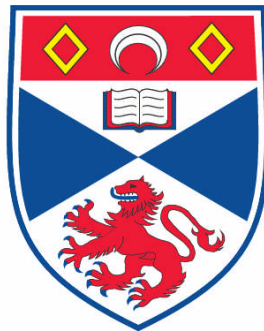


**IMMEDIATE PASSAGE : THE NARRATIVE OF JOEL H. BROWN,  
WITH A CRITICAL ESSAY ON FORM AND STYLE IN THE SEA  
VOYAGE NARRATIVE**

**Richard Jay King**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



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IMMEDIATE PASSAGE:  
The Narrative of Joel H. Brown,  
with a critical essay on  
form and style in the sea voyage narrative

A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Arts  
in candidacy for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing

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## ABSTRACT

‘Immediate Passage: The Narrative of Joel H. Brown’ is an original work of fiction. The protagonist and narrator, Joel Brown, is preparing to set sail for a singlehanded circumnavigation. As he readies his boat and counts down the days until his departure, he reflects on his previous experience at sea, what he expects to see out there, and why he is even going in the first place. The story ends with his departure. It is set in the present day.

The novel is supported by an analysis of the choices of form and style in first person sea voyage narratives, showing general trends and authorial choices in the areas of veracity, structure, point of view, voice, tense, direct speech, and the use of maritime language. A glossary of maritime words is provided as an appendix.

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145 days until departure

I'm thirty-nine years old, and I'm going to try to sail around the world. I want to leave on April 15th. Everyone says you need to just set a day and stick to it, so I'm hoping to leave then, on tax day, so I can get down through the Caribbean and through the Panama Canal before the hurricanes come. I bought a boat a few months ago, but to tell you the truth I don't know what the hell I'm doing. In my twenties I spent a lot of time at sea, on tall ships that dwarf the size of the one I just got, but when I worked on those ships I was rarely in charge of navigation or engineering or anything like that. I was just a teacher. And since I came ashore, swallowed the anchor, I haven't done much with boats for almost a decade.

Before my years at sea, I grew up in suburban Philadelphia and never went on the water in any kind of boat other than once on a fishing charter out of Cape May, New Jersey. My brother and I spent that trip vomiting out our hoagies and lying on vinyl settees while my father and the other men stood elbow to elbow over the rail, getting their lines entangled, so they could bring home a few boney bluefish that their wives would never bother to cook.

After that fishing trip I didn't go on a single boat again, not even a ferry or a kayak, until a few weeks after I turned twenty-one when I got a job on a school ship that

circumnavigated the Pacific Rim. It was my first real job and I couldn't believe I landed it. The vessel was 195 feet long from the tip of the bowsprit to the end of the mizzen boom, and it carried fifty-four high school students from Canada and the U.S. The guy who hired me was a slimy businessman who I'll call The Vulture. He paid the crew and teachers under the table, in cash, and though he had all the square sails decorated with massive Canadian maple leaves, he registered the ship in Liberia to avoid all financial, safety, and environmental obligations.

I'd just finished college and was planning to be a teacher like my dad. I applied to that semester-at-sea program on a whim. I was sending résumés everywhere during that spring before graduation. I received a call and flew up to an interview, at my expense, in Toronto. Then I heard nothing for several weeks, so when I was offered a different job teaching at a prep school in New Hampshire, I decided to take it. But the day after I signed the contract, The Vulture called to offer me a position on the ship. The headmaster at the prep school was a good man and a dreamer, so he told me to tear up our agreement, go sail around the Pacific, and call him when I returned. 'I envy you,' he said. 'You'd be a fool to pass that up.' Looking back on it, The Vulture hired me because school ships needed young teachers who were willing to leave their families and entire lives for a large chunk of time. He knew I'd work for cheap, and likely his first, second, and third choices turned him down. When I arrived in Vancouver to board the ship, my knees buckling out of nervousness and under the weight of a bright new sea bag, The Vulture was the first person I saw. He was standing at the base of the gangway. It was hot that day and his face seemed to pant. I remember wishing he would dab it with a handkerchief or something. He stuck out his hand and said: 'Welcome, Tim!' My name is Joel.

I sailed aboard that school ship for nearly a year. I did not do a good job, and that's not just me being modest. I'd never run a class before. I took everything—myself, the



course material, the students' efforts—all too seriously. If a kid didn't do his homework, preferring instead to gaze over the rail at night to watch the bioluminescence, I took it as a personal affront and a suggestion that he hated me. I managed to stay clear of romantic relationships with the students, though I was closer in age to them than most of the other staff, but I fell in love with almost any woman who made eye contact with me, whether she was another member of the crew or an innocent bystander in port.

There's some alcoholism in my family, and I've always lacked self-control and prudence. These traits uncorked as the voyage went on. Once in Sydney, Australia, I got so drunk in a pub that after every amorous attempt had failed, I walked out the door, off the wharf, and into the harbor. Two policemen escorted me back to the ship, dripping and belligerent, where they handed me over to three students standing dock watch.

Near the end of the voyage, just two days before arriving at our final destination, I got smashed with the bosun and a few of our favorite students—so liquored I could barely stand. In the middle of the night I posed naked for a photograph by the wheel, in a lineup of people, mostly students. The next day I couldn't make it out of my bunk for Colors. When I finally struggled up to breakfast I was sweating vodka. At the morning staff meeting I told my fellow teachers what I'd done and was so disgusted with my behavior that I sat in the ship's paint locker for the rest of the day.

To be fair to myself, I'd struggled under a sizable amount of stress for someone so inexperienced. I taught a journalism class for the first semester and then the English 20 course for the second term. Three weeks before the start of that second semester, I was informed by fax that I had to also teach something called Cultural Anthropology. So instead of time off in Hawaii, I spent two weeks in the library. I wasn't mature enough then to realize that sleep was more important than knowing more 'facts' than the students. I know that's not much compared to, say, having your arm axed off in Darfur or living in

poverty in Haiti, anything like that, it wasn't *real* suffering, I know, but I had a tough time trying to do a good job.

Nearly the entire second semester sucked, even though we were visiting places like Fanning Island and Fiji. The winds seemed to fail wherever we went. We had all kind of engineering problems, too—failed toilets, a faulty generator, and a loose propeller—and a variety of student and staff issues—petty conflicts like cheating, illegal searches for drugs, and people just hating each other. Michael Dean, the director of the first semester, had left in Japan, at Christmastime. His contract was up, and he'd been director for nearly two years. He'd been the only real mentor I had aboard, and I missed him. The Vulture replaced Michael with a crony who turned out to be an absolute disaster. The man had never been on a ship before and our community was so tight and established at that point, our routines so fixed and understood, that it would've taken a Gandhi or a General MacArthur to come in and lead us. To make it worse, this new director seemed to grate on everyone. He made no effort to listen or learn the personality of the group. The truth is, none of us were enjoying ourselves at that time anyway because it was the dragging point in the voyage. I later learned that on big expeditions there's always a time to slog. I know I'm going to have it on my upcoming trip, that period when the initial excitement and fear is gone: you know how to steer, every squally cloud doesn't paralyze you, and even the zillion stars in the sky become a little passé. Time slows. The new director couldn't fight against that, couldn't solve it, so the ship's community lashed out and made him the scapegoat. He quit after two months. The Vulture told me by fax to pick up this man's English 30 class. Then he sent me another fax explaining that I was to organize a group of students to put together the yearbook.

As I prepared to teach the advanced English class, I didn't like the texts the new director had been teaching. They had absolutely nothing to do with the Pacific or the ocean.

We were supposed to read *Wuthering Heights*, for example, which made no sense in this setting. Meanwhile I'd been picking up books about the sea for the first time, reading the journals of Captain Cook and novels like *The Sea-Wolf*. It was energizing to read these works in situ, to page through them with my back to a ship's bulwark and dried cuts on my knuckles. I read Maugham and Stevenson in Samoa. I read *The Mutiny on the Bounty* on the way to Pitcairn and had all the islanders sign my copy as a gift for my brother who had proposed to a woman I'd yet to meet—I'd only just heard about his proposal from my mom, talking to her from a remote island's single phone booth. For the Cultural Anthropology class, I had the students read *Kon-Tiki* on the way to Easter Island. Heyerdahl became our ship's hero until we arrived and the governor of the island told us how Thor fabricated data and was a bigoted, sloppy, egotistic pseudo-scientist. We read *The Voyage of the Beagle* on the way to the Galapagos, and I also read *Two Years Before the Mast*, with which I identified to the word, as I also, one hundred and fifty years later, found much more satisfaction with learning how to release a downhaul or mouse a shackle than with getting an 'A' on an academic paper back at college. While I was reading *Two Years Before the Mast*, I asked the captain if he'd ever read it. He looked at me and said: 'I read that before you were born.'

So when I took over that second English course, despite the amount of preparation time I had, I really wanted to teach more books about the sea and where we were traveling. But I needed works that I could buy several copies of in port, and they had to be different from the ones I was teaching for the other classes. So in Sydney, hung-over from my dip in the harbor, I staggered into the largest bookstore I could find. Having never read any of these before, I bought twenty-five copies of *The Tempest*, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' and *Moby-Dick*.

*The Tempest* and 'Rime' were a snap, because as a whole the students were creative and intelligent, and any theatrical diversion at sea is welcome. In front of a square sail, they performed Shakespeare with gusto. A week or so later we staged 'Rime' on the dock in Auckland. The kids used a big rubber chicken slung from the halyards, and they dressed in all manner of ghostly attire, including make-up. For a later scene a student named Francis dressed up as the albatross and roller-skated along the wharf until he lost control. He careened into a piling and lost three teeth. I got a fax from the office.

Melville was another matter. By the time we got to Tahiti, our ship community was in such bad shape that it was decided that each student watch group would get money to rent a cabana-style hut, to go off the ship for a few days and get a real break. They weren't allowed to go alone, of course, so as a watch leader I went to stay in one of these cabanas with my assigned collection of kids. It was all lovely and relaxing, we were right on the beach with our own palm-thatched porch, but once again I exercised poor judgment and let the students convince me to allow them to buy alcohol. Nothing happened that I know of, but I got in deep trouble when the rest of the staff found out. As my watch group explored the island and drank their Tahitian beers, I sat in a chair for four days and read *Moby-Dick* from cover to cover.

After we got underway again, I reread each section of the novel before every class, foolishly staying up to all hours trying to research every word I didn't know. I paged through the ship's encyclopedia, trying to gather and learn as many of the references as I could, so I'd be ready for any question a student might throw at me. I became obsessed with the novel and whales and trying to learn it all, drowning in exactly what Melville warns about. But the problem was that I wasn't clever enough to pick up on this philosophic aspect or even to see the humor in the book. I lost the majority of the students early on, but a few of them were academically-driven despite me, and they too, bleary-eyed,

read every intense, metaphysical page, all while they had four other classes, four hours of watch in the middle of the night, and two hours of deck maintenance work each day.

By the ninth month of the voyage, without any real break from the ship and the students, I was exhausted and burned-out, trying to prepare and teach my courses and still spend time working and learning about the ship, while also recovering from times in port where I was getting drunk and trying to get laid, or losing still more sleep because a student needed an ear to talk through a problem.

I lived and breathed and dreamed *Moby-Dick* and whales. And as we sailed slowly over the South Pacific, I was not alone in my minor loss of reality and my feeling that we, too, were searching for the beasts.

One afternoon we finally came into some wind and sailed on a broad reach, with all our canvas set. We were on our last, long arc toward the Galapagos and the Golden Gate Bridge, where our voyage would finish. I'd been missing my time on deck, worried that I might actually lose the calluses for which I'd worked so hard in the beginning. I pried myself away from the books and the computer, but my timing was off and there were no real tasks needed. So, instead, I got the watch officer's permission and climbed up the foremast to the royal yard, the highest of the five spars, well over ten stories above the water.

I clipped in and scuttled out along the footropes to the thin, tapered end. My ease with climbing aloft had been a major accomplishment for me. Two summers before going on the ship, I'd worked on a paint crew in Vermont with a few college buddies. I was always the one that did the front porches and the spidery basement window frames because I was too afraid to go up the ladders. But by this point in the voyage I was not only comfortable up there, I could also work aloft, even during rough weather. In my

immaturity, I was competitive and raced with the students to get to the points of honor on the yard. My pride swelled when the bosun picked me for a hard job up in the rig.

So there I was, up there, looking past my feet, peering down on our little bullet-shaped world. I looked down on two frigate birds soaring astern, their wings still and their fork tails barely scissoring to maintain their station in the air. In the horizon, I saw the curvature of the Earth. I felt level with the feathery strands of cirrus clouds. The bowsprit swayed and lifted, and I knew for the first time that we were pointing home.

After a while up there, thinking about people off the ship and tomorrow's classes and all sorts of uselessness, I saw, far off on the starboard side, a single, bushy plume of spray. I just happened to be looking in the right direction, and I only saw it once. A few seconds later, even farther away, I saw its broad back curl, ridged like a dragon. The whale's back continued to arch, slowly, powerfully, in ponderous, suspended motion, until at last its triangular tail surfaced, splayed, then sliced down under the water. It was a large bull sperm whale. I looked down at the bow watch. One student was staring in the right direction, but it was a sleepy day, she wasn't seeing much, and it must've been too far off for her height-of-eye, anyhow. I considered shouting 'Whale Ho!' but kept the words in my mouth.

I was aloft on a square-rigged sailing ship, on a wide glorious ocean day, and I had just seen the flukes of the sperm whale. I'd never seen a whale before, and I felt that I probably wouldn't see one in this way again. I had no camera and no one to glance over to. Though I kept looking, I knew from my reading that this was the dive of a solitary whale going down deep and for a long time.

I pulled my body up so I could put my cheek on the top edge of the royal squaresail, looking out past the yardarm to the horizon. I pushed my feet back and out, pressing my torso against the yard, unconsciously trying to keep my heart from falling out of my chest.

The sails billowed below. I could just make out the sound of the wind curling off the back of the canvas. I hugged the yard, the ship. For a split second, I'd had no thought of my past or future, no 'what am I going to do next' or 'why did I just do that' or anything other than being aloft looking at that giant tail from so far away. I took in the smell of the sail, the tar, the steel, the salt, and I imagined the whale spiraling into the dark.

The thing is that I remember that all so well, that moment from over fifteen years ago. Maybe that's why I've dumped my savings into this little boat, which might be a total piece of junk, but why I suddenly want—no, it's a *need*—a need to get out there again. Maybe it's because I need to see something like that again. To feel that. But the truth is, too, at the same time, I don't even know what's brought me to this spot, this time, why I just wrote another painful check—this one to the yardmaster for the sole privilege of sitting in this sixty-year-old hull, out of the water, and propped up on the cement for the winter. As if in five months I'm actually going to be standing in this boat, floating in the water at the end of this shipyard. As if I'll actually raise the mainsail, raise the jib, and go set off to circumnavigate the world.

## 138 days until departure

The shipyard is quiet. I'm the only fool working on his boat on a cold, windy Tuesday afternoon. The yard manager told me that all the other guys probably won't put their boats into the water until May or June. Since I'll be going back in first, he put me at the far end—closest to the water, with a good view of the sea—but nothing to cut the wind at all. I've been working on jobs like splicing new halyards, things I already know how to do. It feels good to be working with rope again.

It seems like a good part of what I remember about my years at sea, my twenties really, is from that first voyage on the Canadian school ship. It's often just little moments. Like I remember one particular morning when I was sitting on the aft deckhouse. The water had that digital quality to it: grey, skinned, with tiny black pixels, very similar to how the winter sea looks now from the yard. We were sailing that day through a slow swell, and our wake foamed then sat behind us in bubbles, fizzling out quickly. There were layers on layers of clouds that morning, in every direction, and I could see a squall off to the left, to port. There were high 'mare's tails' and also low, billowy clouds and angled ones and huge dark clouds behind that—and also a couple in front moving quickly. There was a cloud identification poster taped up in the chart house, and I thought then how there must've been every kind that day—every example of cloud, every variation of cirrus, stratus, and



cumulus, all stuffed and packed and spread all over the sky. There was a long-winged bird gliding low behind the ship, and a thin orange light to the east, below the squall clouds.

As I sat there the wind strengthened. I saw more dark ridges on the surface of the water. A rainbow was directly off our stern, coming out of a cloud and ending with a small wisp, above the horizon, with a reflection of the colors on the water. The rainbow appeared out of nowhere, and I could see it fading as suddenly as I'd noticed it. Soon only red remained with a bit of green and some fuzzy, expanding yellow in the middle. A few small clouds began to drift in front. The bird kept hovering, then gliding so low I lost it behind the tiniest of swells.

I looked forward again and watched the squall come closer as we sailed toward it, making it seem as if the clouds were rising. Light streamed behind the squall, like sun through dusty attic slats. One patch through the squall clouds was especially white, brighter—either the sun was directly behind it or the cloud was especially thin there—the angles of light were different, the rays went straight down while others were at an angle in both directions, inward, making light streaks similar to a ship's hull, a triangle of a bow coming toward us in a dark cloud. I watched the sea surface turn raspy, like a steel file, but with some purple in it.

I remember that I smelled French toast at that moment. When the cook made breakfast you could smell it throughout the ship, even if you were working aloft or in the engine room. Fresh bread. Eggs. Warm syrup.

When I looked back aft the rainbow was only a final transparent stroke above the waterline. The sky kept growing darker, and I watched one of the students bring a yellow foul weather jacket to the helmsman just before the drops began to fall.

### 108 days until departure

My girlfriend and I just went to her dad's house. I told him about my upcoming voyage because he loves to talk about boats, and I think he's one of the few people who understands why I want to get back to sea. He was actually never able to stay out there himself because he was chronically seasick. He enlisted in the Navy for the Korean War but had to be reassigned to a post on land because he had it so bad. Pretty sad story, actually.

I've been thinking a lot about seasickness. I mean, my boat is only twenty-eight feet long—about as small as it gets for safe ocean-going craft. When I was working on the school ships people were always worried about getting ill and most of them did at some point. I used to have a stock line when I was sitting beside someone who was slumped by the rail and had just vomited. I'd say: 'Do you know that seasickness is no reflection of seafaring experience, athleticism, gender, physical attractiveness, or general intelligence?' It usually got a weak smile, and it's true. There's no real cure for seasickness, it affects most people at one time or another, and it occurs unpredictably, based on the endless variety of vessels and sea states. I saw old Coast Guard guys getting seasick when the ship was tied to the dock in a flat, protected harbor, and I saw bony adolescents giggling and dunking marshmallows in their hot chocolate while our ship wallowed in a gale. You never know

who it's going to hit and when, so no experienced mariner I ever knew looked down on someone who was sick, because it could happen to anyone. I knew captains who got ill regularly.

I once taught on a voyage with a bright and eager university student named Millie. She weighed about a hundred pounds, wanted very much to be a sailor, and had a romantic vision of the ocean, the type of person who makes it a point and a pleasure to refer to a boat as *she* and to know as many seafaring songs as possible. During her first week Millie could not fend off seasickness. We usually told the students to try not to go below when they were ill, because that was bound to make them worse. Also, if they blew chunks down there, it was disgusting to clean up. Eventually, though, people got exhausted and had to go below to rest, even if at the risk of getting sick again. So during this one passage, after Millie fed the fish a few times on deck—which she handled with a positive attitude and a smile—she was told to go below to try to sleep it off. This apparently went smoothly and her body began to recover until, by the luck of Neptune, I happened to be walking by her bunk, which was along the main passageway. Some odd quiver of the hull flicked something in her gut in such a manner that as she woke up she was heaving a mouthful of bile and taco remnants, splattering the lot at my feet. I cleaned it up with a bucket of seawater and a towel. It was nasty business because the soles of a ship are not level, of course, particularly when they're making people sick, so I had to mop things up quickly before the fluid slid into various crevices, all while getting Millie up on deck and safely harnessed to the lee rail.

During my years at sea, I must've cleaned up vomit a hundred times, but what made Millie's case noteworthy is that the very next night, though not at the same time, I was walking by her bunk and she vomited again, directly at my feet. A second offering. I swear.

A few days later, when the seas had calmed down and people got used to it, Millie was the first in her class to climb to the top of the mast. She also had the grace to not dwell on her misfortune. Often people will, as a defense, belittle themselves and talk about how they always get sick, or always got sick. It becomes a sort of obsession for people. They feel that they've failed, but thinking this is the only failure, continually bringing it up, if you'll excuse the pun.

I once sailed transatlantic with a tough young guy who drove a motorcycle at home and worked in one of the local shipyards. This was his first big voyage at sea, and he got terribly seasick, which was a shame because he had a fantastic sense of humor and could fix anything, so he was an ideal shipmate. Whenever I've seen him since, he always makes a joke about how sick he got when we sailed together. I wish he would stop that.

I remember reading in *Two Years Before the Mast* about how proud Dana felt during rough seas off California, because he felt chipper while others were seasick. As far as I can tell, this feeling remains universal and unavoidable. There's few bigger boosts to the ego, even if you know better, than when you're well at sea, able to work, while another is ill. It's hard to keep this in check—I used to be as guilty as anyone at feeling superior. Sometimes the situation was just all too absurd and vile that it could only be funny, like times when I saw people projectile vomit on another or when someone tried to put his fingers over his lips to try to keep it in, which only increased the arc of spray.

In some cases people are resistant to admitting that they're seasick. I remember one trip with a group of teachers. Adults, as you can imagine, were much trickier than kids, more delicate to manage. It was the second day of a passage, a warm summer afternoon with a comfortable breeze in Block Island Sound. Only one person had succumbed to seasickness so far, and he'd been able to get right back up and keep on with the day.

Then one woman came up to me. ‘I’m feeling really tired,’ she said. ‘I’ve had a lot of anxiety over the last few weeks. Before I got here.’

‘Sorry to hear that,’ I said. ‘Are you feeling thirsty?’

‘Yes, really thirsty. And my stomach is upset. This was supposed to be my vacation.’

‘Hm. Do you have a headache?’

‘Oh yes, splitting headache. Right here. I can barely think.’

‘Ms Davdaberg, I think you might be feeling a little seasick.’

‘No, no. Just anxious. I’m going to go below to rest.’

‘I really think you’ve got some seasick symptoms, Ms Davdaberg. You know, it’s no reflection on your experience, athleticism, gender, age, physical attractiveness or general intelligence.’ She didn’t smile. ‘Let me get you some water,’ I said. ‘And I really recommend you stay up on deck. How about right there in the shade?’

‘No, no. Thank you. Just anxiety.’

Not less than twenty minutes after going below, she spewed all over the forward head.

It’s not like I don’t believe that some aspect of seasickness is psychological. Some people worry about it so much that they make themselves ill. I don’t know what you can buy these days, but years ago there were two or three medications that could help. Over-the-counter drugs made you drowsy and weren’t that useful once you got ill, so they had to be taken preventatively. I took some pills before I left the dock on that very first trip out of Vancouver. I was keenly aware that I hadn’t been on a boat since that fishing charter with my dad and brother so I kept taking the medicine for the first few days as we began our big roll to Hawaii. I didn’t get ill, luckily, only listless and a little nauseous for a while. I think

*not* getting seasick that first time always helped me in the future, in a psychological way, as if my body just never learned a seasick response.

I think I'm also lucky to have some biological predisposition to not getting ill. There have been a few occasions when it's hit me, but back when I was sailing, knock on wood, I seemed to regularly escape the days of suffering that I saw others endure. But then again I've never gone on a long offshore voyage in such a small boat, so who knows what's going to happen to me on this upcoming trip. I've surely lost any sea legs I once had. And are you more susceptible when you get older? I mean, I could get paralyzed with seasickness on this voyage. This boat—which I think I'm going to rename *Petrel*—might be a little barf bucket, especially during the first few days when I'm just getting used to the motion, and I'm all exhausted from the preparations—all stressed and afraid about the trip. Then what do you do? What if you're seasick by yourself? My first passage will be across the Gulf Stream, infamous for being choppy and confused.

One thing I've got going for me—at least one reason why I think I didn't used to get seasick all that much is because I've got a terrible sense of smell. I've read that seasickness is not about your nose but a disconnect with your inner ear balance and what you're seeing through your eyes, but I still think smell has something to do with it. I'm not sure why I can't smell very well. It's not that the sense is gone, it's just that only strong and vivid smells make it through. I first noticed my lack of smell in my twenties. The only major incident that I can recall that might've caused this deficiency was one time when I was in the lazarette of a wood schooner on a blistering afternoon off Trinidad. I went down to refill a few small containers of Brasso from an extra large supply can. I guess this container hadn't been opened for a long time and was under pressure from the heat. I opened it too close to my face just as I was taking a deep breath after hustling down the ladder. I saw bright vermillion, then went completely blind, and fell over—I literally fainted, swooned

like in a cartoon. I spilled polish all over the place. When I regained consciousness, my vision, I wasn't able to feel anything on my face for days, and I'm certain I'm just that much more stupid because of it. Mean stuff, that Brasso.

My lack of smell used to serve me in good stead with shipmates because I was able to tackle duties that were too much for others. I once worked an Elderhostel trip where a very kind, long-eared old man had a case of explosive diarrhea, a bad conch fritter or something. I splashed buckets throughout the head and pumped the bilge, but there was, shall we say, detail work to do. He was a wealthy man and left us all an extraordinary gratuity, so my shipmates toasted me at the bar after the trip. I think I would've been a good garbage collector, and I might one day be a good father because of my capacity for labor in the vicinity of scents that would drive others off. Anyway, the point of all this is just that although I haven't heard of any medical studies that connect sense of smell to seasickness, I do think there's a relationship.

If your nose works fine, keeping hydrated, rested, and busy always seemed to be the best prevention for seasickness. Ginger ale or ginger tea helped people, too, and certainly fresh air, sitting forward, and watching the horizon could be useful. I'm not sure if they still sell them, but pharmacies used to hock these acupuncture wristbands, which were forty dollars worth of placebo as far as I could tell.

Then there was 'The Patch,' which doctors who'd never been to sea prescribed for their patients, causing hallucinations and all sorts of really nasty side effects. And once you peeled off the patch from behind your ear, you had to start all the way from the beginning anyway—your body never had a chance to learn to adjust itself to the motion.

That patch messed up one of my favorite shipmates of all time. Her nickname was 'Sweet Feet,' and she was from Sedalia, Missouri, where, she claimed, all the daughters grow up tall, blond, benevolent, and smiley. We were on that transatlantic trip, aboard

*Sumatra*, and we started calling her Sweet Feet because all of the crew, not just me, could put their nose right in her boat shoes and, even if inhaling deeply, could smell only, barely, a delicate scent of a spring meadow. When we left the Canary Islands, Sweet Feet put on the patch, but she still got seasick within miles of the harbor. She didn't recover, remaining ill, aggravated by symptoms like some kind of feverish food poisoning. Soon her vomit was a pea soup color, though she'd eaten nothing like that. We read through all our onboard medical books, which turned up nothing. Then, at last, we thought about removing the patch. She got better immediately—within two hours. After Sweet Feet recovered, she grew bean sprouts in a Tupperware bowl, so we could have fresh vegetables for salads in the middle of the Atlantic. She'd thought to bring the seeds along in advance. During this upcoming trip, whenever I'm negotiating with some foreign customs official, I know I'm going to wish that I could have Sweet Feet and her smile do it for me. If she were with me, the paperwork would last ten minutes, whether she spoke their language or not.

I'm the assistant curator at a little history museum called The Nathaniel Walker House—the job I can't wait to quit. Since it's based in an old seaport, we often tell stories about the ocean, usually based on local fishing or nineteenth-century exploration out of the area, stuff like that. Once we put up a small traveling exhibit about seasickness. As you might expect, there's been a long history of bizarre medical treatments. One fourteenth-century monk believed in blindfolding passengers for their first few days. Maybe that's foolishness, but it makes some sense to me if seasickness is actually caused by a disconnect between balance and vision. Once I sailed with a blind woman who indeed never got ill. In the fleets of Prince Henry the Navigator, some of the officers considered seasickness a contagious malady, so mariners who got *mal-de-mer* were isolated below decks in tight compartments, making them even more ill, and proving their 'guilt' in a witch hunt sort of way. Later treatments involved chloroform or some other anesthetic on a handkerchief,



which was enough to knock the person out, but not enough, in most cases, to kill them. To some extent this did spare them the misery because often when they awoke again, their body had since adjusted.

When I was sailing, the cook used to have a lot to do with how well people did on a first passage. The experienced, kind-hearted cooks made simple, binding dishes for the first few days—dinners of rices or buttered pastas, without a great deal of spice, except perhaps some soothing gingers. Other cooks, however, and this was always a mystery to me, chose to make Mexican food as soon as the weather got sloppy. I don't know why this was, some form of passive aggression, but I can easily bring to mind four ship's cooks who always made greasy tacos on days of heavy seas. Not only was the spicy, fatty beef terrible for the stomach, it was always accompanied with a dozen bowls of toppings that were impossible to control with the movement of the ship. The dinner always ended with spilled sour cream, scallions, tomatoes, and beef bits all over the sole, with a graveling of corn shell underfoot. Soft tortillas—they never even used soft tortillas.

A couple of the ships had in reserve what the medical officers called an 'Air Force Cocktail,' which was a mixture of some serious prescription medication. This usually helped a seasick person recover. In a few cases it was necessary to medicate someone in this way, a person who was in danger of getting too dehydrated and exhausted. A friend who's still in the sail-training business told me that in recent years the ships' staff are getting pretty quick to medicate kids with this stuff, not giving them enough time to develop their sea legs naturally. At first I was pretty snooty about this, but now I don't know. I mean, I might bring some serious drugs with me for my upcoming trip. I could get run down by a tanker if I'm laid out too long.

The worst and saddest case I ever saw was actually on my very first passage, during my first roily ride from Vancouver to Hawaii when I took the seasick pills before I left the

dock. For three weeks we cranked along on a broad reach, all the way there, making speeds of twelve and thirteen knots with every sail drawing hard and foam boiling over the lee rail. It took most of us a week or so to get our sea legs, to get over the confusion of the situation until we settled into a kind of rough routine and began to almost enjoy it.

One student never got his legs. His name was Jean-Francois, from a town outside Montreal. He was a good-looking kid, confident and suave. He wore a necklace with little white shells and gave his hair a lot of attention. During orientation in Vancouver he seemed to have all the girls wrapped around his finger. Apparently he was a star ice hockey player at home—a nimble, speedy goal-scorer for his high school team. Jean-Francois came aboard with his best friend, Peter, who was a defenseman on the squad and was from a large family and a farming background. He acted as Jean-Francois's straight man. Both of the boys got partial scholarships from their school, and they raised the rest of the money for The Vulture's new Mercedes with donations from various sources in town and bake sales run by their church. Apparently Jean-Francois's dad started the whole thing. He adored sailing and ships, and always wanted his only son to go on a voyage like this, having seen an ad for it in a boating magazine. Pete told me his own family was supportive but not overjoyed, because he was one of eight kids and there wasn't gushing attention for anyone, no matter what he or she did.

When first out in the North Pacific, Pete got sick several times, but he bounced back and soon took his turn at lookout, then the helm. Whenever he could, he worked to learn his lines. Meanwhile, his friend Jean-Francois could keep nothing down—no water, no saltines, not even a multi-vitamin. Even after every other student was standing watch and attending classes, Jean-Francois remained below with a trash can beside him. He lost weight quickly, alarmingly. He kept spitting up on his clothes, so he just wore his underwear while he lay in bed. He lost so many pounds that you could see his ribs and

shoulder blades. The room smelled awful and not just because of the vomit, but because the cabin was a closed space for four tall boys. They hadn't had the time or energy to clean the cabin yet, and they hadn't known how to stow their gear properly in the first place, so wet salty clothes stood in clumps while books and papers had fallen in piles all over the sole. One of the magnetic locks on a cubby door had also broken, so on a particularly steep roll this door swung open, paused with the ship, then slammed back again. Pete kept the room dark and made sure the others only went in there to go to bed or retrieve something. He delivered water, ginger ale, and crackers. He cleaned the trash can every day, or more if he needed to.

