the phone and his position as managing director of a shipping company (though I had never heard of it before). To his youthful appearance counted his short, light blond hair – being myself dark-haired and slowly getting older with it, I find it

an outrageous naughtiness that people are often taken for younger and brighter in thinking because of the colour of their hair. I wanted to let him age a bit more, but Mr. Smith mentioned the need for faster action in order to be ready for a live transmission of *Parsifal* from some famous opera-house, so rather soon we found Mr. Jensen sitting in the holiest, innermost part of the house.

After a monotonous presentation, our guest murmured something about the beautiful surroundings with the house so close to the sea (we knew it, seeing it each day) and then asked how a person like Mr. Cordone could enter this room.

"He rang the doorbell and entered through the same doors as you did," I explained. "As for who advised to ask for our assistance, I have no idea. Many people have heard about Mr. Smith but most of them are unknown to him."

The mentioned person considered if it was a positive description of fame or a negative quality, referring to lacking memory of some of these persons. He decided not to comment on my laurel.

Mr. Jensen did not waste our time. "Cordone blocked the departure of M/S Frozen Gulf to Dakar yesterday. He persuaded his five colleagues not to embark. Only the captain remained after that, and he can't sail the ship alone."

Mr. Smith filled out the unspoken details. "Mr. Cordone told me that this coaster, although sailing under Panama flag, is only permitted in Danish and European waters with a crew of eight and he did not recognize the ship dog 'Tom' as the last crew member." We all smiled at this detail. The fat man continued, "That was, however, only the formal reason for their action, and please recognize that the authorities have not been informed of the real reason. That gives us some possibilities to repair the damage done, if I may say so, before your shipping company suffers graver losses."

"They are already grave enough," Mr. Jensen uttered.

Without telling our guest that I had not been informed in advance, Mr. Smith continued. "Mr. Cordone had discovered that among the 400 tons of so-called 'humanitarian aid,' there were at least 300 tons of toxic waste."

"Actually, there were 350 tons, covered by a thin layer of bags with milk-powder and maize grains," Jensen added.

"Thanks for an honest reply. The crew space members have made up some conditions for taking up the travel. At first, there is the need for further goods for humanitarian aid – the ship is anyhow less than half full."

"No problem, I would myself suggest it, we have got a relevant cargo which can also go to Dakar," Jensen said.

"And how soon can that be delivered?"

"It is already on its way. If it was only for that, the ship might sail the day after tomorrow."

"Very well," said Mr. Smith, "we may then consider the other conditions. The second is payment of a risk surplus of 100% to the normal salary."

"I can offer 50%."

"Shall we meet in the middle or possibly at 74% after one week's hard negotiations?"

"No, under that circumstance, I agree to 75%, provided they really sail the day after tomorrow."

"Thirdly, I can offer Mr. Gusto here as the eight crew member. Of course, he shall be paid as the others. He is not acquainted with hard work, but if I understand it rightly, there is a demand for two persons on the bridge all the time, and there he can do his service. He will then act as a guarantee towards both parties that this agreement will be carried out. Then he shall fly home from Dakar, assuming he can be replaced there. How long will the travel last?"

"Normally some 10 days. At latest in a fortnight, Mr. Gusto shall be back again."

Quite a comfortable sea-travel, to bring European waste along with scarce products for humanitarian aid to Africa. There were certain matters to be discussed with Mr. Smith, but I should better wait till after Mr. Jensen had left.

"Finally, there is my own fee of 100,000 DKr, to be paid when the 'Frozen Gulf' arrives in Dakar. The payment for the captain is, of course, a matter between the two of you. According to my experience, he should not earn less than his subordinates, or there shall be new troubles."

Not bad for little more than an hour's work. I found it strange that Jensen agreed to it all. He only wanted to hear if all the rebellious sailors would also stick to the agreement. Mr. Smith gave me a small note on which the mobile phone number of Mr. Cordone was written. I called him and connected to Mr. Smith.

"We have agreed to further 400 ton humanitarian aid, 75% surplus to your wage and finally my assistant, Mr. Gusto, will join the travel to Dakar. If you agree, on behalf of all 6 sailors, the loading can proceed tomorrow and you can sail a day later. If not, my service shall be in vain. Mr. Jensen is here and may later sign the agreement about your wages ... you agree? Then please tell Mr. Jensen directly. Mr. Gusto will bring you a copy of the signed agreement tomorrow at 10 a.m., when he shall see you and the rest of the crew by the ship. Please prepare to load the remaining goods tomorrow. Departure will be the day after." He handed over the phone to our guest and started talking to a small device from which I a little later would have to type the contract. It was not a large text, but I had to go to my office for the paperwork. As I returned, the two men had just ended their conversation, and they both signed the papers. Mr. Jensen folded his copy and placed it in his right inner pocket of his jacket. Then he said goodbye and left.

After escorting him to the main entrance, a procedure I always carry out to see that the guests really leave and the door closes behind them, I asked my boss: "What made you so sure that Mr. Cordone would agree to the deal?"

"Because he had only asked for a surplus of 50% and expected even less."

"I still don't like that I am going to take part in an illegal export of toxic waste to Africa."

"I wanted first to see if the shipping company would pay excessive amounts to get the transaction carried out rapidly. Then we still have a week to find out who is behind and get the mission interrupted."

"But then you shall not earn your fee," I busted out.

"I expect to earn a fee; and I do not expect to earn it from Mr. Jensen."

"How much and from whom?"

He smiled. "I do not know; anyhow, we are not dependant of it."

He was right. In his case it was gymnastics for the brain and in my case it was two weeks calm sea travel – at least, that was what I then expected.

Frozen Gulf

The next morning, I decided to have a look at my home for the next two weeks, which on that day was to be found in Copenhagen's free zone harbour, 'Frihavnen,' just in walking distance from my own apartment. There was no need to go to Mr. Smith that morning. I had become used to Juanita's breakfast and made no attempt to compete with it; a single cup of coffee would have to suffice. Besides, it perhaps marked a step down to the quality onboard thus ameliorating the shock. I also tried to find out about my future job by surfing in the Internet, but the information in the pages, I selected, was either too superficial or too specific, so I gave up in less than an hour.

Then I called my girlfriend, Alice, to tell her that I had changed the job, was now a sailor and incidentally in the harbour, so how about tonight? She was, of course, curious but had something to do then, so she suggested the evening later. I refused to tell her the special circumstances on the phone, thereby awakening so strong a curiosity in her that she agreed to make it possible in her home, in the same part of Copenhagen, at 8 p.m.

I had plenty of time, but it could not harm to be a little early in the harbour. I had forgotten that I was leaving Denmark as I was stopped in the customs-office. It was necessary to go back and fetch my passport, and suddenly the superfluous time was gone. When I came back, I asked the customer if he knew where 'Frozen Gulf' was anchoring. He laughed.

"Anchoring? Not in this harbour. Ships are moored here. What is your interest in the ship, anyhow?"

"I am an assistant by a lawyer," I lied. Detectives are anyhow out of fashion, and perhaps the man never heard about 'consultant,' leading to the question what a consultant actually does (in Mr. Smith's case an embarrassing question, since he let do and does nothing himself).

"Hmm. A Canadian passport – but you speak perfectly Danish?" he asked.

"You too," I stated, although I did not like his dialect – we from the North of Copenhagen do not sympathize with how those from the South Copenhagen speak. "Actually, my mother is Danish, but my father claimed that nowadays it has certain advantages to have a citizenship different from the place where you live."

"Your father is not a democrat," the customer claimed.

"No, he is dead now. How did you know?" It was a lie, but it fulfilled its purpose. He changed the theme and explained me, where I would find the ship.

"It is at least the fourth name it has."

"How come?"

"New owner, new name, old ship." I began to fear for my leisure trip. But now, other persons neared and the time had passed 10 a.m., to which I could add a quarter until I finally reached my future home.

"We almost feared you would not come," Mr. Cordone said.

"I was suddenly aware of my incompetence as a sailor," I answered. "But I started studying the matters. I know now where starboard and portside is."

"That suffices for your part in our trip. I mean, everybody can shovel coal." He saw my disappointed face, and then he started to laugh. "Don't worry, neither coal, nor sail are required for pushing the 'Frozen Gulf' forward, the ship is perhaps old but can sail all by itself. It has a satellite-aided auto-pilot. You tell it where to go and it almost sails there automatically."

"What is then my task?"

"Just being there. The law requires two persons at the time on the bridge. One is the captain or one of the two second officers. You will be there most of the daytime; the others are sharing the less comfortable times. All the crew is very easy, except one. Unfortunately, he is the captain, except for you the only Dane on board."

"With me as well. I'm a Canadian citizen."

