BOUND EAST FOR CARDIFF

A Play in One Act
Bound East for Cardiff

Scene—The seamen’s forecastle of the British tramp steamer Glencairn on a foggy night midway on the voyage between New York and Cardiff. An irregular shaped compartment, the sides of which almost meet at the far end to form a triangle. Sleeping bunks about six feet long, ranged three deep with a space of three feet separating the upper from the lower, are built against the sides. On the right above the bunks three or four portholes can be seen. In front of the bunks, rough wooden benches. Over the bunks on the left, a lamp in a bracket. In the left foreground, a doorway. On the floor near it, a pail with a tin dipper. Oilskins are hanging from a hook near the doorway.

The far side of the forecastle is so narrow that it contains only one series of bunks.

In under the bunks a glimpse can be had of sea chests, suit cases, seaboots, etc., jammed indiscriminately.

At regular intervals of a minute or so the blast of the steamer’s whistle can be heard above all the other sounds.

Five men are sitting on the benches talking. They are dressed in dirty patched suits of dungaree, flannel shirts, and all are in their stocking feet. Four of the men are pulling on pipes and the air is heavy with rancid tobacco smoke. Sitting on the top bunk in the left foreground, a Norwegian, Paul, is softly playing some folk song on a battered accordion. He stops from time to time to listen to the conversation.

In the lower bunk in the rear a dark-haired, hard-featured man is lying apparently asleep. One of his arms is stretched limply over the side of the bunk. His face is very pale, and drops of clammy perspiration glint on his forehead.

It is nearing the end of the dog watch—about ten minutes to eight in the evening.

Cocky—(a weasened runt of a man. He is telling a story. The others are listening with amused, incredulous faces, interrupting him at the end of each sentence with loud derisive guffaws.) Makin’ love to me, she was! It’s Gawd’s truth! A bloomin’ nigger. Greased all over with cocoanut oil, she was. Gawd blimey, I couldn’t stand ’er. Bloody old cow, I says; and with
that I ferched 'er a biff on the ear wot knocked 'er silly an'- (He is interrupted by a roar of laughter from the others.)

DAVIS—(a middle-aged man with black hair and mustache)
You're a liar, Cocky.

SCOTTY—(a dark young fellow)
Ho-ho! Ye werr neveet in New Guinea in your life, I'm thinkin'.

OLSON—(a Swede with a drooping blonde mustache—with ponderous sarcasm)
Yust tink of it! You say she was a cannibal, Cocky?

DRISCOLL—(a brawny Irishman with the battered features of a prizefighter)
How cud ye doubt ut, Ollie? A quane av the naghurs she musta been surely. Who else wud think herself aqual to fallin' in love wid a beautiful, devil-may-care rake av a man the loike av Cocky? (a burst of laughter from the crowd)

COCKY—(indignantly)
Gawd strike me dead if it ain't true, every bleedin' word of it. 'Appened ten year ago come Christmas.

SCOTTY—'Twas a Christmas dinner she had her eyes on.

DAVIS—He'd been a tough old bird.

DRISCOLL—'Tis lucky for both av ye ye escaped; for the quane av the cannibal isles wad 'a died av the belly ache the day after Christmas, divil a doubt av ut. (The laughter at this is long and loud.)

COCKY—(sullenly)
Blasted fat 'eads! (The sick man in the lower bunk in the rear groans and moves restlessly. There is a hushed silence. All the men turn and stare at him.)

DRISCOLL—Sssh! (in a hushed whisper)
We'd best not be talkin' so loud and him tryin' to have a bit av a sleep. (He tiptoes softly to the side of the bunk.) Yank! You'd be wantin' a drink av wather, maybe? (Yank does not reply. Driscoll bends over and looks at him.) It's asleep he is, sure enough. His breath is chokin' in his throat loike wather gurglin' in a poise. (He comes back quietly and sits down. All are silent, avoiding each other's eyes.)

COCKY—(after a pause)
Pore devil! It's over the side for him, Gawd 'elp 'im.

DRISCOLL—Stop your croakin'! He's not dead yet and, praise God, he'll have many a long day yet before him.

SCOTTY—(shaking his head doubtfully)
He's bod, mon, he's very bod.

DAVIS—Lucky he's alive. Many a man's light wouldn't gone out after a fall like that.

OLSON—You saw him fall?

DAVIS—Right next to him. He and me was goin' down in number two hold to do some chippin'. He puts his leg over careless-like and misses the ladder and plumps straight down to the bottom. I was scared to look over for a minute, and then I heard him groan and I scuttled down after him. He was hurt bad inside for the blood was dripin' from the side of his mouth. He was groanin' hard, but he never let a word out of him.