The days went on and Pete and the others began to learn how to set and strike sail, to climb aloft, and were soon able to read and write below decks, even beginning their first homework assignments. Jean-Francois did not get better, even after a double Air Force Cocktail. The ship's staff became seriously worried. His case had surpassed anything even the captain had seen. To compound his shame, they administered some medication to him anally, since he couldn't keep anything down. This helped to stabilize him, but he still did not improve. If the passage was to have lasted even a couple days longer, the captain was preparing to radio a request to airlift him out.

I remember visiting Jean-Francois one morning. He didn't know me from Adam. I just went to see him like many others did, trying to cheer him up. He lay with his back to me. The sheets had been pulled off the mattress, and I could see the knobs of his spine, his skin covered with acne. His hair was mussed, knotted. When he did look over at me, there was a chalky film around his lips and his face was a formaldehyde grey. Cans of ginger ale were crushed on the sole, along with a half-eaten bag of crackers. The trash can sat next to the bed, propped up between foul weather gear. Whenever the ship swooped over a large swell, I had to brace myself against the foot of his bunk while he rolled toward the far

bulkhead, against which he put up no defense. Then at the back end of every heave, that broken door slammed shut, then swung open again, waiting to startle me again on the next roll.

I didn't have anything to say to Jean-Francois. I didn't have my stock line then, though it would've been useless at that point anyhow. I just sat in his cabin, on the opposite bed, crouching my head under the upper bunk. I listened to the movement of people on deck and laughter from the passageway. Pete had covered the porthole with a sweatshirt, but I still heard the sea against the glass. I sat there for a while, he didn't look at me, and then I left. 'Hope you feel better, JF,' I said, flatly. 'We miss you up there.'

Sometimes during that first passage I wondered if Jean-Francois was partly bringing it on himself. He was the kind of person who'd always had a lot of attention, and I wondered if he was subconsciously taking his illness as far as he could because he felt he'd got too far behind, beyond any chance of recovering the lead. If he was going to get sick, perhaps he decided to do it completely and aggressively. To fail successfully, tragically, if that makes sense. Like Cool Hand Luke, if you've seen that movie. Luke knew that he'd never escape prison, but he kept trying until they killed him. I don't know. Like for my circumnavigation it might be better to break my little boat up on a coral reef, to smash it into a thousand pieces, than to simply stop halfway through because I've run out of money. Does that make sense to you?

Jean-Francois was hospitalized for a few days after we arrived in Hilo. The doctors felt it was just too risky for him to continue, in case he just could never get adjusted. We were sailing south into an area far away from modern medical care and commercial air routes. So we had a good luck pizza party for Jean-Francois before we left. He and Pete said goodbye and gave each other a clumsy hug. The ship pulled off the wharf, Jean-Francois waved at us from the dock, then flew home to Montreal alone. I quickly forgot

about him, just as we all did, with so much else going on. He left my memory so completely, that when I was organizing the yearbook at the end of the voyage, when I was looking at the one picture we had of him, I couldn't even remember his name.

But recently I've been flipping through that yearbook and through all of my old journals, and I've been trying to imagine what my first few days out there on *Petrel* will be like, alone, vomiting my way across the Gulf Stream. I've been thinking about Jean-Francois a lot, and I sure would like to hear what happened to him: what he's doing now, if he's married, has kids, if he ever goes on the water at all. There'd be no reason for him to remember me, but I'd still like to meet him again. I'd like to hear the story of how he got off the plane in Montreal, how he held his shoulders square and shook his father's hand. I'd like to hear the story of Jean-Francois, who walked into school that first day back, with his head held up, offering to tell the self-deprecating truth, but only once. To hear the story of Jean-Francois who picked up his friend Pete at his house, by himself, because he had his driver's license now, and they drove to the ice rink and skated around while he asked to hear Pete's sea stories and gracefully demonstrated the newfound accuracy of his wrist shot.

## 90 days until departure

I know this sounds kind of melodramatic, all ‘woe is me,’ but as I’m sitting here cleaning all the mold out of the forepeak and banging all the rust off the anchor chain, I realize that I’ve pretty much failed at everything I’ve ever done. I mean, I’m not in jail, my life’s not terrible by any stretch, it’s just that every real dream—every really big project or hope I’ve had for myself, the ‘love of my life’—none of it has ever worked out.

That first trip on the Canadian school ship was my first really big screw-up. When I returned from that voyage around the Pacific I saw myself, for the first time, as a complete failure. High school, college, the first job—they were all fresh starts, pre-programmed, but now I had nothing to return to. I was convinced that I couldn’t get another teaching job because they’d find out that I was an alcoholic and took a naked photograph with my teenaged students. You’d think by now that this event should seem funny—it’s been over fifteen years now—and I keep waiting for it to lighten in retrospect, maybe you’re getting the humor, but it still fills me with deep regret and self disgust. Perhaps this is because it was the climax of so many poor decisions. It was such a cool job, people at home were so impressed, and I was so close to finishing without a crash. The day after I told the staff about what I’d done, another teacher, who was in his early-thirties then, pulled me into his cabin to tell me that he’d been having an affair with a student: full-on, screwing her in his

cabin. It was as if my transgression had allowed me to be an accomplice to his own sin. He desperately needed to get it off his chest, and I guess he suspected I wouldn't say anything to anyone on board, which was true, plowing me even further into a furrow of shame.

I remember sailing under the Golden Gate Bridge, what I'd been craving for so deeply over the course of the voyage, a moment so anticipated that it felt as if it couldn't possibly exist. It was night, the water was black, and the bridge was lit powerfully. There were lights all over San Francisco Bay—whirring and flashing and fixed—reds, whites, yellows, and greens, running lights of other ships and boats, and I could see the lights of the skyscraper windows and the car headlights that whizzed overhead. As our masts came under the bridge, the students began to holler and screech and jump around, hugging each other. I listened to the echoes of the cars while the students' shouts clanged off the girders and the cement supports. I sailed under that bridge in shame, in dread of seeing The Vulture—surely he'd find out what I'd done, probably already knew—and of realizing that I ended the trip, not triumphantly, not having accomplished all of the duties asked of my position, not even in simple relief, but instead in failure and embarrassment.

I went to the graduation ceremony, which was in a hotel. We wore our formal uniforms, our ties and blazers. The students got their diplomas, and I sat sullen and was not called up to speak. The next morning I climbed up to the very tip of the foremast, beyond the royal yard and above the ratlines. I rested my chin on the mast cap, then came back down and slunk off the ship and took a cab to the airport.

My parents had a welcome home party for me. I was grateful that a few college buddies came and dozens of relatives and family friends showed up, too—likely out of some duty to my mom. I didn't tell anyone what had happened with my drinking or how most of the students and staff hated me by the end or just how difficult the second half of the voyage had been. No one would've wanted to hear it anyway. Books about the sea

rarely discuss the return home, the ‘re-entry’ after spending a year breathing ocean air, after spending nearly every waking minute outside or with the sky visible through a porthole. No one could formulate a question as to what my trip was like, nor did they really want an answer. If a guest at the party was talking to me at all, it was only so he might have an opportunity to tell me about *his* trip to a similar place or when *he* once went on a day-sail somewhere.

At the party, I met my brother’s fiancée for the first time. I gave her the signed copy of *The Mutiny on the Bounty*, but she didn’t seem impressed. For my friends I brought back Balinese batiks, native masks from the Solomon Islands, stone Moai from Easter Island, and a couple rude phallic sculptures from Papua New Guinea. I brought back several things for my parents, including a ship model of *The Bounty* that one of the islanders had carved, complete with a nail from the original ship glued on the bow. It was expensive and because of its size and delicate rigging it was difficult to store in my cabin and bring home. When I purchased it I felt good about contributing to Pitcairn Island, since they lived so humbly and had been so kind to us. A long voyage makes you appreciate your family and friends, too, so I wanted to make some kind of financial and logistical sacrifice for them. I had no idea back then that a few of those Pitcairn guys were child molesters—I’m not sure if you read about this in the news—but those men I met, hiked with, ate with, were raping their young cousins. Apparently there’d been a long history of that type of abuse on the island. And what’s even worse, what somehow sucks ever more, is that’s not even the most depressing news I’ve read recently. I wasn’t planning on stopping at Pitcairn during my voyage, anyway, but now I definitely won’t.

So at my homecoming party, my uncle and a neighbor sat beside a small table where my mother had displayed the ship model I’d brought back. When I walked by, my uncle stopped me and held my bicep. ‘Have you really looked at this boat?’ he said. ‘How much



did you pay? Boy, they saw you coming. That's not a nail from the original *Bounty*. They didn't have nails! Only wood dowels back then. I've read all about ship construction in that era. You and every other cruise ship passenger! Ha-ha-ha.'

I've since learned that he was wrong. They did have nails in that period and the wreck of the ship is close to shore in shallow water. The nail could very well have been from the actual *HMS Bounty*. But at the time I was not sure of myself and the idea that the islanders were selling a fake product, the embarrassment of these two men laughing at me, how I hated the title 'cruise ship' in relation to what I'd just done, how exhausted I was from so much for so long—I remember that moment clearly. I've never forgiven either of those men for it, even though they couldn't have known how jagged a cut that was, how thin my skin at the time. Even when my uncle died a couple years ago, I was thinking about it at the funeral, even when I was throwing my fistful of dirt on his coffin.

I adjusted back to life at home—flush toilets, cars, clean sheets, a lot of time inside, access to food, to a phone, the TV, and having to live with the constant waste and garbage which is shoreside life. I looked for a job. I didn't call that headmaster in New Hampshire who'd offered me the position before I left. Like I said, I thought I was done with teaching and had no idea what to do. Which was a pretty big disappointment to my dad. I thought about going to Alcoholics Anonymous. One college friend asked me to rent an apartment with him in the city, so I looked through the downtown want ads. I applied to be an agent at a student travel company, right beside the university. The manager was impressed at all of the places I'd visited. I could be the 'Pacific Representative,' he said. In the end he didn't offer me the job because, he explained over the phone, 'I can tell you're not committed to the travel industry.' I tried to get a job in a bakery, in a library, in a bookstore, and as an apprentice to a house builder, but with no success. I told my friend I couldn't move in until I had a job. He said not to worry, he'd already found somebody else.

Right after his wedding, my brother bought a new car and gave me his old hatchback. It had over 210,000 miles on it, the windshield wipers were rusted stuck, and I left a steady trickling of antifreeze wherever I went. I decided to drive up to Montreal to see a few friends from the ship, which was the right medicine at the right time. Getting out of the house and going for a long drive through the farms and desolate highways of upstate New York was soothing in itself. Two gallons of antifreeze later, I arrived in Montreal, reuniting with my shipmates. A couple of these folks had only been aboard for the first semester, so they were eager to hear about all of the troubles, in detail, and they knew exactly what, where, and who I was talking about. I told them what I'd done, and what the other teacher had done, too. We talked and sat idly in coffee shops, drank in moderation, and spent a week going to Shakespeare-in-the-Park every night. When I drove south again, I was refreshed, though still without any idea what to do next.

On the way back I stopped at a small boarding school in northwestern Massachusetts to visit with the man who'd been my football coach in high school. It's a gorgeous part of the world, in a valley of the Berkshire Mountains, with rolling hills, small farms, and long ridges of woods with trails that opened into fields or lakes. Bob and I, with his dog, went on day hikes into the forest—right out his front door—and he walked me around the school's buildings and fields. One night we all had dinner at the headmaster's house, which I was too clueless to realize was Bob's set up. Two weeks later I was back at this school, The John Shedd Academy, as an intern. I didn't want to be in front of a class again, but I needed to move out of my parents' house and make some money. I had nothing else.

The position didn't have a great deal of responsibility, which was exactly what I wanted. I helped the headmaster with his English class, helped coach a couple sports, did 'dorm duty,' and filled various tasks that others didn't have time for. The job paid very little but they gave me a tiny apartment, just above the library, on the top floor of an old

ivy-covered building. The apartment was perfect except that it was only one thin wall away from the music room. Back then everything I owned fit in the trunk of the car. It took me just three quick trips up the stairwell to move everything in. The school supplied one desk and one chair, but no other furniture. For the entire year I slept on a blanket, directly on the carpet, which I didn't realize was a huge joke among the faculty until I overheard someone laugh about it in June.

I took up jogging and ran for miles and miles along those country roads and up through the trails and autumn leaves. I used to run before school, as the sun was coming up, and I often came on large families of deer and wild turkey or hidden piles of dead animals the farmers had left to rot.

Growing up in the suburbs I barely considered sunrises and sunsets, but during my year at sea I'd learned how those moments were everything. They were visible and definite on the ocean. I can't wait to get back out there again, just for that, that break of day, to see the sun come up. Sunsets will probably be pretty terrifying for me in the beginning, but I'll get used to sailing alone at night, I hope. I was just reading about the first guy to sail around the world non-stop, and how he drank a shot of whiskey every night after the sun went down, to settle his nerves. I can see myself doing that. I added a bottle of whiskey to my packing list.

When I used to work on the ships we always gathered collectively to watch the sun go down, people commented on the subtleties of color, as if it were a wine tasting. We'd watch the exact timing and azimuth and try to see a green flash just after the very top of the sun disappeared under the horizon.

I remember thinking after arriving at that school in Massachusetts, after spending that year at sea, how morning light inland is so blurry and unsure. When I finally saw the sun it was usually hours into the day when I was looking out a classroom window. But, on

the other hand, I did find out how inland water could achieve a stillness that's impossible at sea, a perfect glass sheen that revealed the coming sun and its colors more than anything else I could ever witness on the ocean.

Whenever I could I jogged beside the lakes and ponds so I could see more sky. The water reflected the sunrise pastels from the clouds and the pale bark from the trees. I remember one morning when I ran over Wequetocock Ridge and down along Tyler Lake. The water was so quiet, reflecting everything so exactly, that I had trouble keeping my balance—as if I were running along a crease in mid-air. I was thumping along, breathing in the pine and the soil, when I saw two women on the other side easing a canoe into the water. The boat was a light green, like the underside of a lily pad, and the women took care to be silent. When they found their cadence and were skimming over the surface, their reflection was so perfectly the reciprocal of themselves that when they used their paddles, in sync with each other and their reflection, it looked circular, like gears.

I returned from those morning runs exhilarated, my lungs cold, my cheeks red, my shoes slopped with mud or soaked with dew. I'd often still be running out of the shower, down to breakfast, still knotting my tie as I slid into the cafeteria just before the bell. I helped coach football at the school, which was ridiculous in itself. One afternoon I swiped a tube of eye-black from the locker room and brought it back to my apartment. When I went running in the morning, I'd occasionally put a couple stripes of this stuff on my cheeks. Once into the woods, I sprinted with my arms in the air, howling absurdly stereotypical Native American cries—'Hao-hao! Ai-ai-ai!'—as I plummeted down the switchback trails. One early morning I was returning to campus and the headmaster was driving out. I'd taken off my shirt and had my face striped and was hollering away. He was behind the wheel of his car. I didn't notice him until I turned just in time to see his shocked eyes. He never mentioned it.

I ran all fall and over the frost and snow and then through the mud in the spring. In April, I drove to Boston and ran the marathon, triumphantly waving to all of the women lining the road at Wellesley College. I had eye-black stripes on my chest, underneath my shirt. When I got to the Heartbreak Hill portion of the race, I turned to another runner and said: 'Is this it?' I'll never be in as good shape as I was that year.

From my apartment at night, I could walk down into the library, all by myself, and read as I liked. That was the year I read, for the first time, Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World*. Back then I never considered that this would be something that I'd also want to attempt. Slocum's skill seemed immortal, god-like. It still does, if you want to know the truth.

Through the mouse-ridden attic that was above my apartment, I often climbed up a homemade ladder and out through a hatch into the cupola where I sat and looked across the buildings and the fields. From here I continued to learn my stars and their movement and I spent hours up there watching the weather move over the hills. Though kids played in a field with a perfect view of the cupola and teachers walked over the gravel of the quad just beneath me, no one ever looked up to notice that I was there.

From one little window in my apartment I could see across the back of a few buildings and all the way to the living room of the new math teacher, a beautiful woman directly out of college. She had a square jaw and wide black eyes. I courted her with all my sailor's effort. I wrote her terrible poems and we sat up in the cupola and went on bike rides together. She was entirely too bright and talented for me and wasn't interested in my scene as anything but a companion, but, as the year wore on, winter came and went, and her options for single, young men grew thinner in our country town. She began to feel differently about me, I guess. I suspect it also helped when I told her that I'd found a new job. I took a position aboard an American high school semester at sea program. I just

couldn't resist going back out again; I missed the ocean terribly, and I couldn't stand the idea of spending more Friday nights telling eighth graders to be quiet and go to bed. Once Chloe knew I was leaving, I guess going out with me was more safe.

So she let me fall in love with her and during the last couple months of that spring we went on weekend hikes together and had sex in the day between classes. She was my first real, extended girlfriend. We had to be discreet because her apartment was connected to one of the girls' dormitories. This made everything that much more fun and when I came back to see her after I left the school, I parked on the other side of the ridge and hiked through the woods so I could slide in her back window, into her bedroom. When I had some time off from the ships, I stayed at her place for a week or several. But I had to be careful not to let her students see me. One snowy afternoon I just couldn't stand being inside anymore so I went out for a walk. I wore her jacket, hat, and scarf to cover my face so I could leave and enter the dormitory without anyone noticing. She and I were almost the same height. When I returned back from the walk, Chloe saw me coming past the window and prepared to unlock her apartment door, which opened into the dormitory. Just as I was coming in through the outer door, one of her students, a tiny Vietnamese girl, came around the corner and saw me. 'Hi, Miss Eneas!' Chloe opened the door to her apartment and the student spun around and saw her. 'Ack! Two Miss Eneas!' The girl ran away down the hall.

In the end Chloe was just too smart and gorgeous for me. Perhaps if I'd stopped sailing we might still be together, but I doubt it. She never asked me to stop working on the ships and I never really considered it. She broke up with me a couple times, the first time just before I was about to go on a three-month voyage. I'd come back from the shipyard to visit her at Shedd for one last weekend. I could tell something was off. Finally, she got it out that she didn't want to continue dating me while I was away. She actually gave me a

pair of store-bought socks as a gift. I left crying. It was in the afternoon and my car was on the other side of the ridge. Field hockey and soccer practice were in the way of my normal hike back over, and in my state I didn't want to see any faculty or students with whom I'd have to small-talk, so I tried to take another trail, but ended up losing my sense of direction and bushwhacking through briars and thistles. As my tears streamed down, I struggled to get through the brush, and my life as metaphor became so poignant and pathetic, that I just stopped and lay there in the thorns and welcomed it until I pulled myself together. After a couple hours, just before dark, I stood up and made my way through the brush and over the ridge, where I dramatically fell onto hay bales like I'd been shot—ten, twenty, thirty times—pretending I was getting blown away with a rifle.

Chloe and I ended up dating again when I came home, but even when I went to visit her where she grew up and we spent an afternoon seeing her father, she introduced me only as her 'friend.' I noticed that she never hung photographs of me in her apartment, at least when I was there—not even taped on the fridge. It was painful to be out sailing but constantly thinking about her, wondering whether she was with someone else, if I should fool around with another, what it would be like when I returned. Sometimes our phone calls from port stops were adoring and at other times they were awkward. Either way, I'd think about them, every word, for weeks until we could connect again. Or I'd read her letters over and over searching for clues. I made up little songs to her that I'd sing while I was standing on the bow. 'My girl Chloe how I miss your hugs/ My girl Chloe how I miss your hugs/ But won't get them unless a homebound tugs.' Stupid little ditties that I sang while up on lookout, shivering, singing over and over, adding verses to pass the time—too much time to think, too much time standing in the cold and dreaming about being in her clean bed, with her warm, lovely, naked self—how her thigh would slide in between mine. And then we'd see each other for two or three weeks, full of passion, then I'd be off again.

When I think about those times with Chloe, I can't help considering my own girlfriend now—if my upcoming trip is going to rekindle whatever love we had, or if it's just all going to fade. And what's worse is I don't even know which I prefer. She's talking about coming to visit at a few ports—she wants to go to Belize and maybe Galapagos, maybe South Africa, too. I don't know.

Anyway, after a couple years, Chloe tired of the isolation of the town and the little private Shedd Academy and decided to go to graduate school. She was accepted at two elite universities, one in Boston and one in California. That March we talked on the phone about her decision. She said she was leaning toward the school on the West Coast.

'I guess I could come to California,' I said.

There was a pause. She was in Massachusetts in her dormitory apartment. I was in Halifax, on a payphone outside a pub, trying to talk over the music of a Beatles cover band. She said: 'I. Well. That wasn't exactly what I was thinking.'

My falling out with her does not sour the memory of my time living at that school in Massachusetts. I don't have any bitterness toward her because I never felt like I deserved to be going out with her in the first place. When I consider all of my life screw-ups, I don't even think about her as one of them. Those were some of my better times, when I was dating her, when I was in good shape—when I wasn't drinking that much.

In the summer we rode our bikes to go swimming. She'd been a champion in high school and could swim circles around me, so when we exercised in the lake we both went our own way—I was too slow to keep up. One late afternoon, after we'd parted in the water, I decided for some reason that I wanted to swim to the other side. I suddenly needed to accomplish this, and I just didn't think of the actual distance and time or that she wouldn't know why I was taking so long. It took forever and I had to stop often to rest, but once I got to a certain distance, I couldn't bear the idea of turning back, so I forged on. As



the afternoon began to fade into night, I made it to the other side. During the swim back, stopping even more often because my shoulders ached, it began to occur to me that she might be a tad worried. As the dock came into view, I saw two police cars parked, the headlights showing the smoke of their exhaust. Once Chloe saw me, she dove in the water and swam over, dragging and hugging me, crying because she was so happy and so furious at the same time.

This lake and the surrounding property were owned by a summer camp. Thanks to me, staff members from the Shedd Academy were no longer allowed to swim there. I learned this by a formal letter penned to me by our headmaster. That's the only legacy I left at that school.

There was another body of water that was even closer to the academy, called Shedd Lake, owned by the town. This is where I sailed my first command, the *Old Shoe*, built by Mr Clyde Cedar, perfectly named, who was the woodshop teacher at the school. He had a large workspace and had built an even larger barn alongside. He was popular with all of the staff and students and had been at the school for decades, famous for always having curls of wood shavings in his hair and in his coffee, even at graduations and Christmas parties. The story went that even his best man had to pull shavings out of Cedar's hair just before he stepped up to the altar. Cedar liked to sculpt with chisels and even had a few figureheads hanging in his shop. He was interested in sailing and boats, though he'd done little himself. In his barn, several years before I arrived, he'd built a pristine lapstrake sailing dory, complete with an easy-step mast and varnished mahogany thwarts and rail. *Old Shoe* sat on a trailer that he'd welded himself, on which he planned to take the boat down to the lake. He said he could never find the time, yet he loved to chat, so you never swung by without making sure you had a cushion of twenty minutes or so. He heard about my year at sea and

assumed I knew all about sailing, encouraging me to take the boat down the road and put it in the water.

One thing about the kind of ships that I taught on was that all of the jobs were specialized. New crew was never involved in certain tasks or in planning the larger picture. On my first voyage I rarely understood what was going on. I was too focused on whatever specific job I had, trying desperately not to mess that one thing up, like tailing one halyard or something like that. I usually didn't have the time or energy to ask broader questions after a maneuver or situation. I'm not the sharpest beak in the nest, but it's amazing to me how little I learned after that first year at sea—how little I picked up after several years. The amount to know is just endless. I'm hoping at least some of it will come back to me when I put *Petrel* in the water—and certainly as I've been working on the boat, a few things have indeed resurfaced. But, the truth is, most tall ship sailors that I knew, particularly those who didn't grow up at yacht clubs, didn't know much about handling a small boat at all, particularly one with a sail. The concepts are nearly the same, but a small boat is an entirely different beast.

So with *Old Shoe*, after only a year's worth of experience, I had no idea what the hell I was doing. But Cedar was eager that his dory get some use. Slowly, step by step, inspired by reading Slocum, I guess, I got the nerve to drive the trailer down, to launch *Old Shoe* into the water, to climb aboard, then to push off into the lake. I never got any good at it, often sailing backwards or not at all or coming inches from capsizing. I would forget to put the centerboard down or forget to bring it back up, or I'd crack myself in the head with the boom. Fortunately, Shedd Lake is never very deep and the shores are soft mud and bog, so it would've taken some doing for me to really damage anything. On the odd time that I was sailing cleanly across the length of the lake, perhaps a distance of one mile, I felt immensely proud. Cedar loved to see *Old Shoe* dripping with water, with the trailer tires

loaded with sand and mud, but he never came down to sail with me or even to watch. 'Too busy, too busy, too busy,' he said.

I've met a lot of Clyde Cedars in my time. Sometimes I wonder if I do things not because I even really want to myself, but because the Clyde Cedars have dreamed about it but never done it themselves. I feel like I should do it because I believe they want to, wished they could. Their dream becomes mine, so I think that's what *I* want. Does that make any sense? Take my girlfriend's dad. If I sail solo around the world I know it'll make him feel so proud and nostalgic, a dream realized vicariously for a man who couldn't do it himself because of seasickness, something out of his control. Am I doing this more for him, because I think he'd love to do it? But then I wonder, if I do complete the circumnavigation, if it might also maybe lower his self-esteem a little. I hope not, but how do you know? You could never ask about something like that.

Anyway, my favorite time aboard *Old Shoe* was one afternoon after Chloe and I had been romantically together for just a few weeks. We grabbed any spare minute we could. She was coaching cross-country, and I had the afternoon off from coaching lacrosse, so I decided to go take out *Old Shoe* after I finished grading some papers. She said she'd meet me at the lake as soon as she was done. It was one of the first warm days of the year. Next to my apartment, the students and their plastic recorders blared in the music room. The teacher yelled at them: 'Harmonize! Jesus Christ. You're not goddamn harmonizing!' I closed up my work early, pulled on a bathing suit, and ran down to Cedar's barn to connect the trailer to my car. The trailer hitch was a little tight. I'd learned to spread some grease on the ball each time before I connected it, so I'd be able to get the trailer off the car later. I drove out of the school, down the hill, and past a few farms. I pulled into the small parking lot at the lake and backed the boat down onto the sandy launch area. If you've ever tried to back up a trailer, you know how difficult it is at first. The correct direction to turn the

wheel and when to compensate back, how much to turn—it's counterintuitive, a mystery, and initial attempts are uncoordinated and always inopportune, like when some experienced, impatient guy is waiting to launch his boat. Shedd Lake, however, had been a perfect place to practice because there was rarely anybody down there and only a tree or two to negotiate. I broke only one tail-light, to which Cedar replied, 'Normal wear and tear. Just normal wear and tear.' He wouldn't accept money for a replacement.

On this one afternoon, I backed it up into position on the first try. I remembered to untie the lines that attached the boat to the trailer *before* I drove it down into the water, and I remembered to tie *Old Shoe's* bow line to the edge of a tree so the boat wouldn't float away once it was launched—so I wouldn't have to swim after it again. I took my sneakers off, eased the boat into the lake, parked the car, and waded through the mud to climb aboard. I put the rudder down, stepped the mast, and raised the sail, underway and, by luck, in the right direction before I'd even tied off the halyard. I recognize that children and teenagers are capable of achieving these tasks. I mean, just a few days ago I read about a fourteen-year-old boy that sailed solo across the Atlantic. I was twenty-four years old when I was teaching myself to sail *Old Shoe*, but I doubt any kid could have felt as much satisfaction.

I was sailing along and at one point looked off the stern and saw an elderly couple sitting on a long porch. They must've watched the whole process. The woman waved, and the man raised his glass to me.

I tacked back and forth across the water for an hour or so until Chloe arrived on her bike. I dropped the sail and put the anchor down. She swam out to the boat, climbed on, and we nestled in the hull of *Old Shoe*, enjoying each other's company and looking up at the sky. We spent a long time this way, chatting about the people at school and holding each other, she kindly asking me to keep her warm, since she didn't have a towel or a dry layer to wear.

We decided to stay anchored until the mosquitoes got to us, but as we were watching the sun go behind the trees, we were startled by something from astern, the sound of clinking metal and heavy breathing. The man from the porch was rowing up in a homemade skiff.

‘Haven’t been out in this boat in years,’ he said. ‘Oarlock about to go.’

We straightened up. Chloe said: ‘Good evening, sir.’

The man grabbed onto *Old Shoe* with a shaky hand and gave me a bag. ‘My bride thought you two might be getting hungry. Asked me to take these out. And I thought you might be thirsty, so’s I sent my share.’ He winked at me. ‘We didn’t have a twist-off, but keep the opener. Got a drawer full. And she said the sweater’s an old rag, so’s you can keep that, too. “Don’t want her to catch a chill,” is what she said. Anyways, you two enjoy yourselves.’ He winked at me again.

The old man pushed off and rowed back to the shore, with the one oarlock creaking so loudly I don’t know how it took us so long to notice him on the way out.

In the bag was a mothy cardigan sweater and two carefully wrapped roast turkey sandwiches with lettuce, tomato, onion, and mustard. There were pickles, individually bagged, and there were also napkins, and four lemon hard candies, two condoms, one flashlight, two paper cups, a bottle opener, and a bottle of red wine that Chloe said was worth three times our combined pay for that week.

## 78 days until departure

It's snowing now, which isn't a huge problem since my boat's under a canvas cover, but it's still frigid in here and too cold to do any of the fiberglassing or painting that really needs to get done. So I'm sort of restricted in the jobs I can do. At night I've been reading navigation books and cruising guides—kind of driving my girlfriend crazy with it all, because pretty much every moment away from work I've been trying to be on board or out buying charts, supplies, and hardware. I've been trying to plan how and what and where to stow things below and trying to make what repairs and improvements I can, or at least trying to figure out what to ask for when I hire a professional to do the wiring or to replace some of the standing rigging.

There's an electrical outlet near the boat so I have light to work by, but I should really buy a heater to put down here. I've been sitting in the cabin freezing my ass off, surrounded by crap left by the previous owner. I don't know what to keep or what to throw away. I'm reading these how-to books about fixing old boats and preparing a boat to sail offshore. It's all a little overwhelming, I admit. There's so much to buy and do before I go. And half my time is spent going back and forth to the hardware store because I never have the right size screw or the proper tool.

I've been working on little projects, like yesterday I mounted a quick-access medical kit, and I've been installing a manual bilge pump in the cockpit in case the electricity fails and the hull is flooding with sea water because I hit something. The reality of a boat, being out at sea, is that most of what you work on is to defend, to avoid, to react against worst-case scenarios. When you see somebody working on an old car or his house, he's usually not thinking 'I better add this so I don't die.'

A few ships in the history of sail training, like the kind I used to work on, sank with all hands. There are hundreds of these tall ships all over the world nowadays and every couple years, a student or crewmember falls from aloft or someone is washed overboard. I have no idea what the statistics are for small boats—for singlehanded sailors who founder or blow themselves up or fall overboard when taking a piss at night over the rail. There's no master network to record this.

