

Brendan? Lovely chap

BRENDAN had been at sea man and boy. And that made it all so silly. He'd known no other life, but was the modest kind, and if he and his shipmates had ever been close to death he didn't say. He joined us here up from the coast some years ago. He'd broken his leg somewhere off the Antilles and the fracture would not heal. The company doctor (who knew Brendan was now of no further use) advised him to retire and settle down, and ensured the company was generous paying him off. With his money, Brendan bought the hut in the hills where Drogo had lived.

Why he chose to live so far from us we don't know, because every day we saw him, on one errand or such, and every night he was with us in Pat's bar. It was some hike a midnight back to the hut, but he took it every night, sober or drunk.

We got to know Brendan in part, though none of us was close to him or each other. The jokes we told over our beer, profane, ribald or other, made us feel we were close, but none would or could talk of a private hurt and none would dare enquire. So of Brendan we knew just a little.

Each autumn brought a stormy season, but this storm was greater than most had seen for many a year. Stay here tonight, we told Brendan, Pat will let you sleep under a table. But, now, he said, no, he was off home, and just before midnight off he stumbled, into the gale and rain, back to Drogo's hut and his bed.

The constable found his body a mile away in the ditch, face down in the water. Probably taking a piss, the constable said, and probably slipped. When we buried him we found we did not even know his second name.