COCKY—An' you blokes remember when we 'auld 'im in 'ere? Oh, 'ell, 'e says, oh, 'ell—like that, and nothin' else.

OLSON—Did the captain know where he iss hurted?

COCKY—That silly ol' jesser! Wot the 'ell would 'e know about anything?

SCOTTY—(sardonically)
He fiddles in his mouth wi' a bit of glass.

DRISCOLL—(angrily)
The divil's own life ut is to be out on the lonely sea wid nothin' but time you and a grave in the ocean but a spindle-shanked, gray-whiskered auld fool the loike av him. 'Twas enough to make a saint shewar to see him wid his gold watch in his hand, tryin' to look a wise as an owl on a tree, and all the toime he no knowin' whether 'twas cholery or the barber's itch was the matther wid Yank.

SCOTTY—(sardonically)
He give him a dose of salts, na doot?

DRISCOLL—Divil a thing he gave him at all, but looked in the book he had wid him, and shook his head, and walked out widout sayin' a word, the second mate affer him no wiser than himself, God's curse on the two av them!

COCKY—(after a pause)
Yank was a good shipmate, pore beggar. Lend me four bob in Noo Yark, 'e did.

DRISCOLL—(warmly)
A good shipmate he was and is, none better. Ye said no more than the truth, Cocky. Five years and more ut is since first I shipped wid him, and we've stuck together iver since through good luck and bad. Fights we've had, God help us, but 'twas only when we'd a bit av drink taken, and we always shook hands the nixt mornin'. Whatever was his was mine, and many's the toime I'd a been
on the beach or worse, but for him. And now—(His voice trembles as he fights to control his emotion.) Divil take me if I'm not startin' to blubber loike an auld woman, and he not dead at all, but goin' to live many a long year yet, maybe.

**Davis**—The sleep'll do him good. He seems better now.

**Olson**—If he wude eat someting—

**Driscoll**—Wad ye have him be eatin' in his condishun? Sure it's hard enough on the rest av us wid nothin' the matther wid our insides to be stomachin' the skoff on this rusty lime-juicer.

**Scotty**—(indignantly) It's a starvation ship.

**Davis**—Plenty o' work and no food—and the owners ridin' around in carriages!

**Olson**—Hash, hash! Stew, stew! Marmalade, py damn! (He spits disgustedly.)

**Cocky**—Bloody swill! Fit only for swine is what I say.

**Driscoll**—And the dishwaster they disguise wid the name av tea! And the putty they call bread! My belly feels loike I'd swalled a dozen rivets at the thought av ut! And sea-biscuit that'd break the teeth av a lion if he had the misfortune to take a bite at one! (Unconsciously they have all raised their voices, forgetting the sick man in their sailor's delight at finding something to grumble about.)

**Paul**—(swings his feet over the side of his bunk, stops playing his accordion, and says slowly) And rot-ten po-tay-toes! (He starts in playing again. The sick man gives a groan of pain.)

**Driscoll**—(holding up his hand) Shut your mouths, all av you. 'Tis a hell av a thing for us to be complainin' about our guts, and a sick man maybe dyin' listenin' to us. (gets up and shakes his fist at the Norwegian) God stiffen you, ye square-head scut! Put down that organ av yours or I'll break your ugly face for you. Is that banshee schreechin' fit music for a sick man? (The Norwegian puts his accordion in the bunk and lies back and closes his eyes. Driscoll goes over and stands beside Tank. The steamer's whistle sounds particularly loud in the silence.)

**Davis**—Damn this fog! (reaches in under a bunk and yanks out a pair of seaboats, which he pulls on) My lookout next, too. Must be nearly eight bells, boys. (With the exception of Olson, all the men sitting up put on oilskins, sou'westers, seaboats, etc., in preparation for the watch on deck. Olson crawls into a lower bunk on the right.)

**Scotty**—My wheel.

**Olson**—(disgustedly) Nothin' but yust dirty weather all dis voyage. I yust can't sleep when weesle blow. (He turns his back to the light and is soon fast asleep and snoring.)

**Scotty**—If this fog keeps up, I'm tellin' ye, we'll no be in Cardiff for a week or more.

**Driscoll**—'Twas just such a night as this the auld Dover wint down. Just about this time ut was, too, and we all sittin' round in the fo'c'stle, Yank beside me, whin all av a sud- dunt we heard a great slitherin' crash, and the ship heeled over till we was all in a heap on wan side. What came after I dismember exactly, except 'twas a hard shift to get the boats over the side before the auld teakettle sank. Yank was in the same boat wid me, and sivin monthal days we drifted wid scarcely a drop of wather or a bite to chew on. 'Twas Yank here that held me down whin I wanted to jump into the ocean, roarin' mad wid the thirst. Picked up we were on the same day wid only Yank in his senses, and him steerin' the boat.

