

Gladys Hindmarch /

## FAIR HARBOUR MY EYE

I'm through now, Coco says, you can start cleaning the galley. Okay, I say. Jan, she shouts from the mess, the guys will be in for early mugup in half-an-hour. Okay, I say. And if you smell my pies burning, she says, will you turn the heat down? Okay, I say. I'll be back, she says, to pull them out. Okay I say. I pick up a full pail of water and Mr Clean. It's cold. I empty half, fill it with kettle water, fill the kettle with cold water and place it on the stove. Half-an-hour, I better do the ceiling first. I take off my shoes and stand on paper on the wooden counter. First I dampen and wring the rag. I wish I had brought gloves; my hands are flakey already from the Fels Naptha and they sting from Mr Clean and I'm just starting. Just starting.

I wipe the hatch that opens up just behind the wheelhouse: soot, thousands of grains of fine soot. Fair Harbour. Sunday morning. No sun. Just close grey clouds. Water runs down my arms. I rinse and wipe, rinse and wipe. I move the paper over with my feet and start the other hatch. I'm a rinser, I'm a wiper, I'm a rinser, I'm a wiper: that's what I am and that's what I'll be. I wipe the top of the shelf that holds all the plates and bowls. I guess I'll have to take them all out. Fair Harbour. Fair Harbour my eye. Why do people put up with things at work they never would at home? I think of dirty toilets in the print-shop, in hardware stores, in cafes that don't have public washrooms but I really had to go, in an electrical contractor's office; offices, all those offices people work in eight hours a day but it looks like no one really ever sees anything at all, dirty metal ashtrays, cheap glass, calendars that are old, things stuck up to cover cracks to cover walls, but like prints at doctors' offices seldom really interesting.

*You are my sunshine*, I start to sing, *my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are grey.* My pail is dirty. I do one final long swipe across the top of two white pipes and am squatting to get down backwards when something lands inside my collar. Aaach, I scream. My shoulders tighten about it. I see Ken's feet through the hatch. Bastard. I pick the scrunched-up paper out and throw it up at him. Not hard enough. It twirls around and lands in my bucket. Pass me a coffee, eh Jan? No, I say, you can come down and get your own. C'mon, he says, just one little favour for an old old friend. I can't refuse him. I blush. I scramble down and step over to the stove. I feel shakey at all my edges. I hold my bum in. I straighten my shoulders. I try to pretend he means nothing to me at all. I bring the full mug to the counter. You still take both? I shout. Sure, he says, double everything. He pushes his hand down and I stretch mine out and up, up to those beautiful just slightly stubby fingers. Thanks, he says, see you later.

I check the kettle and fill it and put it on. I empty my bucket in one sink and fill it in the other and dump in more Mr Clean. What next? The crockery shelves. Do I have to take everything out? I won't get through this and the galley walls and the whole mess in an hour if I do. I won't. I'll leave it till we're using most of the dishes then it'll be easy to lift the rest and do the insides, but that's no good, Coco will be slicing turkey and Puppi will be running through but, what the hell, I'll do the outsides and the bottom now and figure out when to do the insides later. It's not hard, nothing is sooty, there's just a thin layer of grease that can't be seen but is there. There. I stroke down to wash, wring out the rag, up to rinse, and occasionally swirl where fingers, oily male fingers, have touched. Down one slat, down the other, swish at the bottom, rinse the rag, wring into the bucket, then up one slat and down the other. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . done. Then the whole of the under. I stand on the deck and tackle it like I'm in a contest: who can, who can the fastest clean this board? I can, I can the fastest, I am the only one here. I empty the bucket again and do the slats over on the other side of the mess entrance where the mugs are. Do the under. And then over the top of the walk-in and down that wall toward the galley bucket.

*Shit*, it's full. Well I can't empty it now cause we're in port. I pull it out in front of the sink so I can get in behind. I lift the gukky cardboard and lean it on the walk-in door. The wall is filthy. A brush.



Use a brush. No. SOS. I grab the SOS. Isn't that a nautical term? The first one gumps up. I use more, more, more: all soapy, all gooey, but the crud is coming off. Come off, I say, beans, egg-yolk, sausage-fat, off, off, off. Talking to yourself, eh? says Beebo. What? I say. I can't get this stupid junk off. Don't worry about it, he says. No, it's got to come off, I say. He looks at me and laughs. It's very important, I shout to him, it's gotta come off. You're serious about dirt, eh Jan? Yes, I say very definitely and loud, *it's gotta come off*.