There's another guy now who occasionally comes down to work on his boat—I call him Shipyard Tom. He's been gutting a sailboat that he bought for less than a thousand bucks. It's an ugly old beast, and he knows even less than I do, which is sort of comforting. Anyway, he was telling me a story that he read in a magazine. Last month, a massive oil tanker powered into the harbor of LA-Long Beach. It was surrounded by police boats and tugs, but the captain of the tanker didn't know why he was getting so much attention. Soon crowds of workers and news crews and tourists lined the piers as he carefully docked the boat with the guidance of the pilot and the tugs. Crowds gathered at the front of his ship. He hurried down the gangway to see what they were looking at. When he got to the dock and walked forward, he saw the crumpled mast and rigging of a small yacht wrapped around his bulbous bow. The article said the captain had no idea about it—no knowledge of hitting a small boat or when it could have happened. They still don't know how many were

killed. There wasn't enough left to identify the yacht. 'Probably some guy sailing by himself,' Tom said. 'Probably went down for a snooze, then ka-blam!'

For the big vessels you can easily find out how many people have died, when, and where. Admissions officers and education directors for tall ship organizations like to point out that going to sea on a large sailing ship these days is much less dangerous than getting in your car, that you're less likely to be injured on a square-rigger than to be in a city and have a brick land on your head. I don't know who's calculating the deaths-by-falling-brick statistics, or the type of person who's standing idly under construction sites—I mean, maybe this is true, but I sincerely doubt it. Horrific things can happen at sea, and usually in ways you wouldn't expect or don't have the experience to imagine.

I just read this story of how one famous circumnavigator in the 1930s, when sailing in the Indian Ocean, lost his vision in one eye. He almost bled to death because while he was sleeping, a jar of marmalade fell off a shelf, smashed his glasses, and drove a shard of glass into his left eye. I'm going to get a pair of shatterproof lenses with my prescription, but they're really expensive, and I want to get a pair of clip-on sunglasses, too, though I know I'm going to lose those overboard. I'll probably end up just getting those huge grandmother sunglasses that'll fit over my regular ones. I don't want to even bring contacts because I'll be waking up so often and they'll just be too complicated to deal with—what with trying to keep your hands clean and having a steady source of fresh water. But then glasses fog up and are more awkward when using the sextant and binoculars. Having bad vision at sea is really a royal pain in the ass.

Besides planning on how to avoid shards of glass in my eye, I've been trying to consider all the things that could happen on my little boat, what could go wrong, thinking through all the accidents I've witnessed myself—or heard about. Batteries and electronics are what scare me the most.



On my first voyage, on that Canadian school ship, there was a woman named Janie Ferris who came aboard for the second semester, from Yokohama to San Francisco. She was the day watch officer, the assistant to the bosun in terms of helping with the ship's maintenance. She had a pudgy face, a quick smile, and often spoke too loudly. Janie was an excellent shipmate because she loved to laugh, drink wine, and she didn't take herself or anything too seriously. The students adored her. Janie and I were not especially close but we did get along well and always laughed together. Since she came on the voyage only for the second half, she was one of the rare bright spots as everything crumbled, and I remember feeling sad for her that she had to come aboard for such a terrible situation. But I had no energy to give her. When we docked in the tiny island of Palmyra, just as the new director was starting to drive everybody nuts, I asked to be allowed to go camp off the ship for the night, and the captain granted my request. I really needed to clear my head and get away from everybody. Janie asked if she could come, and I, trying to be honest but not wanting to be rude, told her where I was going to be and that she was welcome to come by for a while, but I really needed the night by myself. It was a beach only a mile or so away. I had to walk along a tight trail through palm trees. Fairy Terns fluttered menacingly around my head, as if about to spike me with their beaks. When I paused, I not only heard their wings in the air, but also the devilish rustling of thousands of hermit crabs on the sand. When I got to the beach, the water was calm and, thankfully, I had no view of the ship or its masts.

I tried to build a fire, unsuccessfully, then sprawled out on my sleeping bag, enjoying the peace and eating a sandwich. I thought Janie had got the hint, but she came anyway, after the ship's dinner and clean up. She bought a bottle of whiskey and I soon realized that she'd taken a liking to me. She made no advances and didn't say anything overtly, but there was that tension. I guess it's possible I was imagining it, but I don't think

so. Surprisingly, I wasn't in the mood at all that night, too stressed, despite the stars and that perfect island beach. As so often happens, especially when you lack self-confidence, once another suggests an attraction toward you, it means there must be something wrong with him or her, and you lose any interest you might've had. Looking back on it, I wish I had spent more time with Janie, because I think her tenderness and laughter might have kept me from becoming such an asshole on that trip. Anyway, at one point she just got up with an awkward, 'Well, I guess I'll get going now,' and I didn't stop her. The next morning I woke up to fist-sized red hermit crabs crawling on my face. When I went back aboard, Janie and I acted like she'd never even come by.

After the voyage ended in San Francisco, Janie took a month off and decided to return to the ship to work for another year. 'What else am I going to do?' she said.

On this next trip, about halfway through, no one was aware that small concentrations of combustible fumes from the ship's batteries had been seeping up from the engine room and out a vent on deck. Janie was supervising the students as they sanded the wood trim on deck. She had some kids using sand paper while she gave a few others the power sanders. Just beside the vent, Janie gave a boy named Keith one of the power tools. 'Know how to use one of these?' she said.

'No problem, Janie. Used one a hundred times with my Dad.'

She smiled at him, pointed to where he should work, then began to walk away.

When Keith turned on the sander, he ignited the invisible, scentless gas. The explosion blew Janie forward, and whipped him off the ship, hurling him in such a way that he bashed his head against the stanchion on his way over. They never found the body because he sank too quickly. The Coast Guard investigators concluded, judging from the blood and small bits of hair on the rail, from the slight dent in the cast iron, that Keith died from the impact of the rail, not from drowning.

Janie, understandably, had a difficult time reconciling the event. She suffered a few abrasions on her arms, knees, and face, but nothing serious or permanent. She left the ship early, in New Zealand. Went on a walkabout. Reports from an occasional postcard were that she was deeply depressed and working on a farm outside of Wellington. Then they were that she was just hiking around. No one heard from her for years and eventually we stopped bringing her up when sharing news and gossip about shipmates.

As the years went by I heard about that explosion accident a couple times. While on another ship, looking for a book in their library, I happened upon an unlabeled three-ring binder that held a Coast Guard report describing that very accident, with lengthy technical debates on negligence, battery charging, and recommendations on ship engineering to ensure that sort of thing wouldn't happen again. I read it through over and over, seeing the names of people I knew, staring at a digital layout of the ship on which I'd spent a year of my life. It had been my routine to lean on that very rail almost every day after lunch, to drink a cup of coffee with my friend Harry. We pretended we were wave farmers, surveying the 'crop' and chatting about whatever.

A few years ago, I went to Tierra del Fuego. I hadn't been feeling so good—among other things, my job at the museum was driving me crazy. I decided to max out my credit card and go on a vacation to the farthest, most desolate place I could think of. In the main town, Ushuaia, I walked along the docks, leaning against the fierce wind of the Beagle Channel, imagining Cape Horn just over the mountains. Docked there were several Russian research ships and icebreakers that had been converted to ecotourist vessels, bound for the Antarctic Peninsula, South Georgia, and the Falklands. I stopped by one gangway, something like the third ship down on the left, and picked up one of their brochures. I was reading through it and on the back I read the biographies of the program organizers. One was Janie Ferris. It said that she was an avid tall ship sailor and from British Columbia, so

it was definitely her, but then I read that she was an accomplished climber and triathlete, which was not the Janie I knew. The ship was leaving the next day. After pleading my case through a few different sources, I was able to find out where the instructors normally stayed. I hiked up to a small bed-and-breakfast high above the town. The owner said that Janie was indeed staying there—she always stayed there when she came through—but she was not in at the moment. The owner didn't know where she might be, so I left a note.

Janie walked into the hostel bar that evening. She looked fantastic, her face tanned, thin—it could barely hold her smile. I think she was even a couple inches taller. She told me that she was recently engaged to the other organizer of her Antarctic program. He was a mountain-climber filmmaker curly blonde-haired mega-stud, who fortunately couldn't make it that evening. Janie and I shared a wonderful couple hours catching up, getting most pleasurably drunk. We spent most of the time discussing the randomness of our meeting and the coincidence of timing, how she was only in port for two days, the events that brought me there, how I just happened to decide to read that brochure, and so on—the mysteries of chance and coincidence, or fate, whatever you want to call it.

Janie didn't talk about the accident, but she said that she had, indeed, spent a couple years in New Zealand. She found the land healing, found herself running and biking and got totally into triathlons and had been since. We both confessed a heartfelt connection to the movie *Forrest Gump*, how the main character ran back and forth across the country to try to purge his sadness.

Anyway, when I was thinking about batteries for my boat I couldn't help thinking about Janie and the accident. After talking to the local marine electrician, I've decide to suck up the price and get two brand new gel batteries—the kind that are completely sealed and won't leak as many fumes, won't leak acid if they get turned over. You also don't need to monitor electrolyte levels and all that crap with these, so it's harder to blow yourself up.

Fact is, I wish I could have no electricity at all—just not deal with it—but I’ve got to have running lights, at least a few electronics for navigation, and I need juice to start the engine. The engine is powered by gasoline, instead of diesel, which is just great—it’s that much more flammable—another way to blow myself up. Last week I tried to install a fumes alarm I bought secondhand off the internet, but when I put a rag that I’d completely soaked with gas under the sensor, it didn’t make a peep. Then the next day I couldn’t get the alarm to turn off. I don’t know. I must’ve installed it wrong. It’s useless as far as I’m concerned.

The scariest ship story I’ve ever heard didn’t involve any kind of explosion. It happened on a schooner that I spent over two years on, the *Mary Higgins*. Again, I was lucky enough to not be on board at the time. Many sail-training ships still have manual windlasses. On this schooner’s windlass were two thick oak poles that fit into powerful sockets connected to an iron drum, like two skewers stuck in the middle of a sausage. As you moved the two poles up and down, you turned the drum, the sausage, on which the chain was wrapped. Because of a set of clinking pawls and thick steel teeth, the drum could only turn in one direction, so you didn’t lose the chain you’d hauled up.

On this one afternoon, the *Mary Higgins* was off Garden Key, which is a patch of sand at the western tip of the Florida Keys. It’s known for the ruins of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century fort, a rookery for Sooty Terns, and as a landing spot for illegal immigrants from Cuba. The anchorage here can suffer from large swells, and on this occasion, the seas were so tall and heavy that the group had to cut short the visit ashore so the ship could get out safely. Once everyone was back aboard, they began raising the anchor. A deckhand worked at each pole while the second mate supervised, watching the chain and its angle as it came up. A student helped to keep tension on the chain as it came off the drum, feeding the links to another who flaked it back and forth into a large oak box. It was always difficult work at the windlass. Sometimes people rotated through or it sometimes even required two people per

pole, but that got cramped. The poles were too wide to get your fingers completely around and often you'd need both arms to pull one down. When there was a lot of tension on the chain, it was necessary to pull the pole halfway down and then lean over it with all your body weight to push it the rest of the way. It could also be a very rhythmic motion; working with your partner was as important as brute strength.

Working the windlass was especially difficult in a big swell because a bucking bow introduced slack then a sudden rapid tension in the chain. This one time at Garden Key, there was a single especially large wave, its timing so perfect with so much thrust—and maybe the student wasn't keeping enough strain, or maybe the captain should've used more engine power ahead to make it easier, or maybe the mate watching the giant swell should've warned the haulers, or maybe the engineer hadn't maintained the windlass properly, and maybe this or maybe that. Even those who were there aren't certain—but a young woman named Iris was in the middle of pushing down on the starboard pole, bringing it down just below her knee, when the bow reared up so violently, the chain tightened so hard and so quickly, that it wrenched the links out of the ship with such extraordinary power that the drum itself lurched with it. The pawls flipped, the drum spun, and the poles sprang backwards, one of them whizzing with one hundred and twenty degrees of arc directly into Iris's face. The pole cracked her skull, shattered her eye socket and nose. The sound of it was like a baseball bat swung on a log, but multiplied, as if a giant slab of cement were hurled off a rooftop onto the grass. Iris's blood poured down the decks and into the scuppers. The medical officer shouted to everyone that she shouldn't be moved. The mate yelled back that the chain still had to come up, the swells were too dangerous. So while people worked above her, Iris's blood continued to flow. She was unconscious immediately and the medical officer worked to keep her air passages clear. All others were commanded to stand-by at midships, where they huddled dumbly, listening to the chain and pawls

clattering, one slow link after another. A few students wept openly. One hauled up buckets and splashed sea water in the scuppers to keep the blood washing overboard. When the anchor was finally up, the ship motored into a safe area and held station. The captain had already called for Key West Coast Guard medical assistance. Still Iris would not wake up. The medical officer lost his professionalism and began to weep, to sob, shouting at her: 'Iris! Iris girl! Are you there? Please.' Everyone thought she was dead, but then just as the sound of a helicopter's propeller approached from the east, Iris began to groan. Soon all hands heard the wails of her agony, the last sounds from her as she was lifted up in a basket into the aircraft.

My friend Dave was on board for that, standing back aft, and he said it was just a nightmare. At least an accident like that couldn't happen to me on my boat since I won't have a windlass, just my nearly forty-year-old self hauling up a thirty-pound plow anchor and one hundred feet of chain, hand over hand. I'll be cursing as I try to free the thing from the bottom or hoping the chain doesn't rip out the bow cleat in heavy weather.

What's so scary about this stuff is something can happen even when things are calm and you think there's nothing to worry about. The schooner *Wayfare*, on which I sailed as a fill-in teacher for a few weeks, also once suffered a tragedy at an anchorage, this one off the Grenadines. The students were enjoying a swim at the end of a quiet day. A girl named Nancy had got some sort of poison-ivy type rash on her arm, so she was told to stay out of the water. She loved swimming and was disappointed to have to sit out, so she leaned on the rail and watched the others in a way that you'd call immature if you were being critical. Normally there was a devoted mate or teacher keeping 'swim watch,' but conditions were calm and there were teachers in the water with them. The schooner was so settled, in such a protected harbor, that the first mate on duty came up on deck only occasionally since he was trying to complete a wiring project in the galley before the cook needed to start dinner. The

captain, Willie Pace, was having a nap, preparing for a long passage ahead. Students were jumping off the bowsprit and the rail, diving for a football, and climbing back up the ship's ladder to soap up and shampoo their hair, then jumping back off again. Others were snorkeling around the ship or just floating around and chatting. At one point Nancy noticed that one of her instructors, Mr Anderson, seemed to be on the bottom in an odd way. The ship was in less than forty feet of clear, turquoise water. Mr Anderson, Ben, had a snorkel and mask on, but was lying prone on the sandy bottom, completely still. Nancy saw no movement at all. She walked aft to tell the watch officer. The mate tried to remain calm, got the captain immediately, but soon all of the students and crew began to panic and several tried in desperation to swim down to him. At first they couldn't reach him, and then they couldn't bring him up all the way. People were screaming and no one was listening. The more activity there was in the water, the harder it was to see what was happening down there. One deckhand burst his eardrum in an effort to dive down and get a loop of rope under Ben's arms. Now that guy can no longer swim at any depth or travel at all in an airplane. An emergency team arrived within thirty minutes, but Ben could not be revived. The autopsy said that he died from something called Shallow Water Blackout, which apparently affects thousands of swimmers a year, mostly intermediate skin divers who've begun to train their bodies to ignore the initial signs of oxygen depletion. Supposedly Ben would've had no indication this was coming on. One moment he was flipping over a sea cucumber and the next he was unconscious, drowning.

Captain Pace did a couple more trips, but lost the taste for sail training and took a job ashore. Nancy had violent nightmares for the rest of the voyage. She would wake up at night shrieking, which meant everyone on the ship also woke up.

My own connection with this, other than having been aboard that ship a year earlier and having been at that anchorage several times on other vessels, is that I had actually met



Ben just a few months before he died, when the *Wayfare* stopped in the port where I now live. At that time, I was in-between boat jobs and renting a house with a few friends—just up river from my current apartment. My housemates and I loved to throw parties, provide showers and transportation, and do anything else we could to help the boats when they came through. That year we had a barbecue for the crew and students, and I met Ben in person, though I'd spoken to him on the phone a few times before. He needed a particular piece of computer gear and had it FedExed to our house, but he never got it somehow. They set sail too soon, or no one was home to sign for it, something like that—I can't remember to be honest. As you might expect in a house with a bunch of guys in their twenties, a lot of random things got lost and other things got taped on the wall in the living room. Someone taped up a note from the FedEx delivery man that said: 'Ben Anderson: sorry to have missed you.' Only after we heard about his death did I notice this up on our wall. We kept it up there until we moved out, and I still have it, along with other items I transport from place to place without any future intention, because it would feel rude or disrespectful to put them in the trash.

My own brushes with harm at sea have been far less morose or dangerous. At least so far anyway. I still have a rope burn on the back of my hand from when I was first learning how to handle a halyard on that first passage to Hawaii. During my years sailing, I strained a muscle or two hauling lines, and I got banged up a few times by a roll of the ship throwing me against something. My right knee has been a constant problem, aggravated by my times at sea and a few incidents—but this began when I was seventeen and I tore my ACL kicking around a soccer ball with a few friends while waiting for a bus. Truth is, my knee has never hurt more than it does right now, ever since I've started crawling around in the bilge and under the cockpit of my boat. And it doesn't help that it's so cold and damp. I'm just out of shape. I haven't done any manual labor in years—other than helping to hang

paintings or move exhibit panels around. I'm hoping that once it warms up, once I finish the plumbing and the bilge pumps and don't have to do so much crawling around, once I finally get sailing—that my knee will feel a lot better. If it doesn't improve, I'm not sure what I'll do. I can't cancel this trip because I have a bad knee, for Pete's sake.

The fact is, often accidents have little to do with the conditions at sea. Any skipper will tell you that port is more dangerous for a crew than being out in transit—even kicking around a soccer ball while waiting for a bus—because you're not thinking about safety then. Once after a long trip a bunch of shipmates and I went to a bar in Point Judith, Rhode Island. We were a group that got along especially well, really clicked, so we were celebrating our friendship as much as we were the end of the season. We all got completely loaded, 'wrecked on mahogany reef,' and returned back to the ship arm in arm, after we'd closed the bar, and began playing around on the schooner like it was a jungle gym. While I was watching Harry dancing on the gaff, as they raised him up, a guy named Sacks snuck up behind me and hooked a halyard to the hammer loop of my jeans. Two other guys began to raise me up. The stitching held for a good fifteen feet—they were rugged work trousers and the company should be proud—but then it parted, and I fell straight toward the pin rail like a doll dropped off a porch. Not only did my head land directly between two bronze belaying pins, where there was a gap of perhaps three inches at either ear, but someone had laid a sweatshirt in that exact spot, which cushioned my forehead. Miraculously, the next morning I only had a bump, a headache, and a severely bruised elbow.

I got injured once in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It was January, well over ten years ago now, and I was combining a jog with an errand. We needed cartridges for the printer and this was a chance for me to get some exercise and not have to pay for a taxi. My Spanish is terrible now, nearly nonexistent—it's another thing I need to work on before I set off—but back then I could at least order a meal, find the bathroom, and mail a letter.

So this one afternoon, I was jogging along a sidewalk when a man opened his car door just as I was running past. From my point of view it all happened in slow motion: there was a high fence to my left and the walk was narrow, so even as I tried to avoid the opening door, there was no escape. The steel edge clipped my collarbone. I bounced backwards, then had to kneel down because of the pain, to regain my breath. The man who opened the door stood over me and shouted too quickly for me to understand what he was saying, though the gist was that he was furious about me running there, and I deserved everything I got. I sprinted away as soon as I was able because I thought he was going to kick me. The adrenalin took over. I was livid that he had accused *me* of wrong-doing. And that I ran away instead of standing up for myself. I was only a few blocks from the computer place—bleeding and angry. People were now looking at me strangely as I ran by, giving me a wide berth. When I found the store and ran in, before I even had the opportunity to say ‘Se vende printer cartridges para un Mac, similar de este,’ two women were cowering behind the counter. They would not come out and they held up a phone, saying they would call the police. I was wearing a sweaty white T-shirt and the blood from my collarbone had spread into a vast crimson splotch on my chest. They thought I’d been shot and was going to shoot them. It didn’t help that I was holding up a long black printer cartridge. No amount of cajoling could get them to serve me.

As I jogged home, without the replacement, the empty cartridge thrown in a garbage can, my collarbone began to throb. I could feel the area beginning to swell, and there was a pins-and-needles pain in my fingertips. When I got back to the ship those on deck also thought I’d been shot.

Sail training ships have medical officers, usually an auxiliary position of one of the mates or deckhands. These medics were required to receive some formal training, but their practical experience was usually pretty limited. Once I sailed with a woman who worked as

a registered nurse on shore, but that was rare. On this voyage, the medical officer was a young woman named Tabitha. She was especially keen and quickly cleaned my wound and supplied me with water and aspirin. Then she asked, ‘Can I *please* practice putting in stitches?’ I refused to be her cadaver, call me a wimp, and it didn’t seem worth going to the hospital. So I still have a large scar on my starboard collarbone thanks to a negligent, impenitent Puerto Rican man in a silver sedan. Not exactly a wooden leg to replace one chomped off by a shark, or even a scar on my forearm earned from a pirate’s saber slash. If I do survive the circumnavigation, who knows what I’ll come back with, maybe a second-degree burn when I spill soup on my lap at a restaurant ashore.

My only other injury worth mentioning happened when I sailed on a passage from Bermuda to South Carolina as part of a tall ship flotilla. The festival had a diplomatic mission, so every ship had guest cadets who sailed on board for various legs. On this one passage, from St George’s to Charlotte, we had two native Bermudians aboard. One boy, Rafael, was especially keen to climb aloft, so one afternoon I took him up to help me with some work on the rig.

Rafael was skinny, a small kid, and he’d never climbed on a ship before. I told him all the rules of going aloft, the methods of clipping in, and so forth. He just had this look about him: big, wet, nervous brown eyes. I explained everything to him carefully and slowly, and we climbed up carefully and slowly, and he did just fine, probably wondering why I was babying him. I took him up while I did some patch service. Rafael and I climbed about three-quarters up the shrouds, up to the worn twine. While I was working, he stood next to me, clipped in. I explained what I was doing. It was a sunny day with a steady breeze—the boat heeled and pitched slightly, but there was nothing to make it feel like we were in any great danger up there. Rafael seemed just fine, but I had this feeling that something was going to happen.

I'm not a rigger, but I'd done this minor job of patch service several times. I was wearing a workbelt with a knife and a marlin spike, which is a steel bar tapered to a pointed end. My spike was about the size of a fuel nozzle. It was smithed by hand, a treasured gift from an old shipmate, but way oversized for most jobs. The spike had a lanyard to my work belt, and I'd tied to my harness a roll of twine and a plastic syrup container filled with tar. When going aloft it's important to tie everything to you, since even the smallest tool dropped from the rig can smash someone's head wide open. This is actually the most common accident aboard ship, but since it's warned against so often, it rarely happens, if you know what I mean. I did once hear a story of a bosun leaving a hammer aloft. When the sail was set and the gaff lifted, the tool fell claw side down and nicked a section out of a kid's chin. The slightest tilt of the boy's head and he would've been killed.

For patch service, all you do is cut a piece of twine and weave it into the old section as you wind it around the wire, replacing what has been worn away. Then you smear some tar over it all. In most cases you lay in fabric over the wire before wrapping it, but in this particular spot the underneath parts didn't need to be replaced.

After every turn or so around, I tightened the twine. The easiest way is to take a few twists around the marlin spike and pull. I was tugging the older stuff tight around where I had tucked the new bit. It was an old piece of thin, rotted rope, and I was telling Rafael how one should be careful, because the twine could break. And then a few minutes later it did, with my face directly behind it. I slammed myself with the back of the marlin spike so hard that I thought I'd broken my nose and knocked out a few teeth.

'Rafael, I think you should unclip and head down now,' I said, holding my face.

'Are you okay?' he said. He couldn't see what happened exactly, my back was to him, and he'd since stopped watching my work to look around and enjoy being aloft. I'm

sure he could tell from my tone that something was wrong, or perhaps he even heard the crunch.

‘Yes, yes. I’m okay. Time to head down.’

He climbed to the deck by himself, because I was afraid that if I began to descend right away I was going to faint. As you probably know, the face is a mighty bleeder, so the blood was spreading all over my hand and beginning to drip. I was up in the windward rigging, so the drops floated inboard and aft.

The first mate shouted up at me, ‘Don’t bleed on deck. Stop bleeding on deck! We just painted the housetop. Somebody get a tarp! Thinner to clean it up. Close the hatch to the galley!’ (This mate was known among us as Chief Sympathy. I once went with him on a shore visit to one of the most ancient cathedrals in the world. When he saw the thirty-foot sculpture of Christ on the Cross, he said: ‘Joel. What kind of wood did they use? Must’ve been tough always having to repair those nail holes, then scrub all the blood off every time. Big job. Would’ve had to be pretty rot resistant stuff, too, since it stood out in the weather all the time. But it couldn’t be so heavy that one guy couldn’t lift it. Did they have Red Cedar in Jerusalem? I bet they used Red Cedar.’)

The students hustled out a tarp and four of them held it below me, spread out, as if I was going to jump down from a house on fire. I collected my gear and began to climb down, one wobbly foot at a time. The medical officer, an eager young deckhand named Greg, was cheerfully on the scene. It turned out that I didn’t lose any teeth or shatter any cartilage or bone, but instead only had a gash and a bruise on the side of my nose. Greg cleaned the wound and had me lie down on the deckhouse. He began to administer a set of butterfly stitches, those high-adhesive bandages that help keep the skin closed up. But Greg was so happy to be tending to the wound, actually humming to himself, and Chief Sympathy was still shouting about the blood—I just couldn’t stop laughing. And spindly

Rafael was peering at me from behind the mast, frightened, as if he might be at fault in some way. I was relieved that I hadn't lost any teeth and that the injury was not in proportion to the pain or the embarrassment. We were halfway between Bermuda and South Carolina and dozens of scenarios had already run through my head, including what if I'd fallen backwards and taken Rafael with me, or what if I was going to have a six-inch scar across my face for the rest of my life.

While Greg was trying to put on the butterfly stitches, the mate came over and said: 'Oh, look. That's nothing. I know a guy who got a spike right in his eye. Through his eye. Like this. All the way in the eye until it poked into his spine. Just missed the nerve.'

'Stop laughing,' Greg said. 'Or you're going to have a scar.'

'No, no, that's nothing,' the mate said. 'One time I knew a guy who hit himself in the face with a power drill. The button stuck. He fell over on it. Like this. Under his cheekbone. Look. Right in here. And it kept drilling. Hey, deckhand! Bring the thinner over here. Shit, Joel! Now you're getting the blood all over the deck again.'

The butterfly stitches didn't work—they never set firmly—so today I have a scar next to my nose, though you can't really see it anymore. It's not discernible in the wrinkles.

65 days until departure

You know what I really can't wait for? That feeling of being at anchor after a long passage. How you earn being at a place, really *deserve* to be there, if that makes any sense. Anyone can hop on a plane.

One of my favorite times like this was off Nevis, in the Caribbean. I was sitting on the sampson post of the windlass, facing aft. The sun had just risen over a little town that looked like it had fallen out of the island's volcano, as if the buildings were rolled down like dice toward the shore and then lost speed just before falling into the surf. The night before, I slept in the salon again because my bunk was soaked. The deck on that schooner leaked in heavy seas, especially right over my bunk. That morning at anchor off Nevis, the breeze was warm and it felt good to smell soil and leaves. I also smelled burning charcoal from the beach, but I remember that I couldn't see any smoke.

Even the captain had said the previous passage was a rough one. On our way to Nevis, the main boom snapped right at the main sheet bale during a gybe, just at the wrong time. We wouldn't be able to replace the spar until we got up to the Chesapeake, so we ended up sailing all the way north with a single-reefed main.

That morning, off to port, I could see the low mountains of another island, St Kitts. As we sailed by that island the day before, I'd smelled the grass, and the ridges looked so



inviting, so plush. Then as we sailed up to this anchorage, we saw through the dusk a few squalls that were lit orange by the sunset, and then at the same time a full moon appeared opposite.

For the first time in almost a week I had a decent night's sleep, but I dreamt that some asshole I knew in college met Chloe and was telling her all the bad things I did before I met her, how much of a loser I was. I was desperately trying to get home to straighten things out, but I couldn't figure out the plane schedule, then missed the one I had the ticket for. In my dream I watched a television set that showed the two of them having sex, while I was trying to get off an escalator that wouldn't stop.

While I was sitting on deck that morning, a cheerful student climbed out of the forecastle with a toothbrush in her mouth. Another student brought up a bed sheet, his sleeping bag, and his foul weather jacket—to dry them out. From the island, I could hear the cries of roosters, and a jackhammer started for a few seconds then stopped. I saw an occasional car up on a road, halfway up the hill, but I couldn't tell if I was hearing their noise or the whoosh of surf.

I remember that while I was sitting there, I began to take a close look at the anchor chain. There was something about the way it curled into the box. The chain was a dark rusty grey, once black, with tiny white specks and dried mud. There were links and links, thick individual links that created bulky half-ovals of negative space. The links curled out of the box and lay on the deck, at angles, as if they'd been glued there by a sculptor, as if they couldn't remain so still and placed just so on their own. The staysail boom and the line to the anchor ball and the hull and the wind itself, they were all moving. All I heard that morning were moving things: the wash of sea on the beach, teeth-brushing, the shaking of a bed sheet. Meanwhile, that chain appeared the only still, fixed object, as if it were our axis or the mounted ring of a gimbal.

49 days until departure

Sure, I fantasize about meeting women along the way. I imagine that I'll be fit and tan, and I'll walk into the bar and people around the docks will have spread the word that I've been sailing solo around the world—I just made a passage from New Caledonia or Cape Town or wherever. The women will be impressed. 'He's forty?' they'll say. 'Well, he sure doesn't look it.' I'm going to be sailing in warm places, resort towns, meeting women who are on vacation or are the free-spirited, adventurous types. Tank-tops, short skirts: women who like to have fun. As the night will go on, the yachtsmen will be buying me drinks and asking me questions, and one woman will filter out. She'll ask to come see my boat after the bar closes. And so on. I know I have a girlfriend. Will I be faithful if 'opportunities' present themselves? I really don't know. Do I even care if she's faithful to me?

Granted I was in my twenties—was thinner, had all of my hair then—but it did work sometimes when we all went into port. Some women do have a soft spot for sailors—maybe it's the weathered look, but it's also that when you go into port after a week or so at sea you're so full of energy and joy—exuding that, I guess. I wasn't exactly a chick magnet—nearly all of my friends did way better than me—but there was an occasional time when I met a woman in port who just wanted to have a good time roll in the hay.

One winter when I was working as a deckhand on a schooner in the Virgin Islands I got especially lucky. I was still sort of dating Chloe, but she wanted to see other people, anyway. It was the night after a long day of sailing upwind through the Sir Francis Drake Passage. My feet and hands hurt. The back of my neck was sunburned. We'd been doing these short trips in-between semesters—a series of one-week tourist voyages for adults who just wanted to sail around the Virgin Islands. That day I'd actually done a really stupid thing after we came to anchor. We were joking around, and I cast off the small boat before the engine was running. Another deckhand was floating off and almost couldn't get it started again. Captain Pace was furious and shouted: 'What is this a goddamn circus?' He really gave it to me, and in front of the passengers, but I didn't mind all that much. I'd been yelled at by coaches before, and it *was* a stupid thing to do. We were at this quiet, beautiful anchorage where all you could hear was a small engine far off and the sounding of a bell buoy. We were the biggest boat in the harbor with a few private yachts anchored in an arc off the beach.

So this one woman, Heather, a tall, wealthy lady who liked to ask questions had come up to me on deck that afternoon when we were underway. She was married to a goofy rich guy named Jim who was proud of his proper grammar and thought he was a swimming stud. He walked around the ship in just his Speedo swimsuit. Heather came up to me and said: 'I have something to tell you.'

'Uh, oh,' I said.