That message pleased him. "A Canadian, we did not have that before. The first officer is a Dutchman, Johan Krueger, the second is the Russian Igor Kreschov; then we have the most important person who keeps us all alive, the cook, Liu something – I anyhow cannot speak out his Philippine surname, even if I remembered it. Then there is the specialist for communication and navigation, an English lady Barbara Anders. Finally, the two responsible for the machine: me, as you know I'm Italian and then my assistant, Konstantin from Latvia; and since the machine largely takes care of itself, we are also dealing with all kinds of physical work under or above the deck. Except for Captain Caspersen, God's representative on this ship, we use only the first name. Mine is Luciano."

"I'm Eric. But tell me, if the other members of the crew are following their assigned duties, who are there, except me, to be second on the bridge?"

"Everyone has duties there, even the cook. The machine usually runs without problems as long as there is oil in the tank and communication and navigation is part of the job for everybody on the bridge. You are perhaps dreaming about telegraph and sextant?"

"Ay, ay, sir – I mean Luciano."

"Instead, we have Emails and GPS via satellites. We even have an autopilot, so much of the earlier excitement about sailing is gone by now. Strictly it would be possible to sail the ship with half the crew."

I decided to write down these entire names although I knew that I would soon know them by heart.

Crew: M/S Frozen Gulf

Captain Thorkild Caspersen, Danish

1st Officer Johan Krueger, Dutch

2nd Officer Igor Kreschov, Russian

Chief engineer: Luciano Cordone, Italian

His assistant: Konstantin Liegoff. Latvian

Cook : Liu Mai-Pen. Philippines

Radio: Barbara Anders, English

Ill defined: Eric Gusto – Canadian/Danish

"If I get it right, the ship is old but modernized. But what about containers? I thought that was the modern way of cargo transfer."

"That has certainly become very widespread, but it is not universal. Besides, this is, as you rightly stated, an old ship. The engine is new and also the navigation accessories are completely up-to-date, but beneath several layers of paint, there may not be so much metal as you would dream about," Luciano claimed.

"Is it something you know or something you guess?" I asked.

"You can talk about knowledge, but I cannot tell you here. The captain is approaching."

Indeed, a stout seaman with a bright-blue uniform came down the gangway. He looked rather sour but welcomed me as Luciano introduced me with surname. "Excuse me that my Danish is far from perfect. The language has suffered much from sailing with

the United Nation's most mixed crew for several years. Mr. Jensen told me that you had made our mission possible, even that you have defended my salary without a word from me."

I did not want to tell him it was Mr. Smith, no harm if he would be grateful towards me. This was a good occasion to present him for my reservations. "Please take that as a justified compensation for having me onboard. Mr. Jensen told me that I should fill up on the bridge for formal reasons, although I have no idea of my tasks there."

"But you described it very well: You are there for formal reasons, and the less you disturb, the better. The other part of the crew did not quite understand this demand, including any here standing member."

Captain Caspersen brought this impolite remark without offering a glance on Luciano, who simply ignored any protest. The captain continued his welcome-address to me: "Consider this a cruise with view to the waves from the best position on the ship – from the bridge. How many cruise passengers could dream of that?" He was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Jensen and went to open the door of his car.

"Even Tom barked too much," Luciano murmured in a low tune so that the captain did not hear him. Then it was his time to disappear, because now Jensen and Caspersen approached.

"The loading of the ship is proceeding well and the oil will be delivered tomorrow morning at seven, where after the ship can finally depart," Jensen said.

It would be good if you can be here at seven a.m., too," Captain Caspersen told me. "Would you like to inspect your cabin?"

"Yes, nut just one question. Do you have 220 Volt aboard the ship? I would like to bring my notebook along."

"Yes, we have 220 Volt aboard, but in bad weather there is a risk of salt water even on the bridge. Just remember that. Konstantin, show Mr. Gusto his cabin. Number 7 it is." A young bearded man onboard the ship yelled back that he was occupied with loading it and had no time.

Luciano was at the Quae and offered his help, which was first rejected by the captain but then accepted with reference to the absence of alternatives.

The ship was painted blue, with a white build-up behind in the ship in three decks, the main deck painted dark red. Luciano explained me the function of the ship. "Roughly speaking this aft part includes all essential parts of the ship. Below deck you find the oil-tanks and machinery. The first deck includes some rooms of deposit and devices, with which you are not going to deal. The second deck is split by two short corridors. On the portside you find six cabins with view to the side of the ship, numbers 4 to 9 and yours is number seven. In the middle is the mass, our leisure and eating room when we don't work or sleep. Behind is the galley, Liu's domain. On backboards side are the three cabins of the officers, each double as big as those for us proletarians. Sad for you that you are assigned to our category."

"It should be over in less than two weeks," I comforted myself.

The cabin itself was rapidly inspected – there was indeed not much to see. Everything appeared condensed. I tested that the bed was long enough. There was even a small sink, which was easily covered with a plate, yielding a microscopic desk. There were two small cupboards, which would hardly suffice for the content of one suitcase.

Luciano must have read my thoughts: "And don't bring any suitcases. There is no room for it."

"Yes, I must dress appropriately. Will there be any need for a tie for eating at the captain's table?" I asked ironical.

"No, certainly not. The captain eats alone, and it is good so. And should the notion appear for you to hang yourself, we can offer you a rope of excellent quality. And when

we are speaking about feeling miserable, never use the sink if you are going to vomit. It is easily obliterated and it is a hell of a work to get it cleaned off afterwards. I shall set in a plastic bucket in your cabin.”

“Where is toilet and bathing facilities?”

“Oh, I forgot. There are two enclosures behind the kitchen. The first is for Barbara, the second for us men, except the officers, they have a bath unit each integrated in their cabin.”

“I presume the rest of the ship is for the cargo?”

Luciano confirmed with a nod. “And the ballast tanks. A coaster has a rather flat bottom, so for ocean voyages it is essential that it does not lie too high in the water. Come, Eric, I’ll show you the bridge, or the upper deck of this ‘house.’ There I shall leave you; I have work to do.”

He introduced me at the commanding bridge, as they officially called it when the captain was in hearing distance. There, four persons were present. They were all dressed in a light-blue uniform with short sleeves and golden stripes on the shoulders, perhaps in order to impress each other, perhaps simply as an indication of the captain’s formally correct regime. All wore a dark-blue tie. The captain was an old, never smiling person with silver hair and a short-cut moustache, probably more than sixty years-old. He was slim, therefore with a face characterized by frowns in a bronze-coloured skin. “This is Mr. Gusto, who shall watch over us while we watch over the ship. And these are my assistants, 1st Officer Johan Krueger, and 2nd Officer Igor Kreschov. Then there is Miss Anders, who is responsible for the radio. In earlier days, that would imply the telegraph, but young people don’t know the Morse alphabet, so they now use other tricks ...”

The lady interrupted him. “I know it very well, but nobody uses it anymore.” She was perhaps thirty years-old, slim as the rest of the crew except Luciano, and she had slightly reddish half-long blond hair. Contrary to the three men she wore no cap.

The captain responded, “And thereby Miss Anders could demonstrate how she always interrupts me. In this way, we shall reach the North Pole before Dakar. Mr. Gusto, I expect you here on the bridge at seven tomorrow morning!”

I conformed with a military “Yes Sir!” and profited from being employed by an authoritarian personality in not raising further questions. Assuming I could expect ample time, I decided not to waste any time here on land. Besides, I now had some questions to be solved here in Copenhagen before I left.

Mr. Jensen was gone when I returned. Konstantin was still working in the storage room and Luciano was nowhere to be seen. In the hostile climate onboard the Frozen Gulf, I decided not to spend another minute. If I hurried up – that is, wasted money for a taxi paid by myself, - I could reach the lunch by Mr. Smith in Hellerup.

“A Danish lunch is normally a gesture of survival during engulfment of nutrition during the shortest possible time,” Mr. Smith once proclaimed. It is not fair, I participated in many a luxurious ‘frokost’ in Denmark, but it explains perhaps how he became so fat. Immediately, I called Juanita to tell her to expect me, too. I hired a taxi and arrived precisely at half past twelve in the house in Hellerup.

Mr. Smith has a rule never to discuss earthly subjects, related to current work, during the divine meals. That may partly explain how he became so fat. Concerning eating and sleeping, he was so precise that you could set your watch after him – indeed, that is what somebody claimed that was what happened to the radio clock in Frankfurt. In this sense, he disappeared from the table at a quarter past one, and I knew that I would have less than two hours to find the information I was missing about Frozen Line and their ship, which I was going to join. So I went to my office to surf the Internet and make some phone calls.

Mr. Smith slept an hour – not shabby 59 or luxurious 61 minutes – but getting the walrus in bed and, in particular, out of it with Juanita's aid took some time, so it was three a.m. when he returned to his inner temple, the windowless office, where Juanita already had prepared coffee for both of us. This time, there was an extra cup.

"Are we expecting someone this afternoon?" I asked.

"Your replacement during your sudden holiday, he said.

I knew he was teasing me and tried to stay calm, but thought it wise to protest after all. "You are probably referring to the dangerous mission 24 hours a day, which my employer suddenly ordered, unfortunately without agreeing on an appropriate risk-bonus for this fight against the mafia, as defined in the union of private detectives files." The only way, I could pay him back was in not asking who would come; I played uninterested, although I knew the third cup could not have been served by mistake. Anyhow, I had a suspicion.

