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# A Single Wave

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stories of storms and survival

Webb Chiles

Also by Webb Chiles

Storm Passage

The Open Boat

The Ocean Waits

Return to the Sea

The Fifth Circle

Shadows

First published 1999 by Sheridan House Inc. 145  
Palisade Street Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Chiles, Webb.

A single wave : stories of storms and survival / Webb Chiles.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-57409-072-0 (alk. paper)

1.Chiles, Webb. 2.Voyagesaroundtheworld. I.Title. G420.C475A3 1999  
910.4'5'092—dc21 99-10828

CIP

ISBN 1-57409-072-0

To

Carol,  
the love I hoped for  
and to  
Bill and Hemmie Gilmore,  
whose kindness was extraordinary  
but for them was only normal

A ship in port is safe, but that's not what ships are built for.  
—Grace Murray Hopper

My soul, your voyages have been your native land.

—Nikos Kazantzakis

Curtis probably never found out either why Two Whistles, a Crow chief, had a crow on his head when Curtis photographed him, because after thirty-three years in the field taking photos of the Indians he went crazy and was placed in an asylum. When they let him go he went down to Old Mexico and looked for gold, with a diffidence in recovery that characterized the behavior of many great men—let's go to the edge and jump off again.

—Jim Harrison, DAHLVA

I am, I believe, following the clear path of my fate. Always to be pushing out like this, beyond what I know cannot be limits—what else should a man's life be? Especially an old man who has, by a clear stroke of fortune, been violently freed of the comfortable securities that make old men happy to sink into blindness, deafness, the paralysis of all desire, feeling, will. What else should our lives be but a continual series of beginnings, of painful settings out into the unknown, pushing off from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of what we have not yet become, except in dreams that blow in from out there bearing the fragrance of islands we have not sighted.

—David Malouf, AN IMAGINARY LIFE

A sailor is an artist whose medium is the wind.

—Webb Chiles

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# FOREWARD

I was just rereading my correspondence with Webb Chiles, which dates back to 1976. The hundreds of letters between us record life lived at a level of intensity most people couldn't sustain. More than anyone I've ever met, Webb seeks to establish his limits. The life direction has nothing to do with morality or judgement. It has to do with a wish to measure endurance. Webb wants to know what his mind and body can take—how much, for how long.

Webb's first piece, published in the July 1977 issue of *SAIL*, sets the proper tone for his subsequent 22 years: "Saturday morning, November 2, 1974, I left San Diego, California, to sail around the world without an engine and alone as quickly as possible. I was born for this moment and all the days ahead. I am about to undergo an ordeal. But I have no illusions. I expect an ordeal, an ordeal of grandeur."

In this book the reader begins to understand an extraordinary character, what we say about special boats in the sailing business, a 'one-of-a-kind'. What especially sets Webb apart from other extraordinary characters is his ability to write about what is happening within and without himself with objective clarity, as if he were watching someone else.

Take his first ordeal, for example. He tried three times before he made it around Cape Horn for the first time. He finally rounded it to set a then world record for the fastest solo circumnavigation in a monohull. As he says in a letter to me dated May 11, 1982: "The ocean has always been for me a testing place for the spirit." And that was the grandeur in the ordeal—getting high marks on the test, by his own system of scoring.

Reading the *EGREGIOUS* chapters in this book the reader first sees Webb's ability to watch himself at work. On his third try for Cape Horn his hull cracked in a gale near the Equator. So he bailed his way east through cyclones, through capsizes, through cold and wet terror. Never does he quite lose his sense of humor; as he remarks at one point, "...for a hot shower and an uninterrupted night's sleep, I would gladly sell my somewhat tarnished soul. The Devil is never around when you really want him."

Webb tested his spirit again by setting off in 1978 to circumnavigate the world in an 18-foot, 9-inch undecked yawl. He named this British-built stock Drascombe Lugger, *CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE*, after the man who wrote a poem Webb admired. Not incidentally, Tichborne wrote the poem the night before he was executed. The only problem, Webb notes, was "fitting a nineteen-foot name on an eighteen-foot boat."

Webb set another record for being the first person to cross the Pacific in an open boat. His voyage across the Indian Ocean (4,058 miles from Singapore to Aden in 47 days) is the longest nonstop passage in an open boat. People like Webb—and there aren't very many—always astonish me. Sometimes on purpose, sometimes almost in spite of himself, Webb Chiles rubs against the edges of risk. With his eyes open he pushes at life, and at death.

When he took off in the open boat, we at SAIL worried about the 'stunt' factor. Should we publish stories by this man? Was this sailing or was it circus performing? He carried no flares, no safety gear, no EPIRB in the little yawl. "I don't want people looking for me if I sink," he said. This was a man on his own, in every sense.

Although he loved CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE and thought her an excellent seaworthy craft, Webb came even closer to dying in the little yawl than he had in EGREGIOUS. On the way to Papua New Guinea from Fiji, CHIDIOCK is pitchpoled and swamped 300 miles west of Fiji and Webb is adrift for two weeks. Finally he reaches Vanuatu and rows through breaking waves over a reef to land on a beach, more or less intact. Indefatigable as ever, he repairs the boat and sails on.

Then, when beating up the Red Sea, he goes aground on a reef in Saudi Arabia, is arrested, and jailed as a spy. He is finally released, but the Saudis keep the boat. He gets another Drascombe Lugger in England, ships it to Egypt, and then sails down the Red Sea to pick up CHIDIOCK's track. He completed his second circumnavigation aboard CHIDIOCK II for the most part, but not entirely. The boat was driven ashore in the Canary Islands and, with typical Chiles unpredictability, he decided to leave her there.

In the meantime, overlapping with the CHIDIOCK saga, in 1983 he bought RESURGAM, a 36-foot Sparkman & Stevens-designed sloop, and completed his third circumnavigation in her, closing the circle in the Marquesas Islands.

He continued sailing in RESURGAM west to Australia, and then east, returning to Cape Horn, the scene of his terrible trials in EGREGIOUS. Then he sailed to Uruguay, Rio de Janeiro, on up to the Caribbean and to Florida. Once you've returned to the spot—Cape Horn—where for the first time you were able to stop for a moment emotionally stilled, what do you do next? Where do you go?

What Webb did was observe his boat sinking. In August 1992, about 10 miles off Fort Lauderdale, he "pulled the plug at midnight," watched RESURGAM go down, and then he began swimming. Eventually he found himself swimming for his life, in both senses—emotional and physical. He was in the water for 26 hours without a life jacket before reaching an anchored fishing boat. As he says, the "animal in myself" kept him alive. These were the depths that were left to him.

This chapter, 'Swimming', is perhaps the most moving in the book. Even at the edge of sanity, Webb watches himself watching his beloved boat—this was the boat he loved over all others—sinking, murdered by his own hand. Even here, his black humor is alive: The engine was almost brand-new. I had thought when we re-powered in Australia that this engine should last the rest of my life, and so it would.”

Webb is very strong, and the epilogue of his book concerns itself with his returning to life. With his last money he buys HAWKE and in 1993 sails from New York to Key West, crossing RESURGAM's track.

Now Webb lives in Boston, aboard the renamed THE HAWKE OF TUONELA, where he is outfitting her so he can resume his fourth circumnavigation. This is the plan. And so far, in all but one instance, Webb has done what he planned.

Patience Wales

SAIL MAGAZINE

1998

# INTRODUCTION

Tolstoy begins *ANNA KARENINA* by declaring that every happy family is alike, but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

I don't know if there are more happy than unhappy families. Perhaps there are. But at sea there are certainly many more pleasant, uneventful days than there are storms. Even at Cape Horn in the stormiest season, gales are likely only one day out of three. A peculiarity of human nature is that no one much cares to read about happy families or fine sailing.

Not long ago I happened across a sentence in an article by Rod Kulbach. In passing Mr. Kulbach wrote: "I am awed by Webb Chiles's 'tales of survival'." This caused me to realize that no matter how I view my life, I am best known for those 'tales of survival'.

So here are the dramatic highlights of two decades in three boats: EGREGIOUS, a 37-foot cutter; CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE, an 18-foot open undecked yawl; and RESURGAM, a 36-foot sloop. In these boats I made more than three circumnavigations, twice alone, twice setting world records, twice via Cape Horn, which I was the first American to round alone.

The stories include capsizes in a cyclone in the Tasman and in a storm in the Southern Ocean; drifting for two weeks and three hundred miles in the South Pacific after a swamping west of Fiji; a twenty-six hour swim in the Gulf Stream covering about one hundred and thirty miles after a sinking off Florida; and enough other troubles in exotic climes from Tahiti to the Red Sea to South Africa to Bali to New Jersey to cause one to take a serious interest in gardening.

You will not find any sea monsters here, or even monstrous waves. Most people, certainly most sailors, exaggerate, perhaps forgivably because of heightened emotions and limited experience, perhaps less forgivably because of inherent mendacity. I take pride in not exaggerating. Whenever possible I have sought objective reports, as I did of Cyclone Colin in the meteorological office in Auckland, New Zealand.

As those few who have sailed with me know, if anything I underestimate. I do not dispute that fifty or sixty foot waves can exist. I just don't claim to have seen one. The biggest waves in these pages are estimated at twenty to thirty feet. They may have been more. But that is big enough.

What you will find here is life which can change very quickly into a struggle for survival, sometimes without warning, sometimes in the passing of a single wave.

As I write this I am fifty-six years old. I come from lines of mostly only children. It is very odd that I am the first man in my family in several generations to have reached even age forty, for I am the one who took the greatest risks.

Not later than three years from now, before my sixtieth birthday, I will resume my fourth circumnavigation, long interrupted by the sinking of RESURGAM. I will sail south to Africa and east to Australia, where I will complete this circle when I reach Sydney, Australia. Gardening pales.

Aboard THE HAWKE OF TUONELA

Boston Harbor

March 14, 1998

a note on this edition

In preparing this edition of A SINGLE WAVE I have permitted myself to rewrite, an indulgence I resisted in the e-editions of my earlier books because they are original sources which I have left true to their times, although there are parts of them that I would write differently now.

While I have changed words and sentences here and there, most of that rewriting has been in the form of cuts.

Antoine Saint-Exupéry said of aircraft design that perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing more to remove. I think that is true of writing, too.

When A SINGLE WAVE was first published in 1999, I had completed three circumnavigations. Now, in a few days I will fly back to New Zealand and GANNET, my ultra-light Moore 24, to resume my sixth.

The defining responsibility of the artist is to go to the edge of human experience and send back reports. Here are some of my reports. More can be found at [www.inthepresentsea.com](http://www.inthepresentsea.com).

Evanston, Illinois

February 3, 2016



EGREGIOUS 1974-1976

EGREGIOUS was a stock American boat, an Ericson 37, designed to race under the IOR, the rule in use in the 1970s. I had the builders modify her in various ways during construction in 1973. She had no engine, no lifelines, and in a futile effort to prevent potential leaks, no through-hull fittings below the waterline. The head was a bucket; the galley drained into another bucket. Yet her hull cracked at sea and I bailed more than seven tons of water from her every day for months.

The two most significant technological advances in sailing made during the past twenty-five years have been jib-furling gear and Global Positioning Satellite navigation. I had neither aboard EGREGIOUS. GPS did not exist, and jib-furling gear was new and unproven. I rigged EGREGIOUS as a cutter. In the Roaring Forties I sailed her with a working jib and a storm jib set as a staysail. In heavy weather I was able to lower the sails and lash them to the deck, rather than have to make complete sail changes.

I navigated with a secondhand World War II U.S. Navy sextant and time signals obtained from the BBC. Quartz watches were still in the future.

Those who know the word *egregious* are probably familiar with its modern definition, ‘flagrantly bad’. A second meaning preceding egalitarianism is ‘distinguished or outstandingly good’. I chose the name because of its Latin roots, ‘out or away from the herd’.

Twenty-five years ago, Cape Horn was more remote than it is today—not of course in distance, but in mind—yet even today far more people have climbed Mount Everest than have sailed alone around Cape Horn. I was the first person ever even to try to sail for the Horn alone from California and one of the first to circumnavigate in a modern racing boat with a fin keel and spade rudder. In EGREGIOUS I completed a two-stop solo circumnavigation in what was then world record time, 203 sailing days, breaking the former record of 226 days set by Francis Chichester.

I sought no sponsorship; I hired no public relations agent; I called no press conferences. I did not even notify any breweries, although Guinness somehow heard of the voyage and included me for a while in their book of records. I had not sailed to impress others, but to learn something of the sea and of myself.

During that voyage, as well as more than twelve thousand miles in two earlier unsuccessful attempts, EGREGIOUS, the boat, lived up to both of the antithetical definitions of her name.



## **1973**

**September**, took delivery of EGREGIOUS from builder

## **1974**

**November 2**, sailed from San Diego, California for first attempted U.S. solo circumnavigation via Cape Horn

**November 21**, sustained rigging damage near the Equator; turned downwind to Tahiti for repairs

**December 5**, arrived Tahiti

**December 23**, repairs made, sailed from Tahiti for Cape Horn

## **1975**

**January 5**, rigging again damaged, changed course to return to San Diego for definitive repairs

**March 6**, arrived San Diego

**October 18**, again sailed from San Diego for Cape Horn

**November 1**, hull cracked in gale near the Equator

**December 12**, became first American to round Cape Horn alone

## **1976**

**January 21**, capsized in Southern Ocean

**February 13**, strongest wind ever experienced south of Australia

**March 5**, cyclone in Tasman Sea

**March 16**, arrived Auckland, New Zealand

**May 7**, after repairs, sailed from Auckland for Tahiti

**May 26**, arrived Tahiti

**August 29**, sailed from Tahiti for San Diego

**October 1**, arrived San Diego, completing two-step circumnavigation in what was then world record time of 203 sailing days

# 1 Turning away

On November 2, 1974, I sailed from San Diego for Cape Horn.

*'I was born for this,'* I wrote in my logbook, and I believe that I was. Not specifically to sail to Cape Horn—that was a chance of time and timing—but to have sought such a challenge, to have explored whatever the unknown was during my life.

The answer to the question why some people do such things is, like most answers about human behavior, Darwinian, as is that the question is asked in the first place. Most people most of the time seek the safety and stability necessary to perpetuate the species, but the species also needs a few originals—artists and explorers who are radical experiments—in order to adapt. That most such radical experiments end in failure is mathematically certain.

I expected an ordeal. I even wanted an ordeal. If the voyage were easy, someone else would have already made it and I would not learn anything worthwhile. I did not expect the ordeal I had. I did not expect to have to turn away from Cape Horn so soon.

*'I am sailing to Tahiti,'* I wrote sadly in the logbook in the late afternoon of November 21, 1974.

Tahiti has been the South Pacific dream since Captain Cook. It has often been my dream, but it was not then. I was twenty days out of San Diego bound for Cape Horn. And it was strange to sit in the cockpit that evening and sail into the setting sun, when the sun should have been on the starboard beam.

We were at 11°S, 122°W. Cape Horn was four thousand miles to the south and east; Tahiti was almost two thousand miles west, completely the wrong direction, but the closest place downwind where I could hope to make repairs to the rudder and the rig.

I concluded the entry, *'This is a bitter day.'*

The sea and solitude were new to me. I was experiencing them with fresh eyes and openness. I had owned and lived on several boats during the preceding six years, and I had made a couple of five hundred mile passages along the Californian and Mexican coasts, one of them nonstop and alone. I was technically a good sailor. I routinely sailed the engineless 37-foot EGREGIOUS in and out of her marina slip and everywhere else. But you do not

know the sea until you make long passages offshore. And you do not know solitude until you spend months, and for me ultimately years, alone.

Except for my disappointment, it was not a difficult decision.

The rudder had been grinding and moaning almost from the moment we sailed out of San Diego Bay. It had never made such sounds before, and this bothered me, as did the amount of water I was finding in the bilge of a boat that had no through-hull fittings below the waterline. But those problems would not have caused me to change course.

When you really know a boat, you sail her by feel—the angle of heel, the motion through or off the waves—and below deck, more than I would have expected, by sound. In later years on other boats, I discovered that I would lose touch with what was happening outside while listening to music in the cabin which blocked the constant little sounds of hull and water and wind and rig.

The sounds on EGREGIOUS, however, were not subtle.

At about 10:15 the preceding night I was awakened by a hard, clear metallic crack. I did not have to move from my berth to find the trouble. A few feet away from me the mast was jolting to and fro inside the dark cabin, banging against the deck opening. I lit a kerosene lamp and saw that the two half-inch stainless steel bolts securing the mast to the flange near the overhead were both broken. EGREGIOUS was a stock boat and, as had just been proven, the designer made some engineering errors. Too many yacht designers haven't put in their sea time.

I climbed into the cockpit, disengaged the steering vane, brought the bow through the wind and hove to. My only thought was of how I could steady the mast enough so we could turn back south.

In the dim light of EGREGIOUS's kerosene lamps, I could do little. We remained hove to until dawn, when I sawed some wooden wedges and drove them around the mast. This took several hours, because despite being hove to, we were thrown about considerably by ten-foot waves and forty-knot wind, which was increasing in force. It was 11:00 a.m. before I turned us south again.

Within a few hours, several of the wedges had been pulverized and had to be replaced. After a rest from sawing, I also lashed the mast inside the cabin to the aluminum flanges, which helped, although the line stretched and had to be re-tightened frequently.

With the mast at least momentarily under control, I had time to worry about the bilge again. I had taught myself to sail on San Francisco Bay and had been in gail force winds before, including off California's Point Conceptions—called "The Cape Horn of the Pacific

Coast', but not by anyone who has been to Cape Horn. This was my first full mid-ocean gale. I simply could not believe that all that water in the bilge was normal. There had to be a leak in the hull. When I unscrewed the liner beneath the sink, I thought I had found it. Water seemed to be seeping under a fiberglass support. Although I couldn't do anything about it, I felt better thinking that at least I knew the source.

I went back up on deck to watch the seas rush toward us. I was admiring the way EGREGIOUS sped through them, when something about the rigging caught my eye. The port lower shroud—the one to windward on the cutter's double-spreader rig—was peculiarly slack. I followed it upward and saw that one of the tangs securing it to the mast was broken. It was a two-part tang, so the shroud had not fallen; but there was no longer any question of driving on for four thousand miles, about half to windward, and then facing Cape Horn. As I watched, the shroud snapped taut. The strain on the remaining half tang was an off-center twist. It could not last long.

We were in an empty part of the ocean. On a traditional trade wind circumnavigation, the longest passage a sailor has to make is the one from North or Central American to French Polynesia. Many years later, in the Whaling Museum on Nantucket Island, I saw a display about a whaling ship that sank last century near EGREGIOUS's position. All the crew were lost when, for some inexplicable reason, the captain tried to go east in his longboats. South America was closer to him and to me, but to windward. After only twenty days, I knew better. So reluctantly I turned toward paradise.

Tahiti is paradise. Not Tahiti itself, which is too developed, but the other Society Islands, particularly Moorea and Bora-Bora. But my spirits were low as we headed west.

The next morning I seriously considered turning around and trying for Valparaiso. I reread the Sailing Directions and pilot charts and recalculated distances. The problem with Tahiti was that it was four thousand miles—two thousand there and two thousand back—in the wrong direction. But I knew that ultimately the problem with Valparaiso—that it was to windward—was greater. There was no chance we could get there without being dismasted.

I had never considered having to put in at Tahiti and had no detailed chart of the area, as I did of Cape Town and Australia, which I had considered likely ports in case of damage. Without any chart other than the general one of the Pacific Ocean, I had to sail west keeping south of the Marquesas and north of the Tuamotus, also known as the Dangerous Archipelago because they are low islands with unpredictable currents, until I was almost due north of Tahiti and would have clear water to Papeete.

The gale continued for two more days, but the difference between beating and reaching is tremendous. The putative leak was reduced to negligible proportions, which

should have told me that in fact there was no leak. Much more water than a sailor expects finds its way into the bilge beating to windward in heavy weather.

The rudder still groaned. Small cracks appeared in the deck around the port side of the mast. The remaining half tang was still to windward, but I had repositioned various halyards and the topping lift and running backstays, and the strain was significantly reduced.

Before the gale ended I had adapted to the inevitable. I would sail EGREGIOUS to Papeete as quickly as caution permitted, get the boat hauled, do whatever was necessary to the rudder, check the hull, have new tangs and bolts made or sent by air from California, and make another attempt at the Horn, hopefully before the end of the year. Money was a problem. I didn't have much, and Tahiti was reputedly expensive. But I had enough to do whatever was necessary. I would worry about being broke at the end of the voyage.

When gentle trade winds returned, I even became bored. Ten knots on the beam, low seas, sunshine, was spinnaker weather; but EGREGIOUS limped slowly west under mainsail alone.

There are worse things than being bored. One of them is sprawling in an inflatable dinghy while the stern of your boat rises five feet above you and then fall six feet in a serious effort to impale you on the broken shaft of the self-steering vane. Another is to hammer your thumb rather than the chisel you are using while trying to remove a broken coupling.

One afternoon I was below, napping, sure in the false belief that nothing too bad ever happens on a boat in daytime, when I felt the mainsail gybe. The entire hull shook. I assumed that perhaps one of the control lines from the self-steering vane to the tiller had broken, but found instead when I went on deck that the servo-rudder was trailing along behind us.

At first this did not seem much of a problem. I had a spare coupling aboard, and a spare servo-rudder for that matter. But I soon learned that it was a big problem because part of the broken coupling could not, despite my best efforts, be removed from the shaft at sea. Reluctantly accepting the situation, I set the storm jib and ran the sheet aft to the tiller for self-steering. I had experimented with this in San Diego and knew it would work on a close to a broad reach.

The sea was extraordinarily grand the following day, blue-black with white breakers. Small puffs of cloud in the north and east gave way to great masses to the south and west. As usual the wind blew harder near sunset than it had during the day. We were slicing through the waves at seven to eight knots. Taken in themselves, the past hours could be counted

among the reasons I began the voyage. Yet I could not enjoy them. My concern about the mast increased rapidly. Nothing matters aboard a crippled boat except making port.

From within the cabin I sensed the growing wind. A few knots, the spare halyards vibrated. Another knot, the storm jib sheet snapped through the blocks leading it aft to the tiller. I rested my bare foot against the mast and felt it flex with each gust and wondered if each would be the one that would carry it away. Suddenly the storm jib collapsed, blanketed by the mainsail, and we rolled to port instead of starboard. My body tensed as I waited for the shock cords to bring the tiller to leeward before we gybed. a squeak came from the rigging. I stood and stared up through the clear skylight hatch at the mast. The lower shroud looked no worse. But nothing would break slowly. One instant it would be there, and the next the mast would be gone. I considered reefing the main, but to do so we would have to round up into the wind, which would be harder on the mast than continuing as we were. So we rushed on at eight knots, and I, who love to sail fast, only wished we would slow to six.

Another of our problems—I had become increasingly certain that the hull was not cracked—was solved when the tiller fell off. In another design and/or production failure, the fitting connecting the tiller to the head of the rudder shaft was not up to the task. It bent, wore away bolts, and eventually dropped into the cockpit. Naturally EGREGIOUS gybed, but the wind was not strong and the mast stayed up. I left the cutter hove to while I fitted some spare bolts. They were the same size as the old ones, but the moaning and grinding from the stern never returned.

I taught myself how to navigate, as I did how to sail, and there was negative proof that I knew what I was doing in the absence of land. If my positions were too far off, we would have already run into something. Still we had been out of sight of land for a month and almost five thousand miles, when on December 4, my running fix at noon put us west of Mataiva, the westernmost of the Tuamotus. I hardened up on the sails and turned south for the last three hundred miles to Tahiti. The night was pleasant with a gibbous moon. I spent most of it on deck just in case.

Just before 11:00 a.m. two mornings later a mountain peak rose from the sea off the port bow, precisely where I expected it to be. Under most conditions, Tahiti is an easy landfall. The island is forty miles long and 7,000 feet high and, with its neighbor, Moorea, only seven miles west and itself 4,000 feet high, makes a big target. With advances in technology, I used my sextant less after my first two circumnavigations. But that moment of my first landfall brought a lasting satisfaction that electronic navigation cannot provide.

I reached the pass through the reef into Papeete just before a spectacular sun set behind Moorea. I followed a local fishing boat into the lagoon, where some fellow sailors

took stern lines ashore and helped me maneuver EGREGIOUS into a Mediterranean-style tie off the Protestant church.

After I got the sails stowed and lines coiled and ate a can of stew, I pumped up the dinghy, rowed into the harbor, and drifted in the night. I looked back at EGREGIOUS. She was a lovely sight. I hoped, futilely as it turned out, that her troubles were over. I sat quietly, reluctant to return near the land. Automobiles moved on the street along the shore. A dog barked. Some girls sang as they walked past. Papeete even then had a population of 60,000 and was not a quiet place.

I rowed slowly back to the cutter and wandered restlessly. As I passed the compass I automatically checked our heading, but then realized that there was no need. It was 11:00 p.m. At sea I would have already slept a couple of hours, have already awakened to check the course and wind and speed a couple of times. But now there was no need. No need to go on deck to adjust the shock cords or storm jib sheet for steering, no need to scan the horizon for land or ships. No. I was safe. I, who was to have been rushing toward Cape Horn, was safe in paradise. Perhaps tomorrow I would understand.



## 2 Eden

The parts needed to repair the damage to EGREGIOUS's rigging and mast finally arrived in Papeete on December 23. I immediately replaced the broken bits, cleared with port officials, pulled the cutter away from the shore, and let her drift over her anchor, waiting for wind. I was not blind to Tahiti's beauty, but this was not the right time for me to be there. My only passion then was to make another attempt at Cape Horn.

I sat all afternoon. The pass through the reef lay a quarter mile away across a glassy lagoon. The mainsail hung limp. As a cloudy sky darkened into night and I sat in the cockpit eating a can of ravioli, a stranger rowed out from the shore and asked if I wanted to sell the boat. This was odd, for while EGREGIOUS had fallen from grace, I had not expressed any intention of selling her. I laughed and said, "Not today."

After the man left, I remained in the cockpit, watching the lights along the shore and the low clouds clinging to the mountains inland. I was pleased to feel a breeze begin to blow down from those mountains, but less pleased when EGREGIOUS dragged anchor. I had stopped expecting to get to sea that day, but quickly I raised the anchor and hoisted the jib and rode the land breeze down the harbor toward the red and green lights on the buoys marking the pass through the now complete darkness.

As the white line of surf breaking on the reef came closer, our boat speed dropped. EGREGIOUS was on the edge of the land breeze. There was a moment a few hundred yards from the reef when I considered turning back and re-anchoring. The needle on the knotmeter hovered near three knots—far less than the overly cautious seven recommended by the pilot book for traversing the pass. But a few days earlier I had watched two boats sail through in very light winds, and my desire to resume the voyage was too strong.

Then, just as EGREGIOUS reached the pass, the wind vanished completely. I tried to turn back, but it was too late. EGREGIOUS would not respond to her helm.

Waves broke only yards to either side. A low swell from the north shook the cutter. Sails slatted uselessly. EGREGIOUS was stalled right in the middle of the pass. The wind must return, I told myself, as though my wishes meant anything. The buoy to starboard was farther away than it had been a moment before. EGREGIOUS began to drift helplessly down onto the reef to the west.

I have compared sailing an engineless boat to performing on a trapeze without a safety net. You cannot afford to make a mistake. Yet I had. It wasn't in refusing to have an

engine, for I later often sailed through that pass on boats without engines. My mistake was in letting impatience and a dragging anchor dictate my departure.

Nothing I did made any difference. EGREGIOUS was so close that an anchor would not keep us off. My only hope was that we would somehow bounce across the coral without breaking up. My last thought before I expected to be caught by the breakers was that I should have sold the boat to the man who had rowed out an hour earlier.

EGREGIOUS was there. The bow was in the line of white foam. Simultaneously, I felt the faintest breath of wind. EGREGIOUS responded to the tiller, but I was afraid it was too late. I tried not to oversteer, careful not to diminish our almost imperceptible headway. Slowly, painfully slowly, we ghosted away.

I spent Christmas day repairing a torn seam in the mainsail while EGREGIOUS pressed south under jib and staysail.

We passed Raivavae Island, the last land I could expect to see before the distant Horn. And then, partially because of the truly open sea ahead of us, partially because of the relief at escaping from the hassles in Tahiti, partially because I was again heading toward Cape Horn and the prospect of fulfilling a twenty-year long dream, perhaps partially because, unable to afford to do much reprovisioning at Papeete prices, I was not eating enough, I began to enter an almost mystical mental state.

On December 29, I noted in the log that despite being hard on thirty-knot southeast winds, *'My sense of well-being is immense. I truly love sailing and am grateful for these last few hours.'* On December 30, it was: *"Today is the finest of the voyage so far. I do not know exactly why I feel that because it has not been exceptional in any way. We are sailing smoothly and well. I have a sense of space and openness and solitude in this ocean that I have not known before. I love the idea of the empty sea before me. Sail on, EGREGIOUS, sail on.'*

On New Year's Day I wrote, *'I have been reading and lean back and close my eyes and listen to the water gurgle past the hull, the splash of the bow wave. I breathe deeply and am filled with peace. I have earned this peace, and I welcome it.'*

And then on January 3 and 4 as I entered the Roaring Forties for the first time, the experience peaked.

*'I believe that I am an articulate man, but this is not an experience to be articulated. No nouns, no verbs suffice. There is the sea, but it is unremarkable just now. There is the wind, light and backing toward the north. There is the sky, covered by a layer of low, fuzzy*

*clouds. There is the cutter sailing smoothly southeast. Nothing is exceptional other than the overwhelming sense of peace, which has increased day by day and is now absolute. I have never been so calm and content. I am always hungry, yet that only renders my senses more acute. A sailor is an artist whose medium is the wind. But now I feel the wind more sensitively than ever before. It touches my face, blows over my skin, enters my body, more essential than blood. At this moment I want for nothing. I am whole, complete, one, transcendent. Yet I am also transcended and do not exist except as a part of the beauty around me. The sea is steel blue and the sky light gray. On the western horizon, a single pale yellow band lingers behind the already set sun. This is a view of Eden, of what the world must have been like the first day after creation.'*

The next morning I awoke to a storm—the light backing wind had been a warning—that soon broke the tangs and bolts replaced in Tahiti. The mystical state was replaced by depression. Cape Horn, instead of being less than a month ahead, receded to the infinite perspective of the unassailable.

### 3 Cape Horn

**After** limping all the way back to San Diego, five thousand miles north, with spare halyards and topping lift and running backstays shifted to support the port side of the mast, under severely reduced sail, setting only the storm jib as a headsail and in all but the lightest winds reefing the main, EGREGIOUS was extensively repaired.

One of the things I had learned about myself was that my commitment was absolute. On October 18, 1975 I sailed for Cape Horn again.

Although I wore gloves, my hands turned blue when I bailed. There was no doubt the hull was cracked: I had gone over the side during a lull a few weeks and several thousand miles earlier and located the hairline running up the trailing edge of the keel.

Even while sleeping I wore long underwear, wool pants, four shirts, two pairs of socks, a watch cap, and still I was cold. When I first got up in the morning, my fingers were swollen twice their normal size, the skin drum taut, like sausages. It was December. Summer in the Southern Ocean. The sun was about as far south as it would ever get. The temperature of both air and water were just above freezing, about as warm as they would ever get. For the third successive day there was sleet and snow. Somehow I had not thought to bring a shovel, so I was grateful when waves washed the snow from the cockpit.

I was not complaining. I was precisely where I wanted to be. Through years and women and waves and wanton storms that raged without and within, I had kept coming at Cape Horn. And at last, on my third attempt, it was very near. How near I did not know because I had not had a sextant sight for several days, but near. A few hundred miles ahead.

The sea was a symphony of violence. Each day the barometer moved at least half an inch. Crests were blown from twenty-foot waves; spindrift was everywhere. Never before had the sea seemed so alive. That it isn't was brought home to me by one of the great wandering albatross that, in those big waves, I saw gliding in troughs below me. This one soared beside EGREGIOUS for several seconds and then turned his head and looked at me deliberately. Eye held eye. Life acknowledged life.

One morning I was on the foredeck lowering the staysail when I happened to glance down just as a wave passed. While in fact it was moving forward and EGREGIOUS was

sliding down its back, the momentary sensation was that the boat was going forward, about to take a two-story drop. It was a long way down.

Every once in a while, a set of bigger waves, perhaps twenty to thirty feet, went through.

I was standing in the companionway, having just lifted a bucket full of ice water from the bilge, when I saw a line of immense curling crests speeding toward me. In retrospect I should have closed the hatch, but I was mesmerized. The crest of the last giant topped ten yards to windward and I thought we would be inundated; but EGREGIOUS, despite her imperfections, had many virtues, and she turned her hip and rose gracefully through seething foam.

After fifty days and six thousand miles of sailing south, our course was now east. My later advice to anyone wanting to sail from California to Cape Horn was simple: sail south until the rigging freezes over and turn left. We had made that turn. Odd that a compass course could bring such joy.