'Well, my father always told me that if you have something nice to say to someone then say it. And I noticed you have *the* most engaging smile. You are always smiling. You must smile in your sleep. Are you always so happy?' I didn't really know what to say. I wanted to say something about stupidity and ignorance, but I said thank you, and I guess

that these last couple days I have been pretty happy. Zim had been calling her Mrs Robinson.

We were all pretty jazzed to go ashore. It had been a while since we had a night off. Harry came in the forecastle with a red plum on his nose, flopping around in Zim's size sixteen shoes, singing the Barney and Bailey big top theme song. 'What is this a goddamn circus?' he parroted. The mate took the anchor watch so we could all go in with the passengers. It was this little beachside bar and they bought drinks for all of us. And it didn't stop. I remember so clearly that I was thinking: 'When I'm in my forties I'm not going to party like that,' and here I am now almost that age. I was amazed at how these 'adults' were acting, like freshmen at a fraternity. And they were buying good drinks, too. We didn't pay for a thing.

The night wore on and soon we were all dancing on the sand, shoes off, and Heather was dancing with me and wearing this short sun dress. I don't know how old she was then, but she really had a body. I guess she was a part-time aerobics instructor or something. She was dancing really close to me; I had to adjust myself (which I'm sure she saw), and I was a little worried because her husband was just sitting at the bar. But he didn't seem to care. Heather was funny, too. During one slow song she danced right up against me and she whispered in my ear like it was going to be this secret sexy thing but instead she told me how a couple of tourists at the bar were saying how they were going snorkeling the next day. They'd bought a dozen little bottles with them—so they could get a sample of all of the different colors of water: the light green, the turquoise, the dark indigo!

Drinks kept coming, and some of the passengers started to go back to the boat, but I didn't have watch until five that morning, so I stayed out, but for once I stopped drinking because the mate had asked me to do the last boat run—and I could feel myself right on the edge of getting completely ripped. I probably shouldn't have been driving the boat at all. I

still barely knew how, in the first place. I waited until the end and tried to get everyone in one boat but it would've been just too packed, and the mate got all pissed off if we 'sardined it,' as we used to say. So Heather hopped back out onto the sand and said she'd wait. It was definitely going through my mind. So I dropped the rest of them off at the ship and drove back to pick her up. The bar had long ago shut down and the anchorage was still. No moon, stars everywhere. As she was climbing in, she said: 'The engine's so loud. Can I row?'

'Sure,' I said. Because it wasn't really that far, and she was right—the noise did carry throughout the anchorage. I could hear the motor echoing off the hills of the island, and it was probably waking up some of the yachties. So I shut the engine down and she starts to use the oars, but she doesn't know what the hell she's doing. Soon I'm sitting behind her and helping her, and a shoulder strap of her dress keeps falling over her shoulder. Then she ships the oars, goes up to the bow to ease the anchor over, and then slinks back. 'I'm tired,' she said. She sat on my lap, and I gently started massaging her shoulders. 'Ooh, that's perfect,' she said. And I started to massage her thighs and just behind her breasts and she didn't stop me and she asked me to name some of the stars and then we were kissing and then she straddled me and we started going at it. She wouldn't let me take her dress off—she just slid her underwear over and pulled a condom out of nowhere and slipped it on me, and if I hadn't been drinking I would have been done right then, but somehow I lasted for awhile. She was cooing about how she had this thing for sailors' hands and woo-boy, at the time—and maybe even still—I believed that was the finest, warmest, softest, saltiest, most-wonderful thing that ever happened to me. Afterwards I asked her about her husband and she said: 'Don't you worry about that, Smiles.'

Captain Pace had the watch when Heather and I came back. I thought I was about to be fired, thrown off then and there, but he says, 'Have a good time ashore, Mrs Williams? Thanks for doing that last boat run, Joel. Smart of you to wait awhile to make sure you were sobered up. And kind of you to wait with him, Mrs Williams. Have a good night.' He tied up the boat and walked aft. I was terrified about how I was to act when I saw her at breakfast. Because there were still four more days left in the trip. And like a sixteen-year-old, I couldn't wait to tell Harry about it.

38 days until departure

After I left the Shedd Academy in Massachusetts, just as things had begun with Chloe, I returned to sea on another tall ship, one much smaller than that of my first voyage. It was a wide, slow schooner called the *Mary Higgins*. I taught English and history aboard this semester-at-sea for a couple years, though I had summers off and winter breaks of a month or two. This ship sailed along the East Coast of North America and throughout the Caribbean.

The *Mary Higgins* was built with wood, didn't tack very well, and wasn't exactly designed for extended voyaging. It was originally made for tourist day sails, but it was stable and safe and difficult to make huge mistakes on, thus perfect for a school ship. There were no yards, so there wasn't much need to climb aloft, which made it less fun, but safer. The students had plenty of work, anyway, since the schooner had no winches, a manual windlass, and needed constant maintenance, like all wooden boats. The ship carried twenty-two high school students, seven professional crew, three teachers, and one captain.

On my first semester aboard the *Mary Higgins*, we sailed out of Gloucester, Massachusetts. The boat seemed small to me, so when the schooner heeled to a strong breeze, I walked around, crouching like I was on a yacht. One deckhand asked me if I was

trying to act like a monkey. I was just so excited to be back at sea again. I couldn't hold it in. The crew looked at me like I was high, and I kind of was.

Being a teacher on one of those ships was an odd position, because you got paid as much as the first mate, often more, yet while the vessel was underway you didn't have that much to do. The academic workload on a semester-at-sea was lighter than at a school on land because students put so much energy into working the ship and most of the real learning was what they saw and experienced for themselves. When there were big waves and people were seasick, you couldn't have class; when you were coming into port or an anchorage you couldn't have class; or try teaching when there was a pod of dolphins off the bow, or when someone rowed up and asked about where you came from, or you were in fog and the horn was blasting, or you were under power and the engine was growling, or when the ship needed to tack immediately or gybe immediately or strike sail immediately or it was too hot or too cold or too buggy or too windy or too wet. The only good time to teach class on a traditional tall ship, particularly a smaller schooner that didn't have a devoted classroom space, was at a peaceful night at anchor, away from any other boats. But even then it took a while for the watch to finish cleaning up dinner, and once you had everyone gathered, you knew they were exhausted, could see their heavy eyelids, and just then the engineer needed to run the rattling, deafening generator, and he refused to close the door to the engine room because it got too hot down there and he was working on something. I learned to roll with the punches—to get in classes when I could and to keep them fairly short—to invite interruptions and figure out a way to incorporate them into my lesson. Also, and this took me a long time to finally get: I just didn't worry too much about it. I was with the students for the majority of our port visits. They got plenty of me. Over the years I gathered a fair bit of information, useless and otherwise, so I was prepared and eager to answer any questions the students had, to turn them on to particular books and resources



and take them to meet cool people and see ‘educational’ sights. But I grasped too slowly that if I couldn’t get a class in because of whatever variable, the world would still spin around just fine. Students learned by the bucketful on these voyages, academically and socially, and it was rarely dependent on what words came out of my mouth.

On the *Mary Higgins*, compared to my first voyage on the Canadian ship, I actually had a fair amount of free time when we were underway. The watch officers and the deckhands were in charge when we were sailing, and the teachers were in charge in port. On that first trip I only had one class to teach and no administrative responsibilities or port visits to plan. My failure with my previous sea experience was always in the back of my mind, and I saw this voyage as a second chance to make good. Thinking back on it, too, I realize I was still in pretty good shape from all that running at the Shedd Academy, which added to the amount of excess energy I had when suddenly cooped up on the ship for so many days between ports. The first time we washed the decks for a morning washdown, I scrubbed like a madman, brushing so hard and so quickly, so eagerly, that it wasn’t until we were finishing that I noticed two deckhands standing aside smirking to one another.

For the rest of that voyage, I had to try hard to remember to not take jobs from the students—to not lead a halyard or take the pin when tending a sheet. I often failed in stepping back or moving in on the deckhands’ jobs. I just couldn’t help myself. Any spare second I had, I spent on deck. But I also didn’t possess a great deal of skill, so when I asked for maintenance jobs, the crew gave me a set of wood steps to sand and paint, or a wood grate to scrape and oil. I did all these meaningless jobs, busy-work really, with intensity and care, as if they were crucial to the running of the ship, as if I were sewing a new mainsail.

The captain aboard for that semester was Willie Pace. He was young then, in his early thirties, maybe even late twenties, but I didn’t realize that. In fact all of the crew on

that voyage were very young, but I didn't think about that at the time because I was even younger. All I saw was their position and experience. Captain Pace had spent four years as bosun on a massive square-rigger out of Norway, circumnavigating the world twice. When he returned to the U.S., he moved up the ranks quickly, becoming the youngest captain in the sail-training fleet. He was a shipmaster for over ten years, until a few trips after I sailed with him, when, like I was telling you, Ben Anderson drowned. After that, Willie decided to spend more time at home with his wife and to start a family.

Apparently Captain Pace was a bit of a hell-raiser when he first started. I heard one story from a woman who was the cook for his first command. She was a bit of a hell-raiser herself, so sometimes during nightwatch or when there was a situation where students were up forward and wouldn't see, she'd run up out of the galley and flash her breasts at the crewmembers on the quarterdeck. So one night Willie went down into the galley and dropped his shorts. 'You see how distracting that is,' he said.

She was making cupcakes. 'You want me to ice that, too?'

'Only if you're going to lick it off.'

By the time I got aboard, he'd been captain for years and had assumed his role with grace and elegance. The first time I met Willie was before going on the ship, at an organizational meeting in Maine. I asked him about what sort of shoes I should bring aboard. 'Do you like those sport sandals with the boat-tread bottoms?' I said. 'What if my boots have black soles? Do you prefer steel-toed boots with a lining, or will that get too hot?' And so on.

He said: 'I don't know. I just wear these things.' He pointed down to a pair of white running shoes that probably cost ten dollars and would be most appropriate in an aerobics class.

I grew to love captains like that. In fact, in most cases, the more the captain looked like a farmer, a cowboy, or a librarian, the more trust I had in him. I'll take the captain with the ratty Chuck Taylors, thank you. You can have the one with the three-hundred-dollar yachty shoes. I tried to avoid captains who wore their seamanship on their back, but, that said, I also learned that I didn't want to sail with a captain who didn't dress sensibly for the weather. If it was freezing cold and he was standing on the quarterdeck in a T-shirt—well, I tried to avoid that one, too.

Anyway, every morning, regardless of weather, Willie had us wash and scrub the entire deck with fire hoses and hand brushes, moving every deck box (each weighed hundreds of pounds) and recoiling every single line when we were done. He didn't much care about formal appearances. The washdown was for the benefit of the wood and to constantly make sure that our fire and pump systems were functional. He viewed the schooner as a workboat. The rig and safety were his primary concerns. Every month or so he climbed aloft himself and looked at every shackle and turnbuckle and seizing. Before that first trip with him, the work in shipyard had taken longer than expected, so not everything got finished. Painting the topsides was a last priority in his eyes and the crew ran out of time, so we sailed out of Gloucester with great brushes of orange primer paint on our white hull, like so many leopard spots. We sailed with these spots through the Cape Cod Canal and into Newport, Rhode Island, a place that judges its yachts and traditional vessels closely. Willie didn't care and just sailed right into the harbor and came to the dock by the snootiest restaurant in town.

A week or so into that first trip with Captain Pace, when we were comfortably at sea, he gathered all hands on the quarterdeck to explain our duties during ship emergencies: man overboard, fire, and abandon ship. I was the newest and lowest ranking teacher and there were only so many jobs to go around. The students, for good reason, got the fun,

challenging jobs, like ‘climb aloft and point at the target,’ ‘trip the MOB button on the GPS,’ and ‘take the helm,’ things like that. When he came to my name for my position in a man overboard situation, he listed me as ‘messenger.’ All of the students giggled, then they laughed out loud when they heard that I was again the messenger for the other two emergencies. Willie read my name at the end of each list, as if I were getting picked last on the schoolyard, the equivalent to being the substitute or the water boy.

That afternoon we drilled all of the scenarios. We threw a buoy into the water and launched our rescue boat to retrieve it. We ran out the fire extinguishers to various parts of the ship and sent the spray where it was needed. We tried on survival suits and stood by to launch the life rafts. It was chaotic. All hands scurried around the deck, setting and dousing sails, operating the engine and fire pumps, and bumping into each other as they tried to collect what they were supposed to retrieve.

During the first drill, Captain Pace shouted: ‘Messenger! Come aft!’ I wove my way back to the quarterdeck, and he sent me forward with a command for the first mate, which I forgot by the time I got up there, so I had to hustle back to get the directions again—and forgot them once more—as I was too stressed to think of the meaning of the words, only trying to memorize them as a bunch of symbols. By the time I returned for the third time, the mate was already doing what I was going to tell him. Throughout the afternoon, Pace kept at it, continually calling me aft to relay commands all over the ship.

Since that day, for all my years sailing, I participated in hundreds of drills and rarely was a messenger called upon or required. In a real life scenario, there might be a need to pass the word along, but usually it was just sent with handheld radios or by whoever was available. That afternoon, Willie put me to work like that as an act of kindness—for my self esteem and to prove wrong the students who’d laughed at me.

Later in that voyage he had me initiate a drill at night. I kept walking back to him. ‘So you want me to throw this buoy over the rail and shout “man overboard”?’ He nodded. Two-thirds of the ship was asleep. It took several confirmations before I actually did it— ‘I’m going to do it now, Cap, okay?’— ‘Yes, please,’ he said—and finally I just threw it into the black ocean and shattered the ship’s peace with a holler of ‘Man overboard!’ I can’t think of any other captain who did a surprise drill at night like that. I can see the reasons against it, the desire to not create an actual emergency by practicing a response, but at the same time, we became a crack crew that fall.

One afternoon I was in the engine room and painting the bilge all the way under the propeller shaft. I could just barely fit, often had to slither in between the ship’s frames on my stomach, then curl around the sharp-edged mountings for the engine. Whatever wasn’t getting painted was oily and dirty and soon all over me. As the brush filled up, I started to drip paint on me, too. We’d just left St Mary’s, Georgia, where one of the deckhands and I had decided to give each other buzz cuts, partly to stay cool and partly just as something goofy to do. Since I was trying not to drink too much, I’d been worried that the crew thought I was too much of a fuddy-duddy. That afternoon, as I squirreled around down there, my almost bald head was covered in grease because my hat kept getting pushed off.

Captain Pace climbed down the ladder into the engine room and sat down. He had to change a fuel filter or something, but he spent nearly an hour with me, chatting, telling my ankles about the history of the engine, how they installed it, things like that. It was both nerve-wracking and sort of an honor. Finally he asked, ‘So, Joel. What drives you, anyway?’

I think he meant that in a much broader, philosophical sense, as in ‘What keeps you getting up every morning?’ or ‘Why do you do all these crummy jobs.’ But I said: ‘Just like to keep busy, I guess.’ Even now it seems like a weird moment, and it was in some ways,

but it was significant for me. I remember feeling that this was his method of saying that he approved of what I was doing on the ship, even though I was too eager and kept making stupid mistakes. He wanted me to know that my busywork jobs were meaningful. I accepted his question like a kid catches a sport hero's jersey.

My favorite image of Willie was when we were at the dock in Charleston, South Carolina. We'd sailed in here, unscheduled, to avoid getting crushed with winds over fifty knots off Cape Fear. The steering mechanism on the *Mary Higgins* was encased in a large, varnished wooden box, like a high-walled coffin. It was an endless temptation to sit on this while at the helm, but Pace never allowed anyone to do it. The force of following seas and a few jolts against the rudder had done something to the steering gear. Pace wanted to fix it before we got underway again, but we were already behind schedule. It was pouring rain and he'd been awake all night getting us into port safely. Once at the dock, he had the crew rig a midships awning, under which I was teaching a class to an exhausted, disinterested group of students. We were reading Kipling's *Captains Courageous*. One time I looked back and Willie was sitting down on a bucket *inside* the steering box, which he'd completely removed and propped upright so he could get at the gear. The rain bounced off the top of the box, beading large drops on the varnish. Willie hadn't shaved in days, and he had grease smeared all over his hands and forearms. With his black sou'wester hat on, the ties loose by his shoulders, he sat there having a smoke, staring off and thinking. He had this way of cupping his hand around his cigarette, so it wouldn't get wet or blown out by the wind.

Captain Pace was my own real-life James Dean.

A few months later, the semester ended, and I went back to northwestern Massachusetts and Chloe and the snow. In a seven-hour plane trip I covered the mileage of three months under sail. In Chloe's apartment and at the town library, I prepared my classes

for the spring voyage, then I returned to the *Mary Higgins* a month before the semester started in order to fill in for a deckhand who had to leave early. This was my first time as a genuine member of the crew. We did a few trips with some older passengers, what they called ‘windjammer cruises,’ which are easier in some ways because we anchor every night, but I found them more challenging because I felt like an airline steward or a waiter. It was during one of those trips that I got lucky with Mrs Heather Williams.

Captain Pace had been in command all winter and was leaving just before the new group of high school students came aboard for the next semester. Replacing him would be Captain Travis Sheffield, who was a legend. As his arrival grew near, those who’d previously sailed with him prepared us.

‘Totally different from Willie,’ the first mate said. ‘Sheffield’s old school. Loves his flags, even when we’re offshore. And they’ve got to be raised at 0800 on the dot. Has the students calculate the time for sunset, too. Likes his cannons, the bosun’s whistle, the ringing of eight bells. And brass—we’re going to have to start polishing the bell again. Old school, Sheffield is.’

‘Is he bringing the family?’ the third mate said.

‘Yeah. That’s why Faith has to leave. His wife Elizabeth is going to cook. She’s amazing. Don’t get me wrong, I love Faith, but Sheffield’s wife is a fucking gourmet. And she knows how to shop down in the islands, too—so we get the local foods. The people’s fare, I’m telling you. Fruits, vegetables, coconuts, papaya, soursop. She makes fucking curried goat! Oh, I can’t wait. Get ready to truly eat Caribbean, my friends.’

‘What about the kids?’

‘The two daughters? Yeah-yeah. They’re coming, too. I think that’s another reason we got to get the whitehall in shape.’

Willie wanted to leave the ship in sharp form when he handed it over—he'd once sailed under Sheffield—and the first mate wanted to make a good impression, too, since he was staying on for the spring. The two of them worked us hard. Whenever there was a spare moment—with the passengers ashore or something—they had us painting or varnishing or cleaning something up.

One large project was the *Higgins's* whitehall, a small sailing boat that had been long neglected, hanging in its davits like a forgotten flower box. We used it only for storing fenders and fuel jugs. But now we mended the sail, varnished the combings, fixed a hole in the hull, and repainted the entire thing. I made new fancy ropework and leather for the oars and around the seat. Willie splurged with his own money and bought a few quarts of 'Castle Indigo,' a high end, gorgeous paint that he brushed onto the boat's topsides himself. The rumor in the forecabin was that Sheffield had asked Willie how the boat was doing, meaning—hint, hint—he was looking forward to sailing it around with his daughters.

Willie was the first to sail the boat when we finished. We were in the Dominican Republic, anchored within an archipelago of forested islands and mangroves, a national park filled with trails and sandstone ledges. The passengers were ashore and having a barbecue on the beach, so it was just the crew aboard. After the long workday, we dove in the water and lathered ourselves with dish soap, climbing back aboard by the anchor chain. As we towed off, we watched our captain sail the newly launched whitehall. He tacked across the bay. The low sun lit the new canvas from behind, so the sails were the color of amber. He steered around a few small islands then out of sight. This was his last week aboard, and that was absolutely the only instance when I remember him taking some time for himself. He returned just after sunset, and we gathered on the quarterdeck for dinner, all of us watching the whitehall trail daintily astern, its sail neatly furled. In one way or another, each of us had contributed to the little boat's revival.



That's my Heaven. I've never had any trouble interpreting Santiago's lions on the beach in *The Old Man and the Sea*. I'll go back to that evening: I'm leaning on the bulwarks, clean and tired from a long day working with my hands. My palms are sore and the back of my neck is a little burned. I've just shaved with a hand mirror, some travel foam, and a bucket of seawater. My hair's still wet. I have a short sleeve collared shirt on with just one or two buttons fastened, and I'm with those people, but, since it's Heaven, maybe I'll make an all-star team of my favorite shipmates. We each have a tall, cold *El Presidente* beer in hand. Bottles. We toast to 'Castle Blue' paint and the Sunday *New York Times* and fair winds and we toast to true love that never fades and will return to you someday. We have steaming bowls of that crispy chicken pie that Faith made so beautifully, somehow cramming all of her luscious sex appeal inside a dinner crust. As the stars come out, we watch the passengers' fire on the beach. In the low light of the moon I see an old rotten dock extending out from a cave. There's a gentle offshore breeze, which means a safe anchorage and good ventilation below for sleeping. We hear the passengers laughing and smell their supper and smell the sulfurous muddy mangroves. We chat softly and look up at the constellations and tell jokes and soon the banjo comes out and a couple more *El Presidentes* are opened and then we make up ridiculous songs or just listen, lie on the deck, and look up.

As I prepare to sail solo, it's odd that what I recall most fondly about my years at sea are times with shipmates, the community aboard—the clean up after a long day, the shared peace that we earned, the collective observations of beautiful things on the water. I admit I'm nostalgic about the storms, the shared exertions, the 'time to feel your strength' as Conrad wrote. These memories are usually tied with other people. I don't know why I have this need to go on the circumnavigation alone. Part of it is that there's simply no one left. Harry is about the only one I'd really want to sail with, and he can't, or won't. My

girlfriend likes boats, genuinely I think, but she doesn't want to leave her job and really isn't interested in anything more than a weekend trip. I know going alone is the only way to truly learn, too—to have to figure it all out—without crutches, no one to turn to, no one else who's ultimately responsible. I'll try to become as skilled and calm as Willie. I also, to be honest, would rather kill myself, sailing alone, than be responsible for the loss of another. That's what must've really nagged at Willie—after Ben died—even though everyone knows it had nothing to do with him. It still happened when he was in command. Have I mentioned this? Did I tell you that Captain Pace killed himself? Last summer. Shot himself in the head. Maybe it was Ben Anderson's death that gnawed at him until he couldn't take it. I don't know. We were all talking about it at the funeral, all those guys that I hadn't seen for years. No one knows why. You should've seen his wife and two little kids in grey suits. It was like being at JFK's burial or something.

But what I'm trying to say, I think, is that for my upcoming trip, it's not the loneliness *at sea* that I worry about. There are birds and fish and invertebrates in the sargassum, and I'm going to be so focused on getting from place to place safely. What might get me, if I do manage to sail anywhere, will be the days in port, with no one to share the accomplishment. I'll sit at the bar and drink too much, and if I say I just made the passage from Fiji solo or I've just arrived here from my last port—Bangladesh—wherever, no one will care. A lot of people do it. And often you think those people are just kind of nuts. Which is another, deeper concern of mine.

Anyway, that winter, Captain Willie left and Captain Sheffield and his family arrived. Faith left the same morning, and Sheffield's wife got right to work shifting all of the food around to her own system. Her daughters helped, too, and I was recruited to assist. I didn't much enjoy working alongside them. Lacking maturity, I felt demeaned. They were about eight and eleven years old then, nice and all, but they didn't work quickly and

were just a distraction to me at that point. I wasn't looking forward to sailing with them for four months. First of all, I'd wanted to spend that afternoon organizing my classes. I wanted to finish this galley reshuffling job right away, a task that I wasn't even convinced was necessary in the first place. I felt that I was paid to serve the ship and students only. These girls weren't in my daily life. I'd never sailed with children, never been a babysitter growing up, never had any younger siblings. I barely knew what to make of these kids.

I once sailed with a captain named O'Hara who upon his arrival went aloft at night with the students and crew. He only did this once, as if to show that he still could do it. It was on a square-rigger and it was almost midnight. I looked over and there was this captain furling beside me, gripping the canvas with his old man hands, pale and thin with dark veins. It didn't increase or decrease my respect for him—or even alter my first impression that much. It was just a little unsettling, particularly as this captain was in his late sixties. Maybe this was something he did for himself. It was certainly nothing like Willie Pace's continual checking of the rig.

As for Captain Sheffield, he was too experienced to bother with any sort of initial display of leadership when he came aboard that winter. He was just in charge, as soon as he climbed up the ladder, as if he'd always been. The fact that he didn't know our names yet was inconsequential.

As the mate predicted, Sheffield wanted his flags up and wanted the brass polished. He didn't want a full washdown in the morning because the fire pump was too loud. 'We don't need that racket every day. Buckets'll do fine,' he said. 'And keep the deck boxes where they are—we'll just move those on Saturday Cleans. You've all been scratching up the deck like a gaggle of sharp-toed chickens.'

We picked up the new students at the airport, along with a new deckhand, meaning that I, somewhat reluctantly, returned to my job as a teacher. We were anchored off St

Thomas, in the Virgin Islands, and once all of the students were aboard we sailed off through the Drake Passage. We anchored that night off Virgin Gorda, and by the end of the next morning we'd left Anegada Island astern, bound east for the Leeward Islands chain.

The Anegada Passage is notoriously rough. I didn't know this. The sky was clear, but the wind was directly in our intended direction. In near gale-force winds, we sailed hard onto the breeze, our bow rearing up and plunging down. About every fifth wave we leaned so far over to starboard that the lee rail plunged into the surface. Water spurted in through the scuppers. The sun shone too brightly even for sunglasses, and I could barely use these, anyway, because the spray kept clinging to the lenses. All of the new students were clipped into the leeward rail. Their brand new foul weather gear glistened in a row of yellow, red, and orange. Sick and miserable, they pulled their hoods over their heads, cinching them around their faces, as if to hide from it all. Sitting or lying on the deck, they occasionally got a good sluicing when the ship plunged. I went over to one boy and said: 'Eli, are you cold? Can I get you a sweater or something? To put under your gear?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'I don't know. I don't even know if I'm cold.'

As the afternoon wore on, the waves got progressively larger, and though there wasn't a single cloud, the wind kept strengthening. Sheffield did not take sail and when I was down in the salon doing a boat-check I couldn't help look into his cabin and see the children's toys strewn all over the sole beside his berth.

I was at the port rail, just looking out at it all, when the box for the anchor chain busted. The chain box sat right beside the windlass on the ship's bow, bolted through the deck. It was constructed with thick oak planks and held over four hundred feet of wide, industrial chain. The bow had lifted, then suddenly dropped so quickly, in such a manner that the great mass of chain was suspended for a moment in air, probably just a fraction of an inch above the deck, then it was thrown aft—or the ship moved suddenly forward

underneath it—so the chain bashed against the back of the box, smashing right through the planks. Splinters of wood whirled into the air and overboard. The links, like so many galloping shot puts, thundered out and spread all over the leeward side as they crammed to escape out the scuppers. The sound of it shocked the students upright, and those in the chain's path scrambled aft. The crew, myself included, ran forward to try to gather it all up and to lash the box before what was left caught too much wind and was hurtled into somebody or something. As we tried to gather the chain, we got covered in rust and dried mud, but also washed to the thighs with incoming seas. The mate rigged some hawser on a portion of the deck around the mast and we began to flake chain over this, so we could lash the whole thing into an unruly lump, but every steep roll of the ship freed part of what we'd collected, so it was a grueling step backward for every two steps gained. But we were starting to get the chain under control when the ship rolled so hard that a departing sea caught underneath the whitehall, which was hanging in its davits on the leeward side, several feet above the rail. The wave lifted the little boat up, and since it was so firmly lashed, the steel bars themselves gave way, ripping the bolts clear out of the rail. When the wave swept off to leeward and the *Higgins* temporarily leveled, the whitehall dangled by a twist of ropes, slamming and slamming against the ship's topsides. I happened to be right there and we got a hold of a few lines and got a turn on a cleat. The boat continued to crush against the ship's hull as the *Higgins* pitched and rolled, until at last we were able to muscle the whitehall back aboard. We lost one of the davits and everything inside the boat, including the boom, the sail, and the oars. Most of its port rubrail had been knocked off, and its hull was cracked right down the middle. It had left gaping skids of Castle Blue paint on the topsides of the *Higgins*.

It was my fault. It had been my job to swing the whitehall inboard—not formally stated, it was just something I always did, something I did to get Willie's approval, his nod.

I always remembered to do this before every passage when he was captain, regardless of weather, even back when we thought of the boat as nothing but a storage bin. I still don't know how I possibly forgot that time.

By now the anchor chain was completely free again, all over the ship, tangling in coils of lines and scraping up the deck and the scuppers, but we couldn't deal with this until we lashed the battered whitehall somewhere secure on deck.

I can see so clearly my young self looking aft past the students, past their wide eyes desperate for someone to say anything to them, to say: 'This is normal' or 'This is crazy,' anything. I watched Sheffield on the quarterdeck, kneeling beside one of his daughters who was puking over the rail. Sheffield's one hand kept her aboard, while another rubbed her back.

I'm ashamed at what I was thinking then, how I faulted Sheffield for trying to bring his family to sea, how I thought that he wasn't doing his job—as if the heavy weather, the whole scene, was his fault. I thought that a little boat and a pile of chain were more important than a kid.

33 days until departure

Harry sent me this quote over email. He's all into Chekhov and can't shut up about it:

“But this is the question,” I went on. “Why are we worn out? Why are we, at first so passionate, so bold, so noble, and so full of faith, complete bankrupts at thirty or thirty-five? Why does one waste in consumption, another put a bullet through his brains, a third seek forgetfulness in vodka and cards, while the fourth tries to stifle his fear and misery by cynically trampling underfoot the pure image of his fair youth? Why is it that, having once fallen, we do not try to rise up again, and, losing one thing, do not seek something else? Why is it?”

### 32 days until departure

I'm not sure where we were, or even on what ship this was on, only that we'd been out of sight of land for a few days. It was late afternoon and there were some rays of cirrus clouds reaching out from a point on the western horizon. I looked down to my sail repair and when I looked up again, minutes later, the strands were all the way overhead and massive. There wasn't that much wind, so I didn't know how the clouds had moved so quickly, but they had suddenly spread across the whole sky, like the arms of an octopus around a glass egg, one that I was inside of. I guess the wind was faster at a higher altitude. I don't know.

That's the first time I remember that the whole concept of wind really hit me. It's all pretty old and obvious, but I couldn't help being amazed—I still can't—at how the wind determines which way we can go, how we, a boat, a ship, can move along only using the wind, this invisible thing, which pushes, edges the sea—and pulls, sweeps, and twirls clouds.

It took me years to even figure out where the wind was coming from exactly, how to get a consistent sense of its direction, how to steer not by a course but in relation to the wind—keeping a particular point of sail. This would be the worst thing to have lost. I mean, I can get my sea legs back I hope, relearn my knots, my coastal piloting, even my



celestial navigation, but if I've lost my perception of wind, how to steer 'full and by,' this is going to be a very long voyage. Because the wind is always easing or shifting or strengthening, and the wind will decide where I can go and whether I can eat or sleep or work.

I remember being so struck by how tiny the ship seemed. I mean, I know this is so obvious, but it's different to think how it would be and then to really feel it. I genuinely felt, *understood*, just how small we were, just floating along with everything around us, below us, above us, like we were microscopic plankton on this sliver membrane between sea and air. I can't even imagine what it will be like in such a boat as small as *Petrel*. The meld of all the forces is just so large—sea, sky, wind, sun, stars, moon, planets—no one agent causing the other, everything intermingled. As my speck brain understands it, the sun's heat (what makes the sun hot?) and the Earth's spinning (what makes the gravity?) creates the wind—its direction and its force. It's the solar system in lock somehow.