Instead, I referred my day, ending with the recent recognitions: "The ship does not fit with the profile of 'Frozen Line.' As the name indicates, it is specialized for arctic sailing and 7 of its ships are strengthened for sailing in the icy north – that is the whole fleet, except their recent acquisition, an old coaster which was renamed 'Frozen Gulf,' using two contradictory words, since the Gulf ..."

"The Gulfstream brings heat to us, yes they told us at school," he interrupted.

"So you are awake? I was not sure, so I thought I'd better make it simple. The last owner used the ship for shuttling between the Baltic countries and Scandinavia, for which the special flattened bottom of the coaster is ideal. Many harbours here can only accommodate comparative small vessels with relatively small draft. However, even a coaster s adapt to modern forms of transport, which could involve container transport for easy handling between ship, train and truck and short harbour calls."

"I have read about it," he said, thus permitting me to touch my cup. I was silent for a minute, permitting my boss to recapture what he might else know about this topic, which was perhaps only new to me. Then my boss suddenly started thinking loud. "Mr. Cordone told me that the crew was unchanged for nearly a year. They had been granted a holiday recently while the ship was painted and repaired in Bremen. They had only had one trip from Kiel with a small cargo, making up a fraction of the loading capacity. Then a sailor had died and various circumstances close to a mutiny had forced the captain to search harbour in Copenhagen. The deceased sailor had discovered that part of the load was toxic waste, bound for Africa. The captain had given him a seaman's burial, thus preventing an autopsy, and then given the crew order of keeping a respectful distance to the cargo in front of the ship. He had promoted his dog to be the eighth crew member – did you see the dog, by the way?"

"No, but it might have been in his cabin. Luciano – I mean Mr. Cordone gave the impression that it was the only living person he talked to in a friendly way. Concerning the cargo, when I was there, the front room was closed and exclusively the other rooms were used. I noted with a certain satisfaction how the cargo was secured with vertical and longitudinal intersections, in order to prevent it from moving from one side to the other."

"Why is that important?" Finally some basic knowledge of sailing that he had missed in his previous eventful life.

"In the ocean, big waves may let the ship capsize – hardly a problem in our shallow waters. But our ship is not at all built for oceanic sailing."

"How about insurance?" he wanted to know.

"I did not manage to penetrate the silence of Lloyd's in London concerning the sum, but it seems to be insured there."

Now the doorbell rang. Juanita opened the main entrance and then appeared with the new guest. As I had expected, Mr. Smith had managed to persuade Fred at least to step in for me part of the time, while I should sail away. Fred was the only one among the living who had replaced me for longer periods of time, and obviously Mr. Smith did not want any newcomer to learn about his many peculiarities. Therefore, we got straight to the case. Mr. Smith condensed our knowledge into a few sentences.

Fred was perhaps a couple of years older than Mr. Smith, who was in turn looking much older than his age. Fred was today wearing a tie, the first time I saw him with one and it absolutely failed to make him seem more elegant. He was not just slim but even meagre and his bald head let him look as chronically undernourished, quite opposite our boss.

"There is only one thing I do not understand," Fred began, copying Mr. Smith's habit to avoid abbreviations like 'don't' in his language. "Why are you at all dealing with such a strange case?"

"Mr. Gusto suggested that we should. Apparently he needed work and work he gets."

"Do you require my assistance any further," I asked in order not to start an upset arguing of this matter.

"Yes, Fred needs your keys." He must have recognized this as a bit too hard, even for his standard. "You will get them when you come back – if you come back."

"No need to replace them if they are on the bottom of the sea," I summarized.

"Exactly," he said with a diabolic smile.

I took out the keys for the house in Hellerup and handed them over to Fred. "Don't be too nice to Mr. Smith. He needs some practice till I get back!"

"Buy yourself a business-class ticket home from Dakar. Permission granted."

Then I left the room, got hold of my new notebook, said goodbye to Juanita and then I left the house. The main entrance door locked behind me.

I had ample time before Alice came home from work, so I decided to walk home. I started to pack comfort clothes and a single thick book, just in case of electric calamities. I had downloaded some electronic books. I had no experience with this medium but decided that my small cabin left no room for a bigger library.

Having packed, I left for Alice's apartment, in walking distance from my flat at Østerbro, a part of Copenhagen North of the City and adjacent to the suburb of Hellerup. It was close to 6 p.m. and Alice had just returned.

"What's that nonsense about being a sailor and leaving tomorrow?"

"It is the truth," and I told her the story how it had come to that, leaving out only the toxic waste and the dead sailor. "I shall be at the ship tomorrow at 7 a.m. and shall then fly back from Dakar in ten to fourteen days."

"Shouldn't we go to an informal restaurant nearby and then come back here afterwards," Alice suggested.

"All right, may I suggest the Turkish restaurant?"

"No, we have been there so often. A new Chinese restaurant that has opened in the vicinity ..."

"Please no. The cook on the ship is from somewhere in East Asia. I don't know what kind of food he produces, but could we perhaps stay European tonight?"

The Italians won. How we spent the rest of the evening is none of your business. Call it the privacy desire of any sailor. I spent the last few hours in my own bed in order to be at 'Frozen Gulf' in time.

Rule the Waves

Having reported to the captain shortly before seven, I went directly to my cabin to get some minutes more sleep. Probably we had had too much of the Chianti yesterday evening since I did not wake up when we finally sailed; in spite of the new surroundings and a bed which seemed to be a little too short, I slept firmly until Luciano woke me up at eight and asked me to come to the bridge. I looked out of the cabin window: Barsebäck, the now inactive Swedish nuclear power station facing Copenhagen was slowly passing by, until I realised, on awakening, that the ship was doing the active passing. I had looked forward to great the old white house in Hellerup, but that was certainly too late now.

The captain greeted me again and thanked me for not being complicating their action "Since we were going to spend some time together, you might as well be acquainted with your duties. There are to be at least two on the bridge all the time: firstly, the ones who are commanding the ship are me and my direct assistants here, the navigating officers." He pointed at them, also present at the bridge and with the same uniform as yesterday. "Then there is the second shift, responsible for keeping the important officers alive and awake but otherwise not to mix up in our activities. It is only possible to leave the cabin for a short time for a visit to the toilet or in order to get a fresh replenishment of coffee. This is the schedule for our activity in the first four days, until we reach the Biscayan."

"What then?"

"Then we shall see how you are managing the sea. We can expect some rolling there and it is no shame for a newcomer to feel sick then. Maybe we shall get a first taste on your resistance before, but the weather should be fine for the next few days. Nevertheless, this is no passenger ship and it was not built for comfort." Yesterday he had talked about a cruise, instead he now handed me a piece of paper. "This is the plan for work sharing in the coming days."

First Shift	Second Shift	Clock
Capt. Caspersen	Ch.eng. Cordone	6-8 a.m.
1 st Lt. Krueger	Mr. Gusto	8-12 a.m.
Capt. Caspersen	Machine Ass. Liegoff	12-6 p.m.
2 nd Lt. Kreschov	Mr. Gusto	6-10 p.m.
1 st Lt. Krueger	Tel. Ms. Anders	10-2 a.m.
2 nd Lt. Kreschov	Cook Mai-Pen	2-4 a.m.
2 nd Lt. Kreschov	Ch.eng Cordone	4-6 a.m.

"You see, we four all serve eight hours a day and the others less, since they also have other duties. We do not celebrate special weekdays – a sailor celebrates when he is in port There is lunch at 7-9 a.m., lunch at 11 a.m.-1 p.m. and supper 5-7 p.m., enabling everybody to enjoy each meal."

"Enjoyment depending on the sea," added Krueger. His blond hair made him look younger than his brown-haired Russian colleague but I figured they were both in the end of their thirties. All the officers looked at me and laughed diabolically.

"Speaking about the sea, how does your dog manage rough weather?" I asked.

"Normally excellent, but Tom showed some symptoms on the last travel, so I left him with my sister in Denmark."

"He was sniffing around the front cargo space," added Igor Kreschov.

The captain interrupted him. "It has nothing to do with that. But Mr. Gusto, it is anyhow forbidden for you to stroll around at deck, except the area directly under the bridge. This for safety reasons! This is no luxury liner – if a wrong sea comes in, and that can occur quite suddenly and unexpectedly, you may be swept down in the waves, and I'm responsible."

"Then there is a seaman's burial all-inclusive," Kreschov supplied ironically. The captain killed further comments with a sharp view.

I tried to thaw the general mood with mentioning that I had brought a small device for spending the time and if allowed, I would also be occupied with it on the bridge – yes, if I could just fetch it.

"Here in the beginning of our travel, there are enough people on the bridge. You can stay away till we have passed Kronborg, which will be after ten. Go to the mess and have some breakfast instead."