I let my mind race ahead. East to the Horn. East, east, east with the soaring albatrosses and the petrels and the shearwaters and prions. East fleeing before the shrieking gales, running with the foaming waves. East across the South Atlantic, across the Southern Ocean. East past Africa. Past Australia, past Tasmania and the Tasman Sea. East with the hissing, driving spray. East toward the rising sun. East, east, east past New Zealand. East halfway across the Pacific. East for twelve thousand miles. East for days and weeks and months. East until finally at long last we could turn north and leave the Forties behind and perhaps be warm again. That was the plan; but I knew it would not happen that way. Somewhere I would have to put in to repair the hull. I did not care. We would have already rounded Cape Horn.

Back in California I knew the some people were thinking about me, wondering where I was at that moment, what I was doing. If they guessed either bailing or re-stitching the mainsail, they would have a 90% probability of being right. The sails were top quality, but they were not heavy enough, particularly the main. For this the sailmaker was not entirely to blame. No one had ever before sailed from California for Cape Horn, so no one really knew how strong the sails must be. I spent a lot of time sewing. The mainsail had to be lowered and dragged into the cabin three of the first five days south of 50°S. And when the wind went east for a few hours, I did not drive EGREGIOUS hard to windward to save both the hull and the sails.

The wind was less constant than I expected, blowing fifteen, then thirty, fifteen, then thirty, making it difficult to adjust the Aires steering vane, and causing EGREGIOUS to yaw between a heading of 90° and 160°. The only constants were that every day became colder

and every day passed without my being able to get a sun sight. The two were related. Without sights to fix our position, the safest course was to go further south, which made it colder.

On December 11, I decided that we must be south of Horn Island and set the steering vane to a course that I hoped would average due east. My dead reckoning put us on the latitude of the Diego Ramirez Islands, some fifty miles southwest of the cape. If I saw them and conditions were favorable, I would close Horn Island. If not, I would pass it unseen.

Each morning, with only rare exceptions imposed by the weather, I baked biscuits. Usually I just dropped lumps of dough on the pan—after all they tasted as good no matter what the shape—but perhaps partly to demonstrate to myself that I could still impose order on chaos, I decided to make proper biscuit-shaped biscuits that morning. I dug out the cookie cutter and carefully formed six beautiful biscuits. However, no sooner had I put them in to bake, when I realized that something extraordinary was occurring outside: the sun was casting shadows.

Without taking the time for foul weather gear, I grabbed the stopwatch and sextant and dashed on deck, climbing to the stern where I could sometimes see the sun from behind the mainsail and through the clouds. But EGREGIOUS was rolling so much, the horizon so broken by leaping waves, the sun so dim, that I could not manage a useful sight.

After fifteen minutes of futile effort, I smelled something burning. As I started forward, a freezing wave broke over me.

I rescued the biscuits and set them on the galley counter while I dried myself and the sextant. Before I finished, another wave struck EGREGIOUS abeam, and all but one of the biscuits fell into the bilge.

At noon the day improved sufficiently so that I was able to get my first good sun sight for five days. Unless I was making some serious error in calculation, the Diego Ramirez Islands were not far away.

I spent most of the afternoon bundled in many layers of clothes and foul weather gear, sitting in the companionway, staring ahead. The sun disappeared behind thickening clouds, and at intervals sleet drove me below decks. At 4:46 p.m. I had just heated some spaghetti and returned to sit in the companionway to eat, when I looked up and saw land. The first land since Guadalupe Island two days out of San Diego. For weeks I had sailed across the great bands of weather: the northeast trades, the doldrums, the southeast trades, the horse latitudes, the Roaring Forties; I had marked little x's on charts; I had told myself that I was nearing Cape Horn; but I had dreamed and struggled for so long that it did not seem real

until I saw those desolate rocks ahead. Now, even if the mast came down, EGREGIOUS would be blown past the Horn.

A little more than two hours later the cutter passed south of the southernmost of the Diego Ramirez Islands. The wind was only twenty-five knots, but the surf breaking against green-gray cliffs was impressive. Cape Horn tomorrow, I kept telling myself. I could hardly believe it. But it was true.

That night the Horn lived up to its reputation. The wind quickly increased to a gale. By dawn it was blowing fifty knots, and during the day it built to a full Force 12. Long before it reached that strength, the mainsail ripped. I manhandled it into the cabin and re-stitched the torn seam, but I didn't attempt the by then impossible task of resetting the sail.

The waves increased to twenty to thirty feet now that EGREGIOUS was sailing over the shallow continental shelf, and there were two sets, one coming from the southwest, driven before the gale; the other from the northwest, rebounding from the land. Both sets were breaking.

For the first time, and one of only a handful ever, I tied myself in the cockpit to steer.

Averaging eight knots under bare poles, EGREGIOUS rolled from beam to beam, sometimes in those cross seas rolling to port, sometimes to starboard. Even though it was not in operation, the servo-rudder for the Aries remained in the water, and as EGREGIOUS surfed down the larger waves, a rooster tail rose from it as from a hydroplane. The strain on the tiller was immense, often forcing me to brace myself with my legs and use both arms to drag the cutter back on course. There was no time to turn to see on which quarter the next dangerous wave loomed, but after a while I knew by feel and sound. And though I caught only glimpses of them as they swooped across my field of vision, even in the strongest wind albatrosses and petrels soared about as usual.

Through what was a very long day, I steered. Finally at 7:00 p.m. the wind decreased to thirty knots, and I was able to engage the Aries. Stiff and cold and tired and hungry, I stumbled into the cabin.

After cooking a victory banquet of canned stew, I put a Bach fugue on the cassette player. Bach's music was a small but triumphant sound at 57° South.

I knew that I had just become the first American to round Cape Horn alone; but even if I had not been the first, the struggle would have been worthwhile and the day should have been as hard as it was. A smashed hand, frostbite, piercing cold, fatigue were all made endurable. The water I bailed from the bilge into the Atlantic that evening had come from the Pacific that morning. Cape Horn, which a year earlier had seemed so impossibly remote, was behind me.

## 4 Capsize

**There** is a myth perpetuated by people musing over globes in dry rooms ashore and PR agents for the round the world races that great waves roll unimpeded around the world in high southern latitudes. One of the evils of public relations hype is that it exaggerates when the truth is sufficient.

As everyone since Captain Cook who has actually sailed the Southern Ocean knows, waves there, as everywhere else, rise and fall with pressure systems. Two days after the Force 12 wind off Cape Horn, EGREGIOUS sat becalmed on a flat and glassy sea while an albatross swam circles around her, looking for a handout.

When the wind returned, EGREGIOUS continued east through two fogs: one a small cold circle of visibility barely extending beyond her bow; the other the fog of Chancery Court in Dickens' BLEAK HOUSE, which I was reading.

The crack in the hull seemed manageable. Wanting to get as far as I could during the southern summer, I did not divert to the Falklands or Cape Town. By mid-January I was about halfway between Africa and Australia sailing a course a degree or two either side of 45°S.

January 22, 1976

I don't know how long I'll be able to write. I do not feel well at all. Blood and kerosene are all over the cabin. I have a broken stove, a hopelessly shredded storm jib, and a smashed face—our second capsizes in fourteen hours came at 5:15 a.m., bashing me above the eye with a drawer full of books. This is the most dangerous storm I have been in thus far. The broken stove bothers me as much as anything. Cold food from now on. Perhaps I have a concussion. I'm too dizzy to write more.

January 23

Today I have a black eye—more precisely a vivid magenta eye—from which I cannot see clearly, a severe headache, continued dizziness, a desperate need for a storm jib, and as desperate a longing to be in port with the voyage successfully completed.

The barometer rose rapidly last evening and as rapidly fell, with fifty-knot wind returning near dawn. I lowered the jib and we drifted ahull for five hours. Then, although



the barometer continued to fall, so did the wind, and we resumed sailing. Now, at 3:00 p.m. we run at eight knots before a near-gale.

I will try to go back and make some sense of these past few days, but they are jumbled in my mind. From now on any errors in judgement or navigation can be blamed on brain damage.

The afternoon of January 20 was so sunny and warm that I washed my body for the first time this year and then sunbathed in the cockpit.

I once read that the mountain men of the American West used to sew themselves in their long underwear in the fall and not take it off until spring. Perhaps that is only a legend. But when I removed the long underwear I put on two months and an ocean earlier and threw it overboard, it was so strong that it did not sink, and when last seen was walking briskly toward the South Pole.

Increasing wind in the evening led me to put on my other set of long underwear and lower the mainsail about 7:00 p.m.

As soon as the mainsail was down I almost re-raised it because our speed dropped below six knots. However, I decided to leave the sail down and make another evaluation later. By the time I went to sleep at midnight, there was no doubt that the jib alone was enough. We were doing a solid seven knots under a cloudy night sky.

At 2:00 a.m. I awakened to feel EGREGIOUS heeling over farther and ever farther. There was no special noise. We were rushing smoothly through the water pressed over on our beam. I waited for the boat to rise back to a more normal angle, but she did not. She simply stayed there. No fuss. The sail was not flogging. We were not pounding. There was no particular sound of wind, only hissing water outside the hull. And still she did not come up.

I pulled myself from my bunk, donned clothes, foul weather gear, safety harness, and climbed on deck, while we continued steadily on, heeled 70°.

On deck the sensation of speed and the force of the wind were awesome. Everything seemed quiet inside the cabin because a fifty-knot wind came up so quickly that there were no seas.

I crawled forward on the inclined deck as one would crawl across the face of a mountain. It was a solid wind, a wind to lean against—indeed a wind that had to be leaned against.

Because it is easier to lower the jib when it is partially blanketed by the storm jib/staysail, I attempted to raise that sail first, but was unable to free one of its lashings. I wedged my feet onto the toe rail, held onto the forestay with one hand, and fumbled with the knot with the other; all the time in a standing position, face to the deck, feet only inches above the water.

Finally the storm jib was free, and I raised it and lowered the jib. EGREGIOUS rose from her side, and that was all for the night.

The leak in the hull is never more irritating than in the morning after a night of heavy weather. The water splashing about makes the cabin sound like the inside of a washing machine. When I got up to bring some order to that chaos, the barometer was low and steady. Not until early afternoon did conditions deteriorate.

I fell asleep sitting on my berth reading and was again awakened suddenly, this time by waves breaking over us. The compass by the chart table revealed that we had spun 90° off course and were sailing south. I decided I had better steer.

For the fourth time on this passage the wind was gusting sixty knots and the waves averaging twenty feet. But these waves were steeper, more concave, and more violent than any I had yet seen.

During most of the afternoon the sun continued to shine between fluffy low clouds, and the temperature was not uncomfortable. I was able to keep us headed east, and our speed averaged seven knots under the storm jib alone, although often we exceeded ten while surfing down crests. At 3:30 I thought it safe to go below for something to eat.

About a minute after I got into the cabin, just as I was opening a galley locker, we were turned upside down by a wave, with the mast perhaps 70° below the water. I felt the wave coming, but did not expect it to be any worse than many that had already skipped us like a stone across the ocean. I reached out to brace myself against the companionway ladder. Wasted effort. I flew, or more accurately dropped, down through the cabin against what is designated the overhead but which was peculiarly below me, finally coming to rest in a corner near the chart table, accompanied by pans, plastic canisters, packages of food, eating utensils, water containers, cups, books and four guaranteed unbreakable plates, one of which fragmented into hundreds of tiny slivers. The lid came off a jar of sugar, liberally coating everything with sticky saltwater syrup.

In the main part of the cabin, a hundred books were thrown above the restraining rail on the starboard bookshelf across to the upper berth on the opposite side of the cabin. As were various articles of clothing, a compass, and my Zenith Transoceanic radio, essential for

precise time signals for celestial navigation. These, too, ended on the upper port berth, having seconds before been on the upper starboard one. Nothing fell into the center of the cabin. We were so far over their trajectories followed mine, ricocheting against the overhead before fetching up to port as EGREGIOUS's eight thousand pound keel pulled us back upright without our doing a full 360°. Once the boat is that far over, it does not make much difference which side she comes back up, just so long as she does.

Fortunately I had closed the companionway behind me, but considerable ocean still managed to find its way into the cabin. I opened the hatch and looked out. The cockpit was full of water, and the plywood wind vane on the self-steering gear was missing. With no control on the helm, we were pointing into the wind. The storm jib was slatting horribly, shaking the mast and rig as if determined to tear EGREGIOUS apart. I did not seem to be injured, although later my left wrist swelled painfully. Before I could restore order to the cabin I had to do something about steering.

Not having removed my foul weather gear, I was able to go immediately on deck and take the tiller. A stray line blocked one of the drains, so water subsided slowly from the cockpit. Even with the additional weight aft, EGREGIOUS rose easily to the confused seas. A boat to be loved as well as hated.

Although I needed to be in several places at once I had no choice but to remain at the tiller until the cockpit finally emptied. Then I managed to find and fit a spare vane and go below to attempt to bail out the cabin.

As I bailed, wave after wave broke over us, sending more water cascading in. I stopped, closed the companionway, and waited for a lull. Then I threw another bucketful into the cockpit—there was no time to send it over the side—and another wave came aboard and below. Not until late afternoon was I able to lift one last bucket from an almost empty bilge, and then re-stow all the debris that had come loose and pick up all the slivers of glass I could find.

During all of this the sun continued to shine merrily on hard black waves, and the barometer, while low, remained steady, as it did for the remainder of the evening

When I got up to bail at 3:00 a.m. we were sailing southeast at seven knots, the wind and waves were still powerful but definitely not as strong as earlier and the barometer was rising rapidly. The bilge seemed fuller than usual, but I would have to wait for better weather to know if the leak was worse. All the indications were that the storm was passing. I fell into my first real sleep for night.

Two hours later I was awakened from that sleep by a violent blow in the face as we again capsized. It seemed to take EGREGIOUS longer to right herself than before. I knew

instantly what had happened, but was trapped in the tangle of my sleeping bag. I was pinned not in my berth, but between the railing on the upper berth and the aluminum side support to the mast. As the keel swung back into the sea, I slid down the back rest to the lower berth. A drawer of oversized books which had flown across the cabin and hit me in the face fell onto the cabin sole. One of those was Adlard Coles' HEAVY WEATHER SAILING. Being clobbered by his book was a hazard of the sea he had not warned against.

Blood ran into my mouth and onto the sodden sleeping bag. I noticed that my pillow was gone, and for some reason it seemed important that I find it; but I could not. Much later I found it beneath a sail bag in the forepeak. I touched my nose and forehead hesitantly with fingers which came away covered with blood. As I looked at them, I thought, 'Of course they're bloody. What did you expect, you fool?', and with that I struggled from the sleeping bag.

My reflection in a shard of mirror showed a skinned nose and a two-inch gash diagonally across my right eyebrow. But as I was inspecting these wounds, it was obvious that something more urgent was wrong outside

That we should be thrown off course was to be expected, and the compass by the chart table showed us heading northwest. I thought the self-steering vane was broken again, but a glance aft found it intact. But we did not come back on course and the storm jib continued to flail about. It had been torn apart and the corner to which the sheets were attached trailed twenty feet behind the stern. The remnant of the sail still hanked onto the forestay had also split into two pieces.

Without a storm jib I had no choice but to lie ahull, which we did throughout the morning while I repeated the drill of cleaning up the cabin and then tried to repair the stove, which failed to light. The kerosene fuel tank leaked and would not hold pressure. Whether this was caused by the capsizes or was a coincidence of timing I did not know. To have to face the Southern Ocean without hot food—not even a cup of coffee—was extremely disheartening.

I worked on the stove for hours, spreading soot and kerosene everywhere and accomplishing nothing more than making myself vomit. I don't know if this was due to the smell of kerosene combined with EGREGIOUS's spastic motion or a symptom of concussion.

The stove is definitely useless for the duration. Much of my food cannot be eaten uncooked, and much of the rest unpalatable. Cold hash will be like eating dog food. I can find enough to stay alive, but what an additional misery. I tried heating water over a kerosene cabin light. After a twenty minute ballet it became lukewarm.

The wind continues to build. Without a storm jib, my choices are to carry on under jib, even though at present it is too much sail, or to lie ahull. At this moment we are sailing, but with any increase in wind I will lie ahull.

The sun was briefly visible late this morning and I got a sight which puts us at 43°44'S, but have to guess at the longitude. Dead reckoning is too dignified a definition for my estimates of our position these last three days. However I believe we are near 63°E, the antipodes of San Diego. Africa is two thousand miles behind; Australia two thousand miles ahead. Being halfway around the world should be cause for celebration, but somehow I don't feel up to it. Only two days ago I thought we were not doing too badly.

January 24

Darkness. Darkness of the alien nights in harbor. Darkness of the eerie sail in zero visibility in the probable proximity to icebergs in the South Atlantic. The terrible darkness of the spirit when I had to turn away from the Horn on my first attempts. And now the silent darkness of fear as I lie in my bunk and wait.

I do not know the exact time, but it could not yet be midnight. I lay down about 9:00 p.m. The water in the bilge is not yet too noisy. EGREGIOUS is lying ahull under bare poles. Outside the storm has entered a fierce ecstasy, but my main impression from inside the cabin is of quiet. I hate lying ahull. On another boat I once steered for thirty-three out of thirty-six hours. I cannot afford that exhaustion yet. And I cannot get any sail on her; it is physically impossible. I have tried.

Several times this storm has deceived me into believing it to be abating. Until tonight, despite the capsizes, it had not been worse than weather we have experienced three or four times before. The capsizes were not caused by exceptionally big waves, but by particularly steep and concave ones. Now the storm is fulfilling its destiny. I am certain the wind is more than sixty knots, but I have no idea how much more.

After writing this afternoon and eating a dinner of cold canned ham and beans, I went on deck to decide if I should lower the jib. For almost an hour I sat in the cockpit, until something urgently told me to get the sail down. No sooner had I let the halyard run than EGREGIOUS was knocked down by a blast from the south. I clung to the mast; then when she came back up, I made my way to the bow to lash the jib. While there I had another presentiment of danger and grabbed the headstay with both hands just as a wave crashed over me. EGREGIOUS was again knocked down, and I washed overboard, suspended in space and water until she staggered once again to her feet and I swung back aboard. My safety harness was clipped on, but I am grateful not to have put it to the test. My religious

friends no doubt are certain that an angel watches over me at such moments, but if so, it had better have the wings of an albatross.

We are heeled 20° just from the force of the wind against the mast. The howling seems distant. Then a wave hits, sometimes with a crack like a rifle shot, sometimes with a hollow thud, sometimes with a warning roar of foam, sometimes with no warning at all. We heel farther and farther over; the hull groans and crackles; we are pushed and driven and slammed down against the stone-hard sea. I do not know how much more EGREGIOUS can take; I do not know why one of these waves has not already found her wound and split us wide open. Not since Papeete Pass do I recall being this afraid. I know I am projecting that fear into the elements, but this storm seems relentless, sinister, vindictive. Rain pounds against the deck. Three huge waves hit us in rapid succession. Somehow EGREGIOUS lurches back from each. There is a lull, and I drift into an uneasy sleep.

I have been reading a biography of Clarence Darrow—or rather, I was ages ago when I had time to read—and as I sleep I dream I am a lawyer in a courtroom. I stand and say “Your Honor,” and the courtroom lurches and I am thrown back into my chair. I stand again. “Your Honor.” The room lurches and I fall. That is all there is to the dream: the endless repetition of my standing, the words “Your Honor,” a lurch, and a fall.

I am awakened by another onslaught of waves. Through the hatch I see the sky is still dark, so it cannot yet be 4:00 a.m. The water in the bilge is wild, obscuring even the breaking waves and the roar of the wind. I hate the leak, hate having to pull myself from my berth, dress and bail in the middle of the night, hate listening to determine if it has grown worse, hate wondering if it will kill me.

For navigation my watch is set to Greenwich time. 2300 GMT. 3:00 a.m. here. The barometer which rose ½ inch and then dropped 1 inch has risen 1/10 inch, Wonderful.

I open the hatch and am met by an undiminished blast of wind and rain. Mechanically I begin to bail. My sprained left wrist prevents me from lifting a full bucket. Half buckets obviously mean I take twice as long, probably more, because there is more opportunity for waves and rain to come below.

I return to my bunk and try to sleep.

January 25

The storm is finally and truly over. Last night the bolt connecting the tiller to the rudder post broke again. I replaced it again.

We are sailing east under main and jib.

## 5 The Incomparable Wind

**Three** weeks and more than two thousand miles east of the Southern Ocean storm, I was south of Australia, still in the Roaring Forties.

Between when I bailed at 2:00 a.m. and when I bailed at 4:30 a.m. on February 13, the barometer began a steep decline—a decline which carried it into virgin territory far below any previous reading in my experience. This was to be a day far beyond my experience.

With that precipitous drop, there came no increase in wind. EGREGIOUS continued boisterously but safely east, while I searched the dawn sky in vain for signs of the apocalypse. I returned to my berth but did not undress or try to sleep.

Every half hour I got up. The barometer quickened its downward acceleration; EGREGIOUS continued her fine sail; I continued to become ever more anxious. Something incredible and probably terrible was happening, but the only sign was the barometer.

There was no point in trying to rest. I donned my foul weather gear and stood in the galley, drinking air temperature instant coffee, which means cold coffee, and looking out at the sea and waiting.

When at 7:30 a.m. conditions began to change, they changed rapidly. Within a few minutes the wind increased to forty knots, and I lowered the jib and raised the storm jib. A few minutes later I lowered the storm jib. And then the wind went off the scale.

Just before it struck I finished tying myself in the cockpit. At one moment everything was under control, EGREGIOUS moving safely along at five knots under bare poles; then the tiller was wrenched from my hands and slammed against the starboard cockpit seat. I remember being glad I had lowered the storm jib in time. No sail, much less one repaired as often as that one, could have stood to such a blast. EGREGIOUS careened to port, broadside to a wind far beyond any I had imagined, a wind that leveled everything before it, a wind that pressed us down into the sea until I began to fear we would be forced under.

There were no waves. The wind flattened the sea. Using all my strength I fought EGREGIOUS's bow back down wind. We were making nine to ten knots under bare poles; not surfing, just being inexorably forced ahead. It was like sailing through fog. I could not see the compass two feet away. Yet there was no fog. The wind tore the surface from the sea and flailed it about my eyes. I breathed shallowly, trying to inhale more air than sea water. I like to believe I am inner directed, but I thought, "This is too much, simply too much. It is too bad no one will know I got this far, that I rounded the Horn, before I was killed."

When it struck I had no way of knowing how long it would last, but I did know that I was at the tiller for the duration. This was the time to steer beyond exhaustion. Fortunately that incomparable wind passed within an hour, leaving us to lie ahull gratefully to a fifty-knot gale, which by comparison was a relief.

At 3:30 a.m. the next morning I was able to set the storm jib, only to discover that the self-steering gear was broken. More than broken. Dismembered. Nothing in so exposed a position could have endured.

I was able to rig sheet to tiller self-steering and we continued east, limping a bit more from each blow.

In the last light of sunset I noted in my log.

‘Had I written this earlier today I would have said how tired I am of the constant battle, tired of shackles that won’t open, tired of halyards that foul aloft, tired of being constantly wet and cold, tired of lying ahull, tired of being in pain every time I put on my sea boots, tired of the terrible weather.

‘On the radio I hear that we have encountered an exceptionally bad southern summer. Australia is experiencing devastating storms and floods; New Zealand record rainfall; and EGREGIOUS many, many more days of gales than to be expected, including, according to the pilot chart, a zero probability of gales at our present position. I am tired of knots that jam, and most of all I am tired of the leak, or rather the sound of the leak.

‘That is what I would have written this morning and it is all true; but today was so fine with blue sky and sea and a steady if cold wind, that it revived me. I am pleased just to be alive today and know that I have subjected myself of my own free will to all of the things of which I am tired. Nevertheless, for a hot shower and an uninterrupted night’s sleep, I would gladly sell my somewhat tarnished soul. The Devil is never around when you really want him.’

Repeatedly during my first circumnavigation I called winds or waves or storms ‘the worst I have ever seen’ and then I would experience something that would redefine ‘worst’.

The wind on that February day, however, was incomparable. It was the strongest wind I had been in then; and, more than forty years and four more circumnavigations later, it is still the strongest wind I have ever been in.

It came from an incredibly tight and, thankfully, small low. A barograph would have shown a symmetrical funnel: a long, gradual decline, a precipitous drop, a minute base, followed by a rapid climb, then a continued gradual rise. Had the center of the storm been



larger, had it lasted for twenty hours or even ten or had there been a lee shore, survival for any small boat would have been unlikely.

New Zealand meteorological records verified that in Cyclone Colin I experienced sustained seventy knot winds with higher gusts. For that hour on February 13 the wind was much stronger than Colin's highest gust. How much higher I cannot say beyond that it was at least twenty to thirty knots higher, so conservatively it was at least ninety to one hundred knots. Perhaps more. Incomparable is incomparable.

Every once in a while I read of someone's 'storm management' techniques. This is the greatest conceit since we named ourselves *homo sapiens* and only provides further superfluous proof that we are *homo insipiens*.

Small storms you manage. Big ones you merely hope to outlive.

## 6 Cyclone in the Tasman

On February 20, when Southwest Cape, Tasmania was visible purple against a pale rose sky moments before the sun emerged dripping from the sea, I saw land for the first time since the Diego Ramirez Islands the preceding December 11.

Becalmed a few hours later off the temporarily misnamed Storm Bay, I knew that EGREGIOUS could not survive another month in the Southern Ocean and that I must take advantage of repair facilities in Australia or New Zealand.

When the wind returned I changed course to the north.

On February 28 I crossed 40°S and left the Roaring Forties and Fifties which I had entered November 26, 1975. I thought I was passing into safer waters.

“Ninety-eight. Ninety-nine. One hundred.” I counted to myself and then stopped to rest. The numbers were buckets of water I was bailing from the bilge of EGREGIOUS lying ahull in the Tasman Sea on March 5, my 140th day at sea. I had continued sailing as long as possible. Now perhaps I had gone too far.

It was 3:00 a.m. With a few more buckets the bilge would be as empty as it ever got now that the sea inexorably entered at seventy to eighty gallons each hour. Outside the dark cabin the wind was hideous. Halyards clanged against the mast like fire alarms; banshees wailed through the rigging; rain rattled against the deck; and every evil, frightful spirit from the nightmares of childhood screamed and shrieked. The waves were twenty feet high and with the steep concave form which had twice capsized us more than a month earlier. There could no longer be any doubt. This gale had become a cyclone.

The capsizes I feared came moments after I returned to bed. Three huge waves struck in rapid succession. The first two knocked us down; the third rolled EGREGIOUS over to port. For a moment I hoped it would be no more than a knockdown, but then the mast went beneath the water and all the objects which seemed impossible to dislodge fell through the cabin, even though in preparation for just such an eventuality I had carefully re-stowed everything only hours before. Plates, pans, cans, cutlery, books, pillows, soggy sleeping bags and myself congregated again on what was usually designated the overhead, but which at the moment was not. I was beginning to think EGREGIOUS was more watertight upside down than right side up. Then the eight thousand pound keel pulled us back, and I struggled from the mess that tried to bury me in my berth.

My first step was to the bilge. With every blow from every wave I had been fearing EGREGIOUS would split open. Now as I stared down into a bilge overflowing with water I thought it had happened. The Tasman was a sea too far. We were finally going down.

Hope and heroism did not enter into my actions. I struggled out of habit and because there was nothing else to do. The dinghy had long been half inflated and the supplies I would take with me collected into sail bags: food, water, solar stills, navigation equipment, clothing, foul weather gear, hat, rigging knife, can openers, utensils, buckets, vitamin pills, sunburn lotion, passport, money. But I could never abandon ship in these seventy knot winds. The dinghy would be blown away the instant I got it on deck.

So I began to bail, using the same methodical pace as when I bailed after the last capsizes, a pace perfected during the intervening weeks when I came to be bailing eight hours out of every twenty-four, never sleeping for more than forty-five minutes before being awakened by the ocean splashing over the cabin sole, and during the day reading a chapter of a book and then bailing, reading a chapter, then bailing. A slow reader would drown that way. Water weighs 8.3 pounds a gallon and I was lifting more than 1500 gallons a day, seven tons, each day.

I did not think as I bent and dipped the bucket into the depths of the hull, or as I braced myself against the onslaught of subsequent waves, or as I threw the water out into the cockpit. There were no visions of the pleasures of life I would never know. There was not any regret. There was no fear. Perhaps I was too near exhaustion; but I did not feel tired. Truly I was resigned. Bucket after bucket, gallon after gallon, made no appreciable difference. I knew I had made a mistake. Beyond EGREGIOUS's every weakness, these moments were of my own making. Bend, dip, lift, throw. Bend, dip, lift, throw. I could have made many ports. Cape Town. Perth. Melbourne. Hobart. Sydney. But then if I had not persisted I would never have kept going for the Horn after the two earlier attempts failed. The ancient Greek concept of the tragic flaw: My strength had become the instrument of my destruction. Bend, dip, lift, throw.

I did not think I could keep us afloat, only that I would try to do so as long as possible, that I must continue to total exhaustion, that I must go to my limit as well as EGREGIOUS's. Bend, dip, lift, throw. Part of me was detached, aloof, watching myself as I worked mutely. Often I had wondered what my last word would be if I were lost during the voyage, but now I knew there would be none. My silence and I were inseparable. Bend, dip, lift, throw. I had been bailing a long time. I had no idea how long, but the sky seemed less dark, and oddly the longer I bailed, the less tired I became.

Dawn revealed a leaden sky, twenty to thirty foot seething waves, and that I was gaining on the leak. I was actually disappointed. This must be carefully explained. I

adamantly did not want to die, but thinking—no, knowing I soon would—had the unexpected effect of filling me with life. I was bursting with it. I was euphoric. I could bail forever. Everything was so simple: I bail. That was all. There was absolutely nothing else. Nothing at all. I was very happy. Bend, dip, lift, bail. I would have bailed as the water rose above my knees. I would have climbed the companionway steps and bailed when it reached my waist. Absurdly, I would have bailed as EGREGIOUS lay awash an instant before she sank and I would have known it to be absurd but I would have bailed anyway. And now I will not have to. Life drains from me as I drain the sea from the bilge and is replaced by unutterable fatigue.

I would have liked to have slept for days, but in an hour I was up again bailing. It is in the nature of a long solo sailing passage that one must continue to struggle far beyond what one would have thought to be ultimate limits. EGREGIOUS had for the moment survived, but she was no longer a sailing vessel. She had become a derelict to be nursed to the nearest refuge—Auckland, if we could make it, but the west coast of New Zealand's North Island if necessary. The sea had become her unnatural element.

For nine days I had been unable to get any sights to fix our position and two more would pass before I would verify that we were four hundred miles southwest of the nearest land, Cape Maria Van Diemen, the northwest corner of New Zealand. In late afternoon the wind decreased to a mere forty knots, but it blew directly from where we wanted to go.

Twenty-five thousand miles and two years earlier the sails had been the proud product of one of the world's great sailmakers. Now the sails were rags, seam after seam re-stitched by hand at sea. I did not know how long they would hold, but we could not remain where we were. To wait for good weather in the Tasman is often a futile pastime. I raised the storm jib and the deeply reefed main, and we began to crawl slowly north.

For a week we worked toward the land, balanced precariously on the very edge of survival. Each day one or more sails required repair; each day I bailed eight to ten hours. And always the wind persisted from directly ahead. Repeated immersion in salt water inside the cabin had done my radio receiver no good, but occasionally a faint signal came through. I tried to get weather forecasts, but when I finally succeeded, wished I hadn't. Australia radio proclaimed another cyclone to be wandering about the Tasman after battering the Queensland coast, but neglected to say where. This was worse than no news at all, and caused me exaggerated concern at every minor fluctuation of the barometer.

Still we were afloat and slowly the x's on the chart marking our position neared the elusive peninsula ahead of us, until in mid-afternoon on March 12 a bee settled in EGREGIOUS's cockpit to welcome us to New Zealand while we were still thirty miles offshore. A few hours later I smelled land; and that night we passed North Cape and turned

south toward Auckland, one hundred and eighty miles away. There was a sense that we were safe. But it was false. The wind turned with us. Still a headwind. Still no rest.

Land was never more of a mixed blessing than the morning of March 15. Obstacles littered the sea between us and Auckland, particularly the final thirty-five miles where I counted references in the Sailing Directions to more than forty islands and rocks. We needed a break from the wind, but I expected none.

Not long after dawn we nearly had the final disaster when the main ripped from leach to luff above the second reef while we were less than two miles to windward of a stark uninhabited mile long rock called the South Poor Knight's Island. The wind was blowing from the southeast, causing me to anguish about where such a wind was when we were in the Tasman and would have welcomed it. EGREGIOUS would not come about under jib alone. To change course I had to gybe. But where the bow pointed made no difference. Without the mainsail we were being rapidly driven onto the cliffs to leeward.

Ignoring water which soon rose above the cabin sole and splashed across my feet, I stitched the sail as quickly as possible, pausing to dart a glance at the ever nearer cliffs only when I had to stop to re-thread the needle. Then I stitched faster. Still it took three hours before the sail could be reset.

Great waves were dashing spray against rocks only a few hundred yards away. I reeved the reef line and carefully hoisted the main. The rip was in a particularly bad location, an area of strain at the leech. As soon as it was up it ripped again. Instantly, before the tear could extend across the sail which would have been fatal—there was no time for so extensive a repair—I let the halyard run. Then I cut two rough patches and stitched them on with giant strokes. A poor job, but my only hope.