The humility pares you down. You're constantly being reduced. Relentlessly, mercilessly being reduced. It isn't Zen—as if I know what that is—but just a striking, a moment when you realize how miniscule and insignificant you are. Just when you're stitching a sail, a catcher of wind, you think about it all of a sudden, and you can barely breathe.

For all I know, maybe I'll start praying when I get out there.

### 25 days until departure

Yesterday I took the winter cover off the boat. I had no idea what a huge effect that would have. No more crawling around. My knee already feels better. I'll have some ventilation when I'm sanding or fiberglassing. And it's even starting to warm up outside. Some leaves on the shipyard trees are starting to sprout. I can stand up on the bow without crouching over. I can imagine me out there. The boat's still on the cement, of course, on the stands, but now I can stand upright in the cockpit and hold the tiller. I can see the ocean while I'm working.

I still have a trillion things to do. This afternoon I'm going to roll on a fresh coat of bottom paint, to keep the barnacles and algae from growing on the hull. I probably should hold off until I can put the rudder back on, but I'm still waiting for the guy from the foundry to finish making new bronze pintels for me. I did get my sails back, at least—a brand new storm jib and a repaired mainsail with a new third reef. They look great, but that'll set me back another thousand bucks. I'll put the sails in the garage until I'm ready to bend them on—as I'm trying to keep the clutter down on the boat. I need the electrician to come to finish installing the radar and the tiller pilot, and I've got to install the new rigging on the mast and refasten two blocks to the boom. I'd wanted to repaint the forepeak, but I just don't have enough time. I've got charts to order, and I have to buy an immersion suit,

flares, and flags for the countries I plan on visiting. The list seems to grow rather than shrink. I feel like I just keep getting farther and farther behind schedule, and there's less than a month to go.

Thankfully, tomorrow's my last day at the museum. At last. Good riddance. From now on I can focus only on the boat and the voyage. My voyage around the world! I'll have nothing else to think about besides getting prepared.

It's funny how one second I think I can do this, I can actually do this circumnavigation, me and my girl *Petrel*, and then the next moment I think I'm just a complete ass, wasting all of my savings on a pipe dream, a junky old boat that is going to fail almost immediately because I don't have any clue about what I'm doing.

When I got down to the yard this morning, Shipyard Tom came over and asked me what I'll do if I fall overboard. 'I'll drown, Tom,' I said. I mean, what else, right? Do you think I'll be able to catch the boat, to swim after it? I'll be using self-steering gear, so if I go over, the boat will just keep going. I do plan on rigging jacklines on both sides of the mast—from the stern to the bow. I'll clip in to these at all times, clip in from a tether on my shoulder harness. But I have to figure out a way to rig these jacklines close to the centerline of the boat because I've been reading all these stories about how singlehanders fall overboard and end up getting dragged behind—the boat's going too fast and their tethers are too long for them to be able to climb back aboard. I read about how they found one guy dead, all scraped up and still tied to his boat when it eventually ran aground on an isolated reef off Brisbane, Australia. When they found him the body was too far decomposed to figure out if he died from drowning or from being dragged across the coral.

I've heard about a few systems, like a long line with a buoy that you'd drag astern, something you could grab on to that would disengage the self-steering gear. But I think the chances of you being able to grab even that are pretty slim, and this would get in the way of

fishing, and then what if you're sleeping and a bunch of seaweed catches on the buoy, and knocks the steering off. I don't know. I guess my strategy is just to try to clip in all the time and to stay aboard.

I've never been on a ship that lost someone, but I've heard a couple stories. My friend Harry sailed on a ship where they lost the third mate. She was tending a line on the leeward side in heavy weather, at night. We rarely clipped in on those ships if we weren't climbing aloft. The boat rolled, and she was swept off, fast and clean. No one even realized she was gone until she was probably a couple miles astern.

Even Slocum, the greatest singlehander in history—he disappeared at sea. Most people assume he got run down by a steamer, but no one knows for sure. It's not like he wore a harness or clipped in to anything. He could've been washing a basket of fruit and tripped over some dirty laundry. I mean, it could've been anything.

I used to have this recurring dream when I was at sea. I only had it when I was out there. It never followed me ashore. In the dream I was standing at the very back of an exceptionally long ship, it was so flush on deck, so clean and white, that it was almost like it was a surfboard, but hundreds and hundreds of feet long. In the dream, the stern tilted all the way up, and as I was trying to keep my balance I saw someone get washed overboard and speed past me in the water, arms flailing. The person made direct eye contact, drowning fast, but didn't shout. It varied from dream to dream who it was, until I met Vera, and then it was always Vera. The ship steadied and I looked back and my arms were frozen. I looked over at a life ring but couldn't grab it and when I looked back I'd lost her. I'd wake up then, always at that point, sweating, terrified. I never told anyone about the dream, because I felt like it was bad luck to mention it—particularly if that person was aboard. I haven't thought about that nightmare for almost a decade, until this morning, after Shipyard Tom asked me about going overboard. I finished talking to him and then I looked

at my boat's orange life ring and kind of froze, remembering it. Maybe that's a bad omen, I don't know. Like I said, I'd never thought of the dream when on land.

Only just a few days ago, I painted the word 'Petrel' on that life ring. I'll have no one to throw it to, of course. It's really just an identifier, a piece of evidence, something that'll float in case my boat goes down. The search plane can find it. One day a museum could encase the life ring in glass and mount it on the wall. We call an object like this a 'hanger' in the museum business: a physical, eye-grabbing thing that we can display, an artifact on which we can spin a larger story.

I can't decide if I should write a will or not.

## 23 days until departure

When I was twenty-six years old, I was promoted to director aboard the *Mary Higgins*. In many ways the position wasn't that different from being a camp counselor, but it was a large step up for me. I was in charge of daily scheduling and for the organizing of port activities. I met with the captain every morning, and sometimes two or three times a day. I was now in charge of two other teachers and twenty-five students.

I'd been in front of a classroom, I'd been a little league quarterback, I'd organized a few field trips at Shedd Academy—I mean, it wasn't like I'd never had to make decisions for a group before, but this was all much weightier. The ship hierarchy was strict and suddenly I was one of the people who had the answers, or had to make them up.

I remember the very moment when it hit me that I had a lot of responsibility. We'd come to the dock at South Street Seaport in New York City. The new group of students had been aboard for about a week and most of the crew were also new. They didn't know me from before, only knew me by my new position as director. The engineer on that trip, Todd Latimer, was about my age. His arms were covered with tattoos, and he took his seamanship seriously, because this was to be his career. We'd just tied up at the dock. It

was overcast that morning and the dock smelled of garbage and roasted peanuts. Todd was setting up the gangway as I was hurrying off to confirm an appointment for the students.

‘Excuse me, Joel,’ he said. ‘We’re taking on fuel today. You know when you’ll all be gone?’

‘Shooting to be out of here by eight forty-five I hope. I told the students eight-thirty. Oh, we normally rig that around the cleat there. Like that. No. That’s it. Right.’

‘Thanks. Makes sense. So if we start pumping at ten that’ll be all right?’

‘That’ll be fine. Won’t be back until after lunch. But see you in a bit, Todd, I’ve got to catch up with this museum guy.’

‘Ok, thank you, sir.’

Maybe that moment seems like nothing to you. I’d already answered a hundred questions like that so far. But as I was walking away, this one sunk in. Todd treated me as if I were in charge, with deference—from someone who I considered more as my peer.

I’ve always been fascinated by the way that respect in a leader can change on a dime, how a relationship can change with one simple action, rendering everything different from then on. Once I sailed with a deckhand who was exceptionally skilled. He’d worked on tugs for years, a real tough character. He saw himself as knowing just as much as the mates, and he did, but he’d been asked to serve a season as deckhand to watch how things worked on a tall ship. He was paired with the second mate, but didn’t like him at all since this man was an Ivy League dropout and good at giving commands but not thinking them through. One rainy, cold evening at sea we had to shift a heavy-weather anchor off the rail and about twenty feet aft, onto the deck. It was getting dark, our dinner was getting cold, and the second mate had us lifting this thing with a block-and-tackle system that just wasn’t working. Eventually this tough deckhand stepped in, without asking, and rigged a different method that worked instantly. This act upset the power balance aboard. We had less

respect for the second mate after that, and this deckhand now was someone we turned to for answers.

Of course, these twists of leadership are common on land, too. One January when I was living in Scotland, I went up to the Cairngorm Mountains for a few days. I was staying at a youth hostel and met a guy who invited me to join him on a hike. I wasn't feeling particularly social, but he had all sorts of topographic maps and had a full, high-tech kit of gear. I thought this would be a safe person to tramp around with because I didn't know where I was going or have much of a plan for the day. His name was Michael. The two of us walked for a couple miles in a valley. He prattled on about the peaks he'd 'bagged,' mountain bike races he'd won, and various other accounts of his adventures. Just before the elevation began to increase we came to a stream that was too wide for crossing. We explored along it, trying to find a section narrow enough to jump over, or with some sort of bridge. The water was moving too quickly to freeze, but the rocks were glazed with ice. We walked and walked and began to get frustrated because there was no way to get across. We kept going farther away from our intended route, which was up to a mountain loch recommended by the owner of the hostel. Finally we came to a slightly narrower place, and without much thought, partly out of desperation, I leaped. I made it over, but my back heel slipped and got wet. This was not, I assure you, any Olympic accomplishment, and Michael was even taller than me. He thought about it, threw his backpack over, almost went once, then concluded that he didn't feel comfortable so wasn't going to try at all. I jumped back across and we returned to the hostel together. To make things worse I easily opened a farm gate that he'd had a lot of trouble with on the way in. Our relationship changed. I was now in charge, the 'alpha,' as crass and callow as that sounds. We both knew that his adventure stories had been wiped clean.



I've been on the other side of this. And I know I'm more competitive than the average person. It's not a good trait. Maybe these sorts of things don't affect other people as deeply. I don't know. It's hard to ask people about stuff like this. Recently, a colleague and I traveled to Cambridge, England, to attend a curator's conference. There is a river that goes through the town, conveniently called the Cam. It's a common activity to rent punts and pole along this river, which provides a privileged view of the colleges, chapels, and great lawns. This guy Leo is both a co-worker and a friend. We occasionally hang out away from work. He's generally tentative and fairly naïve with certain things. He's afraid of flying and spiders and, as a whole, not much of a risk-taker. We played a weekly squash match for a while and I beat him so often that it wasn't fun for me. I even beat him once when I was drunk. There was nothing for me to gain if I continued playing with him, only the possibility that he might've beaten me someday. That sounds terrible—but I'm trying to be honest here. It wasn't that I was that good; he just was really, really bad. It wasn't great exercise, and it was indoors. So I stopped playing.

In Cambridge, I was eager to go punting, but he wasn't sure about it. It was a mild autumn day and I thought the old stone bridges would look glorious from the water. I convinced him to go, and I, naturally, being Mr Boats—or at least I used to be—took the pole first. I was terrible at it. I couldn't figure out how to steer the thing straight or what method worked at all. Only after a couple miles downriver did I finally start to get some sort of feel. We turned around to go back, and I passed it over to Leo, thinking he was going to have all sorts of problems. He picked it up almost immediately and steered us back up the river in half the time, as if he'd been doing this as a job. I was severely humbled. Boats are part of who I am and what I'm supposed to know about. Meanwhile, it upped his confidence. 'I really enjoyed that,' he said afterward wanting to discuss his success further. I rationalized that he'd been able to watch my mistakes, see the techniques of others, but

that was only part of it. There was no shift in tide or wind. He was simply more skilled at this. When I saw Leo's wife after the trip, I was trying to be a graceful person and tell her how he was a much better punter than me. 'Oh, I heard,' she said.

I'm embarrassed that my ego is so fragile. Maybe this is part of the reason I want to sail alone. I'm afraid anyone I take with me will have more skill, be smarter, more intelligent, will pick it all up that much quicker than me. I'm afraid of that moment that will render me no longer in charge. You see, I'm actually a very good follower. When someone clearly knows more than me, I'm excellent at carrying through directions and putting my nose down to a task, working for hours and hours at a time. I'm a textbook example of the Peter Principle, where I've been promoted to my level of incompetence. Part of the reason I stopped teaching is because I didn't want to lead others. I really don't. At the museum, I have—I *used* to have—four people 'under' me. And I even hated that, detested having to run a meeting or tell them what to do. I was the assistant curator and we all knew I was never going to run the place. This way, I could have alcohol on my breath in the morning and no one gave a shit about it. No one noticed anyhow. There's this great line in a Jack London novel: 'Mediocrity has its compensations.' I certainly don't see much attraction in skippering a big ship, being responsible for so many people. But, on the other hand, I do want badly to be respected. I don't want to be a follower my whole life. I want to be good at something, anything. Which leaves the best option to sail alone or to have someone working with me who has absolutely no clue. Leading someone who is more afraid and helpless is relaxing and empowering. I know that probably sounds terrible, but you end up spending most of your time worrying about taking care of them, comforting them, instead of freaking out yourself.

During my first semester as director, one of the other teachers was a middle-aged woman who'd spent her whole life in a classroom at a traditional school. She was so out of

her element that she did whatever I said, which made things work quite smoothly. At the other end of the spectrum, the first time I served as a watch officer, as a third mate, I had a deckhand under me who was way overqualified. Kale and I were good friends, but we had a terrible time together professionally because I was so nervous about trying to do a good job, trying to learn a new position, while convinced that he, my deckhand, knew much more than I did. I worried that he was judging me over my shoulder and was aware when I messed up. He often did things before I thought of them or asked him to, which threw off my sense of order and control. It was safer for the ship, yes, but challenging for both of us. It takes a fair amount of experience and grace, a lot of self-confidence, before you can keep a keen employee busy and challenged. And then learn from him or her, too.

A couple years later, Kale was a third mate himself and had his own ‘super-deckhand.’ ‘I see what you mean, now,’ he wrote. ‘It’s a pain in the ass having someone who knows everything already.’

While I was director aboard the semester-at-sea, all I wanted was for things to go smoothly. Anything that went wrong I took as a personal failure, and things most definitely went wrong. Dealing with the other adults was the most difficult part. One afternoon the captain’s wife asked to talk to me. She’d been feeling that her role as cook and assistant teacher wasn’t fulfilling enough. She came to me as someone who could make things better for her. We sat in two chairs on the dock in Baltimore, and she—a mother of two—spoke to me as an equal. She came to me to help her. For advice. No adult had ever spoken to me like that before.

Todd, the engineer, and Rona, the third mate, were on for the entire year, without any time off. They got together romantically, which was fine, though a strain on others since the crew lived in a communal space. They both liked to drink. As they began to burn out from too much time at sea, they fed off each other’s appetite at the bar, often returning

to the ship drunk, in full view of the students. Todd once swam back to the ship buck naked and climbed up the ladder, slurring with rum, while three teenage girls were on watch. Of course, I was no one to preach about this matter—the irony was painful—but I was now in a position where I had to do something. The girls had told their parents, who complained to the principal in the office, who then spoke to me, wondering ‘what was going on down there.’ So one afternoon in port, off the ship, I had ‘a talk’ with Todd and Rona. I asked them to keep their relationship and their drinking away from the students. I did not tell them of my own experience on my first voyage. I only alluded that I too had got myself in trouble with alcohol in the past. These details were a secret that I tried to keep as buried as possible. The sailing school world is small, and I dreaded the day when a crewmember from my first voyage would meet someone from this schooner: my past errors revealed, my current hypocrisy exposed.

There were discipline problems with students, too, of course. We’d started a no smoking policy aboard, a one-strike-you’re-out sort of thing. One evening at the dock in St Lucia, a deckhand discovered two boys smoking. Or at least she smelled the smoke and saw one boy throwing something overboard that looked like a cigarette. She was ninety-percent sure. The boys denied it. I had to call their parents and explain that the boys were being sent home. It was dark when I walked to the phone booth at the end of the pier. I’d practiced the first few words I’d say. As I dialed, I held a clipboard and two pens and a copy of our ‘Rules and Regulations.’ I had everything organized so I wouldn’t be fumbling around. I had plane schedules. The office had refused to make this call for me. In fact, the principal was disappointed that we, I, was standing so firm on this. I heard the phone ringing. Should I leave a message? I hadn’t even thought about what I would say on a machine. Then the mother answered.

I said: ‘Good evening. Is this Mrs Terbane? Good evening, Mrs Terbane. This is Joel Brown, the onboard director of Sea Academy.’ I was sure she could tell that I was only in my twenties. Who was I to do this? ‘Yes. That’s right. I’m sorry to call so late. I. Well, I have some bad news about Alex. No-no. He’s fine, don’t worry. I’m sorry. His health is fine. There were no accidents. It’s just that. Um, well. He’s. I. He’s broken a serious rule of ours.’

We sent Alex home for two weeks. The other boy left the ship for good because he’d already got into trouble for some other things. I took the two boys to the airport and gave one a document of expulsion and one of suspension—pieces of paper that had to be signed by them and their parents. When I returned to the ship I went into my cabin and wept uncontrollably, my face in my pillow so no one would hear. Who was I to decide what lessons to teach? To decide what was good for them and the ship community? I’d sought advice—the captain and the other teachers had voted to send them home—we’d had long meetings with the entire crew back aft—but in the end this had to be my decision. Over the phone, the mother of the other boy had pleaded with me to keep him aboard, because she didn’t know what she was going to do with him at home. When I remained firm, she grew angry. ‘You’re ruining my son’s life—*my* life—over a teenager’s drag from a cigarette?’

When Alex returned to the ship I picked him up at the airport. I always liked him. Maybe I identified with his dumb decisions. He was a smart kid with a wry wit, and he, like me, was really into learning celestial navigation and how to identify the stars. A few weeks later, as we continued the voyage, a reliable student came to me with a rumor that Alex and another kid had bought marijuana while ashore. The following night when we were at anchor, I relieved the on-watch and sent them to bed. After I was sure they were asleep, that everyone aboard was asleep, I went below and woke up Alex. ‘I need you up on deck,’

I whispered. On a ship it's nearly impossible to find a place to speak privately. People are always around, voices carry, and ventilation boxes suck both air and sound down into the lower decks, particularly when it's a windless night and the ship is silent. I took him over to the waist of the schooner, where I felt it was safest. In hushed tones I told him about the rumor that was going around. I had faith in him, I said, but if it were true, he better get rid of anything fast. The captain could lose his license and the ship could be repossessed. In the role of good cop, I talked about how, if he did indeed have drugs, that getting kicked off for this, expelled, would devastate his future. Pulling Alex aside in this way was a breach of protocol, irresponsible of me, because I should've immediately told the captain about any possibility of drugs on board. But this problem was part of my success, too. To this day, I don't know if Alex actually had anything illegal, if anyone overheard our conversation, or if he told his friends about it. Nothing more came of it. I should add that the students chose Alex to give the final speech at graduation. And perhaps I should also tell you that when I was his age I smoked pot more often than I ate breakfast.

During that incident and for the majority of the time I sailed on *Mary Higgins* as director, Captain Travis Sheffield was in command. I came to admire his leadership, though he could be difficult to read at times. He'd sailed so often, for so many years, that he had little interest in long passages. 'Gentlemen don't beat to weather,' he liked to say. He knew every port intimately and had his favorite places ashore: museums, restaurants, and hikes. I gave my opinions on where we should go and when, but he saw me as an adolescent, surely, and I rarely disagreed with him. Sheffield was impeccably skilled as a mariner, a devoted father, and the absolute best at training young watch officers. He was also knowledgeable about all things maritime, in all disciplines, so when he sat in on one of my classes, it was intimidating because I knew that he was well aware when I got things wrong or was fudging something with the students. Occasionally he'd interject something

that he felt was important to add, knocking my class off track. I felt that this belittled me in front of the students—and he did it to the other teachers, too, who came to me to complain about it. Sheffield and I still keep in contact, and he's given me some good information about my upcoming trip. He's one of the few people who didn't laugh when I told him about my desire to circumnavigate under sail. He just went right into a serious discussion about the best cruise track and the timing of the trade winds. He's been helpful recommending ports with safe anchorages and accessible supplies. 'How many crew are you going to have?' he asked. I changed the topic.

One of Sheffield's favorite places to visit was Cap Haitien, Haiti. When I was sailing, this was the climactic port of the semester, not because it was the last one or the most difficult to get to, but because it was so vastly different from the rest of the places in the Caribbean, even from the Dominican Republic just across the border. I visited Haiti three times aboard the *Mary Higgins* and each time after we left, the entire ship's company felt an intense relief. We scrubbed and washed the vessel and ourselves with such spirit and energy that it neared religious refreshment. I've been through the slum outskirts of Lima, Peru, to the back alleys of Guangzhou, China, along the sorry paths of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and I know there are still far poorer and more desperate places on Earth, but Cap Haitien, that place: it exposed me.

The first time we approached Cap Haitien's harbor, before I was director, the mate asked me to climb aloft and look for shoals. I didn't know what 'shoals' were exactly, but I was fairly confident that they were shallow spots. To think that I didn't ask to be certain, was too embarrassed to put aside my own ignorance for the safety of all hands—it's shameful when I look back on it. Anyhow, the harbor channel was marked with green and red day markers. There were a few small boats out fishing, wood vessels with sails that had been patched and repatched and repaired once again with rice bags or burlap cloth. I could

smell the burning of charcoal and plastic from a giant pile of smoldering garbage at the end of a small peninsula jutting into the harbor. From aloft, I saw the roofs of cement houses that were right on the water, and I could see the colonial downtown, a few blocks inland, and the purple, jagged mountain range off beyond the dusty hills. As we approached the dock, the sounds of the island were like all others across the Caribbean: roosters, honking, hammering, people chatter. But there were no private yachts tied up here, only rusty, tired merchant vessels bringing cargos of scrap metal or relief supplies. A weary ship from the United States was there, its entire hold filled with old bicycles.

From the moment we tied up, men and women gathered on the pier to watch us, particularly during mealtimes. I couldn't eat without feeling immensely guilty, but we were warned that to hand food over the rail would cause a riot. We ate and conducted all our business on the water side of the ship, or down below if we could stand the heat. Our audience was mostly young men. They were rarely loud or angry or morose. They just seemed to be hungry and curious, or even bored because they had no work. Few of them spoke English, but they loved to laugh when something funny happened, like when Maria, our bosun at the time, dropped a wet paintbrush on the deck from several feet up. The crowd on the dock erupted. They shouted and cheered. It was already comic enough for them to see a woman in jeans working on the boat. 'The Dropping of the Brush' was relived and retold for hours, because new people would walk up and need to be updated.

At night, policemen with rifles guarded the docks. Pink incandescent lamps lit the cement, and a few of the young men stood and watched us all night long. We kept two students and one teacher or crew on deck at all times, but this didn't stop an approach by water. One morning the second mate looked down at our small boat and discovered that our outboard engine had been stolen.



It was brutally hot in Cap Haitien, and the mosquitoes were maddening. These insects were by far the worst I've ever encountered. At night I wrapped a sheet over my head, sweating, holding the cloth tight with my fists to my chest. The mosquitoes bit through the sheet, staining the fabric with blood. Sheffield had made sure to bring dozens of mosquito coils, which we burned furiously despite our usual precautions about any sort of flame on a wood ship—but these coils were useless, water pistols before a horde of Genghis Khans. We also rigged electric fans, not because these blew away the mosquitoes or the smoke from the coils or even to help cool the ship—they could do none of these. We ran the fans all night long because their whir masked the whining of the insects. Just when I was about to doze off, a shipmate would slap a bulkhead or curse aloud. No one slept in Cap Haitien.

On that first visit, I didn't have much responsibility and actually had a day off, so I set off to explore. As soon as I stepped onto the dock there were a dozen men who offered to be my guide. I'd been prepped as to the French way to say that I didn't want one: 'S'il vous plait, je n'ai pas besoin d'un guide.' I repeated this over and over as I walked, as politely as I could, until finally even the last man gave up. As I explored deeper into town I realized that I was the only white person in sight. I felt afraid and had to question my self-proclaimed liberal attitudes. Was I racist? I realized how tentative, how jumpy and wound-up I was. Yes, it was a new place, a very poor place—I didn't know where I was going and didn't speak the language—but even after I'd spent some time in that port, I always felt as if there were an undercurrent, a whole set of rules and laws, an entire culture that existed behind the doors and French-colonial windows, behind even an ordinary conversation or exchange. I'd read about Haitian voodoo, and I saw women selling voodoo dolls, pins, and dyed rags. I saw a woman squatting on the side of the road, urinating into the milk-brown water of the gullies. There were lizards everywhere—silent and camouflaged. They

shuffled on ceilings and walls and scurried across the road. The streets flowed with men, women, and children, while on the edges, against the walls, like rocks on a riverbank, stood even more people, mostly men, waiting for something, observing. I wanted to take photographs because the paint schemes on the houses were so vivid and wonderful, and everywhere I looked there were lines of school children in peach or lavender or maroon uniforms. It reminded me of scuba diving, when schools of brightly-colored fish would swim out from behind a rock, flicker into sight, then zip back behind a fan of yellow coral. Schoolgirls walked in groups, arm in arm and hand in hand, like characters in the stories I'd read by Jamaica Kincaid.

I held my camera in my palm, hidden by a baseball cap, and tried to take photographs subtly. Sometimes people would stop and stare at me, smile, or shout at me in Creole or French—or voodoo for all I knew. I didn't know if they were heckling me or saying hello. I would hear words interspersed, like 'cool' or 'yo' or 'photo.' One man shouted at me: 'Blan!' I was sure they saw how frightened I was.

Around the city square and beside the street lined with art stalls, more men sat idly against trees or on the ledges of tall, arched windows, as if they were in position, on watch, and had been sitting there for hours and intended to stay several more. When I came around one corner a perfectly nice gentleman stood up close to me. I shot my hands up in defense, then kept walking, hoping he hadn't noticed.

Up a hill, I found a hotel-restaurant. I was thinking about spending the night off the ship, since I had a full twenty-four hours off and maybe the mosquitoes would be better away from the harbor. A tall German man was the owner. He had a severe expression and strands of black hair on the rims of his ears. He showed me a room, which was sparse but clean. As he walked me around I began to notice that there was no one else there, not a single guest. I asked if it would be all right if I could just sit by the little swimming pool

and have lunch in his restaurant. I thought that if I started to see more people, I'd consider staying the night.

So I sat by the pool and wrote in my journal, looking down on the harbor and the hustle below. I thought about going for a run—I had my shoes in my backpack—but that activity just seemed too absurd here. The owner asked what time I wanted lunch. When I went into the dining room I was the only one. The white walls had only two small paintings. There was no music or conversation, just the outside sounds of roosters and honking and hammering. My chair was loud on the tile floor, and I could hear the dishes and cooking in the kitchen, but none of the Haitian staff spoke as they worked. I was dressed in a faded T-shirt and cut-off shorts because I hadn't wanted to attract attention to myself in town. The staff wore crisp tangerine-colored uniforms, and they served me a gigantic lunch: half a roasted chicken with a large bowl of white rice and side dishes of boiled carrots and French fries. There was a salad beforehand and three different forks and spoons. They gave me an extra dish for the bones, but even though I ate on a long white tablecloth, they couldn't find a napkin for me, so I had to wipe my fingers on my shorts. They served entirely too much food for me to eat, but I didn't know what to do, because I didn't want the staff to see that I was wasting it, taking it for granted, but I also didn't want to appear the gluttonous American. I'd told the owner that I worked on a ship. More often than not in those situations I alluded to the fact that I was some sort of merchant mariner. Rarely did I come out and say that I was a schoolteacher. In the end, I stuffed myself. I finished every bite.

I paid for the meal and left. I was able to pay in U.S. dollars, which was helpful, because the money system in Haiti was bizarre. Shops listed their prices in Haitian dollars, but I never actually saw a Haitian dollar. I don't know what it's like now, but I'm not convinced they even existed when I was there, at least in that part of the country. A Haitian

dollar was supposedly equal to five *gourdes*, but no one ever spoke of gourdes. So if something cost three Haitian dollars, I handed over fifteen gourdes. I'm not very quick with arithmetic so it was confusing for me to calculate the exchange rate to American dollars, which at that time was two and a half Haitian dollars to one U.S. There were a couple banks in town but we'd been advised to go to the street men who exchanged money, though you'd better know your numbers before you approached. The gourdes themselves were small bills, more like decorated tickets, and they'd been so traded and worn that it was difficult to read anything on them. They were soft, limp, and smelled of sweat and soil. After I saw women handling the money in the market, I understood how the gourdes were rolled and stored on hips, between breasts, and in headdresses, then carried up far into the hills and hidden, if not buried.

On this first visit our students walked through the market, shopped on the art and crafts street, and toured around the old Spanish part of town. Captain Sheffield and his wife also arranged a connection with a local school where we awkwardly met each other and played a game of basketball.

The primary field trip of this port, however, was a hike up to The Citadelle. This was a three-hour climb up a steep switchback road. In order to get to the foot of The Citadelle and the start of this road we had to take a bus. Our director had pre-arranged this trip with an older local fellow named Monsieur Pierre, who'd apparently been operating with our program for several years. He knew Sheffield by name and our captain in turn invited him aboard as an honored guest. As it worked out, the director had his day off for this hike—likely because he knew what it was really about. He put me in charge. Everything had already been organized, he said, and the third teacher and a few of the crew would be there, too, in case I had any problems.

The field trip was extremely expensive and after we got there, as soon as we got off the bus, there was a pack of guides waiting. Monsieur Pierre left us straightaway, mounting a horse—a boney, exhausted nag—and said he’d meet us up at the top. The guides were relentless, three or four per each of us. They budged in front of one other, shoving their faces in front of ours. We kept walking up the trail and gradually the guides thinned out, through whatever system they’d developed amongst themselves, leaving one guide per person, no matter how much we said we didn’t want their help. They simply would not leave. Meanwhile, I was frantically trying to keep a count of all the students, making sure everyone was walking up safely. A few of our girls refused to dress conservatively, and I worried about how they were being looked at. I’d asked the other teacher to keep counting, too. Many of the guides spoke some English and after a while, I told mine directly, as forcefully as I could: ‘Please. Go away. I do not want a guide. Go away from me. Please.’ He would not accept this, nor would any of the others who latched on to our students and crew. Under a fierce sun, it was a long, tiring tramp. My guide would not shut his mouth, reciting some of the local history—much of which I knew to be inaccurate. If he hadn’t been stressing me out so much, it would’ve been funny: ‘Oh, you don’t want me to speak? You want to speak with God? No problem. I understand when someone wants to walk in quiet. Haiti is a beautiful country. Nowhere in the world can you enjoy quiet like here. I am a student so I value quiet when I study...’ Perhaps it would’ve been best to pay him off, but I was stuck on the principle of the thing. I had no idea how to deal with this.

Finally we got to the top of the mountain, to The Citadelle—which really is extraordinary in its architecture. It’s shaped like a ship’s prow, vast and tall, erected with stones as big as automobiles. The view from the top is of bald, hot hills, rolling all the way to the Atlantic. But it was difficult to learn anything historical, to take anything in. I tried to gather the students to give them a little background on where we were standing, but the

guides pursued, smothering, eager for tips. Monsieur Pierre did nothing to help the situation. Then one student brought out his wallet to pay, and everything erupted. I swear it felt like the start of a riot and some of our crew were shouting to gather the students because I wasn't taking charge enough, and then I shouted at Pierre, 'What are we paying you for!?'

Taking his sweet time, Pierre corralled all of the guides. He agreed on a lump sum for tips, from me, that they would divide among themselves. I didn't want the students to pay. It was all criminally expensive—extortion, really. There were language and cultural barriers, too, so I wasn't sure how much I was getting ripped off, or even what was the typical fee. Was I supposed to barter? But then again, this was such a poor country. They needed the money so much more than me. I gave Pierre the cash, and he took it over to the guides. They argued with each other about who got what, then scattered, and soon we were left in peace, the wind now audible in its pass through the crevices in the stone. Pierre, in a syrupy voice, just before riding down the mountain, called me 'Professor,' then 'Chief.' Before he hadn't even deigned to recognize me.