A good advice which I gladly followed. I knew that I had some adaptation to overcome leaving Juanita's kitchen, but I had not expected problems to start already now. I found the mess easily, where all the other crewmembers were sitting, and I greeted them collectively – they knew I was coming and connected my name to the increase in their salary, so I was welcome.

The coffee was too strong to my taste and instead of fresh milk – obviously a rarity due to isolation of the sea – there was some condensate cream. Square bread for the toaster and various canned products. In fact, there were no fresh products here, although we had just left Copenhagen. I looked out of the window, now showing the direction of sailing. No, we were too far away from the coast to swim home to Juanita's kitchen. I promised never to criticize it again when I came home. In the meantime, I could only try to adapt my taste to a different level since unable to alter the present one. A snob like Mr. Smith would probably not survive these surroundings.

"I thought you were having duty on the bridge now?" asked Miss Anders, the only person there in uniform.

"The captains wanted peace and sent me away. I shall come back after we have passed Elsinore and this time knock at the door before entering."

"Nobody ever knocks the door to the bridge before entering," Konstantin said seriously. He was perhaps twenty-five-years-old, dark-haired with a full beard and a serious young man, not famous for his smile. About the age of Liu, I could hardly guess, a problem I generally have with Asian and African people, but somewhere between twenty and forty, if such a broad margin can be of any use. Worse, he was the only slim cook, I have ever seen, and he did not seem to have brought any of his costumers out of their decent proportions.

I got a certain inspiration, excused me and left the company. At Elsinore and its Swedish counterpart, the city of Hälsingborg, the separating sea, Øresund, our naval strait, was only a few kilometres wide; at least there should I have connection to a mobile phone network and thus the ability to send an eMail from my notebook. It was perhaps also the only possibility to do so during the whole travel. Afterwards, I would try to call Fred from my mobile. Stupid that we had not foreseen this possibility, but who could know that I already had important matters to report? There was E-mail possibility on the bridge, but it would be read by Ms. Anders and possibly the captain. I had already instructed Fred to use allegories to be understood exclusively by me, when I finally could mail him the right address.

So I made my report, and as the Swedish Coast appeared nearer, I also sent it – on first attempt, by the way; I could use such happy experiences more often, when the technique functions as it always was supposed to do.

Then I called by phone, simply to make sure the mail was read. Surprise: the giant himself took the phone, so it was after 9.30 a.m. He never introduces himself. "Yes?"

"We are just sailing close to the Swedish coast and I sent an E-mail with important information. Ask Fred to open it when he comes. I can be interrupted any time from here."

"As long as you are not, feel free to speak."

"OK. There is very toxic waste onboard. A German sailor died on the short route from Kiel to Copenhagen and was thrown overboard, probably to prevent an autopsy. And the captain's dog was given to his sister."

"I did not know that you are so fond of dogs."

"It is kind of a colleague. Anyhow, the captain is very devoted to it, and its absence is a serious symptom. I wonder if the ship is insured. Where is Fred?"

"Do we ask where you spend your time?"

I decided that the time had come for the connection to be interrupted and turned the mobile phone completely off. Then I went to the mass to enjoy the view to Elsinore and say goodbye to Denmark.

The others were gone but Luciano returned and apparently shared my feelings.

"It is always moving to see this place," he said.

"I thought you were Italian"

"I spent most of my childhood in Denmark. In Denmark, they considered me an Italian and in Italy a Dane. And since Denmark seawards ends here, I always had strong feelings when seeing the castle and the flags over there. It sort of awoke the Dane in me. But how about yourself, you are also a mixture?"

"I'm more to the Danish side. I grew up in a small city in Quebec where the Anglophone and Francophone were equally strong, and I then created a third party."

"But your father ..."

"He was seldom home, he was a businessman, and with my mother, I spoke Danish. And since I was mostly haunted by both patriotic groups of boys, I preferred being different. Only when I grew up and moved to Denmark, the Canadian in me awoke. Where did you grow up?"

"I went to Italy with my parents when I was 15, so from then on, there was no choice. Only later did I understand my dual nature."

"Dane abroad and foreigner in Denmark?"

"Exactly, just like you."

"Luciano, we are compatriot Exile-Danes!" and exactly then, a Danish ferry boomed aggressively. There was a heavy traffic here, with small ferries between Denmark and Sweden in one dimension and down the Strait of Øresund, so this was a critical point. "The Danes do not like us exiles," I concluded. "Perhaps it has a deeper meaning that fate has put us onboard a Danish ship under Panama Flag?"

"Be glad that you are not at the bridge, there is probably a bad sentiment after this event."

"Event? Which event?"

"The near-collision. We should let the ferry pass. I can almost hear captain Caspersen scream. But shouldn't you be on the bridge now? Perhaps your absence is to blame."

What a start of my travel. "But I should only come after Kronborg," I stuttered.

Luciano laughed. "Better wait some minutes here till the smoke has cleared. At this point of any travel, the captain is always assisted by one of his lieutenants and Barbara, but although he alone carries the responsibility, he always finds a way to blame someone else for the trouble. Remember that if you are alone with him on the bridge – whatever then goes wrong, it's your fault."

"It seems the captain makes more than one mistake annually. Fortunately, we are not on the same shift in the first few days."

"That may change soon. Suddenly, the captain feels drawing to the bridge and quite as suddenly, he loses inspiration – and he is the boss."

"Tell me about the repair in Bremen, as you mentioned to Mr. Smith two days ago."

"That was at the last trip with the old owner. We sailed to Southampton but in storm, we hit a sand bank east of the harbour. The captain claimed it was my fault."

"Why that?"

"Because I was on the bridge with him as it happened. The same was Barbara and Igor. It was bad weather and we were approaching the harbour, therefore we were four on the bridge. We all warned the captain and when he finally listened to our warnings, it was too late, and then, as we felt the ground under the ship, he claimed it happened because he reacted as we suggested. The ship got a leakage – not dramatic, by the way. It could by its own force proceed to Bremerhaven, not quite Bremen, as you said. And because the repair was expensive, the ship was sold to 'Frozen Line' for the repair costs, which was anyhow too expensive. Coasters are not modern anymore and the crew is too big compared to the possible load. Then container-ships are rapidly loaded and unloaded, so that they are not spending so much time in the harbour. We have too many coasters to share an ever smaller market."

"Such as exporting toxic waste to Africa?"

He looked worried. "That is certainly not ideal."

I changed the subject. "And all of you were employed in the new company?"

"Yes, that was almost a miracle, although the wage was reduced 10%, until Mr. Smith managed this excellent increase. How did he do it?"

"He is even an artist in his field," I said. But it really went too easy. "I better go on to my job, whatever it is."

"Bring something along which can occupy you," Luciano suggested.

"Good idea. One never knows." So I went to my cabin to get a book, but first I looked if I still had connection to Internet through my notebook. I did, but there were no new mails. Then I went to the bridge. From the back of our corridor, there was an open staircase, ending with the door to the bridge.

I could sense a loaded atmosphere, with conversation suddenly stopping with my appearance. Mr. Kreschov had just left, but the other three were still present. That gave me the possibility to act as a superior – as a representative of the shipping company, of course, not as a sailor. The bridge was a large area, as wide as the ship itself, with large windows on three sides and two doors, down to the two short corridors. Now, I looked curiously around, and that cost me some respect.

"Are you looking for the steering wheel?" Mr. Krueger asked.

"You read my thoughts," I confessed. The three other present laughed.

"Three years ago, such expectations were normal," explained the captain. "Now it is all modernized. We have an electric-hydraulic drive for the rudder. Navigating a ship of this type is now a computer game. And navigating is also made a different exercise with satellite-positioning."

'Then how do you explain the average for Southampton,' I thought and I presume the other thought the same, because it was disturbingly silent for some seconds and Barbara and Johan smiled – excuse me that I use their first names, but we rapidly got acquainted, though I do not remember when.

The captain interrupted the silence. "Miss Anders can now explain her responsibilities. That includes the communication. I must go now; the ship, and the fate of all of us, I leave in the hands of lieutenant Krueger." And after this heavy statement, he really left and the mood in the cabin immediately improved.

Barbara instructed me in her work, but I shall not try to explain it further. The most important detail was that the ship had E-mail contact to the rest of the world over satellite, and I rapidly sent Fred instructions, how to reach me. Apart from our own GPS-satellite positioning, we could see over the Internet all ships on selected areas of the sea, and not merely their existence as a point, but also their name, size and other details. "This is how the pirates select their prey," she said. "Like the aircraft, we have a transponder which betrays all what they want to know."

"It is of course more elegant than the old radar," I concluded.

"But we still use the radar. There are small boats and big icebergs without such identification. We know whom we can expect to meet later on, but for the near area, the radar is still supreme."

Then Johan told me about his work, or the absence of same due to the autopilot. "We tell where we want to go and the automatic makes the rest," he simplified the matters. "Only in busy waters, approaching harbour and by change of course is manual steering preferable."

"And by special waves," added Barbara.