**Cocky**—(protestingly) Blimy but you're a cheerful blight er, Driscoll! Talkin' abaaht shipwrecks in this 'ere blushing' fog. (Yank groans and sits uncauly, opening his eyes. Driscoll hurries to his side.)

**Driscoll**—Are ye feelin' any better, Yank?

**Yank**—(in a weak voice) No.

**Driscoll**—Sure, you must be. You look as strong as an ox. (appealing to the others) Am I tellin' him a lie?

**Davis**—The sleep's done you good.

**Cocky**—You'll be 'avin your pint of beer in Cardiff this day week.

**Scotty**—And fish and chips, mon!

**Yank**—(peevishly) Wha're yuh all lyin' fur? D'yuh think I'm scared to—(He hesitates as if frightened by the word he is about to say.)

**Driscoll**—Don't be thinkin' such things! (The ship's bell is heard heavily sounding eight times. From the forecastle head above the voice of the lookout rises in a long wail.) Aaall's welll.
The men look uncertainly at Yank as if undecided whether to say good-by or not.

YANK—(in an agony of fear) Don't leave me, Drisc! I'm dyin', I tell yuh. I won't stay here alone with everyone snorin'. I'll go out on deck. (He makes a feeble attempt to rise, but sinks back with a sharp groan. His breath comes in wheezy gasps.) Don't leave me, Drisc! (His face grows white and his head falls back with a jerk.)

DRISCOLL—Don't be worryin', Yank. I'll not move a step out av here—and let that devil av a bo'sun curse his black head off. You speak a word to the bo'sun, Cocky. Tell him that Yank is bad took and I'll be stayin' wid him a while yet.

COCKY—Right-o. (Cocky, Davis and Scotty go out quietly.)

COCKY—(from the alleyway) Gawd blimey, the fog's thick as soup.

DRISCOLL—Are ye satisfied now, Yank? (Receiving no answer, he bends over the still form.) He's fainted, God help him! (He gets a tin dipper from the bucket and bathes Yank's forehead with the water. Yank shudders and opens his eyes.)

YANK—(slowly) I thought I was goin' then. Wha' did yuh wanna wake me up fur?

DRISCOLL—(with forced gayety) Is it wishful for heaven ye are?

YANK—(glumly) Hell, I guess.

DRISCOLL—(crossing himself involuntarily) For the love av the saints don't be talkin' loike that! You'd give a man the creeps. It's chippin' rust on deck you'll be in a day or two wid the best av us. (Yank does not answer, but closes his eyes wearily.) The seaman who has been on lookout, Smitty, a young Englishman, comes in and takes off his dripping oilskins. While he is doing this the man whose turn at the wheel has been relieved enters. He is a dark burly fellow with a round stupid face. The Englishman steps softly over to Driscoll. The other crawls into a lower bunk.

SMITTY—(whispering) How's Yank?


YANK—I'm all right, Smitty.

SMITTY—Glad to hear it, Yank. (He crawls to an upper bunk and is soon asleep.)

IVAN—(The stupid-faced seaman who came in after Smitty twists his head in the direction of the sick man.) You feel gude, Yank?

YANK—(wearily) Yes, Ivan.

IVAN—Don't gude. (He rolls over on his side and falls asleep immediately.)

YANK—(after a pause broken only by snores—with a bitter laugh) Good-by and good luck to the lot of you!

DRISCOLL—Is ut painin' you again?

YANK—It hurts like hell—here. (He points to the lower part of his chest on the left side.) I guess my old pump's busted. Ooohh! (A spasm of pain contracts his pale features. He presses his hand to his side and writhes on the thin mattress of his bunk. The perspiration stands out in beads on his forehead.)

DRISCOLL—(terrified) Yank! Yank! What is ut? (jumping to his feet) I'll run for the captain. (He starts for the doorway.)

YANK—(sitting up in his bunk, frantic with fear) Don't leave me, Drisc! For God's sake, don't leave me alone! (He leans over the side of his bunk and spits. Driscoll comes back to him.)

Blood! Ugh!

DRISCOLL—Blood again! I'd best be gettin' the captain.