We were spared the annoyance of the guides on the way down, but the students spread out farther than my liking—another thing I hadn't anticipated. A few of them loped down the road while others lagged behind, exhausted, short on water. One student sprained his ankle on the cobblestones. I tried to keep track of everyone. I didn't want our kids waiting too long at the bottom, near the hordes of guides, but it was too late after we'd begun the descent. And what if the bus wasn't there after we'd gathered everyone? In the end, we all collected at the bottom, the bus was indeed there, as was Monsieur Pierre and his boney horse. We made it back to the ship just fine.

The next afternoon, the last day of my first trip to Haiti, I met a man named Johnny. He saw me on the street and began to talk to me. At first I didn't trust his motives, but he kept walking with me, and at that point I'd been so worn down by the press of attention that

I relented. There was also something more trustworthy about him, less threatening, or maybe he just didn't stand as close to me. I don't know. He had high cheekbones, a slight overbite, and a clear, almost innocent face. I gave him half of the sandwich that I had in my backpack. I asked him about his family and he asked about mine. We were exactly the same age, our birthdays only five weeks apart. He said he was married and had one child. He showed me a photograph of his daughter. His English was better than most of the other locals I'd met. He asked, 'What are you looking for? What can I help you find?'

The truth was that I'd been looking for a carved bowl to give to Chloe. I'd seen these beautiful hand-carved wood bowls at local craft stalls. This seemed to me a good way to contribute to the local economy, but I'd been too intimidated to buy one. I knew I was supposed to bargain—it was supposedly insulting if you didn't—but calculating the exchange and trying to understand their French was a little too much, so I shied away from it. I told Johnny what I wanted to buy, and he walked me over to one of the stalls. He asked me which one I liked, then bargained, but he didn't like the cost so we went to three other stalls until we agreed on a 'fair price' and a particular bowl. I didn't know if this was all for show, if he was in league with the artisans and winking to them all along. I just had no idea. But I trusted him and thanked him. Afterwards, we walked over to where they were building a fishing boat, and we talked about the differences in fishing methods, our cultures, and about tourists. Then I asked if he could organize a trip up to The Citadelle like Monsieur Pierre. He didn't answer this right away. He thought about it and said: 'Yes. I think this is something I could do. Would you like that I do this?'

At the time I didn't know I was going to be the next director, so I said: 'I'm not in charge. But I'll ask. I will. This last trip was crazy.'

We exchanged addresses, he walked me back to the ship, and I gave him a tip. It was all so awkward, this tip-giving. Maybe he was insulted by my giving him money. I

just had no idea if his kindness and interest in me was completely fabricated. Maybe Johnny wasn't even his name. Maybe that photograph wasn't his daughter or he just matched his birthday to mine. Maybe he didn't make it exactly the same date because that would've been too obvious.

When I took the director job the next year and began planning the trip to Haiti, I dreaded that fiasco up to The Citadelle, though I recognized the value for the students of seeing this place, and most definitely for going to this port—if only for the reminder of how fortunate we are. I was now in charge of the budget, and the fee we'd previously paid seemed unfair, particularly after I compared it to various guidebooks. And in my gut I just didn't like Monsieur Pierre, anyhow. So I wrote to Johnny, explaining what I wanted and how I thought it might run. I didn't know what the mail system was like in Haiti, if he'd get the letter at all, or even if he was still living at that address.

When we sailed into Cap Haitien that fall, Johnny was on the dock. As was Monsieur Pierre. When I ducked down into the cabin to tell Sheffield that I wasn't going to use Pierre, he looked at me with a skeptical grin, then shrugged his shoulders. 'I just drive the boat, mon,' he said, which couldn't have been farther from the truth, but this was his stock response to something he didn't want to get involved in. Pierre welcomed me warmly. 'Professor! Welcome back.' I explained to him that I'd made other arrangements for The Citadelle. I didn't mention Johnny's name but we all knew he'd find out. Pierre pretended to be ambivalent and said: 'Next time. You'll see how it goes without me.' He didn't try to bargain or earn my business back. I wasn't sure if this was some sort of Godfather thing and Johnny was going to be put in danger. I didn't know how big a risk this was for him. Like I said before, in Haiti I always felt I was living and conversing on a thin film, over which an entire world was going on underneath. More and more, I'd been going with Sheffield to various customs meetings in our ports-of-call. He'd been teaching



me about the need for occasional bribes, in that we paid certain individuals for services as an ‘agent.’ ‘It’s protection money,’ I complained. Sheffield explained that, yes, we could’ve done these things ourselves—arranged transportation on our own, delivered a particular document to customs, whatever—but it was important to keep certain locals on your side. He didn’t see this as wrong. I was too young, too inexperienced to understand.

Johnny and I agreed on our fee and the arrangements and set a time for pick-up. I’d done a great deal of reading about Haiti this time. I’d studied more about the history of Cap Haitien, and I’d also spent many nights thinking carefully about logistics. I made a card for myself with a few French phrases and the money exchange increments written out—so I could think faster. I wrote this out on our ship’s blackboard, too, so students and crew could copy it if they wanted. I rented a room in one of the nicer hotels in town, not the one owned by the German man, but one with a nice porch and Canadian hosts who knew Captain Sheffield. I said this room was paid for out of the education budget, but I paid for it mostly out of my own money. I gave the room to the crew to use on their days off. It was a clean, bug-free space with a large ceiling fan.

I was so interested with all that I’d been reading about the Haitian Revolution, that once we cleared customs at the dock, I immediately took the students to the central square where there were statues of Henri Christophe, Touissant L’Ouverture, and Jean-Jaques Dessalines. I lectured about these men, which couldn’t have been more useless. The students were agape at the setting, the people, and couldn’t concentrate on anything I was saying—nor should they have. I’d already forgotten the initial sensory impact of Haiti, and now here I was leading a group of students to stand in the middle of the square, with all of Cap Haitien watching us.

The next afternoon I tried to teach a class on deck while the mosquitoes were biting and the men stood on the pier watching us. I wanted the students to understand what The

Citadelle was, why it was significant, the symbol, perhaps the mania of a new monarch, how twenty thousand people died carrying the blocks up this mountain, laboring over the cobblestones we were to tread, in order to erect a fortress that Napoleon would never attack, probably never even considered attacking. The Haitian people went from slavery back to slavery. I told them that after we climbed up to the fortress, we were going to stand under the tree where Christophe had committed suicide. And when we were looking out from the top of the Citadelle, catching our breathe from the sun, I wanted them to consider how Haiti has suffered from terrible farming practices, a legacy of the slave plantations then property sub-division which created a feedback loop of centuries of deforestation and over-farming on smaller and smaller plots. That's why the trees, the shade, were so rare. I wanted them to understand the significance of the smell of burning charcoal. I had timelines, photographs, illustrations, and readings. But the mosquitoes were relentless, the heat like a wool blanket, and there were endless distractions from the eyes on the dock. Less than a third of the way into the class, I gave up.

The next morning I prepped the exhausted, bug-bitten students about the trip. Everyone had to have buddies, water bottles, wristwatches. I instructed them to not pay any guides, to direct any of their questions to me. Johnny met us at the dock on time, but he didn't have a big tour bus like Pierre had arranged, just four small tap-taps with open cabs. This seemed like more opportunity for error, but there was nothing I could do about it at that point. Johnny normally had a quick, natural laugh and a large smile, but today his lips were pursed and tense. We'd dressed in a similar way. Dark trousers and a white collared shirt—his a button down, mine a pullover with the ship's logo on the chest. I'd tucked my shirt in and wore a belt, as did he. We sat in the lead truck, but before we departed he ran from driver to driver, confirming something.

The students loved being stuffed into the tap-taps, loved the music, the honking, the chickens in the road, the weaving through the traffic, and the women with impossible bundles atop their heads. When we got to the base of The Citadelle road, Johnny ran out before us and huddled the waiting guides together. I don't know what he said or what the arrangements were—maybe he paid them—I don't know, but we all began up the mountain in peace, flanked by our bus drivers at the beginning and at the end of the group, with a few interspersed.

At one point, just as we were starting our climb, Johnny ran over to the one guide who was hounding one of our students. Apparently this man hadn't heard whatever message Johnny had delivered. Johnny and the man argued, in French or Creole, I couldn't tell. Johnny was not a large man, thin and wiry, but in one motion, turning on a dime, he grabbed the man's shoulder at the armpit, with both hands, and swung him to the ground. Johnny pointed at him, saying something that had the effect of 'stay right the fuck where you are.' Then Johnny looked around: first over to the collection of guides, who'd been silenced by the unexpected violence, and then he looked at me, disappointed I think that I'd seen that. The guide did not stand up until Johnny ran back over to me and we began walking up together. Johnny did not look behind him, but his chest was puffed. He did his best to control his breathing.

When we arrived at the fort, I gave a short lecture that no one listened to. I reminded them of what I tried to teach the day before. Then the students had time to look around, to stand up on the great walls of the fortress. They traced their fingers over the nails that once held tapestries. They climbed on top of the cannons. Everything went smoothly, safely. Plenty of time up there, a calm, safe walk back down—together—and the tap-taps waiting for us at the bottom.

A few of the crew had joined us for this trip. When we got back to the ship, Todd looked over to me and said: ‘Nice job, Mr Confidence.’

I asked Johnny to do one more thing for us. The cook was hoping for a bunch of bananas. Johnny took me with him in the back of a local tap-tap to what seemed to be his neighborhood. People knew him there by name. It was perhaps forty minutes from the dock, well beyond the range of tourists, and crowded completely with locals. Johnny told me how many Haitian dollars it would cost. I gave him the gourdes. He told me to wait, disappearing down a narrow alley of produce sheds. It occurred to me that I could be murdered here easily and no one would have any idea where I was. Or Johnny could disappear with my money and I would never see him again, and there’d be no way to track him down. I didn’t know how to get back to the ship from here or even the direction of the water. There were bands of children running around, weaving through the adults. One boy was dragging a toy car on a string, over the dirt. The body of the car was a large oval tuna tin, wired to wheels made of soda cans. Clumps of people stopped and stared at me. I couldn’t even think of anything to be pretending to be doing. At last, Johnny returned with a bunch of bananas taller than him, and several gourdes change, which I gave back to him.

I wouldn’t mind living this part over again: the drive back to the ship with Johnny in that truck. The sky was pink and we sat together with a comically large bunch of bananas in an open tap-tap that was painted turquoise and red with swirls and diamonds— advertising for some political candidate. We let our feet hang over the back of the tap-tap, watching the dirt and gravel whir underneath. There were a dozen other people in the vehicle, but they seemed barely to notice us, maybe only to smile and point at the amount of fruit we had. ‘Très faim!’ They mostly faced forward and laughed as the driver honked and swerved and stopped suddenly to let a new person swing aboard or to let another off.

Johnny and I ate a couple bananas, taught each other curse words, and shared an orange soda, which he pulled out of his pocket as a surprise.

The *Mary Higgins* left that evening, with just enough time to get out of the harbor before it got dark. We hung the bananas on a pole underneath the radar. Sheffield knew everyone was tired, but, correctly, he knew people would actually sleep tonight if we were off the dock, even if we'd still each have four hours of watch at sea to manage the ship. Johnny and I shook hands and promised to do this again next spring when I returned with another group. I gave him my phone number at home. He was beaming with success, with relief, as was I. The *Higgins* pulled off the dock, and he threw both of his hands in the air, making peace signs with his fingers.

I made peace signs back. 'Au revoir, Johnny!'

'Goodbye, my friend, Joél!'

'Goodbye, Johnny!'

'Goodbye, my friend, Joél!'

Several months later, I sent him a letter with the approximate date of our next arrival. Again, he was waiting there when we tied up. Monsieur Pierre was not. Our trip up to the fort went just as well. This time I brought sandwiches for Johnny and his guides. He'd hired a horse for me to ride up on, but I told him I couldn't use it. The students would never let me forget it, I said, and the horses just looked too pathetic for the journey—which I didn't say. Johnny shrugged and rode up himself, giving the other horse to one of his drivers. That night I took him out to dinner with the ship's crew. We had a fine evening. As Johnny walked me back to the ship, he told me how he'd recently lost a sister to AIDS.

That was my last semester as director and that was the last time I went to Cap Haitien. I left his contact information in the port file for future teachers. I'm not sure if

they kept giving him the business or even if they still go to that port. The next Christmas, I sent Johnny cash in the mail.

Then I never wrote to him again. I'm not planning to stop in Haiti on my upcoming voyage. It's too risky. I was sitting in the cabin of my boat yesterday, taking a break from installing my \$900 EPIRB, and this all came back to me. I found myself with my head lowered and my fingers on my temples. I realized that I've never been a true friend to anyone on this Earth. I wish I could hear the story of Johnny from Haiti who was able to rise out of the poverty and hopelessness of his birth. No thanks to me. I should have been the friend Johnny made in the United States, the story of a man who made the smallest of sacrifices to improve Johnny's life. For a few years after my last visit to Cap Haitien, my parents would sometimes get a phone call from a man in Haiti. I told my parents to tell him I was not living there anymore and not to give him my new number. Once or twice they got a phone call in the middle of the night.

This sailing trip, this attempted circumnavigation: it is the granddaddy of all my selfish acts.

18 days until departure

I've fastened the rudder back on with stout, new bronze bolts. I've painted the topsides dark grey and I'm going to paint 'PETREL' on the transom tomorrow morning, with white paint. I'll put my home port and state underneath, but not 'USA' as I was originally thinking. That just seems a little pretentious and maybe even bad luck, in case I never get going anywhere.

A new friend of mine, Peter Vasser, said he thought the bronze rod that connects the rudder to the tiller looks weak, like it might have some electrolysis damage. I brought the rod to a machinist, and he said it looked fine. I don't know. To replace this rudder post would set me back a few weeks—by the time the machinist could order the material and make a new one, and then I'd have to put it back on and probably drill new holes—but, then again, to lose my rudder at sea would be disastrous. So I decided to keep the old one, but I fiberglassed it in place and fiberglassed it to the rudder itself, giving it tons of extra support. I just can't imagine the type of force required to break it now—but if I ever have to take the rudder post off again, it will have to be with a chainsaw, and the rudder will have to be destroyed with it. Sometimes it feels as if I'm nailing the flag to the mast.

The thing is, if I followed every caution, I would never get going anywhere. I'd be too afraid to leave the dock. It's not like I won't be able to make some repairs as I travel.

But, at the same time, I do not want to be foolish. I would prefer to not be floating mid-Atlantic in a storm with no way to steer because the post snapped, because I was too lazy and impatient to replace it properly. It seems that it's all about calculating risk, deciding how much you're willing to live with.

My girlfriend's dad bought me a book about this eighty-year-old Welsh woman who sailed across the Atlantic. She and her husband were planning on doing it when they were young—her husband was a carpenter and they built their dream boat and even sailed it around the UK a little, but then their plans were interrupted by World War II and then they raised a family, and it all got pushed aside. The boat sat on the back lawn and rotted under a tarp. As Mrs Glade's husband got Alzheimer's, and died slowly over a decade, she and her grandson rebuilt the boat. When her husband died, she renamed the boat after him, and set off across the Atlantic, solo. She wrote: 'At that point, what did I have to lose?' Mrs Glade successfully landed in the Caribbean three months later.

I'm scheduled to put the boat in the water in three days. I need to check the seacocks once more and put on a safety set of hose clamps. I'd like to put on another coat of bottom paint, too, but I'm not sure I'll have time, especially if it rains at all in the next few days. I'd really like to start sleeping aboard, but my girlfriend won't have it. She doesn't understand that I need every minute now until April 15<sup>th</sup>. I have no job, and I'm rapidly going completely bone-ass broke. I haven't had a single drink in two months.



## 17 days until departure

I think about rough weather all the time. The nightmare scenario is that I'm out there and the winds get to a level that I can't handle. I can't heave-to. Maybe I've tried both a sea anchor and a stern drogue, or maybe these keep getting all fouled up, and I've had to cut them free. The wind is howling and the boat is rolling its guts out, at dangerous angles to cresting seas. My only choice left is to just run before the waves, bare pole, with the wind at hurricane force and streaking the surface with foam. It's nighttime and I can't trust the self-steering gear any longer. I take over at the tiller and I need to look back at the seas to judge how to steer with them, but I can't really see because the stern light reveals barely a pinhead in the blackness—like the way a tiny flashlight in a cave makes you feel even more small and frightened. The spray and rain are coming so fast that when I look astern it feels like I'm being pelted with little bullets, clattering on my jacket, my sou'wester, and my skin. I need to cup my hands around my eyes to see—if I could get below I'd get a snorkel mask—but I need to keep one hand, at least, on the tiller. The noise of it all is so terrible and loud that I can't think, and I'm just too terrified to keep looking back, to see how big the waves behind me actually are. But I have to look back to make sure I take the waves on the quarter—if that wave is too far astern I'll get pitchpoled; if it's too far forward I'll get rolled. I know the height of my spreaders, of *Petrel's* mast, so I can

estimate the height of these seas, but I can't believe the numbers even when I scream them aloud, yet shouting helps me feel better and less alone, to hear my voice inside the howling. I shout and curse, nonsense phrases, over and over. Maybe I've been caught near the Madagascar Current, or some other massive current and the seas from these winds are steeper than they should be, like they're going to break and slam down on top of my boat. Something has broken: a portlight, or I've lost one of the latches to a cockpit locker that I installed myself, poorly, or one of the hatch washboards has blown off. Water is streaming down into the cabin. If I had a free hand I could start pumping, but to stretch over to the handle, away from the tiller, is too risky. If I survive this, I'll move that fucking thing closer. I'm worried that the flooding water is going to short out the electronics and then the automatic bilge pump won't work or even the navigational aids and running lights will fizzle out. I try to remember what the odds are of a rogue wave—I've heard different statistics about how often it comes, one in thirty thousand or something like that—or even just how often a wave will come that's significantly larger than the previous one, which is only something like only one in nine hundred. Or is it one in ninety? I'm yelling these questions to myself. I'm worried that a big sea is just going to lop right over the stern and fill the cockpit with water. The books advised making larger drain holes back here, but I never got a chance to do it. I don't have time to bucket out the water because I have to keep vigilant to watch out for that larger sea, so I can try to make sure the boat takes it at a good angle. I'm starting to lose it because I haven't slept or ate or drank. But as the minutes tick away, that much closer to safety, I start to settle myself down, perhaps out of sheer exhaustion. Because no storm can last forever—it will end, it has to abate, sometime. Then a larger wave does indeed come, from the wrong direction, and it leaps high and the boat goes straight down into a trough.

I know my boat is good. It's designed to be one of the best small boats out here for heavy weather, but I'm all too aware that Grand Banks trawlers can go down in storms, *do* go down, *Titanics* go down, and none of it matters now as I've not had the time or the instinct to adjust to this leopard wave. *Petrel* can only save me so many times. The wave just drives me straight down, shoving my bow into the sea and lifting my stern with the crest. The propeller spins out of the water and then the rudder is sucked out, then the keel is in the air. This rogue wave just so effortlessly, just so smoothly, flicks my boat and pitches it. I'm harnessed in. The boat is upside down. I'm thrown and bashed and I hit my knee on the corner of something. My mouth gashes against a winch. The boat hesitates, surprised, then begins to right itself. In my panic underwater, in those few frigid seconds, I don't believe that the boat will roll back again. I'm frantic. I unclip my harness because I must breathe immediately. I push off, float up, and as I'm gasping for air within the spray, I'm blown away from my boat so fast, with such extraordinary height, that I look down on her barnacled bottom, on the glow of the navigation lights under the black foaming ocean. Then I'm taken by the next wave and lost. Hopefully I drown quickly. Or maybe the bash against the winch knocks me unconscious and I stay harnessed to the boat, bleeding, in shock, while the hull does right itself with the next wave. As it rolls over, the cabin continues to fill with water through that busted hatch and because too many things have been thrown around when the boat was inverted—like maybe I didn't secure the battery well enough so when upside down it came loose and tore a hole through the overhead. Or something I never even thought of makes another hole in the boat somewhere—and the hull fills up and begins to founder and lolls beam-to these gigantic seas and fills up more and soon sinks, right to the bottom, with me attached.

That's the problem. I've seen hints of all this. Though it was many years ago now, I've still spent enough time on the ocean, went through enough rough weather to picture this scenario. And not just because I've read too many books about the sea, either—though I'm sure that hasn't helped. When you're young or naïve, that's the time to take a long solo ocean voyage—because you'll learn, I know you do, you will, but you don't have the fear that comes from enough experience to know better. I'm way past that stage where I want to see storms so I can prove myself. I'm in that middle ground, with not enough experience to have sailed through storms solo, to know that it can be done, that I can handle it—while at the same time I've been at sea enough to know how much it takes, the knowledge you'd like to have, all the ugly things the sea can do, the pain it can so indifferently inflict. I'm paralyzed with semi-experience. It's just like being middle-aged.

When you've spent some time at sea you're too much aware of all that you do not know, how much of the unexpected there is out there. Once I owned a small motorboat. It was docked inside a well-protected harbor with a long stone pier projecting out into the ocean. I never got to use this boat nearly as much as I wanted. I was full-time at the museum and the inner harbor where I had the boat was so shallow that there were several hours of the day when I couldn't go out because of the tide. In addition, the harbormaster would sometimes close the hurricane gate for days. So it was difficult to get the right timing and weather to coincide when I had time off.

One afternoon in late fall, I finished my work early. It was surprisingly sunny and the seas looked comfortable. The weather report suggested no aggressive winds, the gate was open, and the tides were right. I hustled down to the boat, the engine started immediately—rare in itself—and I began to putter out of the harbor. At the end of the pier I saw a few lobstermen standing and looking out to sea. I hadn't lived in the area that long and didn't know their ways, but I'd never seen the men out there just loitering around.

My boat was a piece of junk. It was built of thin fiberglass—light, wide, and nearly flat on the bottom. I'd been too lazy and busy to fix a small light bulb and wire, the port running light, so it hung shamefully off the side of the cabintop like a broken mirror on a car. I couldn't figure out the cable steering so I'd just taken it apart and lashed a stick of wood to the outboard motor, making an extended tiller. This worked fine but looked pitiful.

As I approached the end of the pier, a few of the men turned around and looked at me. I gave them a nod and maybe one of the four returned it. Beyond the end of this jetty I saw a line of swell sneaking from just behind, almost perpendicular to the pier and curling around at that point. I could've reversed and gone back in, but I didn't sense how big the swells actually were. In retrospect, the smart thing to do, what I did always afterwards, was wait there, pause to analyze the waves coming in—to watch if they came in threes, how big the distance was between swells, if the angle and size were consistent, if it was possible and safe to go out at all. But it was a sunny day, and I didn't know better then. It looked so calm and inviting out there beyond those few lines.

It's best in a powerboat to take a wave straight on, or meet it just on either side of the bow. You want to decrease the surface area that the water can get a hold of—one reason boats have pointy ends. In a boat like I had, the thing not to do is to get sideways, then you might get rolled over. A wide shallow boat has what naval architects call initial stability, meaning it's very steady and hard to flip at first, but if it does go over, it might have no desire to turn back again. Like a raft, or a plank, it'll be just as happy upside down as it is right side up. Good sea boats are designed to detest having their keel out of the water, almost can't do it.

The first two waves were not especially large. As I motored over them, bow straight on, I even felt that the fishermen watching me would approve of my seamanship and

mumble about something else. The channel out of the harbor went right along the pier and straight out, so even without these seas, I was steering in the proper direction.

The third wave, as it came closer, seemed to grow taller and taller. The waves were steep here because there had been a strong onshore wind for a couple days—they'd been building from the ocean. Directly after the channel there was a sand bar, so the seas wanted to break. If you're a surfer, you know this moment of apprehension on your way out. A wave is growing, perhaps bigger than you first realized. One option is to duck under it, literally dive down under the wave, with your board held close to your chest to decrease resistance. Another option, if you realize soon enough, is to stop, even back paddle, letting the wave crash ahead of you so you can swim through the foam. Lastly, you can paddle harder to get over the wave before it begins to curl and break, before you're thrown painfully backwards, end over end. In the case of my motorboat, I couldn't dive under, of course, and it was too late to stop and reverse. I hesitated with how much power to give. If I had a better sense of the movement of these waves, I would've known to gun it and get over this one, before there were white tumblers at the peak. But I didn't. I hesitated. The wave continued to grow more menacing, taller and taller. There was nothing for me to do but to keep the boat bow-to, to keep some way on, and see what would happen. My bow met the wave just as it was cresting, the absolute worst time, at its highest point before overlapping on itself and crashing. It sucked my keel into its belly. I'm certain the boat reared to 80° or more. I was thrown off my feet and cracked my bad knee on the deck. I clung to the throttle, keeping the engine pushing ahead and steering forward, and, just as I'd accepted that I was going to flip and began to plan what to do when pinned under the freezing water, the wave passed. The boat fell forward on the other side with a mighty slam. The hull rattled, shuddered. I looked back to see if the outboard engine had been lifted off the transom, if everything was still intact. The engine was still there, still running,

though a piece of steel rubrail at the stern had been ripped halfway off and bent like a pipe cleaner.

I had a few more incoming waves to navigate, but these were much smaller. I continued to proceed out. I didn't look back again. I knew I'd given the fishermen a show, but I pretended as if I weren't shocked. I just kept going. I was grateful that I didn't have anyone else aboard—because they certainly would've been thrown. I tried to think if my knee was really hurt, but I was too full of adrenaline to be objective, let alone to go fishing or do much of anything else. I yawned with a shaky throat, out of nervousness, as dogs do when they're afraid.

I motored along the coast—the swells deceptively large out there, too—as I gathered the mental strength to head back in. After I felt I'd been out long enough that the fishermen would think I'd actually been doing something out in the bay, I powered back toward the harbor, considering how I was going to approach the channel with the seas almost directly behind me. I watched the waves from two separate angles. The fishermen were no longer on the pier. At last, calming myself with deep breaths, I approached and prepared to throttle faster or slower to make sure a wave didn't lift me up dangerously from astern.

I made it back in without incident. No large seas tested me.

When I steered into the inner harbor, two lobstermen were standing there. I looked at them and smiled with a shaking of my head, trying to express 'Well, that was something stupid.' I don't know how extreme my ride had looked from their vantage point. They returned no expression. I held out some hope that it hadn't looked that bad from ashore.

I tied the boat up. It took me some time to tidy it, since everything in the cabin had been hurled aft. I climbed up to the sweet dry land of the dock and went over to talk to the men. My knee throbbed. I tried to hide a limp. One fisherman said nothing and kept still, as if I were a wasp. The other one, a small man still wearing his oilers, was helpful and

gave me some local knowledge as to tides and the prevailing swells. Then he said: 'No, no. You don't want to go out today. Not with this wind. You were lucky, eh? Made it in just fine, though. Timed those right. What were you out for anyway? Trying for rockfish?' I don't understand how he knew that I made it in without any trouble, since I didn't see him watching. If I've learned one thing over the years it's that every harbor has a thousand hidden pairs of eyes.

Ten minutes later, two younger fishermen powered back in. They were the only other ones who had dared to go out. When they got off their boat they sauntered up to me and smiled. They'd been out lobstering to the south and out of view when I took the big wave. There's no way they could've seen it, so they must've talked to someone on the radio or somehow been watching at that very instant with binoculars, which is highly unlikely. Regardless, these men already knew what had happened. They laughed. One said: 'Going for your pilot's license are you? Airborne.'

I've always worried too much about what others are thinking, but I learned back then that you can't try too hard on the docks. There's nothing you can do about it. You only earn respect for the day to day, the year to year. If you go and try to throw a bunch of words around, or to try to talk up your experience, you end up looking like an even bigger asshole. I think it's a rare port where you could get immediate respect, even if you sailed in solo from no matter how far away. Most fishermen would wonder why you'd put yourself at risk like that—how you could afford to do it, even—like to get all that time off from work, for one thing. A mariner who dies at sea for the cause of his livelihood—for catching fish, delivering goods, or fighting for his country—that's a man to be honored. But a man who goes to sea for the challenge of it, who puts himself at risk for no other reason than pride or fame, or for finding out what he's made of—that man is nothing but a fool. Even if I complete my solo circumnavigation, I can assure you that many experienced mariners,



even yachtsmen, will think I just got lucky. A man wouldn't give me respect until he observed me for himself, with his own squinty eyes, for at least a few years of going in and out of *his* harbor, day after day after day.

It's astounding the things I do to impress people that have no meaning in my life. Before my first voyage there was this guy at a marine supply store who helped me get a few things on my packing list. He was telling me about when he was a young man and how he'd worked on big square-riggers. He and his shipmates literally ran across the yards. Throughout my voyage I often thought of that man, what he'd say when I walked back in the door with my skin tanned and my hands hardened. I worked tirelessly for the imaginary respect of someone who surely didn't give me a second thought, and who I never saw again. When I got home I didn't even return to the store to see him. I was too ashamed by how my voyage had ended.

It seems like it's unanimous across cultures and maritime industries: good seamanship is never commented upon while bad seamanship is jeered and heckled. Don't go on a boat if you're looking for sympathy or compliments. I suspect those fishermen just saw me as another yahoo, since I didn't even take the boat out all that much. When I sold it to a guy out of town, one fisherman somehow knew this—though the ad was up on the internet for only a week, and I never put up a sign or anything. He said to me, 'I heard the pilot sold his boat.' I fantasize about sailing back into that harbor. For no rational reason, I very much want their respect. So they could say, 'I see the Pilot sailed his boat around the world.'

One year I lived abroad on a job exchange for a few months, as a guest curator at a museum in Scotland. While I was there a fishing vessel sank in the North Sea. It was a steel tank of a ship, 110 feet long and built of double-thick steel with enclosed decks. Named the *Valerie Chambers*, the Scottish shipwrights built it like a fortress for some of the

most dangerous waters in the world. I felt the same wind that murdered the four men aboard. It swept off the land where I stood, at gusts of fifty miles per hour. Yet when this wind swerved around me, it had no fangs. It could barely gnaw off a branch or shimmy out a roof shingle. When that wind pressed past me, I thought how I wouldn't want to be in a small boat out there, but if need be I might do okay under just a storm jib, as long as I had plenty of room. I looked down at the North Sea from a firm hill, in safety, during the day, while the sun was shining and the sky was clear. I saw the whitecaps and the green surf, with the wind coming off the land. Though thick with white horses, the waves appeared manageable since they hadn't had the space to build. The wind passed me by and streamed northeasterly, bound offshore to where the men stood in their wheelhouse. By the time the wind hit them, it had hundreds of miles to whip, punch, and shove the seas. It had combined with piercing gales from Iceland and the Orkneys Islands. That night, exact cause unknown, the *Valerie Chambers* went down. Yes, these were storm force winds and the vessel was in the belly of the North Sea, but this was not a storm of the century by any stretch. The weather system had no name and had been barely discussed on the news. Aircraft and nearby fishing vessels searched for two full days. They found one of the bodies, a few cushions, and a couple articles of emergency gear.

I learned about the sinking of the *Valerie Chambers*, of the death of those men, while I was having a pleasant Sunday brunch at a pub. I overheard someone mention it while I was sipping an Irish coffee, eating blueberry pancakes, and reading a book. I didn't leave that pub until it closed that night, and I never went back there because I was too embarrassed by my drunken behavior.