He picks up the cardboard, shoves it under where the mugs are, and goes into the walk-in while I rub and rub. He comes out with bread, onions, tomatoes and a cucumber and drops them on the counter. We're going to be having mugup, he says, you wanna come sit down with us? I can't, I say as a piece of paint comes off with the yolk. I want to get this done. You know what they say, he says, all work and no play makes . . . how does it go? I look up at him from my corner and see the gucky cardboard against the wall I just cleaned. I don't know, I say, it has 'dull' in it. He empties the coffee grounds in the bucket next to my bum. You wanna sandwich? he says, I'll make you a sandwich. No thanks, I shout to the wall, *shit*, the paint's all coming off. Take it easy, he says. I turn round to him and look straight up and over into his eyes. You look good when you get mad, Jan, yeah, you look good. I don't care how I look, I say. Sure you do, he says, sure you do.

He makes the coffee and I throw the last SOS pad into the bucket. I empty my pail in the sink. You shouldn't do that there, says Lefty from behind me. Why? I turn around and shout to him. He comes right up to me and touches my bust with his chest. Cause you'll clog it, sweetheart. I'm not your sweetheart, I say as my back digs into the metal of the sink, and stop feeling me. My, my, he says, boy are you hot. And I'm not a boy either, I shout as I shove him. Getting horny, eh? he says holding both my wrists. Not for you, I say into his mouth. C'mon lad, says Jock, can't you see you're not wanted? Give her time, says Lefty as he lets go, give her time. He snatches an onion from off the counter and starts to bite it. I turn from them and finish rinsing the narrow (it's only two feet wide) wall as the three of them make toast and sandwiches.

I haul the galley-bucket back into its space and pick up the cardboard that Beebo got for me a couple of days ago from someone on the dock after he realized I really didnt have any cause Ken and I threw them all over the first night out. I put it (all splattered and greasy on both sides) back to protect the bulkhead from more junk more fat more leftovers. Sure you wont change yer mind, Jan? says Beebo as he slaps HP sauce on a sandwich of beef sausage, onion, mustard, tomato, pickle and god knows what else — there's no way that's going to hold together. No, I hesitate. C'mon, says Lefty, I poured you a coffee. *Lefty poured me coffee?* He is standing next to the stove, two mugs in one hand and an onion-green-pepper-left-over-bacon sandwich in the other. You Promise you wont bother me, I say. Do *I* bother you? he says and laughs. You know what I mean, I shout back. I know, he says, what do you take me for? Just what you are, I shout and Beebo and Jock laugh. Lefty Quinton's no fool, he says to all of us. I walk out. No woman is bothered unless she wants to be, he says to them.

Laughing they pass me and I just stand there inside the mess. What did you say? I say to him. I'm just teasing, he says. I know that, I say with my hands on my hips. Well sit down then, he says, get a load off. I'm not sitting, Lefty Quinton, till I find out where *you're* sitting. Jesus F. Christ, he says and slams my coffee down on the end at Buck's place, then he brushes past me and goes to the outside far end near the door so Beebo's between us. Well, how do you like boat life? says Beebo to me. I just snicker. That's no answer, he says, we want to know. Everyone's arms are in the center grabbing cream and sugar and honey. We're waiting, lass, says Jock. It's a lotta work, I say, that's for sure . . . uhh . . . how come Ken's not here? Still washing up, says Beebo. That big monkey's been 'washing up' for a *long* time, says Jock. Christ, I think, is that where he took the coffee? Eh, lass, says Jock, you didnt tell us.



I like it, I say. You like us? says Lefty. Sure I do, I say, especially when there's someone between us. The others smile. We were wondering, says Beebo, what you did at university. My god, how do I answer that. Not much, I say, well it's kinda hard to describe in just a couple of minutes. Try, Beebo says. I dont want to, I say, it's, it's, it's, well it's different than school and way different than here. They're all looking at me as they chomp their sandwiches and I feel funny, I want to say I didnt like it at all but that's not entirely true. I read stuff I'd never read if I didnt go there, I say, and I went to lectures and plays and poetry readings. You read poetry? says Lefty. Sure, I say. They look incredulous, someone they know reads poetry? I like it, I say, I go to readings where poets read their own works aloud. You mean people pay to listen to some 'guy' recite about flowers and bees and love and all that stuff? says Beebo. Sure, I say, but it's usually free, it's good you know, it's not, well it's not about the flowers and bees and it's not like what you think poetry is, it's, well it's real. They laugh but with a type of curiosity. Give us some, says Beebo. Now? Why not? he says.