In ten minutes I raised the sail for what I knew would be the last time. I thought: *We have not come all this way to be wrecked here ninety miles from safety. Hold. Hold for just thirty minutes. Perhaps even just twenty minutes. And then I can do more. But hold.*

Somehow it did.

After easing off that perilous lee shore and applying two more patches to the main while it remained set, we spent the afternoon threading our way between islands that loomed through a low mist and bore no resemblance to descriptions in the Sailing Directions, until in late afternoon unmistakable Little Barrier Island appeared off our port bow.

Sunset found us well down the Hauraki Gulf with the loom of Auckland's lights clearly visible to the southwest. With darkness the wind lightened and backed, giving us an easy reach across smooth water. A gentle sail at last. I should have known better and had I not been so exhausted I would have. That very tranquility was almost to wreck us.

All I had to do was remain awake one more night. After one hundred and fifty nights and twenty thousand miles, only one more night. But as EGREGIOUS softly sailed on I became more and more tired. At about 2:00 a.m. a bright navigation light was abeam which I correctly concluded was TiriTiri. Beneath a full moon visibility was good and I could see that although there were islands ahead of us, we would not come upon them for over an hour. The night was a romantic dream. Water lapped musically at the hull. Fatigue overcame me. I could safely sleep for an hour I told myself as I went below and lay on my berth fully dressed. And I was right. I could have slept safely for one hour. But I slept for two.

I was dreaming. I cannot now recall the dream, but I do remember that I was in a very deep sleep one instant and wide awake with full knowledge of what had happened the next. I leapt to the companionway and looming over us was a great shadow. The jib sheet, tied to the tiller for self-steering, tangled. Frantically I ripped it free and slowly, so slowly, EGREGIOUS's bow swung back into the wind, back the way we had come.

Later I learned that rock was one of a group called the Noises. Judging distances at night is difficult, but the Noises are not very big. I was definitely looking up at the crest of that shadow. It was far above me. But our speed was only three knots. Perhaps we would have bounced off.

At dawn I turned back toward Auckland and we slowly limped past Rangitoto Island and into the harbor on a bright, warm day.

My first impression was how quiet it was for a commercial port on a working day. I was impressed by how many sailboats were swinging at moorings in coves along the shore. I shouted to a man aboard a boat powering by, asking where I should go to clear with Customs. My voice sounded strange to me. I could not recall the last time I had heard it. He directed me to wharves at the foot of office buildings in the center of the city.

In San Diego I routinely sailed the engineless EGREGIOUS in and out of her marina slip, but I had not tried to stop her for months. The space between the wharves was wide enough, but the wind was patchy. I sailed back and forth twice, looking the situation over. Several sailboats were rafted up to the wharves. I lowered what was left of the mainsail and sailed in under jib alone, made a U-turn back into the wind, and came gently alongside a big ketch.

It was a few minutes before 2:00 p.m. Some office workers on their way back to work after lunch watched me. I asked one of them to notify Customs of my arrival.

EGREGIOUS and I remained at King's Wharf for two more days until we were towed to Half Moon Bay Marina, which at that time was the only place in Auckland with a travel lift

that could handle the boat. Not until the moment when the cutter was actually removed from the water and settled in a cradle, a stream of water flowing for a change from rather than into a deceptively innocent appearing three pronged hairline crack, did I feel we were truly safe. Then I slept for fourteen hours.



CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE *1978-1983*



CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE was a stock British built Drascombe Lugger.

Drascombe Luggers are yawl-rigged open boats, that is they have no decks. They are 18 feet long, have a 6 foot beam, a centerboard that draws 4 feet down and 10 inches up, and weight less than 900 pounds.

Using the EGREGIOUS circumnavigation as a baseline, I sought an even greater challenge, qualitative rather than merely quantitative, with even greater reliance on myself than on the boat. Not at all incidentally I needed to do this in a boat that did not cost much. In 1978 CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE cost \$5,000.

She was a wonderful little boat and proved to be indestructible. Naturally she was wet, but she sailed well, making passages nearly as fast as boats more than twice her size. I came to think of her as a small dog, energetic, vital, always eager, a terrier if not a terror of the seas.

With a centerboard and yawl rig, she was easily balanced. I was usually able to get her to self-steer by tying the jib sheet to the tiller offset by shock cords to leeward, a method that had worked on EGREGIOUS when her wind vane broke. I still navigated with a sextant. Actually several successive sextants when my first was lost during the swamping off Fiji.

I made the longest open boat voyage in history in CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE, more than twenty thousand miles with many stops, west from California across the South Pacific to Australia, up to Indonesia and Singapore, across the Indian Ocean, and up the Red Sea, where I was falsely imprisoned for two weeks as a spy. There were, in fact, two CHIDIOCKs. The first which I bought retail remained in Saudi Arabia. The following year the British builders kindly gave me a sistership and shipped it to Egypt where I resumed the voyage which ultimately ended in the Canary Islands.

During the four years from California to Saudi Arabia, I lost for the first time every single object I possessed in the world. I would lose everything again, but more quickly, in RESURGAM.

Chidiok Tichborne, the man, was executed for being involved in a plot to assassinate Elizabeth I. I had long admired the poem for which he is remembered, written to his wife, and variously titled, "Tichborne's Elegy" or "On the Eve of His Execution", and thought it fitting to give an English-built boat an English-built name. The problem was fitting a 19 foot name on an 18 foot boat.

## **1978**

**June** took delivery of CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE from builder

**November 12** sailed from San Diego

**December 16** arrived Nuku Hiva, Marquesas Islands

## **1979**

**January 16** arrived Papeete, Tahiti

**April–September** continued westward across South Pacific to Fiji

**September 11** arrived Suva, Fiji, where CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE was laid up for the cyclone season

## **1980**

**May 7** departed Suva, Fiji

**May 10** pitchpole and swamping three hundred miles west of Fiji

**May 10-24** adrift

**May 24** reached Emae Island in what was then the New Hebrides, now Vanuatu

**October 9** repairs made, departed Port Vila

**October 27** arrived Cairns, Australia

## **1981**

**April-August** sailed north around Australia, to Bali, Indonesia and Singapore

## **1982**

**January–March** sailed Singapore to Aden non-stop, then up Red Sea

**March 12** arrived Port Sudan, Sudan

**May 29** sailed from Port Sudan

**June 4** put in to Rabigh, Saudi Arabia to fit spare rudder; jailed as a spy

**June 15** compelled to depart Saudi Arabia by air; CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE remained behind

### **1983**

**February** unable to obtain permission to return to Saudi Arabia, flew to England where Honnor Marine gave me a Drascombe Lugger which I named CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE II and shipped to Egypt

**May—June** flew to Egypt, launched CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE II at Suez, sailed down Red Sea to previous year's track in CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE, returned north, transited Suez Canal, and sailed west to Malta

**August** sailed from Malta to Vilamoura, Portugal

**October** sailed from Vilamoura, Portugal for the Caribbean

**November** stopped at Santa Cruz de la Palma, Canary Islands, to wait out headwinds; storm capsized CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE II while on mooring; open boat voyage ended

## 7 The Last Six Miles

AS darkness fell on Friday, January 12, 1979, I hove to just east of Venus Point, six miles from Papeete, Tahiti. At 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 16, after countless swamping and a final thirty-five hours continuously at the tiller, I sailed through Papeete Pass.

Until that final—or what I so mistakenly thought would be final—night before making port, the passage from Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands had been uneventful. The entries in my log from January 2, when I raised anchor and sailed out of Taiohae Bay under blue skies, to January 8, when four hundred and twenty miles to the southwest I sighted Takaroa in the Tuamotu Archipelago, were almost identical: ‘Sunny. Hot. Slow’ The wind blew steadily at seven knots; our speed hovered around three knots; our daily runs were a predictable sixty to seventy miles.

I sailed CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE not just to make good the best course to Tahiti, but also to take advantage of shade from her sails, gybing at midday from a starboard broad reach to a port one. With the sun more than 80° above the horizon, there was nothing I could do about those searing noon hours except cover my head with a wet towel, stretch out on the floorboards, and try to doze through the worst of the heat. The hats washed overboard between San Diego and Nuku Hiva—and irreplaceable in Nuku Hiva—were sorely missed. In fact this inability to replace in Nuku Hiva so many of the things I had lost or damaged was one of the reasons I sailed so soon for Tahiti. The other, and more compelling reason was that I wanted to talk to Suzanne, and in 1979 there were no telephones in Nuku Hiva.

The first time I sailed to Tahiti I sailed around the western end of the Tuamotus. This time, however, I was fully equipped with charts and planned, unless the weather deteriorated, to sail directly through—although I recalled meeting two sailors in the Society Islands who had lost their boats in the Tuamotus, and would meet, even in the age of electronic navigation, others who did so later.

My original plan was to sail toward the islands of Manihi and Ahe; but the wind kept me farther east. My morning sights on January 8 which indicated I was near Takaroa were verified when a tiny irregularity on the horizon satisfactorily became palm trees around noon.

It was pleasant to have something to look at that afternoon as we sailed a few miles off palm covered islets, first Takaroa and then the neighboring atoll of Takapoto.

We were through the front door, fortunate to have made landfall under such fine conditions and to know by the proximity of land our precise position at sunset. But now we were sailing into a dangerous watery room. Ahead of us were more reefs than gaps between them. The closest, Aratika, was fifty miles away and, as the wind increased and backed to the north, became a lee shore directly in front of us.

Without the variable of unknown currents I would have worried less. The problem was twofold: avoid running into anything that night, yet plan a course that would provide a landfall the following day. I did not want to spend two nights stumbling around in the darkness. I decided to continue south for thirty miles, then gybe to the west.

For once the wind cooperated and we had the best sailing of the passage, making a steady four knots beneath a partially cloud covered sky. I slept fitfully, peering into the darkness every thirty minutes or so, until 2:00 a.m. when I made the turn to the west.

Nothing went crunch for the rest of the night, and dawn brought one of the more noteworthy events in my years at sea: I caught my first fish. On previous and subsequent voyages I did not carry fishing gear, but before I left San Diego this time a friend gave me some handlines as possible survival gear. On the passage to Nuku Hiva I was kept sufficiently busy and did not use them; but on the second slow day out of Nuku Hiva, I set a couple of lures over the stern. I was surprised to find a twenty pound tuna on one of those lines when I awoke. He was still alive, and I set him free. It seemed unjust to kill a fish that size for one meal. Not to mention too messy. I caught another, smaller fish two dawns later. And then, having proven I could, I stopped.

Until the advent of SatNav and GPS I navigated on sun sights, common sense, and skepticism. Even with GPS the sailor will do well to be skeptical when charts of the South Pacific are covered with notes warning that islands may not be where they have been drawn, apparently at the whim of some junior clerk, and based, all too often, upon surveys circa 1879. So I was pleased when at 10:30 the palm fronds of Apataki appeared where I expected them to, off the port bow.

Apataki is a hollow rectangle and has two passes into the lagoon, one at the northwest corner and one at the southwest near the only village. For fourteen miles I sailed along a pristine white sand beach beyond which stood a green band of palms. It was my first sight of what was effectively a desert island, and the temptation to linger was strong. A thundercloud that made a brief appearance just as we were off the northwest pass, a temperamental stove, and Suzanne, combined to keep me sailing on.

There were two more atolls to avoid that night, but with Apataki in sight at sunset plotting a safe course was not difficult. By midnight we were well beyond the last hazard, with Tahiti one hundred and eighty miles of clear water ahead.

On Thursday I finally permitted myself to speculate about how many more nights at sea. With luck we would be in before Friday sunset, but an arrival Saturday morning seemed more likely when the wind continued to back and the sky clouded over.

A single early morning sun sight on January 11 was to be the last of the passage. Finding Tahiti by dead reckoning should not be difficult, but I did wish that the radio direction finder had not drowned so I could home in on the beacon at Venus Point.

Conditions continued to deteriorate. By noon Friday we were sailing close-hauled with reefed sails on course 235° against eighteen knots of wind and four foot waves, and taking a lot of water over the bow. Four foot waves on CHIDIOCK were very different from four foot waves on EGREGIOUS. It was unpleasant but not serious, so I kept CHIDIOCK to it while I tried in vain to will more substance to various island-shaped clouds than they were able to sustain.

At last in mid-afternoon a firm silhouette became and remained distinct on the horizon. Tahiti was safely in view. As we sailed closer I recognized Venus Point and hove to a few miles east at sunset.

It was the wrong decision made for the right reasons. Although I knew the pass well, I have never liked to enter harbors at night. Obviously a storm was approaching, but that provided even more reason to wait until daylight. Visibility could be reduced to a boat length in seconds and the reef on the north coast become a lee shore. After all, I told myself, one more night at sea does not matter and you only have six miles to go. Sleep a while, get an early start, and we'll be in Papeete in time to check for mail before the post office closes.

That the universe was again not to adhere to my plans became evident at 11:00 p.m. when I was awakened by a flood. I had hove to by lowering the mainsail, trimming the mizzen flat, and backing the jib. Standard procedure. But a gust came along powerful enough to heel CHIDIOCK over so far even under reduced sail that what should have been a drain on the starboard seat became an intake instead. When I located the source of the flow, I furled the jib and pumped CHIDIOCK more or less dry.

Venus Point Light still winked at us from the same relative bearing, and other lights on the shore appeared unchanged. Then, in an instant, all the lights went out, heavy rain fell, and the little yawl began to go backwards very rapidly.

CHIDIOCK hove to well under mizzen alone, and we had an ocean of sea room to the east, so there was no immediate danger. As I expected, the squall did not last long. But when it passed, Venus Point was more distant, and the wind, although less strong than in the squall, held at more than twenty knots. Perhaps had I raised sail we could still have made it

into Papeete, but I thought it best to wait until dawn. Surely we would make port some time Saturday, even if the post office had already closed. After all, we only had eight miles to go.

At 4:00 a.m., in pitch darkness, with no shore lights or stars visible, I struggled for half an hour to make myself a cup of coffee. The stove, jury-rigged with tape and waxed string in Nuku Hiva, proved equal to the challenge of preparing what I expected to be my last hot food before making port. In this, at least, I was correct.

I had drunk less than a third of the cup when a wave swept over us. For some reason I found it difficult to maintain aboard CHIDIOCK the stoic silence I maintained on EGREGIOUS. In vivid images I told the ocean what I thought of it, then I raised the jib and we began pounding northwest toward where Tahiti—now an uncertain distance away—must lie.

I had no fear of sailing blindly onto the reef. We would be lucky, I thought, to sight land again by 7:00 a.m., which, as it happened, was exactly when I did see land, or at least glimpse it, through clouds before another squall hit. That glimpse gave me the impression that we had fought back to the same position where we had first hove to. This raised my spirits, until the next break in the clouds revealed a long stretch of coast miles north off us. It was not Venus Point I had seen but another point far to the south, probably Point Tautira. Papeete was not six miles away, but twenty-eight, all of them to windward. For the first time I began to doubt that we would be safely at anchor that day. And then the storm began in earnest. Everything thus far had only been in the nature of a warm-up. I proceeded on a reluctant circumnavigation of Tahiti the hard way.

CHIDIOCK could not sail against the forty-five to fifty knot winds in the next squall, so I let her run off under jib and mizzen, thinking—hoping, anyway—that we might find shelter at the end of the island.

It was one of the fastest rides I ever had aboard CHIDIOCK. The boat speed indicator read to ten knots, and often the needle held there, not just when we were surfing down waves, but for sustained periods. CHIDIOCK made a couple of attempts to broach, but responded each time to the tiller before matters got seriously out of hand. Finally the four thousand foot high mountains at the south end of the island began to block the wind, the sky cleared somewhat, and we sailed into an area of wonderfully smooth water just off the reef.

As was to occur frequently during the coming days I found myself an indifferent spectator to scenes of great beauty. Green mountains; waterfalls—on Monday I was to count eleven visible at once; misty, mysterious valleys. The picturesque held no charm for me. My only thoughts were of relief that CHIDIOCK had somehow once again held together, and of how to gather the energy to pump her out.

When patches of blue sky appeared I began to hope that the worst was over. Around noon I ate the last handful of raisins. We had gone from fifty knots of wind to five, which lured me into raising the main. Under full canvas CHIDIOCK gurgled gently along, swinging wide to avoid the corner of the reef. I hardened up the sheets and once again we headed northwest for Papeete, this time up the western side of the island.

Until 4:00 p.m. we made good progress, but then with less than fifteen miles to go a sudden gust laid CHIDIOCK far over. Before I could release the sheets the little yawl was full of water.

By the time I had finished bailing, the wind was shrieking at more than fifty knots and the waves were steep and breaking. I knew there was nothing to do but let CHIDIOCK ride them hove to under mizzen, although I did set a sea anchor to try to reduce our drift. The sea anchor was not effective. CHIDIOCK was blown backwards so fast that her stern developed a bow wave.

With nightfall coming on—a night I had once been certain would find me clean and dry and relaxed in Papeete harbor—I found myself wet and cold and depressed. I was not hungry, somewhat surprisingly for I had eaten nothing all day except the few sips of coffee and the handful of raisins. I turned my face once again into the wind just to make certain that it was truly hopeless, before reluctantly wrapping myself in the tarp and lying down. I wondered if CHIDIOCK would survive the night and, if she did, how far away the dawn would find us.

When a sailor is tired enough he can sleep anywhere, even in an 18 foot open boat in a full gale. I fell into a fitful slumber until midnight. The wind continued to shriek, but the blinding rain had stopped by then and most of the eight foot waves hissed harmlessly beneath us, although CHIDIOCK persisted in trying alternately to stand on her bow and her stern. The clothes beneath my foul weather gear were soaking wet, and I resolved to try to change them, although this meant a prolonged struggle. Somehow, by a minor miracle, I managed. With momentarily dry clothes on I found myself hungry and ate a can of chicken before again managing to sleep.

Sunday was a replay of Saturday. We fought our way to the northwest until Tahiti again became visible; then a squall hit—I was becoming very adept at heaving to—and we were blown helplessly backwards in the general direction of the Cook Islands, some six hundred miles away. More than once I thought that I might find it faster to sail there than the twenty or thirty miles to windward to Papeete.

Late Sunday afternoon saw another partial clearing and CHIDIOCK able to make distance to the north. When the island once again came in view, I was elated to see what I thought was the point of land on which the airport is located. Another silhouette, briefly



seen through the clouds, I concluded was Moorea. We had not been as far off as I feared. And once again Papeete was less than ten miles away, though now ten miles to the northeast rather than ten miles northwest as it had been forty-eight hours earlier. And once again I permitted myself to hope we would be in that night.

But as we sailed closer the compass bearings to various points were wrong and the Korean fishing boat wrecked on the reef and clearly visible in 1974 and 1976 did not appear. Neither of these omens bothered me. The bearings would be wrong if I were misjudging our distance from the coast, and the fishing boat could have broken up in the past two years.

Something was definitely off, though, about the channel between Moorea and Tahiti. The islands continued to overlap when from our perspective as we sailed closer they should move apart. The explanation appeared from the crest of a high wave. There was no opening between Moorea and Tahiti. They were connected by a low isthmus. For a moment my tired mind could not comprehend how this could be. Then I realized that what I was looking at was not Moorea and Tahiti but the two parts of Tahiti itself, and the point of land was not the airport but the isthmus at Taravao. I had made the same mistake twice from different sides of the island in two days. Then the wind died and for the rest of the night we were becalmed.

Every hour I awakened and glanced about. We were in close to land; the boom of surf on the reef a mile away was loud. At 1:00 a.m. I saw lights of a ship offshore to the south of us. Having no lights lit on CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE, I watched until I was certain the ship would pass well outside of us, and then I closed my eyes. Twenty minutes later they opened to stare up at running lights. A Tahitian smiled down at me from the bridge of a tugboat a few yards away, and simultaneously CHIDIOCK bobbed violently in her wake.

My heart beat wildly. Much, much too close. Then I thought: A tug? I turned south and there was her tow, another tug bearing down on us. And because the lead boat had swung far in to come over to satisfy the helmsman's curiosity, the tow was swinging even further. There was still no wind. Fortunately, in my premature preparations to make port I had unlashed one set of oars which I quickly put to use.

Time is an uneven medium. Those few seconds seemed infinite. I row. CHIDIOCK slowly gathers way. The sinister shape of the towed tug looms ever closer, swings ever more toward us. I row. The cable between the ships jerks taut, droops into the ocean, jerks taut again. I see individual drops of water being flung aside. I row. Then she is upon us. Even at that last moment I expect to be hit. Silently the tow swings past inches away. I examine her rivet by rivet.

The tugs disappeared around the point long before my breathing returns to normal.

At 5:00 a.m. a breeze blew out from the land and, munching a handful of nuts—practically my only food the last two days—I settled myself at the helm for the duration. Barring another flat calm, I had decided to stay at it until we got in.

I have seldom made such a decision. The last time before this was in one hundred plus knots of wind south of Australia in EGREGIOUS. The next would be in the Straits of Gibraltar years later. Now, off Tahiti, I was already very tired and thought I should make a final effort before the storm ground me down further. The proximity of land was itself a danger. My food supply was low. The swamping on Saturday had ruined all my rice. I was left with only a few rusty cans of chicken and tuna and soup that were edible without cooking, which was impossible. I was bothered by a quickly spreading skin infection on my hands and legs. And finally I had simply had enough of being “tossed and driven on the deep blue sea,” as an old sea chantey so quaintly puts it.

For the next thirty-five hours I remained at the helm—except when bailing—through countless squalls and swappings. After the first three or four the cockpit was officially renamed ‘Lake Chidioc’, and a lifeguard was posted.

The wind did not again reach the fifty-five knot fury of Saturday night but regularly gusted above forty knots and regularly knocked CHIDILOCK down, even under jib and mizzen. Once when the jib sheet jammed, we experienced a new record high water mark, one from which I feared we could not recover. Yet the little yawl came up and I bailed her out.

Slowly, very slowly, often at a rate of less than a mile an hour, we made progress to the north. By noon Maraa Point was abeam. An hour later, after one of our knockdowns, a fishing boat powered over to offer us a tow. Although I very much wanted to accept, I could not bring myself to do so, and watched as they circled, waved, and sped off. My spirits fell a little with the knowledge that they would be in before the next squall.

I had no problem staying awake that night. More rain fell on me than on Noah. Part of the time Moorea—the real Moorea—was in view abeam, and occasionally the lights of Papeete were visible to the east. But every time I tried to sail toward them, heavy wind and rain closed in and I had to tack back west.

Tuesday morning found the storm weakening, although it was to regain strength on Wednesday and last five more days. But in the moderate interval we managed at last to beat our way to and through Papeete Pass, having made good six miles in four days.

CHIDILOCK was easy to anchor, but I was so tired I botched my first attempt. For so long my only thought had been to get to Papeete that when I finally did, I had nothing left. The rode did not run freely; before I could clear the snarl my anchor had caught on the chain

of a large ketch. The owner proved understanding, and I rested there for a while until I gained the energy to retrieve the anchor and set it properly. A few minutes later some fellow sailors rowed over and saved my life with a bowl of chili.



## 8 Adrift

**Each** night I lost something. On the night before I was to leave Suva, Fiji, I misplaced my copy of *WAR AND REMEMBRANCE* with three hundred pages unread and had to buy another copy to learn how World War II turned out. And once underway I lost two buckets, six gallons of fresh water, the moon, and then, in effect, *CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE* herself. It seemed almost as though fate and the sea were methodically reducing me to the minimum for survival.

I left the Royal Suva Yacht Club dock at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 7, 1980. The packing and plastic bagging and stowing had taken longer than usual, although *CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE* was carrying less than she had the previous year. What was routine when I

was moving on every month or so now had to be thought through and planned; but by 10:30 everything was in place. I had cleared with Customs the preceding day, and Immigration had come by that morning—both special courtesies so that CHIDIOCK would not have to go alongside the main Customs dock, which was scaled for ships rather than 18 foot open boats. I still had a dollar of Fijian small change, so I walked up the dock to the yacht club bar and ordered a pitcher of Chapman's, a soft-drink mixture of ginger ale and bitters. Although I had worked up a thirst in the morning sun, a full pitcher was too much and no one was around to share it with. Quickly I downed three or four glasses, but I was eager to be off and left the pitcher half full. Within a week I would be dreaming of it: bubbles rising through amber liquid, ice cubes tinkling, beads of condensation running down the sides.

During her layover for the cyclone season, CHIDIOCK had become a wildlife refuge. Toads croaked from the moist darkness beneath her hull; a colony of ants built a nest in the centerboard well; birds found her gunwale a convenient perch; and a gecko took up residence in the cockpit. Surprisingly, but perhaps because of the gecko, there were no cockroaches on board.

I did not see the gecko until I returned CHIDIOCK to the water and was living aboard her at the yacht club anchorage. Then, sometimes in the evening when I was reading by the kerosene lamp, I would catch a glimpse of the little lizard scurrying across the periphery of light. For his own good I tried to catch him and return him to the safety of the shore. Even the best of passages on CHIDIOCK is not something to be wished on a gecko; but he easily evaded pursuit. So as CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE sailed out Suva Pass into the predicted rough southeast swells, I half expected to see a poor seasick lizard, greener than usual, climb groggily onto the seat, stand on tiptoe, and peer longingly back at the rapidly receding hills. It did not happen. In fact I did not see him again. I like to think that he got off before it was too late.

I had cleared for Port Moresby two thousand miles west and north, where I hoped to obtain the necessary yacht permit from the Indonesian embassy so that I could continue quickly on to Bali. On the chart it was a straightforward passage, the only tactical decision being whether to make the move north before or after passing what were then the New Hebrides. First we had to get clear of the reefs around Viti Levu.

Although I had twice sailed along that coast in other boats, I almost found myself embayed several times by long projections of the main reef reaching far offshore, particularly in the passage between Viti Levu and Beqa. The wind was steady at twenty knots, but the compressed waves were disproportionately high. The forecast was for up to twenty-five knot wind and twelve foot waves off the west end of Viti Levu. Conditions approached that near Suva with cresting ten foot waves in the narrowest part of the passage though which I had to steer by hand.

By late afternoon we were past Beqa. I was able to get CHIDIOCK to balance long enough so that I could eat a can of tuna. A fifty foot ketch appeared from the west, tacked twice and headed toward us. As she came near I saw that she was working hard going to windward. She crossed ahead of us and then turned to reach alongside on a parallel course. Part of her rub rail had worked loose. A jib dangled from the bow. The three crew on deck were haggard.

Pointing south, a bearded man in foul weather gear called, "What island is that?"

"Beqa," I shouted above the wind.

He relayed this information to someone in the cabin. Then, "Can you spell it?"

I did, adding that there is an alternate spelling beginning with an 'M' on some charts.

The larger boat was moving past CHIDIOCK and the man yelled to the cockpit crew to let the jib slat. "And where is Suva?"

This was more than I expected. I pointed back to the northeast. "About thirty miles. But there is a good anchorage on this side of Beqa."

"Our engine is broken," the man cried as the big ketch surged beyond shouting distance.

They turned into the wind and hardened up on the sheets. When they were again close enough I shouted a warning about the reefs. They waved and disappeared into a gloomy dusk. I sailed around the world before I returned to Fiji and learned that they lost their boat that night on the reef.

A few hours later the light on the island of Vatu Leile, the last obstacle before we had open ocean to the New Hebrides, appeared about twenty miles south of the port bow. The wind and waves had increased. CHIDIOCK was sliding down waterfalls, constantly on the verge of either broaching or gybing. Despite having the jib sheeted to the tiller and balanced with four shock cords, I had to keep my hand on the tiller. But sometimes we still gybed when, despite my putting the helm hard over, the stern was carried through the wind by a wave. The force of the wind was so great when this happened that I had to use both arms to bring the tiny yawl back on course. Some return to the sea, I thought. Or is this normal and I've forgotten? Several waves swept CHIDIOCK, but I did not discover the consequences until morning.

By midnight the light on Vatu Leile was astern. I knew that we had made more than sixty miles since noon. I was tired, and there was no reason to exhaust myself by steering through the night, so I hove to for a few hours' sleep.

At dawn the wind and waves were still high, the waves higher than those in the fifty knot storm we had experienced around Tahiti, perhaps as high as fifteen feet, though the wind was only thirty knots. I reached for the small water jug I kept tied to the mizzen mast for daily use, It was not there. More irritated than alarmed, I crawled back to see if it had fallen beneath the inflatable dinghy lashed to the stern locker. But it was gone. The passage to Port Moresby should take three or four weeks and I had debated carrying three or four of the collapsible five gallon water containers. Because CHIDIOCK was stern-heavy when loaded, I did fill a fourth container and lashed it to the bow cleat. Now I saw that it too was gone, leaving behind only its nicely secured handle. Overnight, twenty-one gallons of water had been reduced to fifteen—more than ample, but distressing.

After eating a granola bar and drinking a cup of cold coffee, I tried to get underway. A wave caught CHIDIOCK just as I was turning and threw us sideways a couple of boat lengths. Once we completed the turn and the wind steadied on the port quarter, I was able to get her to steer herself as we fled west at six knots.

Steadily throughout a day of fast if wet sailing we made our way through the worst of the band of rough water off Viti Levu. The odd wave continued to break, but now the waves were in the six to ten foot range, and the wind had dropped to twenty knots. That second night I was able to let CHIDIOCK continue to sail, although I slept very lightly, a part of my mind alert to an accidental gybe which threatened every half hour or so. Usually I awakened in time, but twice I was too late and we were hammered. I knew I was pushing too hard, that it would be safer to heave to, but I also knew that every mile was carrying us out of the rough seas.

The next morning I found that the two buckets, one inside the other, that I used as the head had washed away leaving, as had the water containers, only their handles behind. I had one bucket left, but I began to wonder what would be next,.

All that day, Friday, conditions improved, although I still could not get the stove to remain lit or manage a sun sight. That night we lost nothing except the last sliver of the waning moon.

Saturday, wind and waves dropped further to about eighteen knots and four to six feet respectively. Saturday night I fell asleep at 8:00 p.m. expecting to have my first real night's rest since leaving Suva.

Just before 10:30—when I looked at my watch a few minutes later it was 10:33—CHIDIOCK slid down a wave and pitchpoled. It is difficult to separate what I concluded upon reflection must have happened from my sensations at the time. One moment I was sleeping wrapped in the tarp on the port side of the cockpit, and the next I was flying through the air, catapulted like a pebble, as the stern came up. Dimly I recall a clank, seemingly

metal to metal, and then the stern rising behind me. I was afraid it would come down on me, that I would be impaled by the mizzen mast. Then I was in the water. I struggled free from the tarp, choked as a wave passed, and swam the five yards back to CHIDIOCK. I believe that given time she would have righted herself, but when I reached her she was on her starboard side, masts 30° below the water. Worse than last time, I thought as I swam around the bow. When I put my weight on the centerboard, she staggered upright.

I flopped over the side, which was not difficult. The gunwale was level with the sea. Much worse than last time. I fumbled beneath the water for my eyeglasses and found them still wedged in place beside the bilge pump.

CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE felt as though she were sinking. Except for a few inches at the bow, she was completely below the water. With each wave, she dropped from beneath me and I thought that she was gone. But each time she came back. The sails cracked in the wind. The pitchpole had been explosive and the jib and main were ripped along the leech tapes. The mizzen mast support bracket was broken, and the mast and sail floated astern. I pulled them back inside the hull, though I do not know why I bothered. Inside, outside, there was no difference.

Food bags, clothing bags, the bag with navigation tables, all were secured to a line tied to the main mast, and all were bobbing around on the surface. An oar floated away, as did a bag I recognized as containing books. It was still within arm's reach and I could have saved it. Later I regretted that I didn't; but it did not seem important at the time.

A mess of lines writhed like snakes. I felt below the sea for the jib furling line. We were lying beam on to the waves, the sails still trimmed for a broad reach, and by the time I furled the jib and found and released the main halyard, both sails were in shreds.

Another oar floated into the darkness. The cloud cover was complete, broken by not even a single star. Beneath the black sea CHIDIOCK was unfamiliar. I could only reach into the depths blindly, catch an object, and lift it to my face for identification. So far surprisingly little seemed to have been lost. But I could not find the last bucket. Only a plastic bowl was left to use to bail.

Gradually I gained confidence that CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE was not going to sink. She was an object for going out, rather than an object for going down. And had I been able to clear the water from her within those first hours, we could have resumed sailing not much the worse for wear.

I had contemplated such a swamping and made preparations, but the reality was more chaotic than I expected. The unsolvable problem was the centerboard slot. I had cut two pieces of wood to screw into place to block the slot, but in more than six thousand miles,



even in an earlier capsizing in which I was thrown from the boat on the passage from San Diego to the Marquesas, I had not needed them. When last seen they were in the forward starboard bin with the spare anchor rode, now hopeless twisted with the main sheet, bags, oars, and tattered pieces of sail. I waded forward gingerly. With each movement CHIDILOCK dropped away like an express elevator. But I could not find them. Presumably they had already floated away. With a sense of futility I gave up the search, returned aft, and sat down in waist-deep water. I took my little bowl and began to bail. I did not expect it would do any good, but I did not have anything else to do that night.

CHIDILOCK almost seemed to help, to try and ride higher, though probably it was only that the waves decreased without my noticing, and gradually I made some progress. The gunwales were now sometimes an inch or two above the sea. I stopped bailing and stuffed some pieces of my foam sleeping pad around the centerboard, but turbulence carried them away.