The roughest weather I ever experienced was in the South China Sea in December during my first voyage. We were bound for Vietnam and there had been rumors aboard that some ugly weather was coming. We could feel it in the air. The wind had dropped. The air

felt humid and heavy. Dense, velvet black clouds emerged on the horizon, off the port bow. I still have a photograph of Harry and one of the students posing in front of these distant clouds. The sky is purple and the light on their faces is an almost mustard yellow. They're joking in the photo, standing in front of the rail and pretending to look afraid with their eyebrows arched, their fingers curled under their teeth as if shivering with fear. If they'd had a real idea of what was coming, they wouldn't have mocked it. Within a few hours we were confined down below while the ship tried to motor-sail through the edge of a typhoon, a constant blast of wind and rain that lasted over forty hours. It was relentless. That's one thing I learned about the sea, about rough weather. A storm is most maddening in its relentlessness. Aside from its eye, there are no breaks, no mercy, no 'time-outs.' Even after the typhoon had passed, the following swells were so formidable that I could not stand upright without holding on to something. This ship was 195 feet long. I can't even imagine being in weather like that in *Petrel*, in a craft that's only twenty-eight feet. They say there's a cork effect, the ability for a small boat to ride over the waves—like how a light bulb can float across the entire Pacific without a crack. I don't know.

For almost three days our ship struggled through the biggest waves I've ever seen, but there's a perception problem here because that was my first voyage and I didn't have much to gauge it on. For numbers, though, we had gusts of over seventy knots and sometimes the waves reached ten or twenty feet above the deck houses. Or at least that's what I wrote in my journal. Sometimes the bow would thud so directly into a wave that the whole ship shuddered as if we'd slammed into the face of a cliff. I contributed little to the safety of the ship during this weather. I was only on deck three times during the worst of it: twice at the wheel and once to help brace the yards. On deck I couldn't hear anything—I had to scream right into someone's ear to get a few words across. There was a terrible roar of wind and a splitting tak-tak-tak of lines against the mast. With no sails up at all, we were

still going eleven knots. At the wheel, luckily, we were clipped into the lee of the house, but, man, when I put my head around the corner and looked back, really tried to examine what was coming at us, what was back there, the spindrift darted at my face and into my eyes. I couldn't taste if we were pelted by rain or sea water since it was all so mixed together and horizontal. Geysers of foam and waves hammered against the side of the ship. The running lights, normally shielded from the wheel since they faced forward, lit these plumes green and red, as if the seas crashed great sparks off the hull. Spray and foam whipped furiously and the waves arched up and sometimes looked as high as the coupling of the topmast—I expected them to crash down and break us in half—but somehow, the physics didn't even seem possible, the ship, now so small and fragile, floated up and let each wave slip under.

I remember my two times at the helm during that typhoon in more detail than I remember any sporting event I ever played in. We did thirty-minute shifts, which was not long. Even in normal conditions it took a few minutes to get a feel for how a ship was responding. It was always a little different. On my first go, the mate gave me a compass course to steer: 020°. On clear nights I'd come to learn how to use stars to see how the bow was moving, or sight landmarks as a reference to match the ordered compass course. I'd been getting better at steering, learning how to sense the direction of the relative wind and I'd even started to get a genuine feel for how the ship moved under my feet. I thought I was becoming a good helmsman. In the havoc of that weather, there were no stars visible or anything for relative bearings—all I could do was stare straight at the compass, but the ship was moving so much that the card spun wildly in its fluid. The binnacle wasn't gimballed, so sometimes there'd be so much movement inside that I saw the compass's white belly—the card tilted so far away that I couldn't read the numbers at all, and with the rain and spray I could barely see through the glass to look at the compass in the first place. Soon I just

tried to keep my eyes only on the largest, cardinal arrows, steering closer to north than to east. In normal conditions it's possible to steer within five degrees or so of a given compass course, but that night I was barely able to keep the ship within forty degrees as the ship lurched and heeled and swerved. I was spinning the wheel constantly, trying to keep the ship on course and trying to remember how much wheel I had given in which direction so I could compensate. The captain and all the officers were on the bridge, holding on inside the navigation house. When I was too far off course, the captain would bang on the glass with his ring. As if I didn't know that I was off. When a new helmsman relieved me, the shift over, I went below and collapsed.

The next morning I took another trick at the wheel, but the night of trying to stay in my bunk and the constant slamming of shoulders and elbows and knees had taken its toll. I'd never imagined what kind of angles a ship of that size could achieve: hanging lamps touching the overheads to which they were hooked, pencils tipped out of vertical holders, and me, leaning so far over with a roll of the ship, that with my legs spread I touched my elbow to the deck. I heard sounds of dishes and pots clinking in their fiddles, and harness carabineers dinging on bulkheads. But daybreak always felt better, no matter how snotty the weather, so I got psyched to take the wheel the next day, eager to prove myself and do better than before. When I got on the helm, though, I just couldn't get the hang of it. I spun the wheel recklessly. I lost my train of thought, forgot which way I wanted to turn it. The captain ordered me off. The second mate stepped in and brought it back to somewhat of a course before I got the ship into real trouble. The captain did not request I return to duty at the helm. Conditions were too aggressive for tact or feelings.

In Irving Johnson's historic film *Around Cape Horn*, he describes how sailors will put themselves at extraordinary risk for the good of a ship in rough weather. 'It's some kind of hypnotism,' he said. I suppose this is what we now call endorphins or adrenalin. When

you put a few young sailors out in a storm, you better give them a clear task and command them to come back inside when they're done. I can remember multiple occasions when I was out in heavy weather and made up things to do—relashing ropes, recoiling lines, anything to stay out there longer. For what? To feel important, necessary, to feel the aggression. I can't remember any greater exhilaration in my lifetime than going out into heavy weather with a couple shipmates and doing a job for the good of the ship.

In that typhoon of my first voyage, the captain asked the bosun to get a couple people to brace the yards. I was honored when the bosun woke me up—especially since I had been so crushed by my failure at the wheel that morning. We went out on deck and got chucked around, absolutely soaked, but we did what we had to and made it back in. When we returned to the mess hall, you couldn't shut us up. We were too amped. It was the middle of the night and normally you'd try to be quiet, but we were singing away and jabbering about what it was like out there, shoveling down peanut butter cookies like we hadn't eaten for months. We didn't really care if people woke up and heard us, because then they'd know that we'd been out on deck, working in this weather. I know that's immature, but that's how it was—and I'm not sure I've grown completely out of it. Even the bosun, who'd been through a few storms before, was keen to talk it up. 'We did our damn duty out there, boys!' he shouted. We analyzed every moment, every bit of action, like when we all had to jump up in the rigging to avoid a big wash of water on the deck. The ship had rolled hard, the rail under foam, and the student with us hadn't got his legs around a ratline in time, so his body swung so far inboard that his boots nearly touched the top of the house top. 'Jamie-kid, you were utterly, fuckin' horizontal!' the bosun shouted. While we were bracing, the captain had come on deck to watch us. He wore a long black oilskin coat. When we finished the job, he waved at us to get inside, to not bother coiling the lines, probably because he knew they'd just be washed off the pins anyway.

Eventually, the bosun and the others went below. The mess was pretty dark, lit only with the red safety light. I was listening to the weather outside and watching the pendulum rocking of a rain jacket on a hook, when we collided with a wall of wave. The ship stumbled, and I heard a bang in the galley.

I made my way in, timing my steps with the roll. I turned on the light. A five gallon bucket of cooking oil had jumped out of its fiddles, broken off its lid, and was pouring its contents all over the galley sole. It must've been two in the morning, and I knew I could just turn the light off and go below without anyone knowing I'd seen it. As ridiculous as it sounds now, I was worried that if the weather suddenly cleared I was going to have to teach the next day, and I wasn't ready at all for my next class.

Then came one of my finer moments. Maybe part of it was to get in the cook's favor—that's probably true—I always had a thing for ship's cooks, but I also knew it was for the good of all hands to keep her happy and safe, so breakfast could actually happen. Someone was going to have to clean it up.

I first tried to soak up the spill with a sponge. This didn't work. The oil was just all over the place. As the ship lurched I slid all over the galley. So I rigged a clip-in system with ropes from the stove to the sink so I wouldn't slide everywhere and I could squeegee the oil into a dustpan and pour it back into the bucket. I had to lift up the rubber no-slip mats because they were soaked in every little hole. Because of the weather I couldn't put them out on deck to hose them down, like we normally did, so I stacked them on the sink, but they hung over and dripped then slid off just when my head was underneath. There were about two dozen other buckets of oils and sauces, so the spill got under all of them, too, which required I remove their lashings but also keep them from sliding all over and busting off their own lids.

When I finally got the majority of the oil up, the sole was still slippery as hell, so I tried to cut it with dish soap and rinse it down with fresh water. All of my good foul weather gear got covered in oil and soap and it was in my hair. I felt my knee swelling up. It took me over three hours to clean it up—and I didn't even get it all. I'd become a man-sized wick, so I had to take a shower before lying down anywhere. Showering is nearly impossible in seas like that, I can assure you, because the water doesn't flow, then it doesn't drain, and you're slipping all over with just two little handles to hold on to. Then an especially big roll comes and the shower curtain comes in and sticks to you and you get chucked around in there as the ship pitches in the other direction. Then you bang your knee and one of the handles rips right out of the bulkhead. I screamed for it all to stop—anything for just a five-minute pause. I threw my clothes in the garbage, then when the weather cleared I chucked them overboard. I never got the oil completely out of the straps of my harness. It stank and dripped for the rest of the voyage. One afternoon I even clipped it onto a length of rope and dragged it off the stern for an hour, but with no effect. Then I soaked it overnight in bleach, and this didn't work either.

Some sailors in history navigated their ship around Cape Horn when all the officers got sick with scurvy, others dove into Arctic waters to save a drowning shipmate. I, Joel Howard Brown, cleaned up a spill of cooking oil on the edge of a typhoon. Bow before me, your hero of the Seven Seas!

Last fall I received a letter from Micah Blois, an old shipmate from France. We sailed together in our late twenties aboard the schooner *Ellen*. Back then I had a full head of hair. Harry was on board, too, and skinny as a rail. I don't know how Micah's aged, but he used to have a very boyish face and innocent, wide blue eyes. One night—it's always at night—the three of us were sitting in the salon. We were chowing down after a long few



hours of striking sail in gale-force winds. Suddenly we heard an explosion on the bow, then a deafening whack of canvas. We ran out of the compartment and saw that the jib sheet had parted, so the canvas waved in the air, and its back corner, a reinforced bronze ring, swung through the sky like a wrecking ball. Another crewmember was already on the halyard so we three ran to the downhaul, keeping our heads down. We pulled the luff of the sail to the bowsprit and tied it off, but the rest of the jib, still unbridled, thundered to leeward, as if it were a sixty-foot piece of corrugated iron shaken around like a paper flag. The captain turned on the spreader lights, bright white spots from above, which made me feel like we were on a stage, made the sea even more black, more outside and farther away, if that makes any sense—as if we were performing on the edge of a cliff. Micah, Harry, and I jumped out on the bowsprit and tackled that goddamn jib. We punched it and grappled it and shoved some canvas between our bodies and the spar, then dove out to grab more of the sail. The bowsprit plunged into the sea at intervals, dunking us at times up to our chests, so deep that I was swimming and felt no connection to any part of the ship, while at other times, the bowsprit fell suddenly and left us suspended in air, clinging only to that bastard jib, and waiting for the widow's net to heave back up. We muscled and cursed and tamed that sail, tied it up and lashed it and lashed it again, until it would've taken a hatchet to part the furl from the bowsprit. When we got back to the deck, we found that Micah had dislocated his shoulder. I had a black eye and a cut ear from a whack from the footrope, and Harry had both of his boots sucked clean off. None of us had noticed any of this while we were out there.

In Micah's careful English script, he wrote in his letter:

Dear Joel,

Have not spoken with you in so many years or even written in English in a long time. You are still sailing? A skipper by now? Or you are a professor? I'm

married with three children and have a good position on a tug vessel. This pays well but gives me still steady time ashore. I have two daughters and one son. I came upon this recently by I think one of your American poets and thought of you and Harry. I would like again the three of us out on the bowsprit in forty knots, hauling in the broken jib.

Regards,  
Micah

He photocopied a portion of a poem, by Whitman, and folded it into the envelope. I taped it up this morning onto the bulkhead of *Petrel*:

Passage, immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!  
Away O soul! hoist instantly the anchor!

Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail!  
Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough?  
Have we not grovel'd here long enough, eating and drinking like mere brutes?  
Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books long enough?

Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,  
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,  
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,  
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

## 15 days until departure

Peter Vasser is an older guy who stops by my boat almost every afternoon now. He's the man I mentioned who was looking at my rudder post. Many years ago he circumnavigated with his wife and later crossed the North Atlantic a couple times solo. I don't know what he thinks of me, but he's one of the few people I've told about my full intentions. He often stops by to watch and give me a few words of advice. Everyone always has a few words, but since he's actually done it and seems pretty level-headed, well, there's no reason for me not to listen to him.

What's weird about all of this preparation, all of the work I've been doing on the boat, all of the magazines and books I've been reading, and all of the consulting I've been doing with professionals, is that no one seems to actually *know*. I mean, there just seems to be so few real, concrete answers with boats. Part of me wants to go on this voyage just to see who was right. For example, two different professional riggers have told me two entirely opposite things about my chainplates. And when I asked the electrician—the guy in town who everyone recommends—about what types of batteries to get, he said: 'Mr Brown, everything I thought I understood about batteries has changed over the last couple years. It's got all turned over in my head. I don't know what to think now. I guess my current thinking is to go with the AGMs if you're sticking with the 12 volt system...'

Again, this is a professional at the top of his field. No seems to know anything for sure. It's gotten to the point where if someone's really confident, I don't trust him and want a second opinion. I guess that's how it is with most things, though. You want someone to tell you the answer, so you can move on to the next thing. Just to tell you what to do—clean and simple. But it never is. As you grow older, what you thought you knew, what seemed like good advice, just keeps peeling away. Your heroes kill themselves, your favorite authors turn out to be plagiarists, kind people turn out to be child-molesters. At some point you just have to pick, to act, trust your common sense, your own judgment: so you can move on. Or you just end up paralyzed. Which is what I've been for the last decade—a quarter of my life.

Anyway, Peter Vasser was telling me that what I should really think about is *light air*. 'Everybody worries about storms,' he said. 'They should, of course, but there's not much you can do once you're in it. After you're in it. You make your boat sound. There's a couple strategies. But what's really a bitch, the meanest bitch is the light air. Where the singlehanders lose their mind. It's the flat ass calms. When you make five miles in three days. The sails wearing themselves down. Blocks snapping. Boat's rolling. Can't sleep because of the noise and you start to obsess about how you're going to run out of food, out of water, out of electrical power. How you're going to rot in mid-ocean. Maybe you just saw a merchant ship and he didn't respond to your radio call. Joel. You got to make sure you know how to make this boat move in light air. What do you have for light air, downwind gear? You know the self-steering gear won't work in light air, right? Do you have a spinnaker? A whisker pole? You got to know how to keep this baby moving in light air, Joel. Once you get yourself in irons, you're in for it. You got to learn how to make your own wind where there's jack nothing.'

Shipyard Tom had walked over by then, to borrow my socket set. He told about a singlehander that he read about who got becalmed in the middle of the Pacific for nearly three weeks. Sat there without a breath of wind. The guy completely lost it. He went so nuts that he set his own boat on fire and only came to his senses when he was in his lifeboat watching the flames start to eat away the cabintop. He put the fire out just before it got to the fuel tank. He lost half of his sails and all of his electronics. The wind filled in that very night. He was able to limp to Samoa before a favorable breeze.

I'm not completely unprepared for light air, but I guess the truth is, on the big ships, we might suffer no wind for a day or two, but eventually we'd put the engine on if it got too bad. We usually had some kind of schedule to keep.

I remember an afternoon in the Pacific on my first voyage. The wind was almost imperceptible. Maybe we were making one knot, but I doubt even that. I spat into the water, and it just sat there on the surface. Students had been writing 'calm' in the logbook column for observed wave height. The sails slat, rubbed against wire, and the blocks flopped and clapped against iron or the deck. Occasionally, the ship rolled from some swell that came from an unknown disturbance thousands of miles away. The canvas sucked back in the opposite direction, slapping shrouds and clanging wire and blocks. I'd never expected that a sailing ship could be so much louder when there's no wind, as opposed to when there is some. There's way more noise in storms, but I realized then that there's a difference in the sound wind makes *on the ship*—going through and around the material of the boat—compared to the sound the ship makes *on itself*, in the absence of any breeze: the sudden jolts of shackles, the unsteady shifting of steel booms, and the rubbing of canvas on the rigging.

14 days until departure

Peter Vasser came by to help me paint the boot stripe. He told me this story: ‘This happened one morning while I was sleeping. Mid-Atlantic on my way to Le Havre. I had a self-steering system. Superb. A lot like the one you just put on. I was running with only a storm jib before about thirty knots, in eight to ten foot seas. I’d only been asleep for twenty minutes or so when the jib started luffing. Woke me up. Now this sort of things was rare in my boat. Steering gear never failed. I woke up, miffed, thinking “since when is the blasted steering gear doing this to me?” Wasn’t any wind shift or a big change in seas. Half asleep, I took the tiller. Then I looked behind me—it was a clear day, just the wind blowing hard—and I saw a gigantic orange container ship bearing right down on me, within a mile. The steering gear was jibing me away from its direct path. I’m not a big believer in guardian angels, Joel. Or God, or any of that shit. You take what you want from this, but, make sure you realize, Joel, that a big ship can absolutely run down a small boat in the open ocean, during the day, and it can happen very, very quickly. Hand me that tin of thinner, will ya?’

### 12 days until departure

The boat is in the water. And floating! The mast is stepped, the boat rigged. It all went pretty smoothly. The guy who runs the shipyard made me feel like an ass, ordering me around as he lifted the boat and the mast with his crane, but I expected as much. *Petrel* just looks so gorgeous floating there, ready to go. Still so much to do, but now, once I bend the sails on, I'll actually be able to take the boat out for a trial or two.

First I've got to clean up the area where it was parked on land. You'd be amazed at how much crap I've been using, the amount of trash I made while getting the boat together. Varnishes, thinners, acetones, resins, oils, and all manner of plastic containers, rags, plastic gloves, cardboard packaging, and disposable brushes all went right into the trash. I even, shamefully, put some fluids down the sewage grate when no one else was working at the yard. I feel like I spend an hour every night cleaning up all of the garbage I make.

One thing I'm especially looking forward to is the feeling of flicking something overboard in the middle of the ocean. It has no equivalent to anything I've experienced on land, and I used to adore it.

How we disposed of trash at sea was one of the largest shocks to a neophyte and some people had a pretty tough time of it. Maybe it's different nowadays with the

heightened sense of environmentalism—but I suspect life at sea on the big ships isn't much different—and it certainly won't be on *Petrel*.

On my first voyage on that Canadian tall ship we had a young and lovely science teacher who'd got married just before coming aboard. She wore dolphin T-shirts and carried around glossy sea turtle identification posters. Students in her class presented 'creature features' and wrote letters for environmental campaigns. Blonde and blue-eyed, from somewhere in the middle of Canada, she was a devout Christian. The world for Cathy was a loving and positive place and this trip to sea was her big adventure before she returned to her new husband—a blonde, blue-eyed man who worked earnestly in a human resources firm—and to her home where she'd go back to teaching school and fulfill her ecological and spiritual duty of making several sunny children.

Somewhere in the middle of the South Pacific, well south of Hawaii and our first rough passage, the director took a few of us teachers up on top of the navigation house and brought out some cold beers. This was extraordinary to me, not just because I wondered where he got them and how he kept them cold, but because the students were walking around just below us. He pointed out that they couldn't see what we were doing, we'd have plenty of warning if they decided to climb up, and even then, how would they know it wasn't a soda? He'd been aboard for many semesters and was a firm believer that the adults needed and deserved certain perks. When students complained about certain inequities or hierarchies in privilege, such as no curfew in port for staff, he would say to the kids: 'Your experience. My life.' I only came to understand this after I'd been sailing for a few years.

Anyway, who was I to question? It was glorious to be under the stars with a couple new friends, leaning on the lifeboat, sailing out there in the Pacific. The square sails were up and we were sipping cold beers, toasting to the Southern Cross. We chatted about all



sorts of fine things until the director finished his drink and crumpled his can very slowly. There was a large half-moon rising off our port side, slowly transforming from an orange-rust color to a chalky white. The moon lit the director's face. His eyes narrowed and his lips flattened. He turned and looked at the science teacher and said: 'Cathy, this is going to break your heart.' He hurled the can high into the air, where I'm certain it encountered some odd convection thermal, because it hung there, twirling, the sharp aluminum edges glinting in the moonlight. The can hung in the air long enough for me to see Cathy's open-mouthed horror and to look back at the director's smile, his head leaning back with pleasure, his wrist flicking past his knee with the follow-through of the toss. Cathy remained stunned, until, at last, the can hit the surface with a tinny plink. It was a calm night, with small seas. The can floated astern, where it was lit by the moon, then the ship's stern light, and then by the moon again, until seemingly a mile or two away, long past where our wake had been erased, I lost sight of it.

Cathy stared at the director, her mouth still open. Her lips began to quiver and tears welled. 'You'll have to excuse me,' she said. She was sitting cross-legged and unfolded herself as she stood up in one easy motion. She walked over to the ladder and was about to turn toward us to walk down, but then she remembered she had a beer of her own in hand, with only a sip or two taken from it. I could tell she was grappling with the dilemma. She couldn't let the students see her holding a beer, and it's not like she had a bag with her. She didn't even have pockets. She walked back over to us and placed the can next to me. 'Would you watch this, please?' She walked down the ladder, leaving us speechless until she reappeared a few minutes later with a bag of supplies. In an opaque sample jar she poured the beer—I assumed so she could drain it into the sinks below without being discovered. All we had aboard were clear bags, so she wrapped a scrap of paper around the

can and neatly taped it around the edge before cramming it into the plastic and tying the bag firmly with extra knots. She walked back down the ladder.

The director laughed during all of this, unabashedly, in glory. He was actually a really good guy. I forgave him that bit of unreasonable sadism, because that's the worst thing I ever saw him do. I think it was also something he felt really bad about later. He just couldn't help himself.

The thing is, what else were we going to do with the garbage? You want us to dump it at some remote island that we visit? Where do you think they're going to put it? The islanders would just burn it or float it off to leeward. The international MARPOL law of the sea, agreed upon by something like a hundred nations—I assume it hasn't changed—is that you have to be three nautical miles offshore before you can dump any food waste, sewage, grey water, or any garbage that doesn't float and is smaller than one inch. At twelve miles from land, it's acceptable to dump nearly any garbage that sinks, like metal and glass. At twenty-five miles, you can send it all overboard, anything your little heart wants to get rid of as long as it isn't plastic, including loading pallets, wicker chairs, dead batteries cased in metal, old stoves, generators, anything you can lift over the rail. Remove the toothbrushes and the plastic bags and sink your whole damn ship and see if anybody cares.

Getting rid of trash was one of my favorite jobs at sea. Which is kind of bizarre, I know, since my job, what I'd done since at the Nat Walker House, is to collect. I mean, as a curator or in acquisitions, I gathered historic objects, treated them carefully, tried to preserve them for future generations—and I believe in that genuinely. Friends call me up about their old crap to find out if it's worth saving, and I usually, depending on what it is, of course, tell them they should keep it around. Yet aboard ship, at sea, I just loved to lighten the vessel and the materials things we had. I used to hustle to get the opportunity to take an entire rubbish bin up on deck and dump it over the rail. I'd watch the cracked eggs and

coffee grinds and cardboard and tomato sauce cans slide out of the bin and smack onto the surface, then slide aft and to leeward after splashing a blast of scent at those standing and steering on the quarterdeck. In one motion the ship was cleaner and thirty pounds lighter. I had no doubt the trash would sink in a matter of minutes. Not many people liked this job, perhaps their noses were too sensitive. Often I even scrubbed the garbage can with some soap or bleach in order to make the cook even happier.

It's not like I strived to *make* rubbish or to waste things. Part of the joy of being at sea was consuming less. Aboard ship we were good about using as little as possible: rinsing and re-using Ziploc bags, limiting paper towels and toilet paper, and buying in bulk. We didn't print many things off on a computer, we monitored our fresh water use carefully, we used as few electric lights and appliances as possible, and when we were sailing we were powered solely by the wind. Within a 'green arithmetic' the ship did enormously better than your average dormitory or hotel on land. But let's erase any idea that the sail-training vessel, any ship or boat for that matter, was, is, a bastion of environmental ethics. Chemicals, oils, paints, solvents, lubricants—all manner of petroleum and fish-killing products are used at sea on a daily basis, some of which trickles into the water, both unintentionally and intentionally. It was a rare engineer who didn't recite 'Dilution is the solution to pollution' as a mantra. Spend a few hours with an outboard engine and you'll have to make some concessions as to your environmentalist ideals.

One summer, when I was twenty-nine years old, I worked as a teacher and second mate on a sail-training vessel that sailed in the Hudson River and the Chesapeake Bay. It was built in the 1960s with money raised by a folk-singer. The ship's primary mission was to teach urban school kids about water quality, marine biology, maritime history, and environmental issues. So as not to pollute the water, they used only buckets of cedar shavings for a toilet. I felt like I was a hamster when I relieved myself below, and I was

once involved in emptying these buckets on shore, which felt like I was mucking out the rhino pen at the zoo. This ship also has a wood stove, which seems like a nice wholesome thing to have, avoiding diesel or dirty coal or flammable propane fumes. But imagine a city kid wielding an axe trying to split a log, while another city kid thinks it would be a good idea to hold said log because the ship was rolling too much for it to stay still on the old wooden stand. I'm not saying I didn't have immense respect for that ship's mission. To me that vessel was like the West Virginian love communes that weave their own clothes out of hemp that's been fertilized by their own feces. I envy and value their endeavor, but I don't want to live there.

Of course I care deeply about the health of the oceans and the drop in fish stocks, the loss of coral reefs and wetlands and dune systems. Don't judge me too harshly here. But if I think too hard about it, I just get so depressed—the apocalypse of global warming and rain forests and endangered species and just all of it. Being at sea teaches you about conservation by necessity, the simple appreciation of how little you actually require to live comfortably. On my boat I'm going to have solar panels and a wind vane self-steering system, and I'll try to use my engine as little as possible. Instead of carrying fifty gallons of water, I'll catch rainwater off the sail. I'll shave, shower, and do dishes with buckets right from the sea.

One of the reasons I forgive my first director's sadism with poor Cathy is that I had a similar unhealthy pleasure trying to teach students about food. We often trailed a line astern and occasionally caught wonderful meals, like mahi-mahi, wahoo, sea bass, and tuna. Fishing was an endless conversation piece and a diversion, but I tried not to stream a line if I knew the cook was unwilling to prepare it if we caught one. And then here was my sadistic pleasure: I loved catching a fish and bashing its head with a belaying pin in front of a bunch of students. Those fish that we caught were colorful and powerful, and it was a

thrill to pull one up. I had an atavistic 'me, hunter' feeling. I apologized to the fish in an *Old Man and the Sea* sort of way, and then, at the end of a long swing from above my head, I crushed its skull hard and clean. Gave it a whack, just aft the eye. I tried to kill it immediately, but just before rigor mortis it usually quivered with a few wet jittery smacks of its tail. If there was a good science teacher on board, he or she would dissect the fish and teach the students about anatomy while filleting the meat to send down to the galley. If the science teacher was squeamish, I'd do it myself, though I usually made an ugly job of it. I couldn't teach all that much to the anatomy. I didn't know anything apart from the gills, heart, and stomach contents, so I usually sent a student to retrieve a field guide and an ichthyology textbook so as to lead me and the onlookers through the process.

That is where fish come from. We catch it, we kill it, and then we eat it. Discussions would always erupt over the dinner table about vegetarianism and meat and wild food and killing, and I thought that was good. Whatever they decided.

Once in the Gulf of Maine our lure was skipping too close to the surface and a giant Black-backed Gull chomped on it. By the time we reeled it in the bird was dead. I felt awful. I brought it on board to dissect it, to try to rationalize some use out of the killing, but the majority of the students were too grossed out to learn anything. Only one student remained with me for the whole ham-fisted surgery, and she wanted to take out the brain, which was even too much for me.

On *Petrel* I'm going to fish as often as I can, because it's free, fresh, nutritious food. It'll be a problem preserving the meat and wasting too much, but hopefully I'll be visited often by smaller flying fish and squids that I can fry up and eat whole. And what's nice is that whatever I don't finish, I'll throw right into the sea where most of it will be chomped up by a passing critter before it even reaches the bottom. There's just something about throwing stuff overboard and watching it sink or float astern.

And even if I haven't chucked anything over, I can lean on the rail and watch a boat's wake forever, whether we're motoring or sailing—in any condition. I've not seen anything as beautiful as a ship's wake at night, when it's leaving a foaming trail of pale blue bioluminescence, ever-changing and metaphoric and mesmerizing. Vera used to say the wake is the sailor's campfire.

I might as well tell you about her, Vera, because if I really am trying to be honest, she's as much a part of the reason for my attempting this circumnavigation as anything else. I mentioned her when I was telling you about my man-overboard dream. Vera is the woman I love more than any other person on this Earth. She dumped me years ago, but I still love her so much that she's no longer real to me. My current girlfriend knows about her—but we never talk about it, of course. Vera has now become a fictional character who lives in Portland, Maine—who I talk to once every couple years then destroy the phone number or email for fear I'm going to obsess about it and keep contacting her. I first met her on one of my last voyages, before I came ashore. I was twenty-nine and she was twenty-five. I'd dated a few women after Chloe, but nothing serious. When I met Vera she was a deckhand and I was teaching. She was walking down the passageway below, newly arrived. She introduced herself to me. 'You must be Joel. I'm Vera. This ship is fantastic!' I fell in love with her immediately, at first sight. I assure you that sort of thing actually does happen. We were drawn to each other and I decided to stand the same watch as hers so we had a reason to spend time together and be awake at the same hours. We started to get together during a particularly long passage where we didn't see land or any other ships for a couple weeks.

She and I began a contest. It started with something small. We were each eating a bowl of peach cobbler, leaning on the rail. I wanted to make her laugh so when I finished mine I looked around like a secret agent, then let the spoon drop overboard. It floated and

bobbed away from us (or we left it, but you rarely think of it that way). She thought it was hilarious. We went on talking about something else, then she finished her cobbler and licked the bowl clean. After looking around in the same manner that I did, she dropped the bowl into the water. This also floated and we watched it swish astern.

The following morning I countered by dropping a serving tray into the sea, in the guise of brushing muffin crumbs over the rail. ‘Oops,’ I whispered over to her. We continued, escalating over several days. She took off one of my socks and threw it over. I chucked over one of her shoes. She threw over my favorite hat. I threw over her T-shirt. We did this all covertly. The unspoken rules were that no one but the two of us could see the act, but if someone was standing at the stern, staring at the wake, and happened to see the object floating by, not knowing where it came from—all the funnier. Dental floss, papers, pancakes, a pair of sunglasses, underwear, a bra, an entire watermelon. One afternoon I was reading a book, one that I had to read to prepare for a class. With two fingers she reached below the spine of the text. In one swooping arc, she flicked it overboard. Suddenly it wasn’t that important that I read it. The game was addictive. Her towel. My camera. Her Walkman. My pillow. Our address books.

Finally, in a midnight frenzy, Vera and I hurled overboard a stapler, a hole puncher, a coil of rope, a ship’s plaque, a stack of papers I had to grade, her passport, my passport, and then the overhead projector. Vera heaved the appliance high into the air, like a shot put, and it dropped and splashed and as we together watched it founder in a wake of bubbles, she said, laughing, beautiful, out of breath: ‘Truce. Okay. We’ve got to stop.’

When we got to shore she left me and didn’t look back.

Over the years I’ve tried everything I could think of to get her to love me again. Is there a part of me that wonders if she might look at me differently if I were a solo circumnavigator? The truth? Yes.