YANK—No, no, don't leave me! If yuh do I'll git up and follow you. I ain't no coward, but I'm scared to stay here with all of them asleep and snorin'. (Driscoll, not knowing what to do, sits down on the bench beside him. He grows calmer and sinks back on the mattress.) The captain can't do me no good, yuh know it yourself. The pain ain't so bad now, but I thought it had me then. It was a buzz-saw cuttin' into me.

DRISCOLL—(fiercely) God blast ut!

(The captain and the second mate of the steamer enter the forecastle. The captain is an old man with gray mustache and whiskers. The mate is clean-shaven and middle-aged. Both are dressed in simple blue uniforms.)

THE CAPTAIN—(taking out his watch and feeling Yank's pulse) How do you feel now?

YANK—(feebly) All right, sir.

THE CAPTAIN—And the pain in your chest?

YANK—It still hurts, sir, worse than ever.

THE CAPTAIN—(taking a thermometer from his pocket and
putting it into Yank's mouth). Here. Be sure and keep this in
under your tongue, not over it.

THE MATE — (after a pause) Isn't this your watch on deck,
Driscoll? CAPTAIN

DRISCOLL — Yes, sorr, but Yank was fearin' to be alone,
and—

THE CAPTAIN — That's all right.

DRISCOLL — Thank ye, sorr.

THE CAPTAIN — (stares at his watch for a moment or so; then
takes the thermometer from Yank's mouth and goes to the lamp
to read it. His expression grows very grave. He beckons the
mate and Driscoll to the corner near the doorway. Yank watches
them furtively. The captain speaks in a low voice to the mate.)
Way up, both of them. (to Driscoll) Has he been spitting
blood again?

DRISCOLL — Not much for the hour just past, sorr, but be-
fore that—

THE CAPTAIN — A great deal?

DRISCOLL — Yes, sorr.

THE CAPTAIN — He hasn't eaten anything?

DRISCOLL — No, sorr.

THE CAPTAIN — Did he drink that medicine I sent him?

DRISCOLL — Yes, sorr, but it didn't stay down.

THE CAPTAIN — (shaking his head) I can't do anything else
for him. It's too serious for me. If this had only happened a
week later we'd be in Cardiff in time to—

DRISCOLL — Plaze help him some way, sorr!

THE CAPTAIN — (impatiently) But, my good man, I'm not
a doctor. (more kindly as he sees Driscoll's grief) You and he
have been shipmates a long time?

DRISCOLL — Five years and more, sorr.

THE CAPTAIN — I see. Well, don't let him move. Keep him
quiet and we'll hope for the best. I'll read the matter up and
send him some medicine, something to ease the pain, anyway.
(goes over to Yank) Keep up your courage! You'll be better to-
morrow. (He breaks down lamely before Yank's steady gaze.)
We'll pull you through all right — and — hm — well —

ROBINSON — Dammit! (He goes out hurriedly, followed by the
mate.)

DRISCOLL — (trying to conceal his anxiety) Didn't I tell you

you wasn't half as sick as you thought you was? The Cap-
tain'll have you out on deck cursin' and swearin' loike a
trooper before the week is out.

YANK — Don't lie, Drisc. I heard what he said, and if
I didn't I c'd tell by the way I feel. I know what's goin' to
happen. I'm goin' to— (He hesitates for a second — then
realistically) I'm goin' to die, that's what, and the sooner the
better!

DRISCOLL — (wildly) No, and be damned to you, you're
not. I'll not let you.

YANK — It ain't no use, Drisc. I ain't got a chance, but I
ain't scared. Gimme a drink of water, will yuh, Drisc? My
throat's burnin' up. (Driscoll brings the dipper full of water and
supports his head while he drinks in great gulps.)

DRISCOLL — (seeking vainly for some word of comfort) Are ye
feelin' more aisy loike now?

YANK — Yes — now — when I know it's all up. (a pause)
You mustn't take it so hard, Drisc. I was just thinkin' it ain't
as bad as people think — dyin'. I ain't never took much stock
in the truck them sky-pilots preach. I ain't never had religion;
but I know whatever it is what comes after it can't be no
worse'n this. I don't like to leave you, Drisc, but — that's all.

DRISCOLL — (with a groan) Lad, lad, don't be talkin'.

YANK — This sailor life ain't much to cry about leavin' —
just one ship after another, hard work, small pay, and bum
grub; and when we git into port, just a drunk endin' up in a
fight, and all your money gone, and then ship away again.
Never meetin' no nice people; never gittin' outa sailor town,
hardly, in any port; travelin' all over the world and never
seem'n of it; without no one to care whether you're alive
or dead. (with a bitter smile) There ain't much in all that
that'd make yuh sorry to lose it, Drisc.