After another hour of bailing, I permitted myself some hope. We had several inches of freeboard, the seats were usually clear, and the water was mostly confined to the cockpit well. Only four more inches and I would reach the top of the centerboard trunk. But it did not happen. For two more hours I struggled without gaining even a fraction of an inch. The Pacific Ocean and I had reached equilibrium. Whenever I thought I might be gaining, CHIDILOCK would heel a few degrees and take on more water.

At 3:30 a.m. my back cramped. I was very tired. Perhaps the answer was to wait until dawn, jettison everything not absolutely essential that had not already jettisoned itself, and try again.

CHIDILOCK was too awash to permit any useful rest, so I inflated the dinghy, pumping a foot pump by hand. When the dinghy could support me, I secured it to CHIDILOCK with two lines and fell inside. Soaked to the skin beneath my foul weather gear and no longer warmed by exertion, I lay shivering through the remainder of the night.

By 6:00 a.m. I was back aboard CHIDILOCK. She seemed deeper in the water than when I left her. I transferred the food bag and the two remaining water containers to the dinghy. One container held about a gallon and a half of slightly brackish water; the other, a gallon. The third container had been punctured and held none at all. I also moved the navigation bag, the document bag, a Nikon camera, two of the three compasses, the sextant, the solar still, the big tarp, and two bags of clothes. The clothes were not important, but I had already learned that even a small amount of water in the inflatable made rest difficult, and I wanted the bags to lie upon.

Everything else I threw away: the spare rudder, a box of screws and bolts, the typewriter, two new camp stoves, camera equipment that I had trusted to an allegedly water

tight aluminum case that wasn't, and the kerosene lamps. When I opened the aft locker, other things I would have liked to keep, such as the medicine kit, a spare suit of sails, and a flashlight, washed away.

Finally, one way or the other, CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE was stripped of all but her fifteen pound CQR anchor and rode which would be useful if we ever reached land.

Once again I settled in with my bowl and once again I made progress to the same level of four inches of water over the centerboard trunk. No matter how furiously I scooped, that, once again, was all.

Every hour my back cramped and I had to flop into the dinghy to rest. With such breaks I continued to bail through the day.

In late afternoon I accepted the inevitable and climbed into the dinghy, this time to stay. I sprawled on the clothes bags. Something hard dug into my leg. Too exhausted to sit up, I squirmed until it slipped to one side. I noticed that the sextant case had washed away, but I did not care. The navigation bag was beneath my head. I pictured the chart. Navigation had been by dead reckoning since Suva. We were halfway between Fiji and the New Hebrides. 18° or 19°S, 172° or 173°E. Three hundred miles from the nearest land.

The dinghy spun so that I could see CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE. Torn sails snapped. The mizzen mast again floated off the stern. I should do something, I thought, but I did not move. I just lay there, thinking how much had changed so quickly, in the passing of a single wave.

At dawn and dusk I looked for land, even though no land could be near. And during the day I looked for ships, even though we were far from shipping lanes. I do not pretend that I would not have welcomed rescue, but I was forced to live up to my admonition to save myself, to rely on no one. For the present the wisest action was no action. Enforced passivity is one of the great facts of being adrift. Uncertainly about duration is another. At any moment a ship could appear; or I could drift for months, slowly dying.

On this morning, Tuesday, May 20, the tenth day of living in the nine foot inflatable, there were not even any good imitation cloud islands in sight. For more than an hour I sat on the side of the dinghy, more comfortable than when I was lying on the now saturated and rock-hard clothes bags in the bottom, which still was better than lying directly in the permanent pool of water beneath them. I had nothing new to look at, nothing new to think, nothing to read. The sun rose steadily; waves slopped over CHIDIOCK one hundred feet to windward; the wind blew at fifteen knots from the east-southeast; we continued to drift west-northwest at one knot. Everything was as it had been the day before, and the day

before that. Ironically, good weather settled in two days after the swamping, and we were missing fine sailing. I knew that if this wind carried all the way to Port Moresby, CHIDIOCK would have made her fastest passage ever.

I had had more than ample time to consider what we had struck and was reasonably certain that it was inanimate rather than animate. Great flukes towering over me would be a good but untrue story. No, it had been a log or a tree or, as I was inclined to believe, a container washed from a ship. CHIDIOCK's hull was unmarked, but with a draft of only ten inches that was to be expected. Only the centerboard had hit, and it had not sustained serious damage.

I glanced at my watch. 9:07. I could not wait any longer. Time for the big event of the day.

Sitting down on the yellow plastic bags, I studied the waves. They were only three feet high and rarely coming aboard, but I was acutely aware that whenever I opened the three layers of plastic bags protecting the ship's stores, I was risking a month of life. Quickly I grabbed a handful of cabin crackers and the jar of raspberry jam, the joy of my existence.

Long ago the sea imposed on me the habit of eating fast. Aboard CHIDIOCK it was a matter of getting the food in my mouth before a wave ruined it. But being adrift effected a cure. I chewed each crumb slowly, completely, and those big enough to dip into the jam, even more slowly and more completely. I loved that jam so much that I could not bring myself to ration it. When it was gone, it was gone. Probably in ten more days.

The last cracker crumbs eaten, I could not resist one last finger full of jam. I licked my finger clean before reluctantly returning the jar to the food bag. I waited a few more minutes before lifting the water container for my two morning sips. Sips, not mouthfuls, though occasionally the dinghy jostled when the container was to my lips and I swallowed more than intended. I was angry when this happened. I did not want to cheat. Jam was one thing, water quite another. As never before, I realized that the problem with the world's resources is distribution. A few too large sips meant a lost day of my carefully measured life. I might reach land in a few more days or weeks. A ship might appear at any minute. But if not, I intended to be alive a long, if miserable, time. A minimum of sixty days, ninety or a hundred or more if I was able to catch rain.

On May 17, the first day I made any notes after the pitchpole, I wrote, 'I will be alive in July. But June is going to be a long month.' Two sips of water and two sips only. Each held in the mouth, savored, swished about, swallowed. They were gone. The long day loomed before me.

I tied the water container down and covered it with the corner of the tarp. There were three quarts of water left in that container, rainwater I caught by spreading the tarp between my feet and shoulders during a brief squall—a lovely few minutes.

We had not had much rain. Only that one squall was catchable, combining heavy rainfall with an absence of breaking waves that would spoil the water before I could scoop it up with the lid from an empty jar. In that squall I caught almost a full gallon of fresh water, in addition to drinking my fill. Another change: when sailing I used to dodge squalls. Now I dreamed of them. I also dreamed of fountains and running water faucets and iced tea and drinking from a hose on a hot summer's day, and worst of all, of the half-full pitcher of Chapman's I left at the Royal Suva Yacht Club. I found that incredible. How could I possibly have done such a thing? I vowed I would never leave a drink undrunk again. And then I realized that I might never have the opportunity again.

When I left Suva on May 7, I had twenty-one gallons of water aboard CHIDIOCK; when I settled into life aboard the inflatable on May 11, I had two and a half gallons. Six gallons were lost the first night out, five gallons on the night of the pitchpole. At a generous estimate, I drank a gallon and a half between May 7 and 11. I could not help but wonder at such extravagance: had I ever really used half a gallon of water a day? That left six gallons unaccounted for. I did not even bother to calculate how long I could live with that extra water: for practical purposes, forever.

Despite my meager diet, food was not a problem. I was not much bothered by hunger. I recalled a Kafka story, "The Hunger Artist", in which the main character makes his living by performing fasts as a carnival sideshow. I too did not experience hunger after the first few days. But water was life, and I did not have eight and a half gallons on May 11, I had two and a half. With the rain, ten days later I still had two and a half gallons. But what had happened to the missing six gallons? Leakage? Evaporation? I did not know.

The solar still was a disappointment. As a test I once used such a still successfully, but now when it mattered, I could not get it to produce fresh water. And after I caught rain, I threw the still away.

The sun was warm enough for me to strip off my clothes and air my body. I was wearing foul weather gear and the same shorts and shirt I had on at the time of the pitchpole. Digging into the clothes bag for a change was futile. Everything was wet and never really dried, but my skin felt better for being exposed to the sun.

My tan was uneven. Hands, feet, and, I supposed, my face were dark brown; but most of the rest of my body was fish white, where it was not red with saltwater boils covering my forearms, buttocks, calves, and feet. A couple of spots on my buttocks, both elbows, my left

wrist where my watch rubbed, and both feet, were ulcerated. Ointment helped, but I needed the miracle of being dry.

I looked over the side and tried to judge our speed: a knot? a half knot? The difference was significant: one hundred and sixty-eight miles a week or only eighty-four. I no longer needed to check the two compasses to know our course: 280°, just north of the sun's path and unvarying for ten days. I feared any wind shift. I realized that in some ways we had been lucky—if unlucky to hit whatever we hit, then lucky to have done so three hundred miles east of the New Hebrides rather than west. And lucky to have steady wind blowing us in the right direction, even though such wind was to be expected in this part of the ocean. And most of all, lucky to have it happen this year when I had a good dinghy. I could have stayed alive aboard CHIDIOCK, but the effects of exposure would have been much worse.

A wave halfheartedly splashed aboard and soaked me, and I shifted to the other side of the dinghy to face the sun. From its height I knew it was nearly noon. I leaned over and opened the navigation bag, took a vitamin pill from the bottle, and closed the bag. Of all the things lost, I most regretted losing my sextant. It was a World War II Navy model manufactured by David White, two years younger than I, bought second hand for \$100. It had taken me around the world, and I was fonder of it than any other possession. Everything else I needed to determine our position was in the navigation bag. In this, as in many other ways, the transition from yacht to dinghy was easier for me than it would have been for someone aboard a conventional craft. I was used to living in the open.

I put the pill in my mouth, lifted the water container for a single sip, swallowed.  
Lunch.

Tomorrow there would be more. Cans were rusting and would have to be used. Labels had come off the cans, but by shaking them I could usually guess the contents. Half a can of fruit cocktail for lunch, with the other half for dinner, meant the only water I would use would be two sips in the morning.

In addition to the two and a half gallons of water, I had liquid in seven cans of fruit, three cans of vegetables, and ten small bottles of Coca-Cola.

My liquid ration was less than one cup a day, six sips, or only five, depending on self-discipline at noon. I knew there was a chance of kidney damage, but so far my kidneys functioned. I remembered Bombard's book about drinking sea water while drifting across the Atlantic, but I was not tempted to do so.

Each can of fruit or vegetables would provide liquid for a full day. Ten days total. The water on hand would also last at least forty days, and surely in these latitudes it would rain.

But I did not count rain in my calculations. Rain was a gift. The Coca-Cola, which I considered more secure in bottles than the water in plastic containers, was to be used last. Ten bottles for seventeen days. Two days each for the first eight bottles. I had decided I would drink the last two bottles together. Once before I died, if only for a few minutes, I was not going to be thirsty.

My food supply consisted of five cans ravioli; four cans beans; one can hot dogs; three cans tuna; four and a half packages ship's crackers; three boxes Muesli; one half jar jam; ten freeze dry dinners; four packets powdered milk; one jar peanuts; one can peanut brittle; one bottle vitamins pills.

Each can made two dinners, and the hot dogs would make three. I could stay alive a long time just on the crackers and Muesli. The peanuts and peanut brittle would keep me going for weeks. And with caught rain, each freeze-dry dinner would last three days, and each packet of milk a week. Without rain the freeze-dry food was useless, I had eaten freeze-dried without cooking, and I tried to eat some without water, but it simply could not be swallowed.

At times I wondered if I was being too hard on myself, particularly toward the end of the first week, when my body most strongly protested the new regimen. The odds were good that I would come upon land within a month. And for a drift of only a month I would not have to ration much of anything. But if I did not come upon land, if the wind changed, or if I did see land but was unable to get ashore and had to continue to Australia, I was determined to last the course. I felt stronger that day than I had a few days earlier. In fact, I felt that for each of the past three days I had made some gain, however slight; that I was reversing the inexorable slide toward death.

To escape the blinding heat Saturday afternoon, I had swum from the inflatable to CHIDIOCK. Already I had lost weight and strength, particularly in my legs. Back aboard CHIDIOCK I made another search of her flooded hull and discovered treasure: two bottles of Coca-Cola, a knife, a tube of Desitin and one of sunscreen, a pair of shorts, a mismatched pair of flip-flops, a hammer, and a plate.

The knife had a bottle opener, and I immediately drank one of the Cokes. The other bottle still put me two days of life ahead, and the warm, sweet liquid did me a world of good. I pulled the inflatable to CHIDIOCK and transferred everything except the hammer and the plate.

Tiny electric blue fish swam inside CHIDIOCK. Someday, I thought, I may have to eat you.

The next day I again returned to CHIDIOCK, this time to try to bail her out after passing the tarp beneath the hull in an attempt to block the centerboard slot from below. The seas were calmer than at any time since she swamped, but it took me most of the morning to tie the tarp in place. I still had nothing suitable to use as a bailer. First I tried a plastic bag, which was worthless. I looked around and saw the plate. As a scoop it proved effective. I was able to move a considerable amount of water with it, but unfortunately not considerable enough.

Before untying the tarp and returning to the dinghy, I inserted the rudder and untangled the mainsheet and halyard. When I raised the torn sail, CHIDIOCK responded by gracefully rolling onto her side and sailing for the depths. Less gracefully, I leapt clear. She righted herself and I scrambled back on board and was able to turn her downwind before she could repeat her new trick.

Grossly, very, very grossly, I was able to steer with great sweeping movement of the tiller which was underwater. In an hour I might change her position by a hundred yards. But if I sighted land, even such limited control might make a difference. Inordinately pleased, I furled the sail and dropped the rudder back into the gaping aft locker before returning home.

From the beginning of the drift I held on to the hope I could save CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE as well as myself, though I knew the odds against her were long. That was one of the reasons I kept the boats tied together, even though the dinghy would drift faster by itself. I also thought that both boats together were more likely to be seen than either alone; and that, however, unpleasant, the swamped CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE was someplace to go if the dinghy deflated. Now the odds against CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE seemed slightly reduced.

By mid-afternoon the sun was hot. I took the spare pair of shorts, dipped them in the sea, and put them over my head. I had already draped foul weather gear around my shoulders for shade. Unwashed, unshaven, uncombed, covered with more boils than Job, and with a pair of shorts as a turban, I was ready for the cover of GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY.

I found myself speculating about other solo sailors who have been lost at sea: Slocum, Willis, Riving, Colas, Piver. I wondered if they died quickly or slowly. There had been times when I thought I was going to die at sea, but always death would have been quick. Now I was on the edge, not for a few minutes or a few hours, but weeks, months. Already my tongue was thick, my lips pasty. I wondered what it would feel like to be thirsty and know not that there was water that should not be drunk, but that there was no water. It was not death I feared, but the suffering along the way.

My initial reaction to being adrift was one of apathy laced with depression. I did not care about the voyage or the challenge or the sea. Sailing had brought more pain than pleasure. If I survived, I would go ashore and find a life with a little comfort—the old chimera: peace, rest, ease. Surely I had earned them.

But after a few days of this, I knew that if the sea did not kill me, and if it were possible, I would sail on. If CHIDILOCK were lost, I would try to replace her. I would not, however, sail indefinitely from shipwreck to shipwreck, disposing of open boats like used tissues. At a certain point, and I would know when, such a voyage would become absurd rather than honorable.

The terrible thing about the sea is that it is not alive. All man's pathetic adjectives are false. The sea is not cruel or angry or kind. The sea is insensate, a blind fragment of the universe, and kills us not in rage, but indifference, as casual byproducts of its own unknowable harmony. Rage would be easier to understand and to accept.

Whenever I thought of death, and obviously I thought of it often, I also thought of Suzanne—not really an unflattering association. I was thirty-eight years old. No man in my family had lived to such an age for generations. I had accomplished some of what I wanted to with my life—not all, but more than most men. And for me dying at sea had long been accepted as an occupational hazard. Of all that the land offers—the places I had not seen, the few friends with whom I would like to share conversation and a bottle, the music, the books, the paintings—most of all, I would miss Suzanne. I had never loved her more than during these last days, when the contrast of the happiness we had shared and the bleak reality of the present was so great.

When I left Suva I had not realized that it was the very day on which four years earlier I left Auckland to sail for Tahiti. I had not known then whether I would ever see Suzanne again. Now, for quite different reasons, I also did not know if I would ever see her again. I was glad that I was not yet overdue, that she would have no reason to worry.

Something on a nearby wave caught my eye, something brown and round now hidden in a trough. Then, there it was. It was going to drift past. Terribly excited, I dove over the side and started swimming.

When I had the coconut safely in the dinghy and held it to my ear, I heard the glorious sound of liquid. With the blade of my rigging knife, I cut away the husk, and with the fid, I punctured two of the eyes. Normally I am not fond of coconut, but the slightly sour liquid was ambrosia. I took two big swallows before draining the rest into a jar, almost two cups. And there was more moisture in the meat. But how to get to it? I recalled the hammer on CHIDILOCK and pulled us over. With three blows the shell cracked apart: days and days of life.



Half an hour before sunset I ate dinner consisting of the last half of a can of tuna washed down with coconut milk. Despite the can having been open for twenty-four hours, the fish did not smell bad. And I would have eaten it anyway.

In the last light I searched for land. There was none. I wrapped myself in the tarp and tried to settle in for a long night of broken sleep. My thoughts were the same as they had been last night and the night before that. How many more long days and nights: four? forty? one hundred and four? And what was at the end: an island? a ship? death?

I drifted on.

The blackness was a cliff. I lost it for a moment behind the tattered remnant of mainsail. The time must be nearing 3:00 a.m. and I was sitting in chest-deep water, trying to steer the swamped CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE clear of the island, which, after promising life when I first spotted it the preceding morning, had become just another face of death.

Death at sea is protean. I had known it as water slopping about EGREGIOUS's bilge off Cape Horn; as the innocent-appearing crack at the trailing edge of the keel when I dove overboard in the horse latitudes; as disorientation when EGREGIOUS capsized in the Roaring Forties; as the sound of breaking waves when in the Southern Ocean I lay in my bunk and EGREGIOUS lay ahull helplessly awaiting the wave that would finish her; as the incomparable force of wind south of Australia, ripping the surface from the sea, filling the air with water, making breathing all but impossible, as it drove EGREGIOUS beyond hull speed under bare poles; as the suddenly flooded cabin in the Tasman; as the slab side of the towed tug as it almost ran CHIDIOCK down off Tahiti. And now as this shadow, barely discernible against black sky and black sea.

Through rain-streaked glasses, I caught a glimpse of the ghostly line of surf at the base of the cliff, less than a quarter mile away. If we drifted much closer, I would have to abandon CHIDIOCK and take my chances in the inflatable. But I did not know if I could row the dinghy in such waves, now more than ten feet high and growing steeper as the long swell from the ocean touched the rising seabed below. Perhaps I had already waited too long.

My body was filled with numbness and pain. I had been trying to steer CHIDIOCK for twelve of the past eighteen hours and for the last five continuously. The tiller and all of CHIDIOCK but the mast were below water. There was an illusion of great speed caused by waves rolling over us. One of the waves crashed through the jib and tore it to ribbons. We were 'sailing' on the twenty or so square feet of chaffing patch on the mainsail. We were not truly sailing at all. I only hoped that by keeping the bow pointed generally in the direction of a broad reach, we might clear this first island.

From the waist down I had lost sensation, except of agony when I bumped the ulcers on my feet and ankles against the fiberglass floor. Moving the tiller through the exaggerated sculling movements necessary to control the swamped yawl took both hands, which had also lost feeling. I smiled inwardly when I recalled steering CHIDIOCK with a single finger. My back and neck were on fire. Always the fire smoldered and at intervals it flared into a spasm of white-hot pain. There was nothing to do at such moments but hang onto the tiller and wait for the pain to subside. Don't fail me, body. Don't fail before the sky begins to lighten.

A wave loomed high above me, the highest wave I had seen from CHIDIOCK, a wall of water as high as the yawl was long. Here we go, I thought. This one is going to break. CHIDIOCK started up the steep rise. The wave lifted me from her. I clung to the tiller, no longer steering, just hanging on until the tiller pointed straight up and I was floating at arm's length above the submerged hull. I was not afraid for CHIDIOCK but for the dinghy. Where was it? Downwind where it would be squashed beneath the yawl? CHIDIOCK turned beneath me, riding sideways up the curl. If only the oars weren't washed from the inflatable. Then I was through, sliding down the foaming back of the wave. Somehow it did not break, and an instant later CHIDIOCK and dinghy came through unscathed.

I floated back aboard CHIDIOCK. Within a few yards the comber disappeared into darkness, but I heard its roar as it slammed into the cliff.

We were not going to clear this end of the island. There was so much noise—sails, waves, surf, wind—that it was impossible to know whether my efforts were doing any good.

Under her scraps of sail I could not tack the yawl. I could not point any higher than a beam reach, which was not pointing at all, but merely CHIDIOCK's natural drifting position. Presumably I could gybe. I had not tried, for the wind was at right angles to the cliff and I was trying to clear the closer end. There seemed to be no advantage in gybing, and a clear disadvantage in that we would be in danger for a mile before reaching the far end of the island, rather than the two hundred yards to this end. But, as I hardly needed remind myself, we were not going to reach this end.

I pushed the tiller over, held it there, and waited. Another wave came and pushed CHIDIOCK in the opposite direction from the way I was trying to turn her. I kept the tiller over and kept waiting. With the next wave the rudder gripped and her bow swung slowly off the wind. The motion, once begun, was assisted by a third wave; and with a fourth, the chaffing patch gybed and, from force of habit, I shifted to the other side of the cockpit.

The maneuver had cost distance. The cliff was now less than three hundred yards away and the waves were becoming steeper. I wondered if we had even a safe three hundred yards, if rocks or coral did not lie hidden beneath the breakers. CHIDIOCK was too low to provide an unobstructed view to the shore. I debated again whether I should abandon her

and try to row free in the dinghy, since on this apparent course I was lengthening the distance to safety. Everything was 'apparent' because I simply did not know. Only after long minutes could I form any impression of true movement. Part of me screamed to get into the dinghy before it was too late, and part remained calm and said to wait a little longer until it was certain we could not clear the island this way either.

Without warning a wave broke. Because she was already beneath the sea, CHIDIOCK could not really capsize, but she rolled ponderously onto her side and I was washed away.

My legs were useless, circulation so impaired that commands to swim brought no response. They trailed like vestigial appendages on whatever form of life I was evolving into, as I fought first to keep myself afloat inside cumbersome foul weather gear and then to swim back to the yawl using only my arms.

CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE remained on her side. This view of her no longer seemed unusual. If anything, in the thirteen days since the pitchpole, I had come to have unlimited confidence in her. The sea could strip everything from her, toss her around like a toy, fill her with water; and she would patiently survive.

My legs persisted in their refusal to function, so I could not stand on the centerboard, but the weight of my upper body was enough to right the yawl. She had less water in her when I managed to get back aboard than before.

We had drifted closer to the island, but we also seemed to have drifted along. What was the direction? Days earlier I took the compass bracket to the dinghy in order to preserve it for my next boat. My exhausted mind worked slowly. With the coming of the first squall last night—or rather, this night, but long ago, when I was resting in the dinghy—the wind had backed east, which meant that on a starboard reach we had been trying to clear the north end of the island, and now on port, the south end. I had thought that the current would follow the trend of the trade winds we had experienced for most of the two weeks adrift and tend north. But perhaps it divided. Perhaps there was a tidal variation. Perhaps all my struggling had been unnecessary. Perhaps if I had simply let us drift we would have been saved by blind chance. Because now it was obvious that we were being carried along the coast faster than we were being carried in. I could not yet be certain that we were being carried along fast enough, so I remained at the tiller, more or less holding the bow in the right direction. Even if this did no good, at least it did no harm.

Riding sideways up great curling waves just beyond a line of thundering surf, I fell asleep. My eyes closed and my head fell forward. Reflex snapped it back, which ignited flames along my spine. Each spasm had been worse than the one before, and this was a summation. I wondered if it would ever end. Could so much pain come from a muscle spasm?

Whatever the cause, the pain served to keep me awake until we sailed, drifted, and were carried safely past the island, and I was able to collapse into the dinghy and rest.

Dawn was delayed by a squall. When it passed I saw that we were drifting down a great corridor of sea, bounded on the north by a line of four islands, and to the south by a large island in the far distance and several closer rocks, one of which was so white with guano the I mistook it for a sail. Six or seven miles directly ahead of us lay two more islands: one, a small, sheer peak jutting from the sea; the other, five miles long and with three 2,000 foot peaks, about which the squall line lingered. In the pallid light all the land was gray and showed no sign of habitation.

I pushed myself up and ate a breakfast of half a dozen crackers, raspberry jam, a can of pears, and a handful of peanuts, washed down with unlimited water. At the first sight of land rationing ended. The need for energy far outweighed the possibility that I might not get ashore and have to drift on. I even drank two of the precious bottles of Coca-Cola.

When I completed this feast, I opened the navigation bag and studied the chart. There were only two groups of small islands such as those surrounding us shown in the New Hebrides. One was too far north, so we must be among the other group, just fifty miles north of Port Vila, the capital.

I found some satisfaction in having my dead reckoning proven accurate. I had predicted landfall in two weeks from the pitchpole, and here were on Saturday, May 24, two weeks later to the day. My satisfaction was short lived when I recalled the past night. I still had to reach shore alive.

I stared back at the islands behind me. With the coming of day I was not certain which cliff had almost destroyed us. I turned to the island ahead. Rain was falling on the peaks. People must live there, I told myself.

Throughout the morning waves marched forward regally and carried CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE with them. I felt as though we were being escorted along a marble corridor in a great palace. The waves had not diminished, but now in deeper water they were no longer breaking. The motion was stately; the mood, solemn, as I lay resting in the inflatable and watched the nameless land come nearer.

The size of the waves worried me, as did the nature of the shore. I knew little about the New Hebrides, except that they were at that time under joint British and French rule and soon to gain their independence and be renamed Vanuatu.

Of a few things I was certain: beyond the island ahead lay only the open ocean for fourteen hundred miles to Australia; landing would be safer on the leeward side of the island; I must land before night. I dreaded the physical pain of returning to CHIDIOCK. At 11:00 a.m. I did so anyway.

The ocean felt cold as I settled beside the tiller, perhaps because I was running a fever caused by the infection in my feet. With movement, circulation and sensation were restored. A necessity, I supposed, but a mixed blessing. Who would expect that the feet are the part of the body to suffer most in sailing an open boat? The familiar needle-and-pin pains shot through them. They were swollen with edema. And the ulcers, particularly on both ankles where the rotten skin was easily bumped, were filled with pus. The moment of re-immersion was almost unbearable, but then my feet and legs went numb and I forgot about them.

As I tried to sail CHIDIOCK the sun broke through the clouds and turned the small island bright green. For another hour the larger island remained shrouded, but then the sky cleared and it too turned emerald. And I saw a house. I could not take my eyes off it, the first outpost of man, which during the days adrift I had thought I might never see again. It was just a small house in a clearing on the side of the northernmost peak, and yet proof that people actually did live on the island; and where they could live, I could live. A while later a column of smoke rose from farther up the mountainside.

By then, though, conditions had changed. Once again, no matter how I tried to sail, CHIDIOCK was carried sideways by the current. If in the night the current had saved us, now the scales balanced, for we were being carried too far south, away from the land, which now meant life, not death.

When there were only three hours of daylight remaining, I knew that I could not get CHIDIOCK ashore before dark, if ever. Sadly I returned to the inflatable, cast off, and began to row. The gap between the boats widened. The dinghy rowed well as I quartered wind and wave. I was still too far off to determine anything of the shore, except that midway along the island mist filled the air from heavy surf. There was no question of rowing around to the leeward side. I had neither the time nor the strength, though I was buoyed by the certainty that an end would come before sunset.

As I rowed I gazed back at CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE. Perhaps her loss had been inevitable since the pitchpole. If I had been rescued by a ship, she would probably have had to be abandoned. And even if I had managed to maneuver her to land, if there were a reef, I would have had to let her go. But we had been through so much: seven thousand miles since San Diego. And at this very moment she was still sound. Despite everything, with a few replacements and a few repairs, she could continue the voyage. From only a short distance away, she was mostly hidden in the troughs,, and I realized how unlikely had been the

possibility of ever being spotted by a ship. Already she seemed well to the south on a course that would carry her outside the offshore rock. I waited for one last glimpse of her. There she was on a crest, torn sails fluttering, awash, valiant. I engraved this image in my mind and then deliberately turned away.

For an hour I rowed hard, managing to get across wind and current. Then I rested and drank a Coke as we drifted closer. Individual palm trees became distinguishable, and a second house on the hillside not far from the first, but no other signs of man: no fishing boats, no village that might mark a pass or a landing.

The waves started to build before I saw the beach and the reef. I was directly below the house, which stood a quarter mile back from the shore and a few hundred feet up the mountainside. The beach ran from the northern point, was obscured by brush, then appeared again for two hundred yards of pure white sand before being lost in a jumble of rock. For a quarter mile out from the beach lay the smooth turquoise waters of a lagoon. Life. And between me and the lagoon lay the reef.

When I was close to the surf line I began rowing along the shore, searching for a pass. There was none. Soon we were around the rocks, and the shore and reef fell away to the west. I could see an unbroken line of surf three to five breakers deep, increasing in violence in the distance

I turned and tried to row back; but the dinghy was caught in the sweep of the seas. Suddenly the ocean changed color and I saw coral reaching toward me. Any place was as good as any other. The coral would slice me up, but if I could protect my head I should survive. I turned in.

At first I went slowly, trying to get a feel for the rhythm of the waves. I backed water as the dinghy trembled on a crest that almost broke beneath us; then I rowed as hard as I could. The next wave rose. Still rowing I noted the lovely translucent blue of the water as it climbed to the sky. I even had time to think that this might be the last thing I ever noticed. The wave toppled and threw us out, up, and forward. The dinghy's bow was dropping, and I dove toward the stern to balance it. Everything was roiling water. It passed and I came up for a breath, surprised to find myself still inside the dinghy, the oars still in my hands. Another wave was coming and I resumed rowing.

The second was worse than the first. My sense of direction was lost. I fell backwards as the dinghy stood on its head while the wave swept us along. I forgot my intention to protect my head, and rose once again, oars in hand, rowing.

The third wave was smaller than the first two and less dangerous. I was able to keep my head above water, though neck deep in foam. Then it too passed and instinctively I was

again rowing for my life. The moment when I realized that there was no need, that we were through, that we had made it without even a scratch, came abruptly. The wild ride over the reef, the days of doubt adrift, the solitary struggle, and now I was going to live. I really was going to live.

Once again I found myself chest deep in a swamped ship. Kneeling in the bottom of the dinghy, I rowed slowly across the lagoon. I was amazed that we had not capsized in the surf and that the oars had stayed in place. I owed much to that dinghy. If only I could have saved CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE.

A speck of color caught my eye. Several huts stood among the palm trees at the point. From one of them hung a line of drying clothes. Those pink and blue and white bits of cloth were symbols of normalcy that filled me with comfort.

I drifted the last few yards. Sand grated beneath the dinghy. I stepped ashore, my dead legs collapsed and I fell. I lay there laughing.

The voyage had shattered like a vase, and the pieces were scattered around the world. As I limped along Cook's Beach on New Zealand's Coromandel Peninsula, I wondered if I would ever be able to put it back together. I was no longer free to sail on. I was dependent on boat builders, business men, editors, publishers, shipping agents, dock worker, crewmen on freighters, copra boats, customs officials, tribal chiefs, and revolutionaries. Adrift life had been simple. Ashore it quickly became complicated. As I told the official at the British Residency at Port Vila who expressed surprise that I managed to save my passport and traveler's checks, "I did not know if I would survive. But I knew that if I did, I would need little pieces of paper."

I had been ashore for two weeks, the same length of time I was adrift, but vastly different. My feet and body were almost healed, my spirit less so. Perhaps as was only natural, when survival became certain, my will lapsed. And it was both fortunate and unfortunate that Suzanne and I were lent the use of a beach house.

Fortunate because Cook's Beach is a beautiful spot on the shore of Mercury Bay—Captain Cook stopped to take a transit of Mercury there, as he earlier did of Venus at what became Venus Point in Tahiti—with scenery and climate similar to northern California, but with considerably fewer people. In June we almost never saw another soul when we collected driftwood for the fireplace, and seldom more than a few cars during the two mile walk to the nearest store. It was a fine, quiet place to recuperate and write and think.

But unfortunate because in my weakened condition I liked the place so much I wanted to stay. I found myself studying the smooth water of Mercury Bay and thinking what a

perfect place for a boat like CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE. There were coves and rocks and islands to explore for years, a home ashore, the comfort of Suzanne, and, undeniably, the avoidance of more pain. I had struggled against the sea for most of the past six years, and I was tired.

Bernard Moitessier said to me when we met in Moorea, “Ah, but you are young and strong.” I was thirty-seven at the time. A little more than a year later, I felt old. When I attempted on my first circumnavigation to reach Cape Horn, I told myself that nothing else would ever matter so much in my life, and so I made the commitment absolute. Now, did this voyage too have to become a matter of victory or death? Was it that important to me? Would any lesser commitment enable me to continue? Was it worthwhile, or was I nothing more than a casual amusement, a sideshow freak like Kafka’s hunger artist? Would I come this close to dying three times every seven thousand miles? And when would I have done enough? I held a world record for my first voyage and with CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE I had already sailed farther than any other man alone in an open boat. To paraphrase the great baseball pitcher Satchel Page, I looked back and didn’t see anyone gaining on me.