Let's see, I say, uuuhh. (The first lines that come are Corso's, *Should I get married, Should I be good? / Astound the girl next door / with my velvt suit and faustus hood?*, but that's all I know of it and for sure they'd laugh at the velvet. I think of William's *The Red Wheelbarrow* and Ginsberg's *Howl* — but I dont know much of that one either.) I know, I say, I only know a few lines. Say them, says Beebo. There's a man named Charles Olson who's a big, big guy and lives in Gloucester, Massachusetts, he wrote this:

*to dream takes no effort  
to think is easy  
to act is more difficult  
but for a man to act after he has taken thought, this!  
is the most difficult thing of all.*

*That's poetry?* says Lefty. Yeah, I say. I like that, says Beebo, do it again, why dont you? You mean it? Yeah. And I do, more certain this time, and just as I get to *for a man to act*, Ken steps in. I hesitate. Dont stop, Jan, says Beebo. *But for a man to act after he has taken thought, this! / is the most difficult thing of all.* Ken smiles at me and goes into the gallery. What are they like? says Lefty suspiciously. The

poets? I say. He nods. They're just like everyone else, I say, but I know it isn't true and it isn't what he's asking; they talk *a lot*, I say and I know that's true but doesn't say much to him; you wouldn't be able to pick one out on the street or in the pub, I say, they're tall, they're small, they're attractive, they're gangly, some are gay, if that's what you mean, but I bet you wouldn't be able to tell. I can always tell that, Lefty says in a mocking queer tone. I know at least one you couldn't, I say, he's a bit bigger than you and works in a warehouse for the I.L.W.U. Really? says Beebo. Sure, I say, poets are doctors and millworkers and insurance salesmen and teachers and carpenters and peapickers and almost everything cause nobody or hardly anybody can live off writing. That so? says Beebo. Yeah, I say. Any seamen? he asks.

I think Olson fished, I say, and Jack Kerouac worked in the merchant marine, but, I know — he's not a poet but he wrote all sorts of good fiction — you ever heard of Joseph Conrad? No one has. Well you might like him, he wrote *The Nigger of the Narciscus* and *Typhoon* and *Lord Jim* and many more. What's going on here? says Ken, leaning against the mess entrance. Jan's giving us a lesson, says Beebo. No I'm not, I say but I shut up. Ken comes and sits on the bench next to me and Jock. Did you ever go to one of these here

poetry readings? asks Beebo. Sure, he says. He doesnt look embarrassed or anything. What do you do there, lad? asks Jock. I listen, he says, everyone listens. That's not my idea of fun, says Lefty. Poems *can* be funny, says Ken, like Ferlinghetti's, you ever read about him? No one has. He's got a poem, says Ken, that'd make you split your gut, it's about a dog pissing and walking his way around San Francisco; he's got another one about underwear that . . . Underwear, interrupts Beebo, poets write about underwear?

It's not *just* underwear, is it Jan? it's about, you might say, the underwear symbolizes everything, Ken says. I dont like his tone when he says 'symbolizes' cause I think of it as a way/a word that belongs to university, but I also dont like it cause he's asking for help by looking straight at me. It starts off like this, I say:

*I didnt get much sleep last night  
thinking about underwear.*

But then he brings all sorts of things in, the pope, and underground movements and Lady Macbeth and Castro and everyone wears underwear and it's, I dont know *how* to describe it, but it's funny and serious at the same time. Underwear, says Lefty, what a subject, I bet I could tell that poet a thing or two about underwear he's never heard of. I betcha could, I say and get up.

Dont go, says Beebo. I want to get me work done, I say to him and almost apologize to all of them. It's that time, says Jock looking at Ken who's just begun, but what I cant figure is why the old man called an early breakfast when we have so little to unload. He did it cause he didnt want us to sleep, says Lefty. That's right, says Beebo,



he's pissed off, excuse me Jan, he's angry cause he thinks we stalled at Zeballos so you would get another night lunch. So we did, says Lefty, we could have had that done. What's that? I ask. It's this way, says Beebo, we went just a little slow, not much mind you, but we stalled a bit so you and Coco would get more overtime. Really? I say. Yes, Beebo says. And both he and Lefty smile but Ken, who wasn't there, and Jock, who didn't come in to eat the second time either or maybe was knocked-off early, don't. Thanks, I say to Lefty and Beebo, you didn't have to do that though, I think Coco was very tired and it made no difference to me. Every little bit counts, says Beebo as he leans over to pick up Jock's mug and plate. He then follows me into the galley and places them on the counter as I bend to scrub again.