DRISCOLL — (gloomily) It's a hell av a life, the sea.

YANK — (musingly) It must be great to stay on dry land all
your life and have a farm with a house of your own with cows
and pigs and chickens, 'way in the middle of the land where
yuh'd never smell the sea or see a ship. It must be great to
have a wife, and kids to play with at night after supper when
your work was done. It must be great to have a home of your
own, Drisc.
DRISCOLL—(with a great sigh) It must, surely; but what's the use av thinkin' av ut? Such things are not for the loikes av us.

YANK—Sea-farin' is all right when you're young and don't care, but we ain't chickens no more, and somehow, I dunno, this last year has seemed rotten, and I've had a hunch I'd quit—with you, of course—and we'd save our coin, and go to Canada or Argentina or some place and git a farm, just a small one, just enough to live on. I never told yuh this 'cause I thought you'd laugh at me.

DRISCOLL—(enthusiastically) Laugh at you, is ut? When I'm havin' the same thoughts myself, toime after toime. It's a grand idea and we'll be doin' ut sure if you'll stop your crazy notions—about—about bein' so sick.

YANK—(sadly) Too late. We shouldn't made this trip, and then— How'd all the fog git in here?

DRISCOLL—Fog?

YANK—Everything looks misty. Must be my eyes gittin' weak, I guess. What was we talkin' of a minute ago? Oh, yes, a farm. It's too late. (his mind wandering) Argentine, did I say? D'yu remember the times we've had in Buenos Aires? The moving pictures in Barracas? Some class to them, d'yu remember?

DRISCOLL—(with satisfaction) I do that; and so does the piany player. He'll not be forgettin' the black eye I gave him in a hurry.

YANK—Remember the time we was there on the beach and had to go to Tommy Moore's boarding house to git shipped? And he sold us rotten oilskins and seaboats full of holes, and shipped us on a skys' yarder round the Horn, and took two months' pay for it. And the days we used to sit on the park benches along the Paseo Colon with the vigilantes lookin' hard at us? And the songs at the Sailor's Opera where the guy played ragtime—d'yu remember them?

DRISCOLL—I do, surely.

YANK—And La Plata—phew, the stink of the hides! I always liked Argentine—all except that booze, cana. How drunk we used to git on that, remember?

DRISCOLL—Cud I forget ut? My head pains me at the menshun av that divil's brew.
with the rest of the boys; and you take my watch. It ain't worth much, but it's all I've got.

**Driscoll**—But have ye no relations at all to call your own?

**Yank**—No, not as I know of. One thing I forgot: You know Fanny the barmaid at the Red Stork in Cardiff?

**Driscoll**—Sure, and who doesn't?

**Yank**—She's been good to me. She tried to lend me half a crown when I was broke there last trip. Buy her the biggest box of candy yuh c'n find in Cardiff. (breaking down—in a choking voice) It's hard to ship on this voyage I'm goin' on—alone! (Driscoll reaches out and grasps his hand. There is a pause, during which both fight to control themselves.) My throat's like a furnace. (He gasps for air.) Gimme a drink of water, will yuh, Drisc? (Driscoll gets him a dixer of water.) I wish this was a pint of beer. Ooohhh! (He chokes, his face convulsed with agony, his hands tearing at his shirt front. The dixer falls from his nerveless fingers.)

**Driscoll**—For the love av God, what is ut, Yank?

**Yank**—(speaking with tremendous difficulty) S'long, Drisc! (He stares straight in front of him with eyes starting from the sockets.) Who's that?

**Driscoll**—Who? What?

**Yank**—(faintly) A pretty lady dressed in black. (He for twitches and his body writhes in a final spasm, then straightens out rigidly.)

**Driscoll**—(pale with horror) Yank! Yank! Say a word to me for the love av hiven! (He shrinks away from the bunk, making the sign of the cross. Then comes back and puts a trembling hand on Yank's chest and bends closely over the body.)

**Cocky**—(from the alleyway) Oh, Driscoll! Can you love Yank for arf a mo' and give me a 'and?

**Driscoll**—(with a great sob) Yank! (He sinks down on his knees beside the bunk, his head on his hands. His lips move in some half-remembered prayer.)

**Cocky**—(enters, his oilskins and sou'wester glistening with drops of water) The fog's lifted. (Cocky sees Driscoll and stands staring at him with open mouth. Driscoll makes the sign of the cross again.)

**Cocky**—(mockingly) Sayin' 'is prayers! (He catches sight of