"Mind your own business, I'm now the captain here," joked Johan and added, "at least when the other has left the bridge."

Somehow, the time went. At noon, Captain Caspersen returned along with Konstantin Liegoff, and I had not opened the netbook. It was time for lunch, if the two before-mentioned had left us anything.

At noon, it was time for my first real encounter with Liu's kitchen, a meeting I had feared after the gastronomic excesses in Mr. Smith home and the higher circles I had frequented as his employee. My fear proved justified, but for Liu's defence it deserves mention that he made the best out of having been forced to use foodstuff full of preservation chemicals. At least, the accessories were largely free of them, and Liu exerted big efforts to use fresh products. Since we just left the harbour, this implied meat for the first two days and often self-caught fish for the rest of the travel. Thus, the lunch at noon, as a warm meal, was quite tolerable, whereas breakfast and the cold to my taste were inexcusable. Anyhow, from day two of the travel, I had other problems.

After lunch, I had my siesta and after a brief cold supper, to which only the butter was free of preservation stuff, I had my second shift still in calm Danish waters (if Swedes and Norwegians will please overhear this remark).

Igor Kreschov was the commanding officer on the bridge in these uneventful four hours. He was not very talkative, but I pumped him for information about the deceased sailor, a young German called Heinz Koller, not even thirty years old.

"He had searched in the toxic waste in the fore cargo section. Captain Caspersen had forbidden him to go there, but that it was that dangerous was certainly something nobody could expect." Igor paused. "On second thought, Heinz may indeed have searched something. He met someone in the harbour in Kiel, whom the captain forbade to enter the ship. I was on the bridge then and Heinz went down in the night as we were sailing, after Caspersen went to sleep."

"Who were then in the second shift?"

"Luciano. We first decided not to tell anything about the excursion of Heinz, as he went ill that night. As he then died towards the morning, we told the captain and the rest of the crew about it. He ordered a seaman's funeral and thought we should then proceed to Africa, but then we refused and demanded to turn around to the last port, that is Kiel. We then agreed on Copenhagen. The rest you know."

"I am not quite sure that I know all. Why did you to sail further with this infested ship? For all the money in the world, I wouldn't ..."

"And still, here you are," argued Igor.

"If I had known about this incident, I wouldn't be. I wonder if we are safe here."

"Heinz talked about nuclear waste ..."

"Is there more, you didn't tell me?" I cried. "That could be bad, but hardly immediately life-threatening. There is probably something else."

"There was an awkward smell coming up from it. Tom – the captain's dog, you know, was quite crazy about the fore cargo section, though it was closed as he was let around."

"Still, also the dog was said to have been so ill that the captain decided to leave it on shore. It must be a very representative present from the industrial world, you are carrying to Africa, Massa, Sahib, Sir! How shall they unload it? How many casualties shall it take?"

"It is difficult for a sailor to get a job nowadays. The global economic crisis has hit the shipping industry hard. And in order to proceed with this ship, we needed the cargo holds cleaned."

"At whatever costs to the ignorant natives," I concluded sharply.

Igor stared ahead in the dark and kept silent for a minute. "What do you suggest us to do?"

"To be honest, I have no idea yet. I guess Mr. Smith has a plan, but it would be good if I could mail him the latest details."

"No problem. You can write E-mails from here as you do from home."

"Including deleting them so that nobody can see what I have 'confessed'?"

"As good and bad as from home – and we have no computer experts on board. The best we can offer in this direction is Barbara."

"But the Internet is an open book for experts."

"Even if it is, they haven't got the capacity to search us all. Besides, you can also call by phone. I understood that you speak Danish."

"Yes, but my boss hardly does. Besides, he doesn't like to be called so late. I better write an E-mail to his assistant in Danish." Fortunately, I had instructed Fred to read between the lines. "Do you happen to know the name of the captain's sister in Denmark?"

"Emmy something, I believe, but I have no idea of her surname or where she lives."

"OK, we'll give him as much as we know and he shall find out the rest for himself."

"Do you really think that is any help to him?"

"If he investigated you, he would soon know more about you than you yourself, including a complete psychiatric diagnosis. However, you are not the main culprit here, so he shall concentrate on other tasks." So I wrote:

'Dear Fred,

we have started the travel, and it is very exciting here in the unusual surroundings. Unfortunately, Tom went ill – the same disease as Heinz - and was forced to stay by aunt Emmy. They probably spent too much time in the strong winds in the front of the boat. I am looking forward to hear from you, in particular about the value I asked you. Cherio, Eric.

The clock approached ten p.m., and without wasting a minute in being too early, Johan and Barbara appeared on the bridge for their shift.

"You must change course in about thirty minutes," Igor said.

"You look so worried," Barbara observed.

"Eric spoke to my conscience," he answered.

"Better a bad conscience than none at all," Johan joked.

"It is really serious, Johan. Heinz will get a lot of company in Paradise when the poor black devils shall unload the fore cargo hold without protective garments. And maybe the scandal continues wherever the toxic waste is stored. Imagine children playing there or searching for values among the poisonous waste. I can't help feeling complicit in a big crime."

They all showed grave faces. I thought it necessary to comment. "Let us await the instructions from Mr. Smith. He already indicated that he expected the travel to be foreshortened, and I'm not going just to let it happen as Igor so vividly described. But first we shall keep steadily on course and not upset whoever is going to enter the trap."

"You mean we shall not proceed all the way to Dakar?"

"Yes, certainly, but don't tell the others yet. Can anybody tell about the captain's attitude?"

"No, he is an old stiff-neck," Barbara began but stopped as some noise was heard and shortly afterwards, Old Stiff-Neck himself stood among us. All speech muted and he must have sensed that he was topic of an interrupted discussion. Good chiefs always turn up in the wrong moment.

"Take care of your boss. The next one may be worse," he said, and I smiled, hearing this joke for the first time.

"Really?" asked Barbara. The captain looked sour, so she smiled at him. "You did not say it for the first time."

"We shall change our course soon, Mr. Krueger."

"If we change too soon, we shall be able to collect mussels at Jutland's shores. I prefer water under the ship." A reference to the previous event by Southampton. In an obviously bad temper, the captain turned around and left the bridge with the words, "Greetings to the Norwegians."

Igor and I also left the party, through the other corridor, for Igor in order to avoid meeting the captain. "Except Barbara, no one here could answer the captain that way without suffering some sort of punishment. He may have a good base but it must then be deep, because I never saw it."

I got curious. "May I invite you for a beer in the mess?"

"Sorry, I don't drink ... not any more. I have duty on the bridge in four hours, and you better go to sleep with a not too full stomach before we reach the North Sea ... if we reach it, provided Johan can prevent the captain's experiments."

We parted and I went to bed after the first day at sea.

A Small Addition

Igor was right. A couple of hours later, I really had an empty stomach. Therefore, the pall which Luciano had recommended was in danger of running over, not because it was too small but because it was standing on the floor, and that was only passing the horizontal level every now and then, with ever bigger oscillations.

Shortly after two in the night, Barbara knocked at the door. It was perhaps not suitable for a young woman to visit a stranger, but I was absolutely not dangerous. I tried to be so friendly as a dying man can be, but at first only single syllables passed my lips. She offered to empty the bucket, which I gratefully accepted, thinking I had given it all. When she returned somewhat later, I stuttered, "If the lifeboat swings as much, I prefer to die here."

She laughed. "Welcome to our baptizing ceremony. I just want to say that Luciano and I shall share your shift on the bridge tomorrow morning. Then we shall see ..."

"I shall wake over the ship from above the skies".

"For a dying man, you really mobilize much humour."

"It is just a facade. Now, many thanks ..."

"I understand. I'm leaving now. Just tell me, which relatives we shall inform if you do not survive this small test."

"Small test?" What is then a big one?"

"Wait till we come to the Biscayan," she said, adding "There you shall see waves" just before the door closed.

I managed to sleep some hours and was awoken only at nine a.m. Liu came in with what he considered breakfast, adapted to an ailing person.

"Tea? It is years ago I tried that last time."

"Do you want coffee instead? I cannot recommend it as you look"

"I don't know how I look, but I feel miserable – and I don't even dare to think of coffee"

"Try the tea, Mr. Eric," begged Liu. "There is something special in it, good for sea-sick people. Either you shall recover or die, but as you look now, both results seem to be an improvement. Sip it cautiously and have some toast. The worst is soon over."

"You are right, it can't get worse." I don't know what kind of narcotic it contained, but like an addict, I kept drinking this tea for the rest of my travel on 'Frozen Gulf.' I slept some more hours, just getting up in time for lunch. The two on the bridge, captain Caspersen and Konstantin, had just shovelled something down before noon and now, at ten past twelve, was the general assembly for the rest of the crew.

"So you have decided to return to the World of the living," started Luciano,

"Yes, Liu mixed some doping in the tea," I explained the miracle. "I shall of course return to the bridge this evening. Thanks, Luciano and Barbara, for the help."

