



Oyster-boats go out to the beds off Stewart Island.

the wheel-house and wished that our stomachs were as steady as the mate's hand on the wheel. He'd been at sea as long as Hans, and most of the time with him as ship mate "dredgin' oysters." Both men were near seventy, but didn't look a day over forty. A hard life but a healthy one.

When the skipper came up Jimmy went down for his breakfast. We stayed in the wheel-house watching the white-capped waves whisk past and keeping our thoughts turned from bacon and eggs spluttering in a pan. It wasn't any use. We watched the waves from closer quarters.

As first light came up over Bluff, now far behind us, we neared the oyster-beds and thought of other steadier, cosier cots which the landlubbers were just leaving. We even envied the oyster his.

The dark cloud-bank ahead promised rain. It also meant cloud over Stewart Island and a slim chance of picking up the landmarks that would give the skipper his bearing on the oyster-beds. To get that bearing he needed to line up two separate sets of points on land. Where those imaginary lines converged his quarry would be lying snugly on the ocean-floor. But unless the weather cleared sufficiently for the landmarks to be accurately sighted that quarry would probably continue to lie snug and safe. We wished the defenceless oyster no harm. We wished we'd stayed at home.

Rain began to splutter on the decks. The skipper grunted: "We're about there." His watch said 0745. The red glow in the east said breakfast in bed for some lucky people. Maybe fried oysters. Little would they guess the cost.

The boat hove to. Stewart Island, the lower slopes of the Saddle white with snow, looked grim and cold in the half-light. The skipper cursed the cloud bank quietly, while the boat wallowed. A quarter of an hour passed, and the light improved a little. Away to our starboard we could see other ships of the fleet waiting patiently for a break in the weather, a chance to pick up their bearings and begin work. The cloud hung heavy on the Saddle. The boat pitched and rolled as uneasily as our stomachs. The crew lit smokes and waited. The skipper cursed.

0815 and no sign of the hoped-for break. "We'll chance it," said the skipper, "and drop a dredge." A rattle of the winch, and the iron and rope mesh dredge, suspended by a block from its derrick, swung out from the port rail. An iron plate or bit 10 ft. long forms the lower jaw of the dredge. Behind it runs a few feet of steel ring-mesh and behind that again billows out a bag of rope mesh looped back to the iron bit, but leaving a 2-ft. wide mouth to collect the oysters. The mesh bag is as wide as the iron jaw and holds a sack or two of oysters.

The heavy bit scrapes along the ocean-bed, the oysters roll over it and over the steel mesh dragging behind, and are caught in the looped bag. Small shells will fall through the $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. mesh, but any decent-sized oyster will be held. These dredges are expensive pieces of equipment and very strong. The rope mesh is made from special fishing-line. The whole costs over £70.

Each boat carries two such dredges swung out on derricks from a strongly-stayed mast. They are always on the