As I continued along Cook’s Beach, my mind turned from these unprofitable thoughts to that other, warmer beach a thousand miles north, and to my first moments ashore.

By the time I unloaded the dinghy, the sun had gone behind the mountain and the air was cooler. This was the tropics, so the temperature was still in the eighties. But because of fever, I was cold.

Looking for a change of clothes, I opened the bags and spread their contents on the sand. In addition to moldy clothing, navigation tables, documents, and food, I found that I had also shared the dinghy with such essentials as a road map of Tahiti and a hot-water bottle.

Apparently no one had seen me come over the reef, and I did not feel like walking the short distance to the village that night, meeting people, talking, explaining. I wanted a last night alone. It was enough to know that the village was there. I could wait until morning to rejoin the human race.

When I started to shiver, I wrapped myself in my old friend the tarp, variously a tent, roof, blanket, rain catcher, centerboard plug, and now ground cloth. I fell immediately asleep.

Dimly, through fathoms of fatigue, the murmur of the wind in the trees sounded like Elvis Presley; but even while sleeping this seemed odd, so odd that I knew something must be wrong. I sat bolt upright and threw off the trap, causing thirty or so Melanesians who



thought a corpse was coming to life to scream, shriek, run, and pray. One of them held a portable cassette player from which came Elvis's voice.

"So you are alive, then," said a tall man about thirty years old, one of the few onlookers who remained composed. He had a British accent.

"Yes. And very glad to be. I hit something with my sailboat and drifted for two weeks in that." I pointed at the dinghy. "Where am I?"

"On Emae Island."

"Can you show me on a chart?"

"I should think so." When I handed him the chart, he pointed to a small island about forty miles north of Port Vila, which was where I thought I was. Then it was the man's turn to ask questions.

"How did you come ashore? You did not come over the reef?"

"I couldn't find a pass."

"No. There is none on this side. You must have injured yourself."

"I was lucky. My feet are bad, but that was from before."

They all looked down at my puffy feet and gave a chorus of 'Oh's'.

"We must get you up to the chief's house. Can you walk as far as the trees? I will send someone for the truck."

"Slowly."

"Of course. Take your time."

He said something in another language and everyone smiled. Several children ran off along the beach toward the village, while others picked up pieces of my gear, and we made our way across the beach and through a line of brush to a trail cut through the jungle. I had not stood for almost three weeks, and my feet hurt too much, so I sat down on the damp ground and waited for the truck, which soon appeared bouncing along ruts made by it and the one other vehicle on the island. Even though the young man who drove the truck did so carefully, I found the ride painful.

At the chief's house, which was the one I had seen from the sea, I was left in the care of Kalo Manaroto, his wife, Nellie, and their children. I never knew just how many children they had, for dozens were in and out of the place, and when I asked Kalo, he said, "Oh, I have about five."

Kali offered me dinner, but I was too tired to eat and just drank tea while water was being heated in a bucket on the kerosene stove. When it was ready, Kalo carried it around the house and showed me a washtub. After carefully rinsing off the worst of the salt, I returned to the house and was given a room where a cot was made up with real sheets. I lay for a few moments in this unaccustomed luxury and thought of CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE drifting toward Australia somewhere in the night.

A little after 7:00 the next morning there was a knock on the door, and a bearded man about my age, wearing black-rimmed glasses, jeans, and a short-sleeved shirt, came in.

“I hope I am not disturbing you.” The man held out his hand, both to shake mine and to motion for me to remain in bed. “I am Fred Timakata, the village chief. I am sorry not to have been home when you arrive, but I was meeting with the chiefs of the other villages. How are you feeling?”

“Better, though still tired.”

“I troubled you so early because we have a radio schedule with Vila at 8:00 and I am going to ask if they have a plane free. Are there any messages you want to send?”

This was unexpected and welcome news. “You have an airfield?”

“For the past two years. Just a clearing in the bush, but enough for small planes. We have saved many lives by being able to fly people out rather than having to wait for a ship.”

I wrote a telegram for Suzanne. *‘CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE lost. I fine. At Emae Island, New Hebrides. Will telephone from Port Vila within week.’*

Fred took the message and started to leave for the island’s school where the radio transmitter was located. Just before he closed the door, he said, “Oh yes. I have asked the dresser to come by.”

To someone familiar with British usage his meaning would have been clear, but my speculation as to who or what the ‘dresser’ might be ended only when a shy young man, carrying a large black bag, knocked on the door and announced, “I am the dresser.”

To this I ventured a cautious, “Yes.”

“Yes.” He held up the bag as a badge of office. “I have come to give you injections.”

“For what?”

“To make you well.”

“What kind of injections?”

He displayed a bottle of clear fluid.

“And what is that?”

He was surprised I did not recognize it. “Medicine.”

“But what kind of medicine?”

“To make you well.”

“No.”

“But it will make you well.”

“No medicine.”

Losing such an opportunity was obviously a disappointment and, after a pause, he made another offer. “I will take your blood pressure.”

To this I agreed. But when he took out the instrument, it was broken. Desperately he rummaged through the black bag before exclaiming, “I will get you some calamine lotion.”

Believing this would cause no harm and seeing how eager he was to do something, I agreed. Seldom have I made anyone so happy, and the young man sped from the room to fetch calamine.

Half an hour later he returned and began to dab the pink liquid on my hands and feet. As he worked, we made small talk. I learned that his name was James. He was born on Emae, but trained to be a dresser at a hospital on the big island of Espiritu Santo.

When he had almost finished painting me, he mentioned offhandedly, “Oh, yes. They found your boat.”

My words tumbled out, “What? Who? Where?”

Before Jame could reply, Fred Timakata appeared at the door. “Yes. Your boat was floating upside down in the lagoon at the other end of the island.”

This was incredible. When last seen CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE was far to the south of Emae and i had accepted the she was lost.

“Is she badly damaged?”

“Probably so, I’m afraid. After the men from Sangava village saw the boat, they searched the beach for bodies, think that it was a lifeboat from a ship. When they came up to the school to report, I told them about you.”

My excitement was difficult to contain. “Is the boat still afloat?”

“They said they had dragged it ashore.”

“Can we get there?”

“It would be necessary to walk some, but the truck could take us most of the way. When you feel well enough, that is.”

“I am well enough now.”

“But your feet...”

“I must see my boat.”

I managed to get thongs salvaged from the swamping partly on my feet and we all climbed into the truck and rolled down the hill and along the jungle track.

After stopping in Sangava as a courtesy to the village chief and to pick up men who knew the boat’s location, we left the trail and dodged trees until the truck was stopped by thick bush. “We have to walk from here,” Fred told me. “They say it is not far.”

The Sangava men led us through the vegetation. I could hear the sound of surf, but I did not catch a glimpse of the beach until we actually stepped onto it. My shipwreck was the biggest news on Emae Island in a long time. In their excitement the men took off down the beach at a pace that left me limping far behind. In the distance they joined a group clustered at the edge of the jungle. As I neared, the men quietly stepped aside and there was CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE, not only safe but sound. Her hull was intact. From the gunwale down it was not even scratched. And for the first time since the pitchpole, she was not full of water.

When I later studied a detailed chart of Emae Island, I found notation of a current running clockwise around the offshore rock. CHIDIOCK must have been carried south by this current before being returned to be swept over the reef during the night. She had flipped in the surf. Her mainmast and gaff were shattered, the heavy bronze stem fitting bent, and the teak gunwale cap splintered near the bow and along the stern. But these were all just pieces to be stuck back on. She almost seemed to have followed me ashore. I half expected her to ask what had taken me so long.

While remembering, I had continued to walk and now found myself at the end of Cook’s Beach. Other memories returned as I retraced my steps to the house.

My first real meal at Fred's home that Sunday evening: turtle stew supplied by the islanders, and the treat, for them, of freeze-dry chicken stew supplied by me. My almost regal progress by truck to the airstrip, during which everyone we passed waved or saluted. The efficient British Base Hospital in Port Vila, where I was told by the Australian doctor that coming from a civilized country I had the dubious advantage of having civilized staph which were resistant to the antibiotics used in the New Hebrides; where one night I awoke from a feverish nightmare, reaching up, trying to strike out at a wave towering over me, only to discover that it was a frightened nurse with my 2:00 a.m. medicine. The old woman who smiled and gently touched my swollen feet and gave me in broken English the ultimate accolade: "You win the big sea."

I climbed the low dune separating the house from the beach and stood there a moment. A telegram from England, advising that CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE's replacement parts had shipped in what would become a race with the cyclone season, had arrived that morning.

## 9 The Proper Storm

**On** a moonless night I found sixteen shades of darkness.

Six were in the sky: an over-all blackness of the heavens; a diffuse gray to the west, although the sun had set hours earlier; the pinpricks of the stars; a few scattered shadows that were clouds; the flow of the Milky Way; and sporadic flashes of lightning far to the north.

The sea revealed even less than the sky. It seemed to have turned in upon itself and to be studying its own depths for hidden memories. It breathed with deep, low respirations in rhythm to a long, low swell from the south. The waves, only inches high and from the east, were a lighter gray than the swell, or, rather, than the back of the swell, for it was not visible until it had passed. The shadows of clouds, shadows of shadows, were impenetrably dark. And there were a few flashes of bioluminescence as CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE ghosted forward.

On CHIDIOCK could be found six more shades. The featureless triangle of the mainsail undulated above me. Around me was an indistinct cockpit. A solid black line marked the teak gunwale's absorption of all light. There were the vaguely golden columns of varnished masts; lumps of bags; and my own form, clad in foul weather gear.

The foul weather gear was worn not in anticipation of bad weather, but because everything was covered with evening dew. For me on CHIDIOCK, on even the best of nights, foul weather gear often served as pajamas.

I wondered about the Impressionists' tenet that all shadows have color. In all I saw, only a few stars, the masts, and the foul weather gear revealed even subdued color, hidden as though beneath a thousand years of soot. Yet perhaps more color was there.

When I had exhausted these permutations of darkness, my mind moved outward. Darwin lay a week behind; Bali, I hoped, less than a week ahead, although after several fifty mile days I was not making any predictions.

Sometime since leaving Darwin CHIDIOCK and I had completed ten thousand miles. I was not certain just when. I have never been able to answer when someone asks how many miles I have done. Still, ten thousand miles in an open boat was something of a milestone, and this particular passage was the final phase of the transition that had been taking place since Cairns, Australia. The trade winds and the open Pacific had given way to seas crowded

with shipping and dominated by land. Although I did not intend to, it would be possible to sail almost all the way to Gibraltar in sight of land. The thought was appalling. I realized that perhaps only the Pacific and the Southern Ocean are truly open. I already missed the Pacific, even as I was drawn onward by the exotic names appearing on the new charts: Sumbawa, Lombok, Bali, Java.

Darwin had been an unexpectedly good stop.

The impression of Darwin I arrived was based on a photograph of the muddy commercial basin; but the anchorage off the Darwin Sailing Club a couple of miles northwest is clean, with a good landing on a sand beach, although twenty-five foot tides force boats larger than CHIDIOCK to anchor a half mile or more off.

A frontier spirit still exists in the Northern Territory. The people are friendly, and the weather during the dry season is fine. Dust blowing into the sky over the vast desert to the west results in the most consistently spectacular sunsets I have found anywhere in the world.

What I liked best about Darwin was the wildlife. In Darwin nature had not been subdued. Two-foot long lizards called goannas walked among the cafe tables at the Sailing Club. One of these gave me pause when it refused a scrap of meat pie I was eating. Hawks soared overhead. Dugongs browsed through the anchorage. And a few crocodiles occasionally chased people up the boat launching ramp.

This new beginning, the departure from the familiar world of Australia, caused me to recall my departure from San Diego more than two years earlier and consider what had changed in ten thousand miles. Two things stood out. Now I knew the voyage was possible. The departure from San Diego had been a leap into the unknown, if a calculated one in a proven hull. Viewed objectively after ten thousand miles, the odds of our successfully completing the circumnavigation seemed to me to be about the same as those for any other boat, although weighted differently. We might be overwhelmed earlier than some vessels when caught by a storm, but we would better survived other crises, such as going aground.

The other major difference was that when I left San Diego I did not know if I would see Suzanne again, while now I knew that she would be in Bali on July 3. There was for me great contentment in being able to enjoy solitude at sea and still share harbor life. Sailing CHIDIOCK was a struggle to impose order in a medium of chaotic change, although it might not seem so on this smooth night. My feelings for Suzanne were one of the few constants in that chaos. She had shared the limitations of an open boat as a home, reduced her worldly goods to a single duffel bag, learned to cook well on a camp stove, and endured a succession of potentially final farewells. I think it was Winston Churchill who said that his wife was the sheet anchor of his life. That is what Suzanne had become for me.

Other things too had changed in ten thousand miles, but these were only details. I dislike clutter and confusion, and I would like to believe I have a talent for finding the simplest way to solve problems, at least on boats. One of the reasons I have been able to keep going so long is because I have kept myself as strong as possible, while making sailing as easy as possible.

As CHIDILOCK slouched along, I thought: 'Well, if we aren't going very fast, we aren't paying a high price in wear and tear on boat or crew either. In fact, except for a few mold spores in the fresh water supply, we don't really have any problems. I should be grateful and am.'

For eleven days and eight hundred miles CHIDILOCK eased her way west. We did not in that time ship a single wave. In boredom I took many more sights than usual and knew our position with rare precision. I even stopped winding myself into the tarp at night.

Light winds were to be expected this time of year. Yet I had known passages that began quietly and ended noisily, and was not altogether surprised when on the eleventh day thick clouds rushed down upon us and rain began to fall. The island of Sumbawa was not far off, but its volcanic peaks, ranging to over 12,000 feet, were hidden by the storm. That night there were not sixteen shades of darkness; there was only one: absolute blackness outside of me matched by absolute blackness within. At 11:00 p.m., instead of rushing blindly on, steering by feel down waves I never saw, I hove to.

We did not resume sailing until 9:00 a.m. the next day after I managed to grab three quick sights of a sun indistinct through clouds and over a ragged horizon of eight foot waves. Usually I would not attempt to use the sextant aboard CHIDILOCK in such conditions, and I was annoyed that when sights had not been essential, they came easily, but now when I needed them, they did not. Two of the position lines were a mile apart and the third was only eight miles farther east, which I considered acceptable. I concluded that the east end of Lombok was due north of us. Bali was sixty miles west, too far to reach before sunset. I could only hope to get close enough to enter port the following day.

In mid-morning a promontory on Lombok became distinct for a few minutes before being lost in another squall. At sea visibility was improving, with most of the clouds passing harmlessly overhead on their way to loose torrents on the high islands.

For several hours Lombok played hide-and-seek with us, but by 2:00 p.m. I could see enough of the coast to realize that we were now off the west cape and sailing into a trap. Bali, although still not visible, lay only thirty miles away. In the first ten miles were the swift current of Lombok Strait running at up to eight knots. The next ten were bordered by the



island of Penida. And then the last ten led to Benoa harbor on Bali, safety for a vessel once inside but until then a lee shore. It was a box, blocked to the north and west by land, and to the east by thirty to forty knot wind. We could still safely escape by reaching off to the southwest, but to do so would risk being blown past Bali during the night.

The little yawl dashed on while I considered unappealing alternatives. When 1,700 foot high Penida came into sight at 3:00 p.m., I turned CHIDILOCK into the wind and hove to under mizzen alone.

We were making sternway directly onto the island, which I estimated to be about eight miles distant. Even at just one knot we would be on it during the night, and if this night was to be as black as the previous one, we could not afford to get too close. For the moment, though, we were safe, and it felt odd to be hove to during daylight.

I sat in the cockpit for a while, trying to judge our rate of drift. In an hour Penida definitely drew closer, but not as rapidly as I had feared. So on the assumption that somehow we would reach Benoa safely, I took the opportunity to wash myself and to shave.

As sunset neared I managed to heat a package of freeze-dried beef stew, but I could not succeed in brewing a cup of tea.

The view to windward was not promising. Heavy clouds showed no sign of clearing. The view to leeward was not promising. Individual trees on Penida were distinct. I stared broodingly to the southwest. That way was still open. We could reach off now. Sooner or later this storm would end and we would wind up somewhere. I imagined Suzanne's reaction if after being in Bali for several days, she received a telegram from me in Java. Thoughts, calculations, plans, worries, fears, balanced one another, and I finally did nothing. We would be all right until at least 10:00 p.m. In the meantime I would try to sleep.

A few minutes after I covered myself with the tarp, three waves hit us. The first caught CHIDILOCK abeam and threw her sideways in a great blast of spray; the second seemed to take her from below and toss her into the air; and the third came from ahead, lifting the bow until the little yawl seemed in danger of performing her first backwards somersault. I pulled the tarp away and began pumping the bilge.

Although we were west of the strongest currents through Lombok Strait, we were obviously in the midst of a battle between strong wind and strong current. These were the conditions we had found several weeks earlier near Cape York, here greatly magnified. Ten foot waves leapt up all around us, fell, smashed into one another, rebounded, reformed, and broke again.

I was more angry than frightened. Of all the miserable places to have to heave to. The jagged waves cast long shadows in the fading light. The air temperature was tropical, but I

felt cold, as though CHIDILOCK were being tossed about among frozen mountain peaks. The way to the southwest seemed ever more inviting, but I did nothing except sit and wait; and when after fifteen minutes no other waves repeated the assault of the first three, I lay back, pulled the slimy tarp over my head and again tried to sleep.

Unexpectedly sleep came. There was no reason for me to be tired. Until the day before I had been as comfortable aboard CHIDILOCK as I would have been in harbor, yet I found myself dreaming. A sea snake, such as I had often seen in northern Australian waters, had washed into CHIDILOCK and I kept trying to hit him with an oar, but I was able to move only in slow motion and the snake kept slithering away. In the dream CHIDILOCK became a long marble corridor down which I endlessly pursued the snake. After forty-five minutes of this restful pastime, I awoke. Night was complete. Penida had disappeared. But from the west came a faint loom of light, the first sign of Bali.

I returned to sleep, but throughout the night I awoke at thirty to forty-five minute intervals. The result was a wide range of dreams, but at least the elusive sea snake did not reappear.

When I decided to hold our position and await developments, I had hoped that the sky might clear or the wind decrease or the seas diminish or CHIDILOCK's angle of drift change so that we would miss Penida. Any one of these would have been enough, and the third or fourth time I awoke, I realized that just as CHIDILOCK is a self-simplifying boat, so this night, which had threatened to become an ordeal, had turned into a self-solving problem. Half the sky was clear, and in starlight Penida lay safely north of us. The wind had dropped below twenty knots; the seas to around five feet. I smiled. Sometimes it really does happen. You lie down and cover your head and it all goes away.

The next morning was sunny and warm, with such light wind for a while that I began to be concerned that we might yet be swept south of Bali by currents.

By 10:00 a.m. we were only two miles offshore and I caught a glimpses of patches of white in the distance, which I thought at first were waves breaking against a cliff. Only as we drew closer could I see that they were sails and that the sea was full of them, inverted triangles of multicolored cloth on gujungs, the local one-man fishing craft, which darted about like swift water spiders.

On the chart Benoa appears to be easy to find; it is the first opening in the coast north of the south end of Bali. But soon I began to wonder. A new set of clouds was spreading rapidly over the sky; the wind had increased to fifteen knots; and the storm appeared to be preparing for Act Two by washing all color from sea, land, and sky, and repainting everything a uniform gun-metal gray.

The fishing boats, which were south of me, began speeding home. As the first of them neared, I could see the fishermen, wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and conical bamboo hats. Hand lines trailed from reels in the sterns of their small trimarans. The vessels' narrow center hulls and bamboo outriggers were well maintained and decorated with colorful designs.

The gujungs easily outsailed CHIDIOCK, then making six knots, and the first twenty or so confused me by continuing beyond a break in the palm trees I thought led to Benoa.

Boat after boat streamed past, with another fleet running before a black line squall to the west, and all of them sailing determinedly north.

I let CHIDIOCK close with the coast until we were only a few hundred yards beyond what was the first opening in the shore. It gave no other sign of being a harbor. I could see no ships inside. And the waves on the reef were breaking solidly.

Another group of gujungs approached. I backed the jib and let CHIDIOCK fore-reach across their course. Clutching the mizzen mast, I stood and pointed toward the shore. "Benoa?" I yelled above the rising wind.

The nearest fisherman pointed with an oval loaf of bread he had been eating from one hand while steering with the other. From my perspective I could not tell if he was pointing in or up the coast. "Benoa?" I repeated. But he had already turned away and the reply came from a second fisherman, who, as he whizzed by, gestured for me to follow. By now several of the boats were almost to the surf. I re-trimmed the jib and trailed after them.

With boats of the fishing fleet showing the way as they passed CHIDIOCK on both sides, finding the channel was not difficult. It involved a starboard broad reach followed by a gybe to a port broad reach. The surf appeared to be solid because the reef from the north overlaps the reef from the south.

Rain was falling on the land and behind us at sea. The gujungs were bright jewels against dark velvet. Some of the fishermen smiled, some made shy hand motions that might have been meant in greeting, some stared at me curiously, and most ignored me. Finally one called in English, "Where you from?" Thinking that California was too far, I settled for "Darwin." He looked surprised, then grinned and gave me a thumbs up.

By the time I was off Benoa's fishing village, the first of the gujungs had already been pulled above the high-tide mark on the beach. Larger native sailing craft lay at anchor inside the harbor. An intricate Hindu statue stood beneath palm trees. Flute music came from somewhere. There were smells of fish and spices. Sailing in with the fishing fleet had been beautiful. We had reached the East.

## 10 The Red Sea Backwards

**Arabia** looks just as I expected. The western deserts of America disappoint because they are not barren; almost everywhere something is growing. But Arabia has the terrible beauty of pure desolation: sand and rock, brown mountains rising inland, medieval forts on two of the hills near Bab el Mandeb, the southern entrance to the Red Sea, through which we had passed the preceding afternoon, a cluster of huts in a fishing village, and that is all.

The sea turned a bright green and flat on our second day out of Aden, which I had left after only four days of rest following the forty-seven day, four thousand miles nonstop passage from Singapore. I had learned there that my grandmother, my only relative, was dying in California, and I was trying to get CHIDIOCK to Port Sudan where I could leave her and fly back.

For two hours CHIDIOCK sped north. At noon, when we were off a village called Dhubab, she began speeding too fast, skating on the edge of control at better than seven knots. I furled the mizzen. A few minutes later I reefed the main. We now had only seventy square feet of sail set. A few minutes later I untied the jib sheet from the tiller and began to steer myself. The easy part of the passage was over. The hard part, in which we would have gale-force winds blowing beneath a hard blue sky for three days, followed by a full week of flat calm in which we made only one hundred and seventy-five miles, the least I have done in any boat, had begun.

Sailing was exciting at first that afternoon as we raced along beside a barren shore. The wind blew steadily and the sea remained smooth. But as the hours and miles passed and the Red Sea began to widen, short, steep waves typical of shallow water began to form. The main shipping route, which had been well to the west, began to converge with our course in order to clear a group of islands forty miles to the north. And the wind increased to forty knots.

At 6:00 p.m., keeping one hand on the tiller, I reached back with the other and undid the shock cord on the mizzen. I was not trying to set more sail, but preparing to heave to. When the mizzen was flattened amidships, I spun CHIDIOCK's bow up into the wind and scrambled for the main halyard. Before I could clear it from the belaying pin, the wildly flailing sail wrapped the main sheet around the tiller. The sail filled and pulled the tiller, turning us dangerously beam on to the seas. Two waves crashed aboard. Then the halyard came free, the gaff slid down, order was restored.

In complete darkness I spooned uncooked freeze-dried chicken stew into my mouth and contemplated our situation. We were about equidistant from the light of the town of Al Mukha to the east and the running lights of ships to the west. Each was five miles away. The sea itself was not threatening. CHIDIOCK was riding waves safely; but she was going backwards too fast. Judging our speed was difficult. I thought it might be as much as two knots. If it was, we would cover more than twenty miles before first light and risk being driven ashore or into the midst of the shipping, which was even heavier here than we had seen in the Strait of Malacca. The running lights of at least half a dozen ships were always in view.

For several hours I dozed fitfully as we proceeded stern first up the Red Sea. At 3:00 a.m. something undefinable made me certain that we were about to be driven ashore. I could see nothing except the now distant lights of Al Mukha to the south. Conditions were far from suitable for sailing, but I felt we had to try to claw offshore.

There was a moment of transition between being hove to and sailing when CHIDIOCK was out of control. The instant I eased the mizzen sheet, the bow began to swing off the wind and I aided its momentum by unfurling the jib. Everything seemed to be all right, until I put the tiller amidships and CHIDIOCK gybed. I pulled the tiller hard to starboard and we gybed back, sails cracking like gunshots as they refilled. I moved the tiller amidships again. Again we gybed and rolled beam onto the waves. I gybed back. More gunshots, more groans from CHIDIOCK's simple rigging. I could not understand what was happening. Had waves caught us and forced the stern around? Was something wrong with the rudder?

As we surfed down waves I could not see, I experimented with the tiller which was hard over to starboard; when it approached 20° of amidships, the sails threatened to gybe. Neutral helm was so far to starboard that I could not steer from the port side of the cockpit.

For an hour we thrashed our way northwest. Normally one would speak of thrashing to windward; but although our erratic course, caused by the strange angle of the tiller and my inability to feel or see the following seas was a broad reach, we seemed to be fighting against the waves rather than moving with them. I was using the bilge pump as much as if we were beating. At 4:00 a.m. I decided that land would not be a threat before dawn, so I again hove to.

I did not attempt to sleep, but sat huddled in the cockpit, worrying about when this wind would decrease and wondering what was wrong with the rudder.

As the sun's first rays flowed over the mountains of Arabia, I saw that the waves had doubled in height during the night, and now ranged up to eight feet. My first reaction was that I was crazy to sail in such conditions. But I was positive that we had been in danger.

The rudder was a galvanized steel plate welded to a galvanized steel shaft and could be lifted up into the cockpit through a slot. I had twice bent the rudder shaft on coral, once near Tahiti and once off northern Australia.

Trusting the mizzen and centerboard to keep CHIDIOCK's bow to the wind, I untied the tiller and tried to pull the rudder up, but it would not come. I did not know if the shaft was bent or if the blade was not aligned with the slot. I tried to duplicate the angle at which the tiller had been placed to achieve neutral helm during the night. Bracing myself against the yawl's bobbing and rolling, I pulled, heard the thunk as the rudder blade hit the hull, moved the tiller another inch to starboard and pulled again. Finally I found the correct angle, and to my great relief the rudder came up.

The tiller was attached to the rudder by a cap held by a set screw and a tightening screw. The fit was so tight that the cap had to be hammered in place, and this cap had been on the rudder for a year, so it was corroded in place as well. To remove a cap usually took me at least an hour. But one of the waves during the night had thrown us backwards hard enough to loosen this one. I re-aligned and re-tightened the screws and lowered the rudder. Then I sat, feeling cold and wishing the wind would decrease long enough for me to light the stove for a hot cup of coffee, and waited to see what the day would bring.

By noon our situation was becoming untenable. The wind had increased again. I estimated it now to be more than fifty knots. The seas had increased to ten or twelve feet, with higher sets coming through at irregular intervals. Even ships, several of which left the shipping channel to investigate CHIDIOCK, were making heavy work of it.

With the increase in force, the wind had veered a point to the southwest and was again driving us onto the land. We had drifted past several islands during the morning. Now the largest and northernmost, Jabal Zuqar, was a mile to the west. The island is 2,000 feet high, but has no anchorage. I thought it might at least provide some shelter in its lee. Even more than the previous night, these were not sailing conditions for CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE. But we had to try to get away from the Arabian peninsula and across the shipping route before nightfall.

I tried sailing under jib alone, but the yawl handled better when I set the mizzen as well. The lee of Jabal Zuqar proved illusory. Steering demanded both hands on the tiller. Wave after wave roared up and threatened to swamp us. Waves smashed into cliffs on the island, sending spray high into the air, as further east they broke over the bows of southbound ships.

My belief that CHIDIOCK was safe as long as we had sea room and I was at the tiller was dealt two severe blows by the Red Sea. The first came in the form of a wave that partially capsized us even though I saw it coming, felt it, and fought it.

That wave struck at about 4:00 p.m. By the time I had pumped it out of CHIDIOCK, it was 4:30. I decided enough was enough and remained hove to. Our efforts to get offshore had been partially successful. Jamal Zuqar was southeast of us. The wind had backed again to the south. According to the compass we were driving backwards on course 350°. Tonight's threat would be shipping.

After forcing down another dinner of uncooked freeze-dried food, I settled in to wait out the miserable night. I was wet and colder than I had been at sea for several years. I recalled hearing over the transistor radio a week earlier of 50°F temperatures in the Persian Gulf. I had never thought of cold as being a problem in the Red Sea, although I had lived close enough to deserts to know that they cool off at night. My arms and shoulders and neck were stiff from steering all afternoon. It was, of course, far too wet to take the radio from its protective bag. I watched the running lights of the ships a few miles away and thought of an old sailor's poem:

*Western wind, when wilt thou blow,  
That the small rain down can rain?  
Oh, that my love were in my arms,  
And I in my bed again.*

I didn't want a west wind, but the love and bed would have been most welcome.

I slept sitting up so that I would be able to react quickly. For several hours we seemed to be paralleling the shipping route. At 2:00 a.m. a sound awoke me. I opened my eyes and saw what at first I mistook for a row of street lamps. Perhaps I was just so tired that fear could not touch me. Calmly I thought: Those can't be street lamps. But then what are they? Not even when I realized that they were the interior lights of a ship did I become alarmed. Her hull loomed less than ten yards away. I was so close that I could not see the bow, but the knowledge that it would have hit us before I had awakened only added to my fatalistic detachment. Close, but no cigar. I watched with interest as the stern passed and the ship plowed on into the night. And then I closed my eyes and promptly went back to sleep.

I expected to wake up and find that the gale had blown itself out. This was March 1 and we were beyond 15°N, the usual limit for gales at that time of year. But it was not to be. The wind was still blowing between forty and fifty knots; the waves were still on average more than ten feet high. The only difference was that they were now smashing a group of rocks called Jaza'ir az Zubayr to the east of us, instead of into an island to the west as they had been the day before.

These rocks provided some interesting information. One of them was shown on the chart to be one hundred feet high. Spray from breaking waves reached two-thirds of the way

up that rock. And it took us just forty-six minutes to drift stern first the two miles separating two other rocks, giving us a speed of better than 2.5 knots. In fact we were averaging closer to three, covering seventy miles a day backwards.

If we had been unlucky to be caught by this gale, we had been lucky to be ten yards west of the ship last night, and lucky again to drift past these rocks at a distance of a few hundred yards without having to try to sail.

The Jaza'ir az Zubayr rocks were the last obstacles for more than sixty miles. The ships had disappeared, presumably somewhere to the west. All morning we remained hove to, speeding north stern first. The gale was bad, but I found myself much more tired than I thought I should be. Obviously I had not had time to recover in Aden from two months at sea crossing the Indian Ocean.

At 2:00 p.m. the first of a series of big waves capsized us. Before CHIDIOCK could rise from lying on her beam, a second wave threw her backwards. I clung to the starboard gunwale as though hanging onto the face of a cliff and watched in awe as the ocean creamed through the submerged port half of the cockpit and clutched at my feet.

When the wave finally released us, tossing us aside like a toy with which it had become bored, CHIDIOCK dropped back onto her bottom. It took a minute or two for me to establish that, incredibly, we were all right. Only the flotation cushions, one bucket and a chart had been lost. The bucket bobbed nearby. The cushions, one bright red, one bright yellow, remained visible on distant crests until long after I had bailed and pumped the cockpit dry.

That night the wind finally began to ease, but one more wave partially capsized us. Swimming in the cockpit, I grabbed a bucket and emptied CHIDIOCK without ever fully waking up.

Tuesday dawn found us hove to against a south wind. Tuesday dusk found us hove to against a north wind. And then we were becalmed for a week. On the other side of the world my grandmother died.



# 11 The Island That Would Not Be Passed

**Thinking** about it afterwards I succumb to the pathetic fallacy and say that the island waited, for that is the way it seems; that the island was waiting, wreathed in clouds and absolute assurance that she would draw me to her.

To me in Portugal the island was nothing more than an inverted teardrop, marked on the chart of the North Atlantic Ocean, Southern Part, as rising almost 8,000 feet above sea level some seven hundred miles to the southwest, and a guidebook photo of stone steps leading up to a Spanish church before a backdrop of green mountains. An outpost, the island was the last speck of land off Africa. Beyond it lay nothing but open ocean to the Caribbean. I knew that there was a harbor on the east side of the island at a place called Santa Cruz. But that was all. I did not need to know more because I had no intention of going there.

Thinking about it afterwards I realize how my life has turned at places I never intended to visit: New Zealand, Vanuatu, Saudi Arabia. Soon it would again. This time at La Palma in the Canary Islands.

In making an Atlantic crossing from Europe to the Caribbean, sailors balance the hurricane season, which usually ends at the beginning of November, with the advent of winter gales. Some wait until January for the trade winds to strengthen, but it was my intention to cross the Atlantic twice the season, sailing CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE II to Antigua and then flying back to sail across in RESURGAM, which I had bought earlier that year. So I left Portugal in October in CHIDIOCK.