Liu served the meal, some pork steak, the second meat-meal of our travel. From now on it was planned that the sea would deliver fresh supplies.

"The captain is always on the bridge at noon," Johan explained. "That permits the rest of the crew to celebrate the main meal together – except, of course, the unhappy person who is condemned to share the captain's fate."

"Including the meal with him," it seemed logical to me.

"Not quite. You see the small table over there?" He pointed at a table standing up against the wall. "It's the captain's, and only the captain's. He eats there fast, without looking or talking to the other person who is to join him later on the bridge."

"A man of firm principles," I suggested. Eating just for survival. I was looking forward to tell Mr. Smith about that detail, he who rather lived for eating.

Now Igor supplied: "You can say that again. Having made an opinion, he sticks to it, even when it proves to be wrong."

Barbara wanted to know more. "You did not tell me if you had relatives to inform about your premature demise last night."

"I have a father in Canada."

"You are not married?"

"Working for Mr. Smith is impossible for a married man."

"Oh, that kind of man," she said disappointed.

"What do you mean?"

"A man's world, I mean."

"My girlfriend for many years disagrees; and Mr. Smith, a 300 pound mass of an unmovable invalid, is as sympathetic as your captain, although a lot more clever. He simply demands someone is available for him all the time. His house help or me, who is doing the practical things while he is doing the thinking – at least, that is how he believes his business is running, and he pays me well enough to believe the same. But tell me more about being the sole woman in a man's world, now you opened the topic."

Barbara's face blushed and I almost felt pity, but she started it. "It traditionally demands that all male members respect the position of a female as a full-worthy colleague and not as a sex-object."

"That demands, of course, that the woman behaves like a colleague and refrains from any advantages her sex-appeal may offer," said Igor. Perhaps a fair argument, but the silence which followed it indicated that there had been some troubles before onboard this ship. Though interesting itself, I changed the subject through an innocent question:

"You told me, Barbara, that the waves of the Biscayan may be worse than the North Sea. How about the English Channel?"

She looked at me as was she grateful for the question: "It can be the same, but it is mostly slightly better." That remark started a heated discussion about waves and weather, but at least we had left the former topic, also something with W.

"The waves of the Biscayan may be so big that we may be forced to change the course, in order to avoid being turned over by them," said Johan. "This coaster was not built for that kind of a rough sea. Even the captain shows respect."

"Although one can never be sure, what kind of experiments he carries out," Igor remarked.

"So old and still new experiments," I said in an admiring tone.

"You may soon enough learn to fear them," Luciano commented.

After the hot meal, I had occasion to have another phase of sleep. Probably there was something in Liu's tea that made me sleepy, but I didn't care after the terrible experience, from which I was now relieved. I woke up shortly before my late shift at 6 p.m. and just asked Liu if he could bring me the magic potion to the bridge. Unfortunately, the hypnotic effect lasted also there and counting the waves did no good to that. Igor, himself usually not very talkative, made a big effort to keep me awake.

Around nine, Barbara came up to perform some of her real job. Only now did I notice that there was a logbook in which the presence of everybody on the bridge was noted, exact on minutes. It was the job of the captain and his officers, and they were very serious about it; perhaps because they had not much else to do?

"There is a mail for you from someone called Fred," said Barbara.

"That is my replacement in Mr. Smith's male world," I said and read the content. He had found Tom, but the dog had died by himself before a veterinarian could take the honour for it. That I decided to leave to the captain to make public – or not. The next topic was difficult for me to evaluate, and for that I needed help. "That should interest you. The ship with its cargo for humanitarian aid is insured by Lloyds in London for 50 million £."

Igor was surprised. "The old ship is, in spite of earlier modernization, not very valuable. When it was repaired in Bremerhaven, there were indication of widespread corrosion, and it was considered a wonder that a new owner was found so quickly, in spite of a symbolic price of 1 million €. Coasters are hardly asked for any more."

"And the value of the cargo?"

"With the toxic waste, it must be considered negative. You have to sail far away, to Africa, in order simply to get rid of it. Unless ..."

"Unless what?" Barbara asked energetically.

"Unless the ship sinks on deep water, in which case 'Frozen Line' earns both the fat insurance sum and probably an additional fee to get rid of the man-killing waste," I concluded. "So try to use your criminal brain and tell me, where is the most probable occasion for our ship-wreck, North Sea, English Channel or later?" I asked.

"Definitely later, somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean where you can't even dream of recovering the ship," Igor concluded.

Barbara interrupted: "Probably there is a connection then to a strange order I must transfer to the captain from the shipping company – and of course not tell you anything about. We shall sail to Cherbourg and from there take up further cargo for Dakar. Not a big one, just a single pallet, which we shall then place in the aft cargo area. So it was specified. So the company will pay harbour dues for taking a single pallet on board. What do you think is on that pallet?"

"It is rather obvious. Can you swim, Eric?" asked Igor.

"A few hundred meters, perhaps. But I shall arrange an anonymous call to the police. I just have one question to you: is the captain victim or complicit?"

"As you probably know, I don't like the captain, but he will hardly be able to survive as the only one if the ship suddenly is filled with water. But let us not tell him about our suspicion and simply let Barbara hand out the order from the company."

"Before you go, let me just send a mail to Mr. Smith."

"At least, we know now that we are safe until Cherbourg. Then we shall see. By the way, let me inform my colleague Johan what is brewing together – and let us not inform the others. They will probably panic and desert," Igor said.

"I could consider that myself," commented Barbara.

"Don't forget that we only have a suspicion, whereas you have signed a contract to complete the travel. Before you run away, it is necessary to prove the guilt of your employer. Perhaps that will be possible in Cherbourg, and perhaps we are just wrong in our assumptions. In that case, better keep your job. When shall we be in Cherbourg?"

"Sometime in the night between tomorrow and the day after," prophesized Igor.

"That gives me two night's sleep, before we perhaps becomes the bomb on board. Does it say something about what it should be? Perhaps a gorilla in retirement on the way back to its earlier surroundings?"

Barbara laughed. "It should be a laboratory devise for the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar."

"And which faculty?"

"Higher School of Polytechnics"

"OK, we shall see." And I concentrated now on giving them at home some work. There was nothing else I could do myself, but so much more it was fascinating to deliver tasks internationally from a ship in the middle of the North Sea. Having sent the mail, Barbara went down to the captain, and almost immediately she followed him back.

"Mr. Kreschov, we shall make a small stop in Cherbourg on the way."

"Really? What for, if I may ask?"

"Extra cargo. Order from our shipping company. Anyhow on the way. Any objections, Mr. Gusto?"

"Not if it doesn't affect the travel significantly. I don't mind fresh provisions from France."

"It should only delay us half a day if we enter the harbour the day after tomorrow morning," counted the captain.

"But that is Friday, so any delay will add two days for the week-end," I argued.

It was 10 p.m., so now Johan entered the cabin. Since he was superior to Igor in the captain's stiff hierarchy, he immediately posed the question: "Mr. Krueger, we shall take up some more cargo in Cherbourg. When do you think we can be there?"

Johan was totally unprepared on this question. "Where are we now and how is the weather forecast?" Igor and Barbara gave him report and he answered, "between thirty and thirty-four hours from now. Barbara, what does the autopilot imagine?"

"Thirty-three hours, provided stable speed, currents and wind," she said triumphantly, having already delivered this request.

"You see?" the captain said, looking joyfully at me.

"Fresh croissants for me tomorrow morning," I answered.

"Ay, ay, Sir," said the captain as he turned around and went. He was undoubtedly feeling comforted of the event. The others were not, in particular not after Igor gave Johan a full report of our conversation.

"There is nothing more to do about it tonight. Let's hope, Mr. Smith can react on our behalf, according to the mail I sent him. Barbara, can you take over now?"

At three a.m., it knocked silently on my door. It may have done some time already since I heard it first as part of my dream. "Come in," I said. At least, I had not locked the door, saving me to get out of bed as Barbara entered, fully dressed.

"If you want to test my virility, you have to take off some of the packing," I started.

"Certainly not. I just couldn't sleep."

"With all your clothes on?"

"I decided to leave them on if something should happen to the ship." She was really quite upset.

I should better not tease her anymore. "Listen: if the ship is threaded by its current owners, it is definitely associated with the extra cargo in Cherbourg; therefore there are two nights to sleep, with or without your clothes on, but just sleep. In the meantime, the French police will receive a tip from Denmark about that extra cargo. In fact, I hope it is a bomb, because that would give us a valid excuse to stop our trip. I am feeling very uncomfortable with this export of life-threatening garbage to Africa."

"So am I," she said.

"If, on the other hand, the pallet does not contain anything particular, we must develop another plan. Or rather hope that Mr. Smith has an idea."

"Do you promise that there is no danger?"

"Not before Cherbourg, at least."

"Then I shall try to sleep."

"Alone?"

She smiled. "Absolutely naked but alone. And the door will be locked. No temptations, no disturbance of your relation to your girlfriend what's-her-name?"

