



Source: Nicholas Watt, 'Ban on genocide talks earns rebuke from EU', *The Guardian online*, 24/09/05.

Tags: [disenchantment](#), [travel](#), [water](#)

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It seemed not that long ago at all since he passed this place. He was ram-shackled with the hatred of a lonely old man, whiskey breathed and dragging his steel caps as if each step were to be the last. The gravel was still embedded in the crevices of his palms. He had fallen too many times before, but knew not of the damage it had done. His forehead carried 56 years of sweat that now stained his furrows. The dry winds had pierced holes in his stubble.

Life was the undulating crests that fought for their place in the Atlantic Ocean, Norwegian and North Seas. Born on board, but dying on land. It wasn't hard to remember his youth in the Shetland Islands. His memory was impeccable. There had been an echo in his every move, awakening each morning on a trawler with sleep in his eyes, dredging the beds below.

It was much colder then of course. The razorbills and gannets made romantic gestures on their precarious perches out there amongst the ledges of the Sumburgh Head. They whispered calls of devotion to one another and danced with their wings in the wind from season to season. He dreamed of that wind that only once took him on flight in an old RAF biplane fighter. For that moment he was taller than all and answering to neither of them.

It was terribly difficult to please them both. For a long while now he had heard the tight moans of the others' abhorrence. Only the collision of worn sailing lines and mast could swallow the daily bickering. With yet another provocation, he was stricken for life. Each night as he bowed his nape over a pail of menthol and hot water, he would breathe the scents of a town celebrating life under the sun. And as he gulped down a thimble of wild cherry bark, he would taste the delights of their fresh fruit and vegetables. It took little to persuade him to jump the £10 boat.

He arrived in the small port of Ulladulla in the early 1950s, where he made a small immigration hostel his home with the kind help of its owner. His story was short, and drawn for only a select few as time and effort became scarce through impending work. They were out at sea before dawn and returned after dusk, for days at a time. Although older and stronger now than he had ever been, his body was wearing thin and wiry and tendon-like in appearance. His belly grew bloated, and his skin was sea dry and sagging from its bones.

The day came where he was no longer of use on deck. He was run aground. He had walked the timber skirts of one old girl to another for over four decades. They had told him there was to be revelry for his dues that night.

The sodden bar mat soaked his shirt at the elbows, as he chewed scales from under his nails. His teeth were stained yellow from rancid coffee and rolling tobacco of the day gone by. His feet barely touched the ground from his stool. But it was his delight to sit amongst the flurry of the town hype in that little nest and consider the days ahead.

After the stragglers had passed and the nightcaps worn thin, he made for the door and left. It was a short stroll to his room. The air was sterile outside, but he had a lump in his throat. Warm saliva swelled in his mouth, and he sat.

With his oiled dungarees swung down behind the bench edge, Dughall reached for his pocket, poured a small dram into his tin cup and drank. His loose lips had sunk his ship for the final time. Soon, he lay there having never uttered a word. He lay there having never danced with the wind in his wings. He lay there having never joined the seabirds in mocking the fishermen below.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by David Hagger.*