The wind headed us on the fourth day, ending what had been pleasant though cool sailing. Just after taking a noon sight of a sullen sun lurking behind thin clouds, I changed from sheet-to-tiller self-steering used on a reach to simply tying down the tiller for going to windward. Within a few hours the wind had increased to over twenty knots. The mainsail was reefed. I was perched on the windward seat. Heavy water was breaking over the bow. Alternately pumping and wiping spray from my eyeglasses, I watched great thunderheads tower above us.

At sunset we were heading directly for a dark purple line squall. Anxiously I scanned the horizon, seeking a way to avoid it. But even as I watched, it grew and advanced upon us. I lowered the mainsail and sat wrapped in the tarp as cold rain plucked inquisitively at my foul weather gear. After an hour, still in the rain, I turned on the flashlight and fumbled

through the food bag until I found a can of ravioli which I ate cold and diluted by rain and seasoned by salt spray.

Under jib and mizzen CHIDIOCK was heeled 15° to port, and it felt as though every wave would capsize her. I did not expect that under those conditions she would capsize; it just felt that way. I lay down and pulled the tarp over my head and tried to tuck it in at the sides and over my feet. I knew that I would not sleep, but there was nothing else to do.

I screamed at the sky.

That first gale lasted two days and three longer nights. During the second night the wind increased to over fifty knots and I had no choice but to heave to for five hours during which we were driven backwards at three knots, or three times faster than our velocity-made-good of one knot earlier in the day.

I accepted that storm. I had sailed from Portugal knowing of a low near Madeira. I had expected it to move, but obviously it hadn't. So I had gambled and lost and had to take the consequences. On the third morning the wind gradually weakened, the black waves began to average less than ten feet, and the sky partially cleared. By afternoon, puffy, regularly spaced white clouds and a northeast breeze made me wonder if we were already on the edge of the Trades. If so, the gale had been a fair price.

After the poor sailing in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, I let my mind recall fine fast days in the Bay of Bengal and the Coral Sea. I was looking forward to this ocean passage, to giving CHIDIOCK her head and letting her dash off in a series of one hundred mile days. Perhaps we could challenge our best runs ever. After three times making more than one hundred and forty miles noon to noon, this would probably be our last chance to try to break one hundred and fifty, for good sailing could not be expected from the Caribbean back to San Diego. All this I contemplated because of a few puffy white clouds.

My hopes did not last long. At sunset we were again sailing directly for a dark purple line squall. I did not scream at the sky because of that. I screamed because the wind had returned to the southwest, again directly heading us. I informed the sky that if we had to have another gale, at least I was entitled to a reaching gale. The sky ignored me. Except for a few hours, CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE II would never know reaching conditions again.

Ahead of us, beyond that wind, now two hundred miles closer, Atlantic waves smashed into the black volcanic rocks of La Palma Island.

A kind of madness comes to a sailor in a small boat in a gale, if by madness one means the acceptance as normal of conditions that are far from acceptable. That night I slept for

twenty minutes when I first lay down at 7:00 p.m., but I lay wet and shivering beneath the tarp almost until dawn before sleep came to me again.

As CHIDIOCK slammed and slithered through a pitch-black night, the pitiful barriers between my body and the sea were breached. Hull, tarp, foul weather gear, clothes, were useless in this second gale which struck before I had dried out from the first. That night the ocean and I were one.

The struggle was unceasing. Lying down, my cold wet shirt plastered against my back beneath wet foul weather gear, my cold wet Levis plastered against my legs, my cold wet feet inside wet plastic bags, I snaked an arm from beneath the tarp and pumped the bilge every few minutes. I tried to count the strokes but lost track at two hundred when CHIDIOCK lurched. There must have been thousands of strokes every hour, hour after hour. I reached for the mainsheet. This was what made me think of madness. Teetering always on the verge of burying the lee gunwale and swamping, at intervals CHIDIOCK actually started to go over, and I did not even bother to sit up but just reached out blindly and played the mainsheet as one would a racing dinghy around buoys in a harbor. A sailor does not live on or even in a boat as small as CHIDIOCK; he wears her.

Conditions were such that I knew that were I living ashore I would not go daysailing even on a larger boat. Deliberately I turned my mind away, as one might from a battlefield, and tried to think of something pleasant. But while my mind wandered, my arm continued to play the mainsheet.

The next morning the wind decreased to less than twenty knots and we had more reasonable sailing. The twelve thousand foot high peak of Tenerife Island appeared to the south.

That night I slept well. We were becalmed.

For three days we drifted off Tenerife and celebrated two anniversaries: November 11, my forty-second birthday; and November 12, the fifth anniversary of the beginning of this voyage.

For my birthday CHIDIOCK presented me with a broken shroud. On a larger boat this would have been serious, but on the little yawl I was able to lower the mast and tie a jury-rigged line to replace the wire, which had snapped at a swage.

Fluky afternoon breezes enabled us to make a few miles each day. On the afternoon of the twelfth, the shadow that was La Palma Island appeared to the southwest. I considered if I should put in for provisions. This was our fourteenth day at sea, and we had covered only

seven hundred miles. Before leaving Portugal I had provisioned for two months, but we still had two thousand seven hundred miles to go. If we ever found the trades, we would have no problem. But if we continued to make only fifty miles a day, I would soon have to start rationing supplies, which, unrationed, hardly provided a luxurious diet.

I glanced at my face in the mirror. A bit gaunt. I pinched my arm, like a housewife testing a chicken in a store. A big stringy. But I supposed that losing a few more pounds would not kill me.

A return of wind, a headwind from the southwest naturally, was followed by the obligatory sunset line squall. The north end of La Palma Island lay roughly five miles south of us when the black clouds came together with a peal of thunder, which might as well have been the slamming shut of a door to the open ocean forever.

Quickly the wind rose above forty knots. For CHIDIOCK these were conditions in which to heave to, but I wanted desperately to get past the island. I tried to stagger on under jib and mizzen. Initially I held the tiller in my right hand and played the jib sheet with my left to keep from capsizing; but soon I could not control the thirty-square foot sail with my left hand and had to switch to my right. CHIDIOCK toppled from crest to trough, her gunwale scooped up the ocean, solid water covered the bow. Above the sound of crashing water came a high-pitched whine from the rigging.

The strain on hull and rig and sailor was immense. I knew that we should not be sailing, that despite all the commotion, we really weren't getting anywhere. CHIDIOCK did not have enough weight to carry forward motion through such waves. We were mostly leaping up and down in one place, making at most a knot and not even that in the desired direction. At least, or so I told myself, we were not losing miles.

Yet we were not to be permitted even that solace. After an hour the wind increased to the point where I could not control the jib sheet with both hands while steering with my knee, and we had no choice but to heave to. I reached for the jib-furling line and pulled on it with one hand while slackening the jib sheet with the other. The sail flogged dreadfully, shaking the rig, the hull, me, trying to tear us apart. The furling line came taut. The sail flogged. CHIDIOCK was out of control.

Thinking that either the furling line had snarled on the drum or that the head swivel had jammed, I tried to ease the line. The sail flogged hard and pushed the boat stern first into a breaking wave. CHIDIOCK shook herself free from most of the water, but the cockpit remained half full. I tried the furling line again. Again it came taut with the sail only partially furled.

With water in the cockpit acting as ballast, the little yawl settled somewhat. 'Settled' is an ominous word. From the tiller I grabbed two shock cords normally used for self-steering and waded forward. My weight at the bow reduced our inches of freeboard dangerously, but when I captured and tied the flogging sail, the mizzen took control and relative order was restored.

By the time I had pumped out the cockpit, the squall had passed and a few stars were peering shyly through clouds. I found the flashlight and tried to figure out what was wrong with the jib. I experimentally unfurled and furled the sail until I realized that when I had replaced the furling line after jury-rigging the broken shroud, I had put enough wraps on the drum to furl the sail completely in normal wind, but the tension on the sail in whatever wind we had just endured caused the sail to wrap so much tighter that half of it remained exposed.

This was a fortune discovery, for it prevented me from resuming sailing until I crawled forward and put additional wraps of line on the drum. Before I finished, another squall hit, and we remained hove to.

There is an immense difference between trying to beat against a gale and being hove to. For several hours I slept fairly well in at least fifty knots of wind. Only occasionally did a wave leap on board. Only occasionally did I have to pump. CHIDILOCK rode the waves like a cork.

The problem was that we were going too quickly in the wrong direction. At 1:00 a.m. I saw from the compass that the wind had veered to the northwest. By adjusting the mizzen sheet and the centerboard, I was able to change our drift to the south. During the hours we had already been hove to, we had been pushed away from La Palma. The island is twenty miles long from north to south. If we could not get past the north end, the gale might now push us past the south. I went back to sleep.

The sky was clear of all but a few distant clouds. The sun was bright. The waves slight. I had set the jib and resumed sailing before dawn. Now CHIDILOCK sat under full sail. White buildings dotted the shore of Santa Cruz a few miles west of us. I watched cars climb a coastal road. I watched Iberia 727s land and take off from a runway carved from a hillside. I gazed up at green peaks rising behind the town, just as they had in the almost forgotten guidebook photograph. I did all this at some length that Sunday morning. We were becalmed.

Across smooth water CHIDIOCK raced for the last rock off the south end of La Palma Island. Ahead of us the open Atlantic sparkled in the sunlight. The wind had returned just after noon on Sunday.

Sitting on the starboard seat, I was content. CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE II was still hard on the wind, the tiller tied down, the jury-rigged shroud to weather, but she was dashing along at five knots. This was the first fine sailing of the passage. I expected to put La Palma behind us before sunset.

When that last rock was three miles away, another door slammed, though this time without a drumroll of thunder. From a clear sky the wind increased to gale force. Even close to shore the sea became choppy. CHIDIOCK's speed dropped and her bow fell off until she was pointing south toward the island of Hierro, thirty miles away.

For a while I let the boat head that way, hoping that we would work clear of what might be only locally strong wind funneling around high land. Yet the farther south we sailed, the stronger the wind blew. I glanced back north. The sea was covered with white-caps. On our present heading we would have to pass east of Hierro sometime during the night, but if we turned, we would have a reach back to the north end of La Palma. CHIDIOCK would make at least six knots reaching in this wind. I untied the tiller, and we came about.

That afternoon was splendid. A last hurrah, although I did not know it then. CHIDIOCK was well balanced under jib and mizzen. Out of pleasure rather than necessity, I kept the helm in warm sunshine. Low waves pushed us rather than stopped us. CHIDIOCK seemed to enjoy the romp.

The rock at the south end of La Palma disappeared. The white buildings of Santa Cruz passed abeam yet again. A rock at the north end of the island came into view. I expected to have a late dinner because I had decided to continue steering until we were past the island; but I did not expect it to be as late as it was.

The wind vanished with the sinking sun. Twilight found me playing cat's-paws, trying to crawl the last mile to a flashing navigation beacon. This time the door closed silently. Between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. we made two hundred yards, and I gave the wind an ultimatum: Let us pass the light by 8:00 or I will go into Santa Cruz.

At 8:00 p.m. the light insolently flashed a half mile to our west. A glassy sea reflected stars. CHIDIOCK drifted quietly. No breath of wind troubled the flame of the stove as I heated water for a cup of tea. I tried to turn the bow toward oft-passed Santa Cruz.

It was the middle of the following morning before I reached the breakwater, behind which I found a small, dirty harbor filled with a few small freighters, about twenty yachts, all sensibly waiting for a break in the weather, and some fishing boats. The freighters were tied to a wharf at the north end of the harbor, near the center of town. The yachts were anchored off a high cliff to which they had run stern lines. On the top of that cliff, reached by stone steps, sat the Club Nautico. The fishing boats were on moorings near the south end of the harbor, beneath a several hundred foot high cliff. A forlorn arc of black sand ran between this cliff and the lower one at the Club Nautico. The beach seemed to be composed more of cinders than sand.

Having lowered the sails, I kept CHIDIOCK stationary with oars while I considered where to put her. Clouds began pouring over the mountains, blotting out the sun. Gusts of wind scurried about the harbor. I let them push us closer to the yachts. A woman rowed out from one of them. Someone standing near the fishing boats yelled something and gestured toward a vacant mooring. As she came within hailing distance, the woman said, "Webb Chiles, I presume." I cannot pretend not to be pleased at being recognized, though of course she had recognized CHIDIOCK, not me. Her name was Annie. She asked where I had come from. I asked what the weather had been like in the harbor and in what depth the yachts were anchored. As we drifted I saw that there was no room for me among the other yachts. There was space for the hull, but not enough for CHIDIOCK to move about as much as she likes, even if I put a stern line ashore.

I rowed toward the mooring indicated by the men ashore. CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE II was much smaller than the fishing boats; presumably what held them would hold her. I could always move later.

I took the mooring, tying fore and aft to it as the nearby fishing boats were tied. I waved my thanks to the men ashore, who smiled and waved back. A sheet of rain drove Annie back to her boat, the man ashore into a shack, and me hurriedly to erect CHIDIOCK's harbor tarp tent. That we were deep in the shadow of the cliff did not seem significant.

In Portugal I had met a beautiful English woman who looked a great deal like Julie Christie. I telephoned her and asked if she could come out and spend a few days with me. The forecast was for continued unsettled weather, so I wasn't going anywhere for a while. She agreed, but her London travel agent had only a vague concept of the Canary Islands and put her on a flight to Lanzarote, the island closest to Africa and farthest from La Palma. I got on one of the 727s I had watched from the sea and flew to spend some time on Lanzarote.

The Iberia jet banked slowly on the approach. During the short flight from Tenerife on that lovely sunny morning I was pleased to see a sparkling ocean touched by a light

easterly wind. Perfect sailing conditions. I went over the list of things I had to do before setting off across the Atlantic. Mostly it was just re-provisioning and re-packing everything in plastic bags.

It was Thursday, November 24, 1983. I had been away from La Palma for a week, longer than expected because a storm had shut down the airport at Tenerife through which I had to fly to and from Lanzarote. In high spirits, with no sense of foreboding, I paid the taxi driver and walked through the Club Nautico to the patio overlooking the almost deserted harbor. Most of the yachts had already taken advantage of the fine weather and left for the Caribbean. CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE II was not there either.

For a moment I thought I was not looking in the right place, that the little yawl was hidden behind one of the fishing boats. I walked to the end of the wall. She was not on any of the moorings. My eyes swept the beach. I could not see her anywhere.

I called down to the crew of catamaran who were preparing to weigh anchor. They called back something that I could not understand and pointed toward a launching ramp near the fishing boats. I followed their arms and saw CHIDIOCK's hull sitting there without masts.

I found my inflatable and learned from various people that the storm which had closed the airport on Tenerife had brought hurricane force winds to La Palma. The gusts were strongest in the downdraft off the cliff. In one of them CHIDIOCK capsized. Fishermen managed to get her ashore. The authorities had taken everything removable, including the mast, to their headquarters for safe keeping, but before they had done so, someone had broken into the only locker and stolen equipment.

I rowed to the ramp and walked up to CHIDIOCK. As always she had survived. Other than the deliberately smashed locker hatch, the only damage was two broken belaying pins. The oversized padlock lay locked on the cockpit floor.

I went to the police headquarters and was sympathetically shown the equipment and stores being kept there. A good many things had been lost when the boat turned over: provisions, charts, a compass, anchors, clothing. Other necessities, including my sextant, which was in the locked locker, had been stolen.

Those losses completed a process begun by a capsize in the Pacific in 1978. I did not own anything—not a single article of clothing, not a book, not a cassette, not a chart, not a radio or a sextant or a camera, not a teaspoon—that I had owned when I left San Diego on November 12, 1978. It is just as well that possessions do not matter, for they do not survive a voyage in an open boat.



I thanked the men and crossed the street to the Club Nautico where I stood for a few minutes, looking out at the sea on which CHIDIACK TICHBORNE I and II and I had sailed twenty-five thousand miles. There was not the slightest sign we had ever been there. Putting the boat and the voyage back together again would not be difficult. It would take nothing more than time and money. But I knew that I would not do it. People later said how disheartening that moment must have been. It was not. Almost a decade earlier, having to turn away from Cape Horn because of rigging damage was disheartening. A year earlier being imprisoned in Saudi Arabia and divorced from Suzanne was disheartening. Almost a decade later, losing Jill and RESURGAM within a few hours was disheartening. There are more circles in my life than those I have carved on the world's oceans with boats. I glanced at my watch. I had been back on the island barely an hour. I turned and walked away.



RESURGAM *1983-1992*

**RESURGAM** was also a stock British boat, a She 36, designed by the American firm of Sparkman and Stevens. When I bought her in 1983 the dollar was strong versus the pound sterling, making boats atypically less expensive in England than the U.S.

She was my first used boat, but not my last. The spread between new and used boat prices has increased dramatically and, at least for me, decisively over the decades.

She was similar to EGREGIOUS, a 1970s IOR racer, with a low wedge cabin fairing into an almost flush deck. Although only a foot shorter than EGREGIOUS, she was actually much smaller. She was also a much better boat, both in design and construction. Olin Stevens was arguably the foremost yacht designer of the Twentieth Century, and RESURGAM's first owner had his own workmen build a beautiful and functional interior.

Between her purchase in Ipswich, England, in 1983, and her sinking off Florida in 1992, I completed my second, made my third, and began my fourth circumnavigation on her. By chance I closed the circles of circumnavigations II and III in Taiohae Bay, Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas Islands. Most of the passages during those years I sailed with Jill, who was then my wife.

RESURGAM was a sloop. By 1984 I had come to trust jib-furling gear and had it installed in the British Virgin Islands. From that point, RESURGAM was a three sail boat: a 135% furling jib, a main, and an asymmetrical spinnaker. Although I carried a few other sails, I never used them.

I still navigated by sextant when I bought RESURGAM; by the time she sank I used GPS.

Self-steering was by Aries wind vane, a later model than the one used on EGREGIOUS. For nine years it worked perfectly, requiring only an occasional freshwater rinse, lubrication, and the replacement of one bolt. RESURGAM had an inboard diesel, so I also had a tiller pilot which I sometimes used when under power near shore.

*Resurgam* is Latin for 'I shall rise again'.

I first came across the word in a biography of Sir Christopher Wren, who incorporated a piece of rubble inscribed *resurgam* from old St. Paul's into new St. Paul's. In the context it referred both to Christ and to the cathedral.

In 1983, after a year during which a publisher with whom I had a contract went out of business, my grandmother, who was my only close relative, died, I was imprisoned in Saudi

Arabia and later went through a divorce, I named the boat RESURGAM as an affirmation that life would get better. And it did.

## **1983**

**April** bought RESURGAM in Ipswich, England, where I left her while sailing CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE from Egypt to Malta

**July** flew to England and sailed RESURGAM to Vilamoura, Portugal, where I left her while I flew to Malta and sailed CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE to Vilamoura

## **1984**

sailed from Portugal in January and continued westbound circumnavigation begun in CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE I and II, closing circle in December at Nuku Hiva, Marquesas Islands

## **1985-1990**

made third circumnavigation, also westbound, again completing circle at Nuku Hiva

## **1990**

continued west across South Pacific to Sydney, Australia

## **1991**

**October** sailed east from Sydney to New Zealand with a stop at Lord Howe Island

## **1992**

**January 15** sailed from New Zealand for Uruguay via Cape Horn

**February 27** rounded Cape Horn

**March** arrived Punta del Este, Uruguay

**April** sailed from Punta del Este to Rio de Janeiro

**June** sailed from Rio de Janeiro to St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

**July-August** departed St.Thomas for Key West, Florida. Collision with ship off Puerto Rico. After repairs in Puerto Rico, arrived Key West

**August** sailed Key West to Fort Lauderdale, Florida

**August 15** RESURGAM sank ten miles off Fort Lauderdale

**August 16** after swimming twenty-six hours reached anchored fishing boat off Sebastian Inlet, Florida, 125 miles away

## 12 Nautical Roulette

**Circumnavigating** sailors become spoiled, though they might be surprised hear so. For most of a trade wind circumnavigation the wind is fair and there are no major routing decisions. The trades blow from the east, so you sail west. Except during the various hurricane/cyclone season, nothing too terrible happens in trade wind belts, and there is some fine sailing there.

Aboard RESURGAM I could quantify fine sailing: the sloop was making at least six knots more or less toward our destination and the foredeck was dry enough for me to sit there after lunch, lean back against the lifelines, and listen to a couple of cassettes on a Walkman without getting wet, preferably in the shade of the jib. Sounds idyllic, and it was. It even happened. I have been in enough bad weather to savor the good.

Sailors can circumnavigate without leaving the trades with only a few exceptions. One of these is the first leg to get on the carousel. Most sailors live in places with worse climates than they will face in the rest of the world, which is why they often have the worst weather of their entire voyages at the beginning.

You can get around South America to the north while remaining in the trades. You will have to cross the doldrums twice in a circumnavigation. I have now crossed them and the Equator ten times, almost always in boats either without an engine or with one that was inoperative, and have never been slowed much. Only twice will most circumnavigators leave the trades, and one of these is optional. From the Pacific Islands down to New Zealand can be avoided, but in my opinion shouldn't be. The distance from Fiji to New Zealand is eleven hundred miles, and only the last half is unpredictable. But Africa presents greater problems. You will have to leave the trades no matter which way you go around Africa. Having gone both ways, I prefer south. When you approach from Australia and Indonesia, the wind is usually fair all the way to Mauritius. But from Mauritius to Durban is a sixteen hundred mile passage from the tropics to the Thirties across weather patterns. There is no way when you set sail from Mauritius to know what will be happening when you approach Durban. It is nautical roulette. You spin the wheel and trust yourself and your boat to live with whatever turns up. Even if you have voyaged mostly in the trades, by the time you reach Africa you are calling yourself a sailor, so it is time to be one.

In 1985 we had two gales between Fiji and New Zealand. In 1987 we had one gale between Mauritius and Durban. That one storm was worse than the other two combined, and the worst natural disaster in the history of South Africa up to the time, with floods causing hundreds of deaths and hundreds of millions of dollars damage. Except for the

cyclone in the Tasman, it was also the most severe storm I have been in outside the Southern Ocean.

We first heard of the storm on a BBC radio broadcast while enjoying fine sailing six hundred miles off the coast. It had taken a week to cover the first thousand miles from Mauritius. It would take another week to cover the last six hundred. And twenty hours for the last eight miles. The only redeeming feature of that storm was that it blew mostly from the southeast, which enabled us to reach and run ahead of it. Except for the threat of freak waves caused by wind against the Agulhas Current and eventually concern about approaching a lee shore, RESURGAM handled the weather well once we let her broad reach under bare poles.

Before we went to bare poles the sloop took three knockdowns. She went so far over things came adrift in the cabin that had never done so before. We thought the masthead must have gone in the water. That the masthead wind instruments were still in place was proof that it hadn't. We had long since lowered the mainsail, and the jib was furled to t-shirt size.

So little sail was set that I did not think reducing it would make any difference, but it did. RESURGAM was making six and seven knots and the heeling force caused by those few square feet of sail was just enough to enable the steep waves to throw the sloop onto her beam. As soon as I furled the jib completely, the knockdowns ceased, and we continued at 5.5 to 6.5 knots with the Aries steering easily. The lesson here may be that when conditions are truly unacceptable, do something even if you don't think it will work.

We entered the storm on a Sunday night. On Monday we began to pick up Capital Radio, a commercial station near Durban, which recited an increasing litany of disaster: floods, landslides, washed-out bridges, rising rivers and death. On Tuesday we learned the Durban harbor was closed to all shipping because of waves breaking across the entrance.

The wind continued to blow from the southeast. RESURGAM continued to make one hundred an twenty-five to one hundred and fifty miles a day under bare poles. At this rate we would be on the coast on Tuesday with no place to go or hide. For the first time I tried to drag lines to slow a boat down. On RESURGAM this did not work.

On Wednesday morning, when we were little more than a hundred miles offshore, I set, also for the first time, a para-anchor. For a few hours this did stop us. But setting it was an ordeal, and as the manufacturer warns, the line to the anchor is subject to enormous strain and chafe. Despite my eventually getting three layers of chaffing gear in place, the line parted after only a few hours.



The wind was then fifty to fifty-five knots and the seas ten to twelve feet. Other sailors who were in that storm described the waves as up to thirty feet, but I don't think so.

RESURGAM rode to the para-anchor uncomfortably. Eating lunch in the cabin, we were not sorry to hear the twang of the snapping line and feel the sloop's bow fall off downwind. Held by the para-anchor, RESURGAM felt hobbled and trapped; falling free, she came alive. The lesson here may be that it is better to wait and do nothing. Pick one of the above.

The one thing Capital Radio did not give was a useful weather report. Huddled over the transistor radio in a wet, bouncing cabin, night after night we hoped to hear that the storm was at last clearing. Instead we were told, "Well, the weather tomorrow will be a lot like today. Rain. Rain. And more rain." And the ultimate: "The forecast is so depressing, I'm not even going to read it tonight."

On Wednesday RESURGAM continued to make six knots under bare poles toward a coast whose only two harbors within three hundred miles, Durban and Richards Bay, were closed to all shipping. The only yacht that attempted to enter Richards Bay was wrecked and its crew killed.

The disturbing joker in this was the Agulhas Current. The Indian Ocean's counterpart to the Gulf Stream, this is a river of warm water flowing south along the east coast of South Africa at three to five knots. Confronted by contrary winds, it can create freak waves. It is strongest near the one hundred fathom curve, which at Durban is ten miles offshore.

Dawn on Thursday at last brought a change. The wind was still blowing at Force 8 and 9, but it had veered south. No longer could we sail toward Durban under bare poles. But also no longer was the coast a lee shore. After a few minutes hesitation, we unfurled the jib to storm jib size and continued on. We were already in the dangerous zone of current and would cross the one hundred fathom curve during daylight.

Expert advice—if there is such—about freak waves says they do not occur in less than one hundred fathoms of water, and that therefore, in gales off the east coast of South Africa, the sailor should move as close to shore as possible.

By noon the wind was a solid Force 9 blowing directly against the Agulhas Current. RESURGAM rolled on through heavy rain. Great storms at sea have no color, but are black, gray and white, constantly shifting. Black waves become white as they break. Gray clouds become black with rain. Much of the time Jill and I observed these changes while standing, clinging to the overhead rails in the cabin, trying to see out the narrow cabin ports.

Early in the afternoon the radio gave us the good news that Durban Harbor had reopened to shipping. Then the bad news: The first ship to enter had been thrown by a wave against the breakwater and holed her bow.

RESURGAM's depthsounder usually began to get readings at about 730'. At 5:00 p.m. the 700' alarm sounded and we knew we were nearing the one hundred fathom curve. The waves were now fifteen feet high. Standing and staring out, we thought, 'She cannot rise to this one. This one is going to break. It has to. It is going to roll her.' But they never did. As the last touch of light left the sky we reached the inside edge of the current, and the waves obediently dropped to six feet. For the first time in several hours, we smiled.

Perhaps because of the opposing wind, we were never set south by the Agulhas Current. While in Mauritius I asked one of South Africa's most experienced racing sailors if, once clear of Madagascar, he would steer for a point well north of Durban or sail the rhumb line. He said the last time he made the passage, he had aimed north but was headed by a southwest gale as he neared the coast, so this time he intended to sail the rhumb line. We were glad we followed this advice.

After dark we proceeded with an instrument landing. The depthsounder showed steadily shallower water. The radio direction finder showed a signal from Durban at the expected angle. And the SatNav, a predecessor to GPS, which only provided positions at hourly or more intervals, got to stay up late. All indicated that there was a continent ahead. In conjunction, we believed them. But until a little after 9:00 p.m. it was an act of faith in black boxes.

Then, almost simultaneously, we saw lights ahead, the wind and waves decreased further, the Sat-Nav declared that we were eight miles from the harbor entrance, and the shipping forecast on the radio claimed that at last the storm system was on the move. It seemed we had made it.

I decided to sleep for two hours, then sail slowly to be off the breakwater at first light. But something—several things—went wrong. When Jill, who had been standing watch, woke me at midnight, the wind had veered southwest and increased to forty knots. The waves had doubled, and RESURGAM been pushed north. Durban harbor now lay directly to windward, and RESURGAM, who usually sailed well to windward, seemed reluctant to do anything but point at the nearby shore or head straight back out to sea.

I decided to power. But the Indian Ocean had been hard on the sloop's electrical system. Twice waves had shorted out the ignition switch to the Volvo diesel. In Mauritius I had the switch replaced. As we approached Durban, the new switch also failed and I had to remove the control panel and hotwire the engine.

None of the engine instruments was working either, so I could judge rpm only by sound and had to worry about the alternator and oil pressure. When the engine sounded right, our speed was only two to three knots. That should get us to the harbor at dawn, I thought, as I struggled to remain awake for the rest of the night.

A Sat-Nav position at dawn disillusioned us. It claimed we were now eighteen miles from Durban. My curse woke Jill. "This just can't be true," I said. Or words to that effect. "How could we be eight miles off last night, power all night, and be eighteen miles off this morning?" But daylight revealed a coastline of low green hills and a muddy sea full of bamboo, cane, trees, and, although we did not see any, hundreds of corpses. A barely visible speck far to the south was the bluff marking Durban's harbor entrance.

Unwilling to push harder with the engine without knowing if we were over-revving it, we partially unfurled the jib and headed in as close to shore as we dared before tacking to starboard. All that day we fought our way to Durban, passing a dozen ships anchored offshore, the backlog from when the harbor was closed.

By early afternoon we had sailed far enough south so that finally we were able to come about onto port tack and steer for the bluff. When we had to fall off to go under the stern of one of the anchored ships, we ran afoul of a tide that was pouring out of the harbor. We tacked back and forth, making little progress. Sunset was only two hours away, when I said, "We may blow up the engine, but the only way we are going to get in today is to power."

Sitting in the bottom of the cockpit, I sorted out the wires and got the engine to turn over. A glance over the side verified that some water was coming from the exhaust, though not as much as usual. This I attributed to my probably having the engine at lower rpm than usual. By boat speed we were making four knots; by spray coming over the bow we were doing the best possible. The harbor entrance was only two miles ahead. Again it seemed we would soon be in. But it was all too much like the experience I once had with CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE at Tahiti. We no longer cared about hot showers and food. It would be more than enough simply to sit quietly in the cabin tied up securely to a dock and not have to spend another night at sea.

Both Jill and I were in the cockpit, taking turns steering. "Would you like a can of Coke?" I asked. She nodded assent, so I climbed down the companionway into a cabin full of smoke and a bilge overflowing with oily water. "Cut the engine!" I shouted. "Something is on fire." The combination of water and smoke led me to the culprit, a cracked muffler. I had repaired this with underwater epoxy when I couldn't find the proper replacement in Australia. The storm had thrown RESURGAM around enough to crack it again.

With the engine idling, the wind and tide were rapidly carrying us yet again away from the harbor. We put the electric bilge pump on automatic and the engine in gear, setting the throttle now not by sound but by volume of smoke billowing from the locker leading to the muffler. The race between wind and tide and setting sun and smoke ended in what I prefer to call a tie. No waves broke as, in a cloud of smoke, we crossed the bar and entered Durban at 6:00 p.m.

The transition was miraculous. One moment we were struggling against the storm as we had been for five days; the next we were in sheltered water. Within a half an hour we were tied to a dock. Within an hour the officials had cleared us, and that hot shower and food we had tried to convince ourselves we did not really care about were irresistibly available.

# 13 Thin Water

**From** time to time I see my life as, among other things, a cartoon.

Years ago, while sailing CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE between Singapore and Aden, late one afternoon just south of the Persian Gulf, a supertanker steamed up from the south and came to a stop directly in our path. Expecting the ship would move, I did not change course. But the tanker remained obstinately in place. CHIDIOCK sailed on for an hour and the ship loomed ever larger. As CHIDIOCK continued to sail and the ship continued to loom, a cartoon appeared in my mind's eye. In the first two frames CHIDIOCK sails toward the tanker. In the third, the 800 pound sailboat's bow nudges the 500,000 ton supertanker's side. In the fourth, the supertanker rolls over and sinks. In the last, the little yawl sails blithely across a sea from which a few bubbles are rising.

Half a world and more than a circumnavigation later, the cartoons appeared again, twice in one day, when I was caught by a May storm in which the New Jersey coast became a lee shore. For a while it seemed I was going to face the indignity of being shipwrecked right there in Atlantic City in the middle of a podiatrists' convention.

I had left Beaufort, North Carolina, a few days earlier in RESURGAM headed for New York City. The wind was from the east, then backing and heading us. For a day and a night we crawled north and tried to keep away from the shore ten miles to leeward. There was thick fog, so the existence of the shore was postulated from charts, SatNav positions, and radio direction beacons. It was also cold, with air temperature, water temperature, and wind speed all in the forties.

I was dividing my time between reading, glancing out the companionway at the fog, and checking various electronic displays. The SatNav was giving fixes every hour or so. The radio direction finder showed the Atlantic City beacon to be receding behind us. The depthsounder verified we were staying in sixty feet of water. One of the adjustments I had to make when sailing the East Coast of the U.S. was to revise my definition of deep water. Being off soundings was a fond but distant memory.