"Alice."

"OK, just like in the alphabet, A comes before B."

"Exactly," I said. I could not guarantee to stand the temptation of the beautiful woman forever, but at the moment, Liu's anti-doping helped keeping all sexual instincts down. Probably, that it was also the reason why I slept soon after.

"Could you make your lifesaving potion a bit less strong, so that I can stay awake longer time today?" I kindly requested Liu as I entered the mess for breakfast half past seven. Only Johan was also there, two were at the bridge and the other three were in no hurry and probably waited till the captain had swallowed his survival ration.

With Johan, I shared only casual remarks. Anyhow, there were hardly important novelties since I left the bridge and I should now share four hours mostly alone with him there. The breakfast consisted in my case of tea and toast with slices of cheese, since honey and jam had a sad tendency to leave the bread with the next wave, and since I still did not approve of sausage or pie in the morning.

We went up to release the captain and Luciano from their duties. Luciano nodded to me with the meaning that I was now in charge, whereupon he disappeared.

The captain had changed completely since I saw him last evening. Confidentially, he turned to Johan, the second in command and therefore, according to his logic, the closest approach to a friend on the ship. "Emmy sent me a mail that Tom has died." He then turned to me and said, "Tom was our ship dog, nine years-old but still going strong."

"But exactly therefore, why did he die?" asked Johan.

"Perhaps we shall get the answer, because within a few hours, the police appeared and took care of the dog's dead-body. They'll perform an autopsy. I thought this honour was only granted humans. I wonder why the sudden interest – nobody called them. I shall return with rest of the crew when they gather for breakfast. We shall all memorize old Tom." And then he also went.

"Typical," said Johan. "When Heinz Koller died, he was just bothered about the possible delay. There was no talk about memorizing what we considered a good colleague but just get rid of the body as fast as possible."

"Is that still allowed?" I asked.

"The captain claimed it happened in international water, an onboard this ship he is the highest authority after God – with whom he appears to stand in direct contact."

Shortly after, a strange ceremony was carried out. The remaining crew appeared, Liu balancing eight small glasses in a basket – a tray would have been impossible to keep in this rough swell. The captain brought a half empty bottle of Danish schnapps, which he parted for all. Barbara protested with something about an empty stomach, but it was overheard. Each one of us took control of a glass, whereupon Liu filled it up, thereby emptying the bottle completely.

Deeply moved, and the only one being so, the captain shortly spoke out: "I have received notice that our beloved ship-dog Tom has died. Let us memorize the moments we had together with him. Cheers!"

I noticed how Konstantin showed his teeth behind the back of the captain. When he after a minute in silence had disappeared, I asked him of the meaning of it.

"I remembered how he bit me the first time we met. I hated that dog."

"But it was a good liquor," thought Johan while Barbara showed her disapproval.

"How can you know, in this microscopic amount?" asked Igor.

Luciano explained, "The Russians drink Vodka like we others drink water."

Igor shuddered. "You can sail in Water, possibly even bath in it, but drink it?"

Everybody had forgotten about Tom and they went down, except Igor, whom I held back. "What about my predecessor, Heinz Koller, did he leave anything written?"

I can look in his cabin. I don't think anybody entered it after he was ... eh ... buried." He went down and came back with a small handwritten notebook and a ring binder with various articles in German and English. Then Igor left us.

Many Dutchmen speak multiple languages, and Johan was one of them. I was not so attentive in German at school, so I gave him the notebook and started myself with the articles. It was all about human destruction of the environment, obviously Heinz' great interest. There was a particular section about nuclear power plants. I referred it for Johan:

"Did you know that worldwide there is not a single final deposit for nuclear fuel? It is all stored in more or less secure 'temporary' deposits. Only the Americans have found another use for it – but unfortunately, it is then used to make weapons. Several countries in the Middle East have been bestowed by American bombs with so-called depleted uranium, an excellent deception of public awareness, which has so far failed to notice that the nuclear warfare has long begun. Except for Iraq, where the health-problem is extreme, increased cancer-rates from the victimized population have been referred from Serbia, Lebanon and Gaza."

"And the world speaks at best only about the poor soldiers with often fatal radiation disease after some months' service, not about the population which has to live there forever."

"Wrong, Johan, the world does not even speak about the veterans and their ailments. It is as if they had deserved it themselves by being stupid enough to participate in modern warfare."

"Which perhaps is not quite wrong, Eric."

"We should better discuss our own problems. What did his interest have to do with our load? Do we sail with radioactive cargo?"

"In the notebook, Heinz has indeed listed some indices of radioactivity from our cargo – even here on the bridge you find an elevated value."

I should have reacted anxious. In fact, I was certainly not exactly comfortable, but where to escape? Besides, Johan himself seemed not to be upset, so why should I behave more nervous than he? "He must have had an appropriate device for measuring it. But go on."

"The levels up here are not problematic for days or weeks. Even in the front loading room, the levels are certainly more elevated but not that dangerous."

"So that is not what killed him?"

"No, but he found other substances there, and his fate gives me no inspiration to look after it. I can believe they are toxic."

"In a way, we need no further confirmation of what this ship is carrying. Details are unimportant. Besides, it hardens the suspicion that this ship shall be sacrificed with its crew on high sea. But what can we do about it?"

"That is a good question. If we declare what we have on board, they will never let us into any harbour, and we can forever sail around in the world. Coming decades will know me as the 'Flying Dutchman' – and because of the nuclear waste, I may soon start to glow, adding another dimension to the tale."

That gave me an inspiration. "Johan, the E-mails we write are read by many people who should actually care about other things?"

"You bet they are. Therefore they must be encrypted in a way making them unreadable for anyone except us and the shipping company. Barbara has the key for that procedure."

"But I can send a normal mail, if only I and the receptor understand what it is about."

Johan nodded. Mr. Smith, a devoted Wagnerian, had just received a new version of the opera 'The Flying Dutchman' shortly before our travel, and with reference to that, I managed to describe our situation roughly without mentioning anything directly. Mr. Smith understood and answered rather fast, but unfortunately his replacement of encryption was less genius. It was a long sentence, of which each seventh word gave the meaning 'abandon ship next harbour.' Any scout could decipher that, and there were indeed such scouts at work on the continent, as the events would show.

But at present, our horizon was only disturbed by bad feelings, and they improved as I saw Liu with a fishing line. He was himself lined up to the ship. Johan explained that this was obligate by sailing in a rogue sea, unless you wanted to study the fishes in their true element after being wiped overboard by the next large wave.

"In the Biscayan, he will not dare to fish," informed my companion.

At noon, the captain and Konstantin took over, and Johan and I went down to eat lunch. Liu's *menu surprise* was a fresh unnamed fish just drawn up from the water.

We passed Dover in the afternoon, and I tried my mobile phone, but I only received a bad connection to Fred. He told me in Danish that Mr. Smith needed me home immediately, at best with my companions and if necessary without. Then the connection broke irreversibly.

The rest of the day was uneventful. I looked forward to the interruption of the sea-travel the next morning.

Return to Sender

I had planned to get up early, but Liu's magic potion, which should just pacify my stomach, pacified all of me instead. Anyhow, I had planned to get away from the ship this morning, but as I rushed into the mass, we were still sailing.

Liu had a surprise for me: a fresh croissant. To me, this has always been one of the signatures of French life as I know it from Quebec. I closed my eye and enjoyed it, then opened in reply to a call from Liu, who offered me a second one.

"Delicious – but where have you got it from?"

"From a *boulangier* in Cherbourg, by strict order of the captain, especially for you."

I looked out of the window. The French coast was visible far away. "But where is Cherbourg?"

"We left it half an hour ago. There was only one pallet for us which Konstantin and Luciano loaded themselves without help from any harbour authorities. It was the shortest harbour-call I ever experienced. I had hardly time to get back from the baker shop."

The blood left my face. Mr. Smith's message to the French police had landed in the false hands and somebody has facilitated express loading of the extraordinary cargo.

"What is suddenly wrong with you, Eric," asked Konstantin.

Before I could explain, Barbara, Johan and Igor entered. "Do you know that we have been in Cherbourg as we all slept? And that we have become a certain package onboard?" Igor cried upset.

"I just heard Liu tell about it. May I ask you all to come to the bridge? It is an emergency!"

The captain and Luciano looked surprised as the rest of the crew came up to them on the bridge all of a sudden. I thought Johan was the only person who could speak to the captain, but he simply introduced me with, "Mr. Gusto can probably best tell you about the terrible crisis we are in.

And so I told them all about the toxic waste, which had so far killed a man and a dog ("no, not just a dog but your beloved Tom"), about the nuclear waste, the high insurance sum and the probability that we were never expected to reach Dakar. The new cargo from Cherbourg was possible a bomb that should send ship and crew to the bottom of the sea and save some unknown criminals from using much money for detoxifying industrial waste, not to mention the nuclear part of it. And what it will do there is a lecture that I might hold another time, if we should survive this emergency.

