

THE MARSHIP .

Was a floating borstal , a grey hulk to which BAD boys were sent instead of going to jail . I never saw the Marship but I was told whenever it happened to be in the harbour , which was whenever I happened to be bad , and the night was Dark , and the curtains were drawn . It was then that I hovered anxiously between the Devil on the chimney, and the Marship on the deep blue sea ..

On the Marship boys were made to scrub the decks all day long. That was all they ever did—
Scrubbed until their kneecaps were worn whitely through the red rags of their skins , like the elbows of the Old women , and their hands were sodden lumps of Carbolic soap , scarlet from the constant immersions from dawn to dusk ..They had to use Freezing water , and if there was a single speck of dirt left on the deck by any boy , that boy was tied to the mast and flogged ..
Buckets stood ready to catch the Blood as it

leaped from the cat of nine tails which they used for the flogging .. The Marship boys lived on hard tack , with Maggots for meat . They slept with Rats in their bunks , but when they had been especially Bad they were put in the bilge and the wobbly eyed crabs came and linked claws round their Necks , fringed their raw wrists and Picked off their Toes one by one if they dared to move a muscle ..

It was the thought of those living necklaces and bracelets that convinced me .. And I knew just what it would be like to have No Toes .. An old man called Tom Tarvit used to hobble up to the house to see my Gt Grandfather .. He was an ex whaler and had lost all his toes in the Antarctic . He came in on two sticks , bent in half , his Red eyes leering out of the rats hair that grew on his face ..

You”ll be like Tom Tarvit “ they used to say to me “ Not a Toe to your feet and not a Tooth in your head “ ..

Once only I was picked up , slung over a shoulder ,and told I was being taken to the Marship .. My response was instantaneous .. I went rigid and stopped breathing.. The frightened adult put me down and shouted for help .. The whole family beat me in turn until I was black and blue , but they could get no more breath out of me than out of an Iron bar ..They stuck their fingers down my throat , they tore my hair , they held me upside down and rained blows on my back .. Somebody even shouted to me that I'd be taken to the Marship if I didn't come out of it !! It was an ingenious but futile suggestion .. My face must have been like a bursting purple plum when Old Leebie drove her largest Darning Needle into my behind .. This Blood letting let AIR into me at once and I lived to recall something of the horror of that last moment . The puncture in my rear had to be repaired , but at last I managed to sit at peace

From then on I committed ONLY Minor Crimes ..

Reality . One boy from Portlethen spent four years on the Marship .