In the fog my main concern was shipping. We were inside the main traffic separation to and from New York, but I worried about smaller coastal vessels and fishing boats. At about 2:00 p.m. I was startled to glance out the cabin port and see what I first thought was land but which, as I moved to the companionway for a better view, became a tugboat. She was only two hundred yards to leeward or I would not have seen her at all. As I stood there, getting doused by waves and spray, I determined that she was moving a knot faster than we

were on a gradually converging course. Her course was the one I would have liked to be holding myself, parallel to the coast. The question was whether she had a tow and, if she did, whether we would clear it.

During the next fifteen minutes in which the tug and RESURGAM continued to move slowly closer together through a small world of fog and rain, the answers were gradually revealed to be yes and no. The tug was towing a flat barge piled high with sand and RESURGAM would not clear it.

Waves were smashing into the side of the barge. This close she seemed to be carrying a rapidly eroding beach. And suddenly there flashed the newest cartoon, this one a single frame in which several men stare down from a pier into a vast barge, empty but for one man holding a teaspoon of sand, who asks, "Where do you want me to put it?"

I let RESURGAM fall off the wind, swing behind the barge, and gybe. It was so much more pleasant for a moment not to be hard on the wind. I was cold and wet. My fingers were swollen as they had been years earlier in the Southern Ocean. The prospect of spending the night watching for ships—which I probably would not see anyway until they were upon us—and not making more than twenty miles good all night, all coalesced into an abrupt decision to turn back to Atlantic City where I could spend a comfortable night at anchor.

As quickly as this decision came, the tug and barge disappeared. We were alone in the fog, making seven knots under deeply reefed main and and deeply furled jib.

I went below to the chart table. Absecon Inlet at Atlantic City has a straight entrance channel with a minimum of twenty to twenty-five feet of water. A radio beacon on the south side of the entrance should help us find the place in the fog. But the chart did show a shoal when the depth might be as low as fifteen feet about a half mile off the mouth of the inlet. The southwest to northeast trend of the coast was decisive. I would not be sailing into a dead-end trap. With the wind slightly north of east, there was an escape route broad reaching to the south without having to come back hard on the wind if something went wrong.

Still, doubts about closing with a lee shore in such limited visibility alternated with doubts about spending the night sailing blind near busy shipping lanes. The waves were ten feet high and steep. They would become steeper as we moved in and the water shallowed. It all ended with RESURGAM sailing at seven knots, the waves behind us, and the radio beacon ahead. We aren't committed, I told myself. We are just going to take a look. With the first intimation of danger we will turn southwest and gain sea room.

A replacement for the bolt which had fallen out of the Aries wind vane a couple of thousand miles earlier still had not caught up with us, so the electronic Autohelm tiller pilot

was steering. Ducking back into the cabin from time to time to be certain we were still sailing toward the radio beacon, on deck I stared into the fog, searching for land and watching the depthsounder record ever shallower water. In half an hour it read thirty feet, then returned forty, and I realized that we were about two miles from the shore.

For ten or fifteen minutes I saw nothing. The depthsounder showed the water to be moving rapidly through the twenties. The waves were steeper and higher, building to twelve feet. Many of the crests were on the verge of breaking. I was becoming increasingly anxious. What would happen when wave height equaled water depth? Would we go aground in the troughs? Suddenly something appeared through the fog, rain, and my salt-encrusted glasses. A brown line against the sky and sea. They were buildings and water tank, but I could not see a break in the surf line.

To get a better view I was standing in the cockpit, hanging onto the lifeline for balance, when the first wave broke over us. My eyes on the shore, I had no warning before RESURGAM went over onto her side. I hung onto the lifeline, half in the sea, the sea half in the cockpit. RESURGAM righted herself and I turned to find myself looking up at the neatly folding top half of another twelve foot wave. A hard, tumbling, twisting, disorienting blow. RESURGAM was on her side again. Righted herself again. White water poured from her deck, half filling her cockpit, completely filling my foul weather gear.

Fleetingly the day's second cartoon appeared.

RESURGAM is carried by a foaming crest right across the beach and onto The Boardwalk, where she comes to rest, undamaged and upright on her fin keel. In red foul weather gear and yellow sea boots, I climb down, nod to the gathering crowd, and disappear into the nearest casino. After the span of time necessary to eat a good steak and salad, enjoy a couple of whiskeys, and visit the roulette wheel, I reappear, walk through the crowd, and climb the ladder, hundred dollar bills falling negligently from my salt-encrusted parka. The rope ladder is pulled up and sails set. And in the last frame, RESURGAM speeds down The Boardwalk on a broad reach.

Back in whiskey and steak-less reality, I punched a new course into the Autohelm, bringing the sloop's bow back to the wind, cranked in the main and jib sheets, and then took the tiller myself. Sixty feet of water had come to seem like the Marianas Trench.

I hand steered through the next few waves, taking them at a less dangerous angle ahead of the beam. By the time I had a chance to glance back, New Jersey had vanished like a bad dream, as some wish it would.

When we reached thirty feet of water, the sailing settled into the unpleasant but no longer immediately threatening conditions that had preceded my sighting of the tug. I had

time to eat a can of tuna, and then spent the night tacking between the ten and twelve fathom lines. We got nowhere; I saw nothing; eventually I slept a little.

By dawn the wind had died completely, but the fog was still with us and the waves remained high, materializing suddenly a boat length away. I let them throw us around for an hour and then turned on the engine. We powered and sailed and powered and sailed through shy wind and intermittent fog all day.

RESURGAM was about a mile offshore as we approached Sandy Hook. I could see the outline of something that seemed out of place. It took me a moment to realize that I was looking at the first hill in a thousand miles, rather grandiosely named, 'The Highlands of Navesink' on the chart. But then if you are the first hill in so great a distance, you are entitled to an exalted name.

The fog had lifted to five mile visibility as we rounded Sandy Hook near sunset. I let go RESURGAM's anchor in twenty-five feet of brown water and then sat for a few minutes in the cockpit.

I was tired. My neck hurt from being whiplashed by the waves off Atlantic City. The light came on in the nearby lighthouse; a few cars drove along the street running up the spine of Sandy Hook; some ships moved in the shipping lanes a mile north of us. Two fishing trawlers raised anchor and gracefully swung out their booms, before heading into the night, reminding me of prawn boats I had seen along Australia's deserted northeast coast. On the misty horizon to the west was the vague outline of Staten Island. But, particularly after the storm, everything was quiet. Even without the fog, there would have been no indication that we had just entered one of the world's great ports. This was one of sailing unique pleasures. Imagine coming to New York and being impressed by the quiet.



# 14 Cape Horn Is Just Another Place

**When** the wind backed east, we were not worried. After all we were eleven days out of New Zealand, bound, as our clearance papers proclaimed with some flair, for Uruguay via Cape Horn, and at 42°S and 160°W well within the province of the celebrated westerlies of the Roaring Forties. Thus far on the passage no wind had lasted more than twelve hours without shifting at least 90°. The relevant square on the pilot chart categorically denied the possibility of wind between north-northeast and south-southeast. This aberration would soon end. In the meantime, with the easterly at eighteen knots, the sailing was not too bad and the late January temperature not too cold, although enough spray began coming over the bow to drive us from the cockpit.

We were ahead of our expected rate of progress since leaving Whangarei on the afternoon tide of January 15, 1992. As I returned our shower key, the woman in the harbormaster's office had asked where we were going. I told her and added, "It is only the first mile I'm worried about."

Whangarei is a convenient port from which to depart on a voyage. If you don't draw much more than RESURGAM's 6'3" you can enter the town basin, twelve miles up river from Bream Head, and be in the heart of the central shopping district. But you must do so on the top half of the tide, with the last mile being a long 'S' not shown on the chart. The channel is marked by posts, but on our way in the depthsounder had twice shown us to have only inches of clearance. I had taken the gamble and removed our anchor from the bow for the long open ocean passage. I could only too vividly image the hassle of digging it out of the cockpit locker along with the dinghy and oars, inflating the dinghy, kedging off, being stuck, being frustrated, wasting time.

In the event that did not happen. When we were safely in thirty-five feet of water, we unfurled the jib, let the autopilot steer, and broke out a couple of cans of cold beer bought at the last minute with our refunded key deposit. Despite our lack of refrigeration, cold beer did not figure to be a novelty on this voyage.

A dying tropical cyclone, downgraded as it weakened over colder waters, pushed us away from land and did not catch us until long after New Zealand's rocky East Cape vanished in rain. As it did, we realized that we were sailing East Cape to East Cape. Uruguay's Punta del Este lay six thousand miles almost due east.

For RESURGAM the depression provided gale force winds from the west and seas rising to twelve to fifteen feet, a taste of what I had come to know in the Southern Ocean on

my first circumnavigation. But as I said to Jill, only too prophetically, “A gale from astern is better than twenty knots from ahead.”

As the burgundy sloop moved easily ahead of cresting waves under only a scrap of jib, I thought how different this was from my Cape Horn passage sixteen years earlier. In 1975-76 I was alone on EGREGIOUS, a similar though slightly larger boat, on which following bad advice I usually kept some of the mainsail set and had no jib furling gear. As a result, EGREGIOUS was often over-canvassed; and I spent a lot of wet and dangerous time on the foredeck. Now, older and wiser, at least in this, I kept RESURGAM moving without being as hard on her or myself as before.

The differences between 1992 and 1975 were many. On RESURGAM I was with Jill and not alone; and RESURGAM had an engine, electrical system, jib furling gear, solar panels, and a small dodger. I was navigating by turning on a GPS unit smaller than a Walkman, neither of which existed in 1975. The two most fundamental differences were that at fifty I was on my fourth circumnavigation where at age thirty-four the world was new to me and Cape Horn an unknown frontier; and that I had come to expect that RESURGAM would not break, where EGREGIOUS almost always did.

I thought of music as the east wind not only persisted, but strengthened. We had been looking forward to this long passage, to settling into the great rhythms of the Southern Ocean. From experience I knew that the concept of giant waves rolling right around the world in those latitudes is a delusion. But we did expect weeks of broad reaching in strong winds, sliding down good size waves, RESURGAM's bow wave curling above the deck, slashing through the sea, reveling in the power and majesty of the Southern Ocean. We had last made such a passage crossing the Indian Ocean five years earlier from Bali to Mauritius, though then in tropical latitudes and warmer trade winds.

Such rhythms are Beethoven and Brahms. Now as we shortened sail and pounded to windward, the rhythms were short, staccato, erratic, jerky, uncomfortable. Instead of a romantic symphony, we got heavy metal. Literally so on two nights when blocks broke on the main sheet. It was not until after I had replaced the second block—the swivels failed on both—that I realized that, with the slack main sheet, the new fully battened mainsail had feathered peacefully into the wind, when our old conventional main would have flogged itself to death.

The east wind became a nightmare.

RESURGAM sailed well to windward, too well at times for her own good. On a long passage it is better to go fast than point high; but as the wind remained doggedly at 115° and

we sailed off to the south-southeast, the seas steepened, and RESURGAM began to leap off them with shattering regularity.

The wind increased to thirty, then thirty-five knots. We furled the jib more deeply. When we clicked the Aries off to a broad reach to tie another slab reef into the main, we had a momentary vision of an unattainable paradise. Our speed went over seven; the motion was easy. This was the wind angle we had a right to expect. This was what the travel agent had promised. The problem was that we were heading southwest and did not want to visit Antarctica. Jill tailed the mainsheet as I winched it in. Then, with simultaneous sighs, we ducked through the companionway. I clicked the Aries lines to bring RESURGAM's reluctant bow back to the war.

A grid compass positioned on the aft end of the saloon table could be seen from our bunks at night. Night after night we awoke, and hour after hour, night after night, always we were disheartened to find the wind unchanged, the luminescent lubber line far outside the luminescent V set for our desired course.

For two days the wind was Force 7, gusting Force 8; but the barometer was high and steady and the sky cloudy. In increasing gloom, mental and meteorological, we sailed down to 45°S, where the wind continued to head us beyond endurance. I was willing to sail south to get east, but not west of south. At 45° S we tacked to starboard, and gradually the wind headed us again. The over sized, over strong lee cloths Jill had sewn for this passage were well tested as we jolted on.

The wind decreased to twenty-five knots, but remained east. Even the trade winds are not that steady. I studied the pilot chart in disgust. This simply could not be happening.

A week passed. An entire week of easterlies in the Roaring Forties. It was unheard of. I had expected us to average five knots getting clear of New Zealand, then at least six knots to Cape Horn. Our first week we made good an average of 5.7 knots. The second week 4.9. The third 4.0. Despite having seventy gallons of water on board, we reduced our consumption. Only one cup of coffee each in the morning and no tea at night. Holding cups was too difficult anyway.

Secured in our berth we read and forgot the words a moment later. Despite the motion, Jill managed to bake every second or third day the whole grain muffins, fortified with powdered milk, muesli, and raisins, that were our staff of life, and to heat water for freeze dry meals at night. Sequential thought became impossible. Life was spasmodic and episodic. The simplest tasks became ordeals, demanding complete attention while maintaining balance. Every moment night and day the force of gravity was an intrusive force.

In the southern hemisphere an east wind could be created by a high passing south of us or a low passing north, neither of which was normal. The barometer remained high and steady. Could there really be a big high, or a series of them, keeping pace with us to the south? Or was this a consequence of El Nino? In New Zealand we had heard experts proclaim that an El Nino would cause New Zealand to have a wetter summer than usual, unless it caused the summer to be drier. No one speculated about what an El Nino would do to winds in the Southern Ocean.

Day after day we pounded east, gradually being forced from 45°S up to 42°S, where we tacked again. Finally back at 45°S and 129°W, the barometer dipped, rain began, and the wind backed to due south.

The following morning saw patches of blue sky and a continuation of the wind backing. "Well, it has finally happened," we told one another as we emerged to sit in the cockpit for the first time in two weeks. "We have found the westerlies." RESURGAM was making an easy 6.8 knots toward the Horn. After all the beating, the motion was so easy she hardly seemed to be moving. The only worry was that the wind was continuing to back.

Two days later it steadied again due east. Hopes of fine sailing and a fast passage had long since died. This was not epic. This was trench warfare, footslogging drudgery, plodding through knee-deep mud, step by step, wave by wave. It could not be happening, but it was. And for seven more days RESURGAM fought against that perverse east wind. Though we eased her way as much as possible, we could not help but wonder how much she could take. Twenty to thirty waves every minute stressing hull and rig.

The temperature dropped as we moved south, but it was not until our last week before the Horn, with the wind west at last, that we used our fireplace. On a mooring in Sydney it had helped us through an Australian winter, but we had never tried to use it under sail. At 50°S the cabin temperature was in the low 40sF. We were wearing several layers of clothes and sleeping comfortable under two sleeping bags each, which we used as lap robes during the day. With the waves finally from astern, I opened a bag of charcoal and carefully made a fire. The wind built to gale force, only our second true gale since leaving New Zealand, though three times the east wind had gusted Force 8. On deck the temperature dropped to just above freezing, with wind chill much lower. Inside we grinned at one another as the cabin temperature rose to 70°F. Never had a gale been so enjoyable, and at last we were having a thousand mile week.

February 27, the day of the Horn, dawned hard and spectacularly clear. Although the GPS pinpointed us still thirty miles west, Horn Island's pyramid face was visible at the end of a chain of purple mountainous islands. I had not seen Horn Island in 1975 and this time wanted to pass as close as possible.

The wind died in mid-morning. We turned-on the engine rather than be thrown around by eight foot swells caused by the shallow continental shelf. In 1975 a Force 12 wind created twenty to thirty foot breaking seas on that shelf. My body still remembered the tremendous power of those waves.

As we neared Horn Island, clouds spilled over the now gray mountains to the north and cold rain began to fall. Ominously the wind came from the land, backed north-northeast and increased to twenty-two knots. Horn island disappeared along with our hopes of building a fire that afternoon. Going to windward in more than twenty knots, too much water came over RESURGAM's deck to open the chimney. It doesn't really matter too much, we thought, for we had planned to pass east of Staten Island and perhaps even the Falklands; but now, after beating most of the five thousand miles east to the Horn, our first afternoon trying to go the fifteen hundred miles north to Uruguay found us close hauled. That evening I did manage to play the Bach fugues I had listened to in 1975, this time on compact disc.

The following afternoon, Staten Island, whose jagged peaks are somewhat reminiscent of Moorea though it's climate is not, lay in bright sunshine just north of us. We sat on deck, watching albatrosses. There was so little wind that they could not glide, but had to flap their wings. Life was tough all the way around. When the wind returned at sunset, it was from the north.

Each of the next three afternoons found us becalmed. Each night found us close hauled against north wind. The headwinds lasted for ten days, all the way from 56°S to 41°S. East wind when we wanted to go east, twenty-four of the first thirty-four days of the passage; and north when we wanted to go north, for twelve the last fourteen days to Punta del Este. In all we were hard on the wind for thirty-eight of fifty-eight days at sea.

Those afternoons were not unpleasant. Each day birds hunted around us, and on the third, the albatrosses found flying too much effort and began to settle on the water, dropping and folding their wings, as we dropped and folded RESURGAM's sails. More and more birds landed, more than we had ever seen or even expected were in our vicinity, until finally a silent RESURGAM sat on a mirror-smooth sea surrounded by several hundred mostly silent birds. The birds yawned. Well, it was that kind of day. Being honorary albatrosses is an interesting way to spend a slow afternoon. Not until a light breeze returned near sunset did our flock disperse.

That night we saw a loom of lights to the northeast. It appeared to be the light of a substantial city, but the chart did not show any land in that direction. On Falklands AM radio the next morning Jill heard that an injured fisherman had been airlifted from a large Japanese fishing fleet in the vicinity. For the following two nights we saw boats in the

distance, but avoided the floating city. Those days we noticed a great many dead birds in the water: penguins; albatrosses; cormorants.

At 42°S, the wind still ahead of us, a cloak of thick fog of several days' duration lifted, and we were able to shed the remnants of our woolly cocoons and expose our pasty bodies to the sun. Perhaps because of the fireplace or perhaps because we stayed mostly dry, even off the Horn the cold had not been as severe as I remembered. Now we were sunbathing in the Forties. The sea was a gently undulating meadow. Even if we were not moving very fast, making only three to four knots close hauled against five to six knots of wind, we had only three hundred miles to go.

The wind increased and boxed the compass the final twenty-four hours of the voyage, so that appropriately we found ourselves close hauled against a twenty-five knot northeasterly as we crossed the wide mouth of the Rio de la Plate. Landfall should have come at dawn. The GPS put us only ten miles offshore, yet nothing was visible in thick fog. Trusting devices more than I cared to—another said we were in sixty-five feet of water—we pounded on. Nothing but jagged waves, more of the dragon's teeth we had known seemingly forever. New Zealand was a distant memory. Finally I caught a glimpse of something. "Is there a hill near the coast?" I asked Jill, who had visited Punta del Este by land a decade earlier. "Not that I recall," she replied. The outline was lost, then reappeared and firmed. What I had mistaken for a hill was a cluster of high rise residential buildings. We lowered the mainsail, furled the jib, and powered slowly forward while I shackled the Bruce anchor to the chain.

Fifty-eight days and almost seven thousand miles. It had been slow; hard on the boat and hard on us; but we had not known any really severe weather or big seas. Except for the two broken main sheet blocks, a flashlight lost overboard, and a minor tear in the spinnaker, we had not sustained any damage. Jill had become a Cape Horner and could now keep one sea boot on the table when we toasted the Queen.

I realized that I had thought that this passage would be a completion for me. And it was, though not the completion I sought. I had sailed toward the greatest moment of my life, the time when I had the most hope my life would have meaning, and of course it was not the same. For sixteen years, from the moment I first passed it, I had known that I would return to Cape Horn. Now I had, and I felt an unexpected sense of loss. I needed new capes. In a few months one would appear, and I would have more than just a sense of loss. I would have the reality.

Though it had not been an easy passage, it had not been epic either. Some nights Pavarotti has laryngitis; some days Cape Horn is just another place.

## 15 Almost

“**This** is it, Jill,” I said, but it wasn’t. RESURGAM was destined to survive for another month. When I spoke I expected her to sink within seconds.

We were ninety miles northwest of Puerto Rico, 3:30 a.m. on a clear full moon night, broad reaching before twenty knots of wind under furling jib at seven knots. I had checked less than ten minutes earlier and seen nothing. The bright moonlight and perfect visibility may even have contributed to the collision. Running lights, ours and the ship’s, would have shown up better on a darker night. Of course radar would have helped; but even after sailing recently on two ships equipped with radar, I don’t regret not having it. The current drain is too great for my kind of boat, and ships with radar still run into one another. The ship that ran into us was new and surely had radar, and I know that RESURGAM gives good returns.

It was a big ship, several hundred feet long, and I had not seen it. RESURGAM’s masthead tricolor was lit. Her jib a great silver triangle. Still, assuming we were closing at a combined speed of twenty knots, together we would have covered more than three miles in ten minutes. The Aries was steering RESURGAM. Who knows who or what was steering the ship. On the bridge, the helmsman looks down, daydreams, looks away, sips a cup of coffee, gets involved in a conversation with the watch officer, if there is one, and for the last half mile or so a sailboat is hidden beneath the bow.

We had deliberately sailed far north of our rhumb line course from St. Thomas to Key West via the Old Bahama Channel in order to be away from shipping, and had not seen a single ship all that day or night. It is difficult to figure out where this one was headed so far away from the usual shipping lanes. Her course was east; ours west. Perhaps she too had gone north so her crew could sleep.

A grating, twanging sound. Metal to metal. Harsh. A giant file rasps the strings of a giant guitar. I look out the port and say, “This is it, Jill.”

She sits up and stares at a rushing wall of metal. Although I believe it is painted red, in moonlight it appears darker, the color of dried blood. “It’s a ship,” she says.

Our voices are normal, flat, declarative. We freeze for a moment, expecting to see the ocean pour into the cabin. The terrible sound of grinding metal continues for a few seconds,

then ceases. Inexplicably water does not appear. “Try to reach them on the VHF,” I say and jump for the companionway.

The ship’s squared-off stern towers above me. Perhaps I could read the name and port, but at that moment I am not interested. I still expect that RESURGAM will sink. My impressions are of a big modern container carrier. Most definitely she is not a Caribbean tramp. I turn my eyes from the ship to RESURGAM.

The ship has passed to windward. We are still in her lee, gliding slowly. Our freeboard does not seem to be reduced, but we must be sinking. As I open the cockpit locker to get the dinghy and jerry cans of water, I hear Jill’s voice through the companionway. “The is the sloop RESURGAM calling the ship that was just involved in a collision with a sailboat ninety miles north of Puerto Rico. Come in, please. Do you hear me? Come in, please.”

The radio is a handheld unit with a ten mile range. With a sense of relief, I see the ship slow and turn beam on to us a half mile astern. If we have five minutes, we can abandon ship, prepared well enough to reach land by ourselves. If we have only one minute, we probably can’t. But with the ship returning, we will survive. Then I realize that Jill is still in the cabin. With the inflatable half out of the locker I stop and call down, “Is water coming in?”

“No.”

How can that be? I wonder. I duck my head through the companionway. The cabin is startlingly normal. For the first time it occurs to me that we might not be sinking, and if somehow we aren’t, then damage control is more important than preparing to abandon ship.

I move forward along the lifelines, lean out, and stare down at RESURGAM’s hull. The starboard upper shroud is slack in my hand. Above me the broken starboard spreader clatters against the mast. RESURGAM has a single spreader rig, and the mast is flexing grotesquely, bending more than forty degrees. Finding no visible evidence of hull damage, although there are parts of the hull I cannot see, I run back to the cockpit and pull on the Aries control lines to gybe the sloop and bring the wind to the port side of the boat.

As the jib comes across, the mast bows almost to a right angle, snaps back, and holds. I trim the jib sheet and run forward to bring the spare jib and spinnaker halyards and topping lift to the toe rail to act as shrouds. For a moment I stand beside the mast and stare up into the night. Although we are now sailing with the wind slightly forward of the beam into five foot waves, the mast is almost steady and almost straight. I return to the cockpit and furl the jib to half size.

I pause. Not much time has passed since that first squeal of metal against metal. Two minutes; perhaps three. Jill is still futilely calling the ship.



“Shall I send out a Mayday?” she asks.

“No. If we’re not sinking, we can reach land by ourselves.”

“Why doesn’t he answer? Do you think there’s something wrong with our radio?”

“I don’t know.” As we later established, there wasn’t.

Even at a distance, the silent ship seems big. Slowly her stern turns toward us, then she gathers speed and rapidly powers away to the east. Beyond doubt the collision has not gone unnoticed.

“May an albatross hang around your neck,” Jill calls over the radio from the companionway.

We both go below deck. The cabin still seems normal, and considering what has just happened, normalcy and relative silence are eerie.

I push the Mark button on the GPS and plot the position. The concern is not survival now, but how to reach land without losing the mast, and to find a place where repairs can be made. The Dominican Republic is downwind, but I do not know of any repair facilities there. We have an old cruising guide to Puerto Rico, dating from when we sailed to San Juan in 1984. San Juan is too far to windward now, but Mayaguez, a port halfway down the west coast of the island looks possible.

Jill checks the bilge. Over her shoulder I see that it is dry. She stands and says, “It just does not seem possible.”

“No. I don’t understand either. To be hit by a ship that big and not be holed; not, as far as I can see, even to have a scratch on the hull. You start the engine while I put Mayaguez in the GPS.”

By the time I finished at the chart table, a dawn more welcome than most was lightening the sky, and we were able to make a more thorough search for damage.

On my first solo circumnavigation I was capsized three times in the Southern Ocean, and in RESURGAM we had taken a few knockdowns. You don’t ever really know what happens at such moments. You just try to piece them together later. In this instance, all we would ever find was damage aloft.

The starboard spreader, still attached to the upper shroud at its outboard end, had snapped off near the mast. Jill subdued it with one of the other halyards and its own flag halyard. A single strand of the shroud wire was broken. The masthead wind instruments

were hanging down, as was the masthead light which was still working. There was a shallow dent on the forward side of the mast three feet above the tabernacle, a kink in the jib furling foil at the same level, and an adjacent one inch hole in the jib, all of which were surrounded by smears of red paint.

RESURGAM's rig was all well inboard. She had tumblehome common to 1970s designs, and her chainplates were several inches in board from the toe rail. All of which leads to the conclusion that RESURGAM passed almost the full length of the ship before rolling her rig to windward and catching something extending from the ship's hull near the stern, or perhaps being turned toward the stern by the Aries when it was blanketed by the ship. I would like to have been a sea bird soaring high above us in the moonlight. The burgundy sailboat and the great red ship approaching one another across silvery waves. The sailboat's course varying by ten or fifteen degrees as she slides down crests. Within a hundred yards she may have been directly in the ship's path. She may have been pushed aside only at the last second by the bow wave. The two vessels must have been only inches apart for a half minute or more before we knew.

"You were lucky," some said when we reached land; and some misguided souls even called me lucky a month later. To the extent that character is destiny, and that is by no means as certain as social myths would have us believe, I am neither lucky nor unlucky. Spend years at sea and something will go wrong, sooner or later, and perhaps both. Something, many things, will also go right. In either case the experience will be intense, and whether pleasure outweighs pain, or joy redeems sorrow, is a matter of individual and capricious judgement. At times life seems too short; and at other times much too long.

With a deeply furled jib and the engine at moderate rpm's, we motorsailed southeast, hoping to reach Mayaguez before dark. Some of the seas were hitting us forward of the beam and caused the mast to sway ominously. I cut back the engine a little and let out a little more jib. I also moved our new Spectra main halyard to the starboard toe rail as a running backstay and tightened it with a winch. This was the strongest, lowest stretch line on the boat. When it was in place the mast seemed solid.

In late afternoon land became visible for a few minutes before being obscured by thunderstorms over the inland mountains. Dark clouds and heavy rain passed ahead of us, and it was not until just before sunset that we found smooth water in the lee of the land. We were still ten miles from Mayaguez. Under the circumstances and with the help of a rough sketch in the outdated cruising guide, we broke our rule of not entering port after dark. Of course the buoys marking the entrance through the reef had been changed and at least one of them was unlit, but the approach was straightforward and we certainly did not want to spend the night wallowing around outside. At 10:00 p.m. the anchor went down well away from the bright lights of the commercial wharf.

“We made it,” Jill said. And for the moment, it seemed we had.

Ahead of us lay another long day and night of powering along the south coast in a futile attempt to return to St. Thomas or at least reach the east side of Puerto Rico where the bigger boat yards are located, all dismally to windward. I don’t know that the mast would have survived. Each time we came off a wave, the mast flexed. I counted an average of twenty-five waves a minute. Times sixty meant one thousand five hundred an hour. Times twenty-four meant St. Thomas was thirty-six thousand waves away.

I was fatalistic. The mast would stay up or it wouldn’t. If it did, we would do one thing; if it didn’t, we would do another. But the engine decided otherwise by sputtering, probably from a dirty fuel filter, twenty-five miles east of Ponce, Puerto Rico’s second largest city. The cruising guide said that there was a yacht club there, but was vague about facilities. For us the place had the incomparable virtue of being to leeward, although the last quarter mile would have to be made with the jury rigging to windward. We had no choice. RESURGAM was not going any farther.

The engine seemed grateful. Instead of laboring east at three knots into a short, nasty chop, which had not diminished at night, we made an easy six knots back to Ponce and anchored off the yacht club just before nightfall.

“Well,” said Jill, “we made it.” And again it seemed we had.

That was Saturday night. The collision had taken place Wednesday. Although the yacht club did not have a repair yard, with the help of some members RESURGAM’s mast was pulled and re-welded, and the shroud replaced.

The repairs themselves took very little time, but there were delays waiting for tides that would enable us to get RESURGAM to the dock, and for parts to be sent from San Juan to repair the forklift that was used to pull and re-step the mast.

We were both anxious to be on our way again. This was July. The hurricane season had begun, and we had sailed more than thirteen thousand miles since leaving New Zealand for Cape Horn in January. We were weary, mentally and physically, and needed to come to rest.

On the second Sunday after we reached Ponce, the mast was re-stepped, and the next day we sailed for Key West. Thirteen days had passed since the collision, almost half a lunar cycle.

The worst is behind us, we thought, as we happily headed west across the Mona Channel on a dark new moon night. I had felt unusual pressure all that year. Move on, move on. Get the miles done. I had chaffed at each delay: almost forty days beating to windward

during the long passage around the Horn, including that improbable three weeks of easterlies in the Roaring Forties; an extra week in Uruguay waiting for lost mail; several weeks in Rio for Jill to have surgery. I could not know, but perhaps I sensed, that we were rushing to destruction. The next full moon would be RESURGAM's last.

## 16 Swimming

I pulled the plug at midnight.

Specifically I removed the transducer for the boat speed indicator which left a 1¼ inch hole through the hull just forward of the mast. A column of water shot through this hole two feet into the air and began to fill the cabin. I straightened up and watched the water for a moment before nodding my head once, a single dip of my chin, then turned and climbed into the cockpit.

Five miles to the west the lights of Fort Lauderdale reflected across low waves. It was a pleasant, starry August night; the wind light and warm. I sat quietly as the sloop continued to sail east, away from the land.

After an hour I leaned forward and looked through the companionway. Several inches of water covered the teak and holly cabin sole and splashed onto the lower berths when the boat rolled. The level was disappointing. I climbed down and opened the locker in the galley where Jill kept pans. Warm sea water swirled around my ankles as I pulled pans from shelves, exposing the engine's water intake. From the tool locker above the galley I took a screwdriver and stooped to loosen the hose clamp around the seacock. Even without the clamp, the hose remained stuck to the seacock. I had to pry it off with the screwdriver. Another column of water, this one 1½ inch diameter, began to enter the cabin.

By habit I started to return the screwdriver to its proper place. Jill, when she first began to live and sail with me, had protested that I was too particular. In time she came to understand that it is necessary for everything on a boat to have its place where, even at night in bad weather, it can be found quickly. But no longer. I dropped the screwdriver, heard a splash, and climbed back up on deck.

With the increased flow, the sloop began to sink more quickly, but still another hour passed before I felt the change: a lurching out of synchronization with the waves, a heaviness, a slowing of motion, as though she were tiring.

There was no sound from the cabin now that the intakes were below the rising water, and I peered through the hatch again to be certain. The level was much higher, covering the lower berths. Cushions were floating, papers, the tea kettle we had bought a few months earlier in Uruguay. Out of curiosity, I turned the ignition key for the diesel. Nothing. The batteries and electrical system were below water. The engine was almost brand new. It had

less than two hundred hours on it. I had thought when we re-powered in Australia that this engine should last the rest of my lifetime, and so it would. I gave a small smile.

Behind me shore lights had fallen below the horizon. Only the loom was visible, a glow stretching fifty miles from Miami to Palm Beach.

I sat calmly, a tall, lean figure, expressionless once the smile faded.

At 3:00 a.m. on Saturday morning, the sloop's bow dipped beneath a wave as it had millions of times in the nine years I had owned her. But this wave was different. Although only a foot high, it was RESURGAM's last. Her bow did not break through doggedly or triumphantly as it had in every latitude from beyond 50°N to beyond 50°S, in survival storms to gentle trade winds, from the English Channel to the great Southern capes. This wave ran up the deck to the mast, before hesitating for a moment, as if surprised by its temerity and success.