The captain did not want to believe it, but he was obviously uncertain.

"Let's search the new cargo," said Igor. If it is harmless, Eric will probably excuse all the trouble caused. But if there is anything to it ... may I advice everybody to put a life vest on until we have certainty." He sent Konstantin and Liu away, and they returned with 8 vests. Everybody except the captain put it on, also sort of a demonstration.

"A ship is not a democracy, but I am in doubt myself, so therefore, Mr. Gusto, go and examine the pallet – and better find something. Cordone and Liegoff can assist you."

Fortunately, the sea was today as calm as the English Channel can be. We opened the aft cargo hold and Luciano and I crawled down. Konstantin should stand up and above us, five noses were pressed against the front screen of the bridge.

The new pallet contained a box of a square-meter at the button and one-and-a-half meter high. The easiest was to liberate it from the fixation, Konstantin had made in the morning. The next was to open – that is draw up the box to see its content, hoping there was not a booby trap releasing the bomb before any curious view could analyze it

further. If there had been, I would not be able to write these lines. Instead, we found a detonator, connected to a watch showing twenty-two hours, 37 minutes and some seconds descending. Underneath it were some packages, probably the explosive material for the main load.

I took off the detonator and held up in direction of those at the bridge, but they all shook their head and indicated that we should throw it in the sea. I therefore handed it up to Konstantin. "Be careful, there is a small explosive dose, part of this detonator. Throw it as far away from the ship side as possible."

He did as I had said. Probably the saltwater caused a fuse in the detonator, because suddenly there was a water column as high as to the bridge, but hardly any other sound.

"If that is a small explosion, I would like to see a big one," Konstantin said.

"I'm sorry, I can't help you with that. You just threw the detonator away, and without such, this load is harmless." I patted fearless on the remaining packages, restored the box and secured the load.

Back on the bridge, I found that also the captain in the meantime also had put on a life vest. Strictly, it was not necessary any more, but it was good that he also now understood how serious the matters were.

"Mr. Smith told me yesterday to abandon the ship. However, let us do it in a decent way and not support the gang which planned to sink the ship. If we go back to Cherbourg immediately, we can reach the ferry to Bournemouth at 10 a.m. and leave 'Frozen Gulf' in the harbour. They would never let us come in if they knew what we have onboard. We have to get out of the country as fast as possible."

"With what argument shall we enter the harbour," asked the captain.

"Keep as close to the truth as possible. There is an important part missing in the device, we got delivered. Let them start wondering about it tomorrow when we are gone. From Denmark, Mr. Smith will sensitize the police what to look for and how to dress while they are doing it."

So the ship turned back to Cherbourg. Everybody packed while we sailed and we just reached the ferry. In Bournemouth we rented two spacious cars and Barbara and I, both acquainted with driving in the wrong side of the road (opposite right), brought us to Heathrow. From there we flew to Copenhagen and the same evening, the hotel in Hellerup got seven new guests while I reported to Mr Smith and then went home to get some sleep. I did not call Alice to tell her that the sailor was back in town – I just wanted to sleep.

They call him Master of Disaster. Normally people lose money in various calamities. Not one is bad enough to affect Mr. Smith negatively. Since I have been employed some years with him, I have studied his technique: since the responsible in the big crimes usually cannot be brought to justice, they are at least going to pay for his silence.

In this case, I first had the pleasure to inform the French police of the task for the 'hazmat' department on a deserted ship in Cherbourg's harbour. They should also investigate why information from Denmark about explosives to this very boat had not been followed up.

The next morning, we had invited the whole crew, which came by foot from the nearby hotel at a quarter to ten a.m. Juanita had moved all six chairs from the morning room to the central office, where they were posed in two rows. One of the chairs remained empty, except some red roses, representing the deceased sailor. I had already given Mr. Smith a brief report and now, after the formal introduction, used the time to

tell them to let Mr. Smith do the speaking. After all, the only option was to get the salary out of the shipping company.

At 10 a.m., Mr. Jensen appeared. He looked surprised, but I guess he was well informed at what was going on, otherwise he would hardly come with such a short notice. "Where is my ship," he started, recognizing the complete crew.

"The crew had to bring it back to Cherbourg harbour, after detecting that they had a bomb onboard," Mr. Smith began.

"A b-bomb?" stuttered Mr. Jensen, as if he did not know.

"Mr. Gusto rendered it harmless by removing the detonator. There is other stuff on board which is not so harmless, toxic material which already killed a man."

"And a dog!" It was the captain who broke his silence to emphasize what he found more important.

"I therefore ordered the crew to return, rather than run any safety risks, and we are all going to find a way out of the crisis, giving the crew its promised salaries ..."

"But those were for bringing the cargo to Africa. Our company is close to a ruin, and now we have ship in the harbour of Cherbourg, which nobody dares to touch. I received notice from the French authorities this morning. By the way, captain Caspersen, you are wanted by the Interpol. You will never sail again."

"I don't mind, I should anyhow have retired long ago." Did I see Johan and Igor nod at this remark? Somehow, their heads moved.

"I have developed a concept, where the company 'Frozen Line' will be able to exist further on, so that it can pay off all its former employees. Nobody in this room is served by the company's demise, but in order to permit it, we must receive our payment as agreed upon." Did you notice Mr. Smith's use of the word 'our'?

"How do you intend to do that? It will cost a fortune to clean up the load of 'Frozen Gulf,' much more than its crude value," Jensen asked.

"That I do not doubt, considering how little you paid for it."

"It was even too much. There is no big use for coasters anymore."

"What a pity you did not catch the big insurance, made by Lloyds in London," said Barbara ironically.

"For which to be paid out eight people should drown," interrupted Igor

"And immense ecological damage be done," added Johan.

"Please calm down, honoured guests," said our host. "But you see, Mr. Jensen, all aspects of the trip is known to the crew, and still they prefer a solution with you, rather than sending you to prison and your firm to bankruptcy, which will also involve the colleagues on Frozen Line's other ships. In this first round, I represent nine persons, in the second ..."

"But I only see eight persons here," the accused person interrupted.

"That is because there was another sailor onboard, whose sudden death necessitated the involvement of Mr. Gusto. He was not married, but his parents in Lübeck, to whom I spoke on phone yesterday, are entitled to compensation."

"What did you tell them?" snapped Jensen nervously.

"Only that their son has died. Their signed request for me to deal with it on their behalf was faxed yesterday."

"I thought you represented 'Frozen Line'," gasped Jensen.

"The contract did not mention radiation material or the bomb onboard. However, I might represent your interests further on if you care to listen to the preconditions. Please note that unless we renew this contract, I am obliged to share my present knowledge with the police. But I shall try to defend the interests of your company."

"Please go on."

Mr. Smith read up from a paper. "**Firstly.** The crew of 'Frozen Gulf' is paid for seven days duty for the trip from Kiel over Copenhagen to Cherbourg plus transport back to Denmark and one night in the hotel in Hellerup. The payment follows in cash – today."

"I can offer a cheque for each. The sum is covered at the bank."

"**Secondly.** The death of Mr. Heinz Koller. As an accident at work, it is covered by an insurance, provided it is reported instantly, which was unfortunately not the case. Captain Caspersen will hear some blame on that account, we cannot spare you that, but that must be done. We shall discuss it with Mr. Jensen afterwards." Perhaps Mr. Smith indicated thereby, that the crew might not be necessary, but if the police was involved, as is generally the case by fatal accidents, they were all being questioned, so their statements should be coordinated.

"**Thirdly.** The ship in Cherbourg. You must present it to the French authorities and be happy that the cleaning and harbour dues are saved."

"And with which money shall I pay all the expenses?"

"With the money you already received in advance from Germany. That may also be needed to pay my salary."

"You are well-informed, Mr. Smith. Perhaps you also know where the toxic waste was produced?"

"Of course. Otherwise, I could not negotiate the deal with the French."

"But the waste came from Germany?"

"Yes, that is where it came from. I mean, where your ship loaded it and from where you were paid. By the way, I should inform you that the second rate will not be paid since not even half of the travel was carried out."

"Sounds even logical. I had expected so."

And so it came. I bet that Mr. Smith blackmailed the foreign industrialists for cleaning the toxic waste, earning lots of money on keeping silent about the crime he had uncovered. The crew dispersed to other ships, except captain Caspersen who stopped sailing; he was fined a small sum, to be replaced by Mr. Smith, for improper handling of the so-called occupational accident, but therefore, Heinz Koller's parents at least received a proper damage (they had preferred getting their son back). The load of depleted Uranium was later sailed to Russia on the ship where they were loaded, the ship which was once called 'Frozen Gulf', the only ship which ever saw me among its crew and the ship sailing with radioactive loads between France and Russia today – if the Danes only knew ... When Fred turned up that day, everything was fixed and our guests had gone. I tried to exert a prolongation of his work, so that I could make a small holiday – with solid ground under the feet, of course, but Mr. Smith decided that what I really needed was what he considered a proper diet.

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Lörrach, December 6, 2009