

Black Ball Line

It's on the Black Ball you'll sign your life away
You'll break your back, boys, for bad food and worse pay
You'll sign on the packet in Liverpool town
And you'll soon rue the day that you left solid ground

*On the Black Ball Line, on the Black Ball Line
Where the skipper always smiles, and the weather's always fine
So it's in through the channel, and it's out on the brine
I have worked my life away on the Black Ball Line*

It's dreadful hard usage from morning till night
And you'll be hard at work long before the first light
And if you gets tired and makes but a sound
The mate he will curse you and he'll knock you down

Chorus

The old man in his cabin drinks brandy and wine
You asks for your pay and he tells you that's fine
You buy your boots in the spring, buy your jacket in the fall
When you've paid for your whiskey, you've none left at all

Chorus

When first I signed on I was still in my prime
And I gave my best years to the damn Black Ball line
I gave them three decades, I worked hard and well
And now I can't work, and they says, "go to hell"

Chorus

Composed by: Alex Sturbaum

Appears on *River Run Wide*

A song about the packet steamers that used to run between New York and Liverpool, carrying mail and passengers across the Atlantic. The Black Ball Line maintained its efficient schedule with brutal treatment of its crews; among sailors, the packets were referred to as "blood boats". The melody of the verses is borrowed from Keith Murphy's version of the traditional Newfoundland song "Hard Times".