The bow sank lower beneath the water; the stern rose several feet into the air. In the steeply inclined cockpit, I pulled myself to my feet, stood, and glanced about the deck one last time. I had made voyages other people had thought were impossible, but which I had believed I could accomplish. Now as I stepped over the lifelines into the warm ocean to die, I was about to do something even I considered impossible.

RESURGAM' stern loomed above me, echoing scenes from newsreels of ships sinking in World War II. No home port was shown. My home waters, I had written, were the world.

The rudder and propeller were exposed. I noticed a gooseneck barnacle on the strut that I had missed when I snorkeled to clean the bottom a week earlier in Key West, after the completion of the passage from Puerto Rico in a year that had seen us cover fourteen thousand miles in seven months. I thought: I miss New Zealand. I miss the Southern Hemisphere. The North Atlantic has always been my least favorite ocean. That barnacle made a mistake. It will not survive the depths toward which RESURGAM is headed. A thousand feet of water beneath us. I made a mistake too. I never should have returned. All the decisions seemed reasonable when they were made. Yet they brought me here.

RESURGAM's stern rose higher, then slid down and disappeared. A few ripples. A few bubbles. No suction. Some loose objects, which had been familiar possessions, but were now strange and foreign in black water, drifted around me. I swam a few strokes to get clear of them. Everything I owned, except for the t-shirt and shorts I was wearing, and the elephant skin billfold I had put in my pocket, thinking that the plastic credit cards might be the only way to identify the body in the unlikely event it was discovered, was gone. Everything I loved lost within a few hours.

I pulled the eyeglasses from my head and let them drop from my fingers. I could not see through the wet lenses, and I would not need them any more. Stars became diffuse fuzzy spheres. With small movements of my hands I turned and faced out to sea. I leaned back in shimmering water, stared up at the full moon, and let my mind wander.

I had sailed so much that I was always meeting myself, crossing tracks on charts from different years. Because I did not consider that I had spent much time in the Caribbean, I had been surprised when I pulled out the Caribbean chart on the passage a few months earlier from Rio de Janeiro to St. Thomas to see how many small penciled x's marked noon positions from past voyages. One line entered from the east from Portugal to Antigua in 1984; another from Portugal to the British Virgin Islands a circumnavigation later in 1989; then a line from Antigua to the British Virgin Islands in 1984; and one from the British Virgin Islands north of Cuba to Key West in 1989. All these I had made alone.

There was the track from Roadtown in the British Virgin Islands south to Venezuela, where I had sailed with Jill when she joined me in 1984; and along the coast, then out to the offshore Venezuelan islands, to Bonaire and Curacao and Panama, where she had unexpectedly left for the first time; followed by my track alone disappearing off to the west to the Marquesas. A line ran south from Key West through the Yucatan Straits to Panama and west to Tahiti that Jill and I had made in 1990 when we were reconciled after a fourteen month separation.

With the increase in the price of charts, I kept them and marked RESURGAM's position with ever lighter and smaller x's. Several hundred charts were on board RESURGAM at the end. When Jill had returned and we decided to sail to Australia, we had to buy only one new chart, and that was the first one around the west end of Cuba.

There were so many places, so many images. I had been in almost constant motion for two decades. When I was falsely jailed as a spy in Saudi Arabia in 1982, the police required me to account for my past travels. I discovered that I had not been in one country for more than two months during the preceding four years. Memories clicked through my mind like slides on a projector: Portugal where Jill and I first met on Christmas Day in 1983 and spent our third wedding anniversary in 1988; South Africa; Sydney, Australia, the single place we had stayed the longest; Lord Howe Island; Bali; Europe; South America; Namibia; New Zealand. The images crowded in too fast, blurred, stopped. My mind became a blank screen.

I was calm. I was Socrates after drinking the hemlock, waiting for the numbness to move upward from my feet, asking, "Why should I fear death? For when I am, death is not. And when death is, I am not."

Courage did not enter into this. I had lived a certain way, and it had brought me here. 'Live passionately, even if it kills you, for something is going to kill you anyway.' I had written; and now it would. 'Intensity, not duration.' I had written; but against all odds I had lasted fifty years.

A little wave, the first of many, too many, splashed into my face. Sputtering I let my legs drop and came upright in the water. I pictured RESURGAM sailing through the depths below me, her new mainsail still set. I wondered how long it would take her to reach the ocean floor. I had wanted her to be my last boat and Jill to be my last woman. Now both were. But I had not expected it so soon.

That mainsail was less than a year old. It would easily have carried me though another circumnavigation. The engine, less than two years old. The dodger and GPS and windlass were new in New Zealand the preceding December. The bilge pump had been purchased only a few weeks earlier in Puerto Rico.

I let myself turn slowly until I faced the loom of distant shore lights. I am a good swimmer, but I had never tried to swim so far. It was at least ten miles, and I had never swum a mile at a time. There is nothing for me there, I thought. I deliberately turned and swam a few strokes further out to sea, but then I stopped and leaned back and floated. I thought of RESURGAM again. What will it be like down there? I speculated idly about how far my body would sink, and how long it would be before I weakened and drowned. Staying afloat was so easy.

Another little wave lapped over my face. I came upright. Treading water was more comfortable than floating. I looked at my watch and was surprised to discover that it was already 4:00 a.m. I had been in the water for an hour, which seemed only a few minutes. Less than a week earlier Jill and I were snorkeling near Key West and I had gotten out of the water, slightly chilled, after only forty-five minutes. I undid the watch strap and let the Casio I wore at sea fall away. I was beyond time. In the moonlight the water was clear and the watch remained visible as it sank. My hands, moving slowly near my waist, were pale.

I didn't know what I expected, perhaps weakening, loss of consciousness, oblivion; but nothing was happening. I was in England in 1983 when Rob James drowned off Salcombe Harbor. But that was February. Hypothermia. You would not last long there. Or off the Horn. I thought of the modern Greek novelist and poet, Nikos Kazantzakis, who imagined Ulysses leaping into the Southern Ocean after walking the length of Africa, striking out for the South Pole. I had long expected that I would die in the Southern Ocean. 'The ocean waits to measure or to slay me. The ocean waits. And I will sail.' I had written. And I had sailed and was still here.



This was taking too long. I had possessed everything I wanted materially: the boat; the books; the music; and a few luxuries: in port we ate off Wedgwood and drank wine from crystal. I had the boat exactly the way I wanted it. I had the woman I wanted. "It is the end of an era," I had said to Jill as we approached the entrance to Fort Lauderdale only an unbelievable three days earlier. I had meant that the epic phase of my life was over. I was fifty. I had done enough. Loved enough women. Sailed enough. Set world records. Done things no one had ever done before. Written words that deserved to be remembered, but wouldn't be. Returned to Cape Horn and found it unchallenging. Without taking a breath, I lowered my head beneath the sea and swam down.

Only ten or fifteen feet beneath the surface I ran out of air. Instinct, what I call the animal, took over. The mind can say, 'You are in a hopeless situation. I do not fear death, only the suffering along the way.' But the animal always wants to live, and my animal is strong. It had kept me alive for five months in a damaged boat in the Southern Ocean. It had kept me alive for twenty-five thousand miles in an open boat. It had kept me alive while drifting three hundred miles in an inflatable in the South Pacific. Some people said my open boat voyage expressed a death wish. They did not consider that my first circumnavigation was for me a baseline. I sailed the open boat because I wanted to do something even more difficult. The panicked animal struggled back to the surface.

Gasping, sputtering, I slowed my legs and arms. A wave curled over my head. I coughed water. I was getting tired of these waves. They were higher now, though still only one to two feet. The sky was lightening to the east. I turned. Either because it was lost in the oncoming dawn or because I was drifting farther offshore, the loom of shore lights was no longer visible. I let myself rotate slowly. In every direction was only the ocean. I stopped myself facing east, and calm again, quietly, dispassionately, observed what I expected to be my last dawn.

I treaded water and floated. An hour or two passed. Perhaps more. I continued to be amazed at how easy it was to keep afloat. I had been swimming for at least five or six hours, but felt completely relaxed.

I thought of the pioneer French aviator, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, writing about his attempt to walk away from a crash in the Sahara. Dying is simple, a natural act, said Saint-Exupéry, as he struggled not to die. He survived the crash, only to die flying in World War II. I wondered what Saint-Exupéry thought in his last seconds, if he had time to think at all. Dying might be simple. Drowning might be the sailor's death. But the animal wasn't having any.

Low mist turned into fog. For the first time I shivered. Perhaps this was the beginning of hypothermia. I knew that heat is lost by movement. I was not moving very much. Slow strokes with my hands; an occasional kick with my legs. I was seeking neither life nor death. I was simply waiting.

Something, a darkness in the fog, caught my eye. As I watched it became a small fishing boat. Instinctively my spirits soared. I heard the low throbbing diesel. It would pass close. Nor more than twenty yards away. The engine became louder. I was wearing a yellow t-shirt. I pulled it over my head and tried to wave it in the air, but the shirt was sodden and heavy and stuck to my hand.

When the boat was close, I yelled, "Help!" once. The boat pattered steadily on. I watched it fade into the fog and disappear. "All right, don't help," I said aloud in a normal conversational tone, struggled back into the t-shirt, and turned back toward where a bright spot in the fog indicated the sun and east.

My instinctive reaction to the fishing boat came as a surprise. But there was nothing for me ashore. Everything really was gone. And death is not optional. If not now in the next few hours, then sometime in the next ten or twenty years, probably from heart disease or cancer, more painfully and with less dignity. 'That is the trick: to give up a few good years to death before it is too late.' I had written in a poem about the death by cancer almost twenty years earlier of the man I thought of as my grandfather. Recalling the words calmed me. I was glad the fishing boat was gone, glad to be alone again. Of the six or seven years I had spent at sea, four or five of them had been alone.

While I slowly treaded water, my movements mechanical, my mind wandering, the fog dispersed. I became aware of the sun hitting my face. The sky was blue and clear. I turned toward the west. No land was visible; but even without my glasses I could make out the fuzzy outline of a ship heading north several miles inshore of me. The Gulf Stream would have carried me a few miles north and perhaps east. Land must now be more than fifteen miles away.

An isolated image flicked through my mind of us having lunch in Rio de Janeiro on the terrace of the restaurant at the top of Corcovado, just below the statue of Christ, while the city appeared and disappeared through clouds below and humming birds sipped from wild flowers beside our table. I could feel the sun burning my face. No need to worry about skin cancer any more, I thought; but I pulled the back of my t-shirt over my head as a kind of cowl. Evaporation from the damp cloth was soothing.

The sun was almost directly overhead. I had been in the water for nine hours and was only a little tired. The wind had increased to ten knots. The seas were still low, but dotted now with scattered white-caps. More and more of them splashed into my face. I was not hungry, but thirst was becoming a torment, as it had been when I drifted in the inflatable for two weeks in the Pacific. I felt something brush my leg, then a tentative nip. My leg kicked out automatically. I looked down and saw several small fish scurrying away. "Not yet," I told them. And then, having started, I continued aloud, "How the hell long is this going to take?" The words provided an impetus, and the animal ran with it. Before I knew what I was doing, I had turned and started swimming west.

I stopped. 'What are you doing?' I asked myself. 'There really is nothing for you there. RESURGAM, Jill, everything, really is gone.' That truth was undeniable. The response came not from reason, but from instinct, from thirst, from the saltwater rawness in my face and mouth. I did not think I could reach shore, but I could no longer endure waiting for the sea to take me.

I swam the crawl for few minutes, before turning to side-stroke, then backstroke, then crawl again. It felt good to swim. After that first instinctive burst, I swam smoothly. My muscles enjoyed the movement. The last time I had swum much had been almost two years earlier in the fifty meter pool in Suva, Fiji, where I usually did sixteen laps. And now survival was at least thirty times farther away, plus a current carrying me north or northeast while the coast of Florida fell away to the west. It did not matter. 'I might not need to reach land,' I thought. 'I might be seen by a ship. Besides I need goals, and now I again have one.'

Swimming helped divert my mind from my thirst, but my body remembered. It was as though that earlier thirst when I was adrift in the Pacific was indelibly imprinted in each dying cell.

Pausing every once in a while to float and rest for a few minutes, I swam, chasing the sun west through the afternoon. The wind increased a few more knots, but remained moderate. Waves pushed me toward land; but more of them crested and filled my mouth, which was becoming a raw wound. Breathing was easier on my side, so gradually I found myself swimming sidestroke more than the other strokes combined.

Sometime in mid-afternoon I saw a sail to the south. I stopped and treaded water, hope rising. At first the sail seemed to be heading for me, but as it came closer I saw that it would pass a half mile to the east. I watched silently as the small ketch sailed north. I thought I saw someone in the cockpit, but without my glasses and with my eyes raw, I was not certain. I felt a sense of loss when the sail disappeared.

This was the longest rest I had taken since noon, and for the first time I realized that I was tiring. I had been in the water about twelve hours. I had not eaten for almost twenty, or had a drink since before midnight. I was surprised that I still had to pause to urinate occasionally. I did not have much fat to convert into energy. A cramp seized my stomach. I reached down and pressed my hands against my abdomen until the pain eased. It was more hunger than a muscle spasm. A growl from the animal: "Feed me!"

My hands felt strange. I raised them above the water. They looked like something from a horror movie. The skin was not just puckered, but seemed to have come loose from the muscles. As tentative as the fish, I touched the back of my left hand with the fingers of my right, half afraid the skin would peel away. For the first time I thought of blood and sharks. The skin moved peculiarly, but remained in place. Fear gave the impetus I needed to resume swimming.

Gratefully I observed a line of clouds move in from the ocean and block the sun. Heavy rain began to fall behind me. I stopped and waited, hoping for a drink of fresh water; but the shower passed to the south. When I resumed swimming I discovered that the sun was completely obscured and I was confused. The wind had increased to eighteen or twenty knots and the waves were higher and steeper. In quick succession three waves broke over me, leaving me coughing and gasping for breath. The waves dictated my course. Despite a probable wind shift with the clouds, I had no choice but to swim before them.

The waves seemed to be helping me. I thought of body surfing off San Diego and Bali. A few years earlier I had been caught by a riptide off Bali. People ashore, including Jill, had watched helplessly as I was carried toward Java, but eventually I reached the beach. Now I did not swim hard. I knew I wasn't getting anywhere. More and more waves crashed over my face. Each was a knife cutting my eyes and mouth. I tried to keep my eyes closed; but found that I changed direction almost immediately. And I had to keep my mouth open to breathe. Gargle twenty thousand times with salt water.

'Ninety-eight. Ninety-nine. One hundred.' I counted strokes just as earlier after EGREGIOUS capsized in a cyclone in the Tasman Sea I had counted buckets full of water. Without thought, without any attempt to reason why, without considering hope or hopelessness, I continued swimming.

The clouds and wind lasted until nightfall. I was swimming only twenty strokes sidestroke, ten back, then five crawl. My right elbow hurt, and I did not have much power in any stroke. The moon would not be up for an hour or two. I stopped and waited for some stars to appear so I could determine west. In the increasing darkness I noticed the lights of two ships, one heading south, one north. It took a while before my tired mind realized that

they were both a mile outside of me. *Outside*. During the limited visibility in the rain, which never quite fell on me, I had crossed the shipping lane, Momentary elation collapsed when I turned and saw the loom of lights from the shore. Only the loom. Experience said that I was still at least ten miles offshore. The goal for the night could only be to try to turn the loom of lights into specific lights. And to last until dawn.

The night blurred and my mind wandered, pausing at my first night in New Zealand. When was it? I was irritated the I could not subtract two numbers. Fifteen years ago? No. Sixteen.

The water in the bilge was preternaturally still. It was still coming in, but now that EGREGIOUS was tied to King's Wharf in Auckland, it was not leaping and splashing about and it was not coming in very quickly.

I had made the initial transition to land after five months alone at sea with ease that afternoon, swarming up the pilings, standing on land with no sensation that it was moving beneath me, talking to people easily. I had bathed in salt water before entering the harbor and must not have looked too bad. People expressed surprise that I had been out so long. They assumed that I had just come overnight from the Bay of Islands.

But now, when I could at last sleep an entire night, I didn't. I bailed the bilge knowing that it would not fill again until after midnight, lay down and fell asleep, only to awaken thirty minutes later. For five months I had not slept through a night, and for the past three of those months I had awakened to bail every half hour. Through habit I lifted the cover and glanced in the bilge. There wasn't even enough water to think about.

I stood in the companionway and watched traffic moving on Customs Street and the lights of the high rise buildings. It was all quite amazing after seeing nothing but ocean for so long. Restlessly I wandered about the cabin, took a book and tried to read, but soon put it aside. I tried to go back to sleep and failed. I got up, put on my clothes, and went ashore.

I had not exchanged money that afternoon. Probably I could have done so that evening at one of the hotels, but I didn't think of it, and for that matter I didn't really want to buy anything. Some part of me was curious, some part starved for new sights, new sounds, new sensations.

I was a complete stranger to the shore and the country. I looked at people almost as an alien species.

I experienced everything through a veil of exhaustion. Corners of buildings, stoplights, window displays, other pedestrians, all blurred. As I walked up Queen Street, my

legs quickly gave out. I stopped in front of a takeaway called Uncle's, offering the novelty of American hot dogs. It seemed an appropriate spot to turn around.

I was waiting at a stoplight halfway back down the hill when a woman came up beside me. Through the city smells, damp pavement, car exhausts, her perfume reached me.

The light changed, but I just stood and watched her cross the street.

The cold of the sea, the warmth of a woman. It had been a long time.

I remembered my first glimpse of Suzanne's legs. Her husband brought her with him to see EGREGIOUS in the boat yard and to invite me to dinner. She was wearing a rust colored skirt and a white blouse and sandals. I was working on the hull when they arrived unexpectedly Sunday afternoon, and I held the ladder for them to climb up and see EGREGIOUS's interior. Her body moved up the ladder only inches from my face. My eyes followed her. She had nice legs, good ankles. I found myself staring at her bare thighs, and, not wanting to desire someone I could not have, deliberately looked away.

Two days later she stopped by the boat yard alone.

Three weeks later, EGREGIOUS repaired and back in the water, I rowed Suzanne out to the mooring and we made love for the first time.

New Zealand was still Suzanne to me when I sailed there nine years later with Jill, but this last time it was not. My memories of Suzanne were more than a decade old. No emotions clung to places I had been with her. It was as though it had never happened. And Jill and I had been particularly happy. That was still this year, I thought, as I swam ever more slowly.

I was in Paris with Jill. On the first fine day of spring we left our hotel near the Louvre and walked through the Tuileries.

We passed the circular fountain where seven years earlier I had sat one afternoon watching children sail toy boats. The children pushed the boats from one side of the stone fountain and then ran, laughing and shouting, to where they expected the boats would touch the other side. Often a slight breeze backed sails and caused a change in course. And there was the falling water in the center as a permanent squall. I was alone at the time. It was the year between Suzanne and Jill. As I watched the children, I expected that some of them must dream of real voyages, and I wondered what would become of those dreams.

Near dusk a woman in a burgundy coat came and took the last two children, a boy and a girl, by the hands, and they walked together in lamplight toward the river. She was a pretty woman, with a sweep of raven black hair, high cheekbones and long legs. I envied the man she was going home to.

Jill and I walked along the Seine to Notre Dame.

We sat for a while outside the church beneath cherry trees in bloom, beside buttresses and gargoyles, before crossing to the left bank. From the bridge we saw that the ledge below was filled with pale Parisians in bathing suits, sunning wintry bodies and picnicking beside the dark river as though at the seashore.

We caught a cab to Napoleon's Tomb. Jill had never seen this one, although we both remembered his first grave, an unmarked slab hidden in a grove of trees on a hillside at St. Helena, where we had stopped on the passage from Namibia to Europe. There had never been an inscription on that grave because the British and French could not agree on whether to include the title 'Emperor'. When a generation after his death, the former enemies had become allies, his body was moved from the lonely South Atlantic island to Paris where the French built him this grandiose monument.

Leaving the tomb, we turned toward the Eiffel Tower and recrossed the river to find a crowd at the Trocadero: street musicians, singers, dancers, African men selling windup paper birds that soared in brief bright flight, families out for a Sunday stroll. We stopped and watched a slalom course roller skaters had made with tin cans. Many of the skaters were talented, zigzagging down the paved slope at speed, some backwards.

We were hungry and headed to the Champs-Élysées where we sat in a restaurant and drank a bottle of wine and ate salmon.

We had finished the salmon and decided to order another bottle of Chablis when from the avenue came loud music. Everyone stopped, and several of the patrons rushed outside. A sound truck appeared followed by an open convertible, carrying a young man, who was smiling and waving as people cheered. In a minute the small caravan had passed; the music and cheers receded in the distance.

"What was that all about?" Jill asked.

"I cannot remember the man's name. We saw his arrival on television the other night after he had just completed the fastest solo circumnavigation."

It had once been my record, but I had not held it for many years.

The waiter brought the bottle of wine.

We rowed ashore to a patch of sand and brush, frequented by frigate birds and boobies, and walked out onto the reef. At Suvarow, one of the few deserted islands in the South Pacific with a usable anchorage, the reef is more volcanic than coral. Those parts washed by the tides have been smoothed through the ages, but near the shore lava spikes remain almost as jagged as when they first exploded into air. The black reef becomes salmon pink as it is uncovered by the outgoing tide. Brightly colored fish are often trapped in tidal pools, trying to hide from soaring birds until they are released by the returning ocean.

I rose from studying a tide pool and turned to see Jill standing with her back to me, looking out at the sea. I felt as though we were on the edge of the world, a primitive world of great beauty in which there were no other people. A vast blue sky and sea, a white turmoil of waves breaking on the outer edge of the reef a few steps away, just beyond which the reef fell off to a hundred fathoms. The lush green vegetation on the islets; a narrow band of white sand; black lava; salmon pink lava; fish; scuttling crabs; the bright sun and the shadows of circling birds; the elegant lines of Jill's nearly naked body. It was a perfect, timeless moment, a rare moment when I felt at peace, a moment I knew even as it was happening that I would remember as long as I live.

And all these memories will soon be lost, I thought, as I swam ever more slowly.

The overcast sky partially cleared and the moon came out. Despite improved visibility, I found that I increasingly lost my sense of direction and was swimming the wrong way. Only pain was clear and sharp. My eyes, my mouth, my throat, thirst, were intolerable. For a while I felt a painful urge to urinate, but could not. There was no more fluid in my body. My right elbow, bending with each sidestroke, was becoming excruciating and useless. I stopped swimming and hung almost motionless in the water more and more.

Two or three times I started to shiver uncontrollably. The Gulf Stream was warm, but it was not body temperature, and I thought each time that this was the end. But each time inexplicably the shivering stopped. Two or three times I was brought up short by swimming into jelly fish. The stings were unpleasant, but not serious. Two or three times my body was wracked with dry retching. There was nothing in my stomach to come up. Two or three times I fell asleep for a few seconds, but woke when my head fell below the surface and I breathed in water. A flick of the wrist was enough to keep me afloat.

I made two discoveries. First, that Saint-Exupéry was wrong: dying is neither natural nor simple; and that the weaker and more exhausted I became, the stronger my will to live. I



was *'not going gently into this good night.'* If for the first nine hours I had been Socrates, now, as I weakened, I became Dylan Thomas.

By about 1:00 a.m., judging by the moon, I knew I would never reach land. Lights were still only a loom, a glow to the south, then darkness, and two other patches of light farther north. I began to hallucinate, while aware that I was doing so. A particular cloud, illuminated by the moon, turned into a filigree of lace each time I looked at it, starting at the bottom and working upward. I rather enjoyed watching the process. And I thought I saw a sailboat, a large sloop, motionless, sails down, unlit, seemingly at anchor. While I was certain about the cloud, I was unsure of the sailboat, and spent some time treading water, studying the image. There really seemed to be straight lines of rigging and mast that could not appear naturally. Sometimes when I looked it was there, and sometimes not. I resumed swimming.

On my right side, facing south, I saw the loom of lights concentrate into specific pinpoints that seemed to be running lights. I dismissed these too as hallucinations; but they persisted and came closer, until my mind finally accepted that they really were the lights of two fishing vessels. About a half mile away, they stopped. I continued swimming, slowly, painfully, favoring my right arm, for a few more minutes, then I stopped too.

I hung in the water and considered the fishing boats. One of them remained stationary, while the lights of the other described a long oval in the darkness. Of course I did not know how long they would remain; but I knew beyond doubt that I could not reach the shore. It was not really a gamble to turn south instead of west.

I swam harder than I had since nightfall, trying to ignore the pain in my elbow; but it was like trying to walk on a broken foot. I kept myself from looking at the running lights as long as possible. When I finally did pause to rest, one set of lights was far out to sea, but the other was definitely closer.

I resumed swimming, trying to maintain a sustainable pace. When adrift in the South Pacific, I had been surprised that after two weeks of near starvation, I had enough energy to row the final miles to land. But that had been a decade earlier. I was fifty years old now and had had no water for more than twenty-four hours and no food for forty.

I prevented myself from stopping to rest by trying to remember when I last had a drink.

I thought I recalled drinking a can of Coke Friday evening. It was now sometime around 2:00 a.m. Sunday. I thought of Jill and wondered where she was at that moment. We had separated almost as soon as RESURGAM reached Fort Lauderdale. And then I

thought about what would have been the last piece of music I would like to hear. I could not decide from a short list of Bach's Art of the Fugue, Beethoven's late string quartets, Satie's Gymnopédies.

When I could not take another stroke, I stopped, looked up, and saw that the fishing boat was only a hundred yards away. There was no point in saving anything. I took a couple of deep breaths and set out again.

I had not gone more than twenty yards when I had to stop. My body had no more strength. When I looked, the fishing boat seemed no closer. I could see details, the deckhouse windows, the booms. I yelled, "Help!" as loud as I could. The effort hurt my throat. The sound seemed to fill the night. But there was no reaction from the boat.

I lowered my head and swam, desperately trying to close the gap. But this time when I looked, the lights seemed father away. I swam again. Each time covering less distance before having to stop. Twenty yards. Fifteen. Ten. Yet each time the fishing boat was no closer. Finally, in despair I understood that it was powering slowly away from me. "Don't go," I shouted. But the gap steadily increased. "I am dead," I said unnecessarily.

The effort to reach the fishing boat had exhausted me. I could not swim, but lay back in the water, keeping myself afloat with sporadic hand movements. I watched the clouds turn to lace. I began to shiver. I stopped shivering. I became aware again of the torment of my eyes and mouth and throat, and of thirst. This is unendurable, I thought. Truly unendurable. Part of me would have welcomed oblivion, but it did not come. And gradually, as I floated, I regained some strength.

I came upright in the water. Dawn should only be two or three hours away. I could last that long. And perhaps in daylight another boat would come along. Life had become simple again. Just do one more thing. Bail when EGREGIOUS's hull was cracked. Row when I went over the reef after CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE pitchpoled in the Pacific. Now, swim until dawn.

Floating and swimming a few strokes, then floating, mostly floating, I tried to move west. I began to see the sailboat again. 'I don't believe in you,' I thought. But then I found myself stopping and staring. I really did think I could see the hull and the straight lines of rigging and mast. I looked away and then back. It was all still there. I still did not believe in the sailboat, but it was not far out of my way so I swam toward it, breaststroke, my least effective stroke, but the one which enabled me to keep my eyes on the boat and caused the least pain in my elbow.

The sloop remained in place. 'I don't believe in you,' I kept telling myself; but part of me was beginning to. Then, off to my left, I noticed a light. I turned. My vision, blurred by exhaustion and salt water, was suspect; but there seemed to be a white light, an anchor light. I turned my head back to the sailboat. It was still there. Then toward the light. It was still there too. I did not know what to believe, what was real, if anything. Somehow the anchor light made more sense. Giving the sailboat a final glance, I started toward the light.

I did not hurry. My goal was to survive until dawn. I had to swim somewhere, so it might as well be toward that light. I did not have the strength to do more than inch my way. Whenever I looked, the light was closer; but I did not feel the elation I had when approaching the fishing boat an hour or two earlier.

What seemed to be a long time passed. Not until I was close enough to see the hull in detail was I convinced that there really was a boat. It was a small commercial fishing vessel about forty feet long, anchored in the middle of nowhere. There was no sign of activity. No lights except the anchor light. No sound of an engine. This was very strange and made me suspicious that I was hallucinating. The only way to find out was to swim over and knock on the hull. But as I watched in horror the boat began to move away from me. "Help!" I yelled. "Help! Don't go!" The gap between us continued to widen. "Help!" I yelled again. And from the darkness a sleepy voice answered.

"Is there someone there?"

"Over here. In the water. Fifty yards off your port quarter. Don't go!"

"Where? Keep shouting," a second voice called.

"To port. Astern. Don't go."

Deck lights came on. Then a handheld spotlight flicked across the low waves.

"Farther out. No, to your left." And the beam found me.

"Where's your boat?"

"It sank yesterday off Fort Lauderdale."

"Fort Lauderdale?" The voice sounded confused.

"Just don't go. I'll swim to you. Just don't go."

The pain was still there, but I covered the final yards without stopping. The hull rose sheer above me.

An engine was turning over. A voice shouted above it, "Come round to the stern."

“The prop?”

“It’s in neutral.”

I swam along the starboard side of the vessel and came to the stern. Two young men were leaning over and staring at me. Water from the cooling system and exhaust smoke were bubbling out.

“Put your foot on the step and try to reach up.”

“I don’t have much strength in my legs,” I said. My foot slipped, found the step, and I pushed myself high enough for hands to reach me. I did not think: I will live. I thought: at last I will get a drink of water.



Epilogue

THE HAWKE OF TUONELA 1993-

A little more than a year later, I sailed past Sebastian Inlet, several miles off which the fishing boat I had reached when swimming had been anchored. The fishermen were two men in their twenties who were using their father's boat in an effort to catch enough fish to pay off several hundreds of dollars of traffic fines so that one of them would not go to jail.

Regardless of their driving habits, they were good young men who treated me kindly and gently. They gave me water and dry clothes. They offered me food, but my mouth was too raw, and, oddly, I wasn't hungry. They wrapped me in a blanket. They took me thirty miles south to Fort Pierce. And they gave me an old pair of sea boots.

Their confusion when I said my boat sank off Fort Lauderdale was understandable because Sebastian Inlet is one hundred and twenty five nautical miles north of Fort Lauderdale. That is one hundred and forty-four land miles. I later drove it, and it took two hours at seventy miles an hour on Interstate 95. I am a good swimmer, but not that good. Most of the distance was a gift of the Gulf Stream.

I limped down the dock in sea boots and cast off clothes and stepped onto the land.

I was saved and I was lost.

I accepted a long standing invitation from sailing friends to visit them in New Hampshire and flew north. I expected to stay a few days. I did stay more than four months, much of it alone while they were away sailing.

I accepted an offer to do a lecture tour in January, seven cities in nine days, starting in Boston and ending in Miami.

In Miami I rented a car and drove as far south as I could and rented a room in Key West, where I sat on the beach and stared at the sea and my memories. At times the despair was overwhelming. And in time I knew I had to get out of Key West.

I bought some boating magazines and found an ad for a boat for sale in Connecticut, a thirty-six foot ultra-light splinter designed for a solo transatlantic race, a freak; but it had to be for me to be able to afford it.

I drove a car north for an auto transport company.

I did not buy the boat in Connecticut. It was too weird and rough even for me.

I asked the owner why after going to the trouble of designing and building the boat he had not enter the transatlantic race. He said his wife wouldn't let him.

I kept looking, and in July found HAWKE, a 37' Heritage One Ton IOR racer, on Vermont's Lake Champlain. She had been used hard and neglected, but she seemed basically sound. I knew that I could not really afford her. She would take almost all of my

money. But I also knew that I could not not afford her. She would be a start, something I could rebuild upon.

With two acquaintances to handle lines in the locks, I powered her along the Champlain Canal and down the Hudson River to the sea.

In October I sailed south.

I continued past Sebastian Inlet to Fort Lauderdale. I considered sailing over the approximate position where RESURGAM sank, but as I approached, the gesture seemed empty.

I went directly into Fort Lauderdale and took a mooring near the Las Olas Bridge, which happened to be next to the one RESURGAM occupied on her penultimate night afloat.

I pumped up the inflatable and rowed to the landing, then walked east over the bridge and looked down at HAWKE, just as I had fifteen months earlier looked down on RESURGAM.

They were similar boats, with semi-flush decks. HAWKE a bit bigger, in theory a bit faster, and with a green hull; RESURGAM burgundy, elegant, perfect, veteran of all oceans and Cape Horn. I pictured her for a moment, only a few miles away, beneath a thousand feet of water, fish swimming through her open hatches. I cared for her and trusted her as I did not yet care for or trust HAWKE. But she was gone, irretrievably gone, and, in time, I thought, I might come to care for this stranger, who I had not then renamed. After circumnavigating in EGREGIOUS, CHIDIOCK TICHBORNE, and RESURGAM, I was tired of explanations and intended to leave HAWKE's name unchanged. But by the time I painted her topsides teal a few years later, I had put so much of myself into modifying the sloop, I decided she was sufficiently mine to change her to THE HAWKE OF TUONELA, a variation on the title of a short composition I admire by Jean Sibelius.

A few days later I sailed to Key West. Entering the harbor, I passed the beach where I had sat staring out to sea earlier in the year.

The following June I met Carol.