10 days until departure

I just went for my first sail. The engine was a little slow to get going, but seems to be running fine now. I went out by myself. It wasn't pretty, but I tacked and gybed and sailed *Petrel* out into the Sound alone and back to the dock without incident. I mean, I did everything really slow—it probably was painful for anyone who was watching—but I made it. Granted, I had easy conditions, calm seas, a steady, light breeze. But still, it's a success. Even that the boat is still floating feels like I'm farther along than I actually thought I'd get. I did have a little trouble getting back into my slip—one of the shipyard guys had to help me out—he's probably laughing about it with his buddies, but I don't care, whatever. I'm going out with Peter Vasser tomorrow. He's going to help me set up the wind vane self-steering and take a look at the rig tension.



9 days until departure

The bracket for my marine toilet finally arrived in the mail today. Thirty-five bucks for two metal brackets and four screws. I wasn't going to have a toilet at all. I was just going to use a bucket. When I bought the boat, it had a holding tank and a flushing toilet, plumbing that brought sea water in and pumped sewage out, but I removed all of that. I wanted to close up all the seacocks I could. I'd like to worry about as few holes in the boat as possible. But then I decided to get one of those port-a-potties, with a removable container at the bottom, like a bedpan, that you empty over the side. I thought it would be good in case my girlfriend wants to come aboard, or if I have any visitors. Of course, the port-a-pottie didn't come with any way to keep it fastened in place, to keep it from rolling around when the boat does. So I had to order this special part that was supposed to be here a month ago. I'll install it this afternoon. Then the next thing is to sort out where to store and secure the jugs of spare water and fuel.

## 7 days until departure

I chose the name *Petrel* because of one particular night at sea many years ago. It was one of my first nights as a watch officer, being in charge of the deck on my own. There were heavy seas and decent winds, but everything was going okay. The captain hadn't come up during my time at the con, so that felt good, meaning he had some trust in me. Fortunately there was no shipping traffic worth waking him up for. I remember we were sailing only under a double-reefed main, and the staysail. No foresail at all—a very conservative sail plan. In the middle of the watch Kale and I were standing back aft. Kale was my deckhand. A student, Lyndsie, was at the helm. We weren't talking at all because we were sort of in that middle-of-watch lull—cold and numb and too early to allow yourself to start thinking about going to bed. Kale and I were wearing our full black foulies and black sou'westers. The rain had been coming intermittently. It was so overcast and blustery that I just stopped bothering to track the squalls on the radar. We'd get gusts of thirty or thirty-five knots, and we just heeled into them and rode the increase in speed. Lyndsie was getting a good feel for how to anticipate the weather helm when it came.

It was still twenty minutes or so until I was to plot the next fix when Kale noticed a bird sitting in the lifeboat. It was lit up by the ship's stern light: a tiny ash grey seabird, sitting completely still. Kale said it was a female Storm Petrel, a 'Mother Carey's Chicken.'

The bird looked terrified and every once and a while she would try to move but kept losing her footing on the slippery surface of the boat. Her webbed, grey-blue feet couldn't get a grip.

'She sick?' I said.

'Maybe,' Kale said. 'Or maybe stopped to get a rest. Wonder if she can't fly, y'know. Boat's tilted so there's no wind for her. Keeps trying to get going. Let's give her some space. We're probably freaking her out.'

So we did, we stepped away and watched her. The petrel would rest, then scramble for a few steps, lift her wings, but couldn't seem to go anywhere, so she'd stop. As if to think up a new strategy. We had another gust and I looked forward just to make sure everything was okay. I decided to bring the lookouts back to midships. We didn't need them all the way up there. There wasn't anything to see, no traffic, and I felt better being able to keep an eye on them since we'd been taking green seas over the bow now and again. It was a particularly dark night, too, so I was nervous when I couldn't see them up there. The students came aft by the main mast and clipped in. After I plotted our position, I went back up by the wheel and asked Kale if the bird was still there.

'Yeah. She's over there, out of the light. But I think I'm going to give her a lift.'

Kale was a big guy, six-four or something, with these thick hands, and he reached into the life boat and gently placed his palm over the bird, from behind it, almost as if he was petting its back, then he sort of smothered her and slid his other hand under the belly. Kale was really good with that kind of stuff. He brought it over to us, cupped into his palm. The bird had black eyes, a squat tube nose, and a white line of feathers above the tail. Kale said the word 'petrel' was derived from St Peter, because they sort of patter over the surface. Maybe the bird was terrified, frozen with fear, but she looked peaceful in his hand—maybe there was something in the warmth of his skin? With one finger I touched

the bird's wing. I could feel how light, how fragile she was. Kale made sure Lyndsie got a good look at the petrel, too, then he went over to the rail and lifted the bird, sort of half tossed her. She flew away like how a bumble-bee will leave a room when it finally finds an open window—seemed to smell the air, woke up, quickened, and then she was gone. I'm not sure how Kale or Lyndsie felt, but I was just so struck, so moved, by how that little storm petrel flew into the dark, jumping into the gale on the wing, as if it were thinking, 'Ah, thank God. Now I'm safe.'

2 days until departure

On the phone yesterday, my brother told me that I'm having a midlife crisis. Maybe that's true. I don't know. I'll be turning forty pretty soon, and I do remember how thirty hit me pretty hard. I was on the schooner *Bellatrix*, at anchor off St Lucia, just a few days before that birthday. I wanted to do something that I wouldn't be able to do after another thirty years in this body. I guess some people skydive to commemorate these milestones, or buy fast cars—things like that. I'd been aboard for about a week. Though I'd signed a contract for five months, I already felt like it was time for me to come ashore, to get a stable job and try to get a girlfriend—just someone kind, and predictable. I was ready to have my own place on land and have my mail going to me instead of my parents, to not have to live in random places for only a few months at a time. I wanted a decent salary and a desk job where I could work with artifacts and no one would bother me. I wanted to get up in the morning when I felt like it, read a newspaper, and have a cup of coffee. I sort of knew this when I took that job on *Bellatrix*, that it was going to be my last stint at sea for a while. I didn't expect that it would be almost ten years before I went back out, though. I didn't know that this would be the story of a man who did nothing worth noting from age thirty to thirty-nine.

Anyway, after I came aboard, the second mate told me how he'd jumped off the spreaders. I wanted to do it, too.

So one morning we were at a peaceful anchorage and working on various deck projects. The ship was in-between trips so we carried no students. A deckhand, Ronnie, was working aloft, so I climbed up and offered to help. As we worked, I told him I was thinking about jumping from up there. Telling him that, saying it aloud, got me that much closer to actually doing it.

'Really? Right now?' he said.

'Thinking about it.'

It was a clear day, the water turquoise, the surrounding hills a cactus green. There were a few charter yachts in our bay, but none close by. I knew we were in at least forty feet of water, so there'd be no problem with me hitting the bottom. Before I went aloft, I'd changed into a bathing suit and put on my canvas sneakers. I helped Ronnie with his project, switching out a halyard block, until the cook rang the bell for lunch.

'So you going to jump?' he said.

'Going to try.'

'Now?'

'No. I'll wait until everyone's below.'

He climbed down, looked up at me for a few seconds, waved, then went below to the salon to eat. Soon the deck was clear of people, and I trusted him to not say anything to the rest of the crew.

The *Bellatrix* didn't have any yards or crow's nests or anything like that, just a set of small crosstrees at the coupling of the mast so one or two people could stand and handle the topsail. Extending out and aft, horizontally from these crosstrees at about a thirty-degree angle to the beam of the ship, were two narrow spreaders, two long pieces of wood that

attached to wire backstays. The backstays extended from the top of the mast down to the deck, in order to stabilize the rig. I took off my harness and left it clipped into a bar around the mast. With nothing to hold on to, I shuffled tightrope style out to the end of the spreader, where I could grab on to the stay. There wasn't much wind, but enough to flutter the nylon flag directly beneath my feet.

I was mostly afraid of not clearing the rail. It required a fair leap outboard. And I was also worried that I'd hit the surface of the water in any way besides feet first. I know people swan dive from much greater heights, but I wasn't confident of my skill here, and I only saw myself landing flush on my back and breaking my neck. When documentaries talk about people dying from jumping off bridges, they always say how from that height the surface of the water might as well be a sheet of concrete.

Because I'm so damn sensitive to what other people think of me, telling someone that I'm going to do something often helps me get it done. Like when I wanted to make sure I was going to participate in a distance running event, all I had to do was tell a friend I'd entered, which ensured I wouldn't back out. As I've grown older, I've recognized this, so I try not to say things aloud unless I'm certain that I want to do it. Like I don't say 'I'll never drink again.' With my circumnavigation I've been extremely wary about announcing my plans. So much might still happen to keep me from even getting off the dock on Monday, and if I do actually get underway and voyaging, who knows if I'll be able to complete the trip?

My brother told me this story of a friend of his who was a triathlete and a mountain climber. His name was Jared and he decided he wanted to swim the English Channel. He was an excellent swimmer; it was his best event in his triathlons. He trained for over six months, paddling in the frigid waters of San Francisco Bay, his best match to the waters of the channel. He read every article, website, and essay on the topic and he chose the

absolute best time of year for the attempt. Jared invited my brother and a few other friends to travel with him to Dover, then to ride across in the safety boat. My brother and his family decided to make a holiday of it. After they got there, Jared had to wait a few days for the right weather, but then he got the green light. The next morning at 0315, he slid down his goggles and waded into the water off Shakespeare's Cliff. The safety boat stood by, off the beach. He swam a few solid strokes. Then he stopped. He started treading water. 'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I just don't think I can do this.'

His friends urged him on. 'Don't worry,' they soothed. 'You just need to swim a mile or two to get into it,' and 'You got it, Jar. No worries. You can do this.' Then: 'You've worked too hard to bail out now.'

No amount of cajoling could get him to swim. He floated over to the boat and grabbed the gunwale. He was shivering. His friends tried to motivate him, but meanwhile valuable time was being wasted, minutes of favorable tide and current. And then Jared said he got a cramp. He said he'd try again tomorrow and paddled limply back to the beach. The next day the weather was poor and so was the next. On the third morning it was acceptable again, which was good because this was the last day my brother could go with him. Jared waded into the water, swam maybe five hundred yards, then stopped and turned around. He simply could not go through with it. He couldn't put down his fears, regardless of the other things he'd done—he'd completed a full Ironman triathlon just a few years previous, and he'd solo-climbed Ecuador's Mount Cayambe. Yet with this Channel swim, his friends could do nothing to get him to venture any farther. He flew home the next day.

What if that happens to me? I mean, what if on Monday, my boat is fully rigged, fully prepared, and what if there's a little surprise party wishing me well? What if I sail off and I simply can't go through with it? I anchor over at Marigold Island and stay there for a few days, then finally I just return home with my tail between my legs. Or what if I get a



week into it and lose all my nerve when I'm offshore, decide that I hate sailing by myself, and after a few months end up really losing my mind in some sort of Donald Crowhurst sort of way?

I once read the following, by Goethe:

Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffective. Concerning all acts of creation, there is one elementary truth, the ignorance which kills countless ideas and endless plans—that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no one could have dreamed would come their way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it—begin now.

I love this quotation because I want it to be true. I've read nothing else of Goethe, but lots of people think he was very good and important and smart. To be honest, I'm still not even sure the proper way to pronounce his name, yet I'm willing to let a quotation from a poem or a pop song or a poster pasted to an office wall guide my life's actions, especially if it agrees with what I want to think, if it puts my hopes to words. I don't even know the original source for this Goethe thing. It was just on a sheet of paper titled 'Inspiring Quotes' that I found by chance, left in the classroom of the museum, probably a leftover from some corporate team-building function or something dumb like that. Maybe the quotation is taken completely out of context and in the next line Goethe tells you what a fool you are to believe that, or the whole comment was meant to be ironic, or it was said by some character who is insane. That always happens with quotations you like or think are beautiful. Someone comes along and tells you that wasn't exactly what the author meant. But I found that page of quotations by chance. So it must be Destiny!

It's this Providence business which isn't convincing. You know by now that I'm not a man of great faith. Even if I were, Providence might make a rogue wave just where I happen to be, or Providence might make me trip on a jugged piece of pavement tomorrow on

the way out of the supermarket, tearing the ligaments in my knee again, rendering my body incapable of sailing. It's Providence that is perhaps twisting the chemicals in my brain so I have delusions that this is something that I can actually accomplish. Or Providence might make me decide it would be better, I would escape all this pain and embarrassment, if I just slid my head under the wheels of a train that was slowly steaming out of the station. If you subscribe to Providence—well, Providence made Crowhurst decide to lie about his voyage for months over the radio, then to drown himself by jumping overboard mid-ocean.

I must admit, however, that the more I let it leak that I'm planning this voyage, good things have indeed been starting to happen, especially in terms of expert advice and assistance. For example, a few weeks ago, a former shipmate gave me a free tricolor masthead light—the low draw LED kind with an emergency strobe. It's brand new, worth five hundred dollars. He said: 'Aw, I'm not going to use it and it makes me feel good it's going far. Just make sure you stop in Madeira and bring me back a jug of the good stuff. You want me to install it for you? I'm looking to get out of the house.'

I do like how Goethe says there's genius in action. Maybe I can make up for my failures, my inadequacies, with simple boldness, with bravery—though I'm not sure boldness and bravery are exactly the same. Oddly, I don't recall what's pushed me over the edge when I've done certain things. On one spring break from college, I went bungee-jumping. I was absolutely terrified. What did I say to myself to get me to take that step off? I don't remember. I just know that lots of other people were watching, mostly backpacker types who were planning to jump themselves or had just finished. I'm sure I thought how I might see one or two of them in the bar that night, maybe go to bed with one of them. On the loudspeakers they were cranking a pop song: 'No, we're never going to survive unless/ we are a little/ crazy crazy crazy!/ In a world full of people only some want to fly/ Ain't that crazy/ crazy!/ Oh babe/ Oh darlin'!' At some point I made the decision to

jump, peer-pressured, my feet strapped and clipped to a long elastic cord. I probably thought something like, 'Hundreds of people do this every day,' but instead of leaping with confidence as they did in the video, I more tepidly half-stepped off, leaning forward. As I was falling I was unable to scream. I was so afraid that I was incapable of uttering any sound. Passive, dumbfounded, my body fell, my head and torso dipped into the water then bounced back into spinning space, trees blurring and whizzing, upside down, my mouth still open, voice still paralyzed.

What if I'm doing these things—sin of sins—to say that I've done them? For that only. For the photograph, the T-shirt, the cocktail party conversation? For the pride, the fame, the ego? For the girl? As if Vera would come back to me if I did this. Have you ever read Sir Francis Chichester's *Gypsy Moth Circles the World*? In 1967 he set the record for the fastest solo circumnavigation. The book is pretty technical and his wife ruins the whole book in the end with this little epilogue about prayer, but if you get a chance, scan through the pictures: the photograph of *Gypsy Moth IV* escorted into Plymouth by hundreds of ships, the photograph of Chichester at sixty-five years old getting knighted by the queen, and the photograph of him waving from a London balcony to millions, literally millions of people, all cheering for him, the sky blurry with ticker tape. What would you give to experience that glory? How often these days, working on *Petrel*, have I imagined my return home after the circumnavigation, my own little moment. Tying off those docklines. Stepping ashore. The party! Yes, I admit it. The pride.

I also don't remember what got me to jump off the spreader on *Bellatrix* that morning off St Lucia. The footing was awkward because of the narrowness of the plank and because the wire was right at end of the stick of wood. There wasn't a firm spot from which to take a big solid leap out. I was going to have to push off around the wire. Sometimes while I was standing there thinking about it, the flag licked up, threatening to

trip my feet. To get myself to go, I probably thought of the concept of ‘nitchevo’ mentioned by Harvey Oxenhorn in his *Tuning the Rig*. This word carried me for a few years around that time. The captain in the book claims this translates to ‘what the hell,’ another version of *carpe diem*, because the sea and weather teach you that you could die anytime anyway and you really don’t have control over very much, so you might as well just go for it while you have the chance.

How hard could jumping off the spreaders be? The second mate did it, right? When you know others have done something, it seems easier—or at least attainable. Yet this requires a certain democratic confidence that you are equal to the person who accomplished what you wish to. As I get older, that notion is slipping precipitously—that idea that I might be equal, even nearly equal to any given man, because year after year I check off more and more things where I am, empirically, most definitely not.

At one point on that spreader, nearly ten years ago, I almost fell because I was thinking too much about how I should leap. While looking down, my eyes altered focus, shifting between the deck rail and the waterline, and it felt like the ship was suddenly moving forward. I lost my balance and had to hug the wire. As I tried to settle my breathing, I looked up at the top of the mast, but this was even more vertiginous because two clouds moved past the mast cap in such a way that it gave the appearance that the ship was not just moving ahead but also sinking at the bow. It seemed a pathetic way to die—to fall from aloft while only considering a high dive into the water. I imagined slipping off and trying to grip a halyard on the way down, which would only spin my body, increasing the chance of my head bashing against the edge of the housetop while my legs or arms tried to brace my fall, then snapping in horrible angles on impact.

It’s not like people don’t kill themselves everyday by doing a stupid thing that they know someone else has accomplished, something even hundreds or thousands have done. I

knew a kid in middle school who was in a line of us scaling a churchyard fence to get down to a football field. A new, higher fence had been erected beside one from centuries ago, one with iron spikes as long as a man's forearm. To get down to the field from school, the quick way, we had to jump over a short stone wall into the church, across a courtyard, then climb over the new chainlink fence. Once over the top, we scaled down the other side very carefully, so as to place our feet between the spikes in the scary fence—in fact, that's how we knew it at age thirteen, simply as 'The Scary Fence,' even before the accident. Once safely balanced between the spikes, we twisted our bodies around, then climbed down using our arms until we felt low enough to jump onto the grass from there. So one afternoon, this kid Nick stood two boys behind me as we all lined up to climb over. He was heavy and square shouldered. I guess his feet didn't fit well into the gaps of the first fence, or his sneakers were loose or something else in the hands of Providence, because as he began to come down on the other side, he slipped and fell directly onto one of the spikes, which punctured his inner thigh at exactly the wrong place, bursting an artery. If he made any screaming sound I didn't hear it. In fact, it took me several seconds before I learned that he'd been impaled, some sort of sixth sense made me turn around, because as soon as my feet landed on the grass, I'd started to sprint over to the field, triumphant, just as the other boys had done. Bob Webb was the kid that sounded the alarm, had the sense to run and get help and not just stand there stupidly like me and the others, looking at Nick's back, the angle of his body, all of that blood, listening to him try to breathe. That was the first funeral I ever went to. And the content of my first real nightmares, the kind where you bawl so loud that *both* of your parents come running in.

On my first sailing voyage there was a student named Eric Lavrillier. He was fearless. Occasionally, at anchor, we set up a rope off the yardarm so the students could jump off the rail and swing outboard into the water. One afternoon a few students wanted

an even bigger rush, so they started jumped off the yardarm itself. Before the captain put a stop to it, Eric climbed up even higher, to the lower topsail yard, which on that ship was probably equivalent or higher than where I was when standing on the spreaders of *Bellatrix*. Eric jumped off without a fiber of worry or concern. He did it several times and even did a back flip once.

Eric made all of the teachers and crew nervous because he didn't care about anything. He was utterly without reservation. His type of boldness, perhaps bravery, was nothing to aspire toward. He was eventually kicked off the ship for drugs, but all the staff wanted him off anyway because he was such a loose cannon. He'd tell you to fuck off without batting an eyelash. He's the guy on the highway, on the motorcycle, without a helmet, who explodes past you so quickly that your heart pauses. Before you can even curse him, he is out of sight, swerving between cars with an unfathomable disregard. I'm certain Eric's dead by now. You could feel this about him. He oozed violent death so much that sometimes I didn't like to stand near him.

Anyway, at last, that afternoon off St Lucia, aloft the schooner *Bellatrix*, thinking nitchevo or some other stupid concept, I pushed hard off my back foot and reached out into the air, seemingly at the same level as the frangipani trees and the century-plants on the opposite hillside. I shrieked like a teenager on a rollercoaster. A column of blue sky, white cloud, and green tree all spun up like a slot machine, and I fell and screamed and I don't recall my time in the air very well, but I plunged with a smack on the water, my shoes slapping the surface, and I can see myself clearly in the green-blue water with the bubbles tickling my face and as soon as I was wet, could feel the wet, I was smiling with relief and pride, though I was surprised how far down I'd gone and how much work it took to get back to break the surface, how I really had to swim, needing to breathe, as I looked up at the

green light through the water. When I broke through, I shouted ‘Yeah!’ I flipped my hair back. Fists in the air. ‘Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!’

Looking over the rail, down at me, was Captain Kenneth Palmer, also out of breath. This was his first command. He’d sprinted up from his lunch in horror, thinking one of his crew had fallen from aloft.

I’d never once considered how great a fright this would give the captain.

When I’ve told people that I’m thinking about a circumnavigation—‘Just in the dream stage, right now,’ I say. ‘Just going to sail south and see how the boat does, how I do.’ The response I usually get is, ‘Alone? What are you trying to do? Commit suicide?’ I don’t think I am, but, at the same time, if I do die doing this, well, this seems a fairly good way to go. ‘I hope I die before I get old.’ Peter Townsend. 1965. I don’t even really subscribe to that anymore, though—now that I’m much closer to ‘old.’ I meet plenty of perfectly happy, wrinkled and bent people, who have somehow, it appears, come to a certain peace. Perhaps they’ve genuinely arrived at a Buddhist’s understanding of a human’s fragile place in this world. Or maybe they’ve just been cobbled and worn to this, numbed down with whiskey: they’ve acquiesced the loss of certain dreams and their own mere averageness. My girlfriend says I’m being a condescending asshole when I talk like that, but I don’t think I am. I know that *I* am average, below average even. I’m just too immature to stand it. How can I explain this? I mean, I don’t commit suicide because I guess I wouldn’t mind sticking around to see what more happens here on Earth. If I really do get only one shot at life, well, might as well see what will unfold. Might as well reach for a dream or two while I’m here. ‘Oh baby/ Oh darlin’.’ Worse thing that happens if I get out there is I hit a reef, I founder in a storm, I get shot and mugged by an Indonesian

criminal, and I die, and none of those seem that bad. Is that suicidal? If it is, then I guess I am.

But then there are the Captain Kenneth Palmers, the people who will be affected if I fall overboard and drown. Though all of my personal connections are tepid at best, I've failed to isolate myself. My death will affect others. I have parents, a brother, nephews.

My girlfriend has been crying every night for the last three days. Which complicates things.



20 hours until departure

I'm going to leave at 0615, at the start of the ebb tide, and get going before there are too many people at the dock or on the water. I've not slept for days, staying up to try to cross off everything I possibly can from my list. I promised my girlfriend that we'd have one last night though, to go out to dinner, that I'd at least lie down with her for a few hours tonight. She said she's worried that I'll be too fatigued, and she's probably right. I guess she wants to have sex one more time. But there's so much to do. She said: 'Why don't you just wait another week, really get prepared.' I don't want to. I set this date and I just want to get going. I've paid my last month's rent to her. I've paid all my bills. I've cleaned out the garage. Nearly everything's on board. 'Maybe I'll be back in a few days, anyway,' I say. 'Maybe I'll be turning right back around.'

Harry came on the boat yesterday, helped me get the regulator squared away and then he stayed up with me all night, helping me provision: labeling, waterproofing, and storing all of my food somewhere in the cabin. 'Joel, by God,' he said. 'You're really going to do this thing, aren't you? You're going to do it. It's brilliant. Balls, brother. You got big goddamn balls. Maybe not brains, but balls, boy.' Shipyard Tom dropped by and gave me a bottle of Scotch, and some brand new 3/8" rope that he said he wasn't going to

use. 'Fair winds,' he said. He apologized that he couldn't see me off, but, he said: 'Me and the wife have to go see her sister. Send a postcard will ya?'

Another guy stopped by the boat to give me a gift. He's just been starting to come down to the yard to work on his boat. On weekends recently there have been at least a dozen guys down here. Despite my best efforts—just in the last day or so—almost everyone knows what I'm hoping to do. This particular guy, I call him Porno Steve because he demanded I come see his boat and inside his cabin. He has all of these centerfolds taped up on the bulkheads. He rarely works on his boat but leans on his truck and talks on his cell phone to some other guy about internet sex sites that he's found. Kind of weird. He gave me a gift of about thirty Penthouse magazines and another stack of magazines that are more hardcore. 'Hand picked,' he said. 'Best of my collection. You better bring them back, okay? And don't stain them. He-he-he.' Porno Steve is actually a good guy, though, and every time I see him he says, 'Aw, Man. I wish I was going with you. You got it right, fella. You just gotta go. Fuck what all the rest say.' I assume he's referring to the other guys in the yard—they don't come over—they don't say anything, but I can see it in their faces. They think I'm going to die, to run aground, to get sunk by a tanker, to sink in a storm. I don't know what it is, but they think I'm going to fail. They want me to. They can tell I don't have a clue what I'm doing. And what's weird, what's really surprising to me, is I'm really glad they look at me like that. It is almost spring and the skies seem more blue; there is music in the yard from one of the guy's trucks. My boat is the only one in the water, and I realize, I've come to understand—really just in the last day—that they need me. I am important to this yard. I have given them something to talk about. Something to take home to talk about over dinner, to talk about at the bar. Porno Steve really looks up to me, and the others, maybe they do or maybe they don't, but I am something in their life to react

to—whether it be to hex or to idolize—but I am something, someone, if that makes any sense to you.

For the last ten years I have been the curator of other people's successes and failures, collecting their artifacts, recording their stories: cataloging. Somehow I have not taken a single photograph of the restoration of *Petrel*, not even thought about the historic preservation of the process. Maybe because I've been afraid to jinx it.

As Harry and I were writing on the cans and stacking them in the lockers, we reminisced about Captain Redmond Hollister, who once came aboard with us. We both agreed it was the saddest thing we ever saw. Hollister used to be captain, had been a skipper for years before our time. He was really into sail trim and had won a few tall ship races in his day. He came aboard the schooner we were working on, for a month, almost as a vacation for him. He hadn't driven a boat, he said, for twenty years or something. He wasn't really that old, maybe in his early sixties. He'd left driving the ships to work in the office, to administrate, to raise money for these types of programs. He was a great guy, and established all of these scholarships for disadvantaged kids—getting them out on the water and to sea on the big ships. He was actually the one that did the service over Willie Pace's grave.

So this one afternoon—probably about fourteen years ago—we were at anchor and about to get underway. This was off Deer Island, Maine. Captain Hollister was driving the long boat from shore and delivered a few passengers to the waist of the ship and let them climb up the ladder. Normally the captain went up with them and then a deckhand or mate drove the boat back to the stern and helped haul it up. Hollister said: 'Let me do it, boys. Been so long since I've worked the falls.' He powered the boat back and was trying to connect the block and tackle. There was a small swell from a passing motorboat, and I guess his body didn't do the same things he remembered it would. To work the falls you

have to be a little flexible and sort of steady the boat underneath you with your feet as you're overhauling the tackle with your hands. Hollister fell backwards into the water. It was summertime. He climbed right back aboard. Luckily, he didn't hit his head on something. Harry rushed down and helped him, connected the falls, and the captain rode up, sopping wet, trying to laugh.

Once on deck, Hollister went right down below. We didn't see him until later that evening as we sailed out into the Gulf of Maine. He was leaning over the rail watching the wake and you never saw a man so sad. Talking last night, Harry and I agreed that it was a look that we're only starting to understand.

Harry said: 'I can't tell you what to do, Joel. But fuck them all. Go if you want to. Once you leave that dock, you've done more than any of them, *us*—me—ever dreamed. Crash or die or sail clean around the Earth, man—you've already won.'

What Harry doesn't understand, what he doesn't realize, is the thing that scares me most is not death or failure, but if the story ends differently. What if this is only the story of Joel H Brown, who, even after circling the entire globe singlehanded aboard his beloved *Petrel*, returns home to find that nothing is different, not even himself?

[end]



## CHOICES IN FORM AND STYLE FOR THE SEA VOYAGE NARRATIVE

You have returned from your adventure on a ship and would like to write a book about it. Join the club. The sea voyage narrative is one of the oldest genres in Western Literature, beginning perhaps with Homer's *Odyssey* (B.C. 750-725). Stories of adventure, discovery, and personal transformation at sea have always been popular: from The Bible's 'Noah' and 'Jonah' to *A New Voyage Round the World* (1725)—in which Defoe is already complaining about how many poor books about sea voyages have been published—and on to works such as *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836), *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Typhoon* (1903), and contemporary best-sellers like *The Life of Pi* (2001).

The 'sea voyage narrative' is an account told by a mariner who has returned from an expedition on the ocean, usually set within a fishing trip, a mercantile voyage, a naval mission, a scientific expedition, a slave ship, a travel or emigration passage, a recreational cruise, or a singlehanded sail on the water. The sea voyage narrative is, as Edwards writes: 'the experience of being on a ship, as captain or seamen or passenger or prisoner.'<sup>1</sup> Though the roots of the sea voyage narrative are in nonfiction, in a claim to realism, it can also be a work of fiction or even verse. The traditional, pre-structuralist definition of narrative leans

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards, Philip. *The Story of the Voyage: Sea-narratives in eighteenth-century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.4.

toward a direct, plain style in the telling of events.<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of brevity and relevance to 'Immediate Passage,' this essay will focus on prose narratives told only in the first person, working within a limited survey of these stories written in English.

As in any genre, when creating a sea voyage narrative the author decides to tell his or her story in a particular manner. He or she makes choices about accuracy, structure, point of view, tone of voice, tense, the inclusion of direct speech, and the use of specialized terminology. This essay will examine these authorial decisions, so as to inform both the critic and the aspiring author as to the tools commonly used in the writing of this type of story, some of which are applicable to the writing of any book, while other decisions are more specific to tales about the sea.

### **Fact or Fiction?**

Choosing the level of fact and believability is likely the author's first major decision for a sea story. At the simplest level, he or she chooses to write a work of nonfiction, fiction, or one that deliberately mixes the two. But it is a far more complex choice than that, one that is both conscious and unconscious, and one that is revised as the writing progresses.

If the author chooses nonfiction, to recount a voyage that actually occurred, decisions in accuracy must be made from paragraph to paragraph. Even in the centuries before formal litigation for slander and defamation of character, the author needed to decide exactly how much and how many of the facts should be told. Should real names be used? Real places, real ships? What if the author wants to use actual locations, such as the precise

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion on how the definition and understanding of narrative has changed, see: Rigney, Ann. 'The Point of Stories: On Narrative Communication and Its Cognitive Functions.' *Poetics Today*, Vol. 13, No.2. Summer, 1992, pp.263-283.

latitude and longitude, but only has a record for half of them. And what should be written on the cover or title page—what claim to truth?

Consider Owen Chase's *Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-ship Essex* (1821), the story of how a sperm whale rammed a ship and sank it in the middle of the Pacific, one of the major inspirations for *Moby-Dick*. In the *Essex* narrative the first mate had to explain why, after they were cast adrift, he and his crew cannibalized a dead man in the whaleboat that he commanded. Chase published the book nine months after his rescue, soon after his return to his native Nantucket and after seeing the neighbors and relatives of those who died. Chase writes in his 'To the Reader':

I am aware that the public mind has been already nearly sated with the private stories of individuals, many of whom had few, if any, claims to public attention; & the injuries which have resulted from the promulgation of fictitious histories, and in many instances, of journals entirely fabricated for the purpose, has had the effect to lessen the public interest in works of this description, and very much to undervalue the general cause of truth. It is, however, not the less important and necessary, that narratives should continue to be furnished that have their foundations in fact... On the subject of facts contained in this little volume, they are neither so extravagant, as to require the exercise of any great credulity to believe, nor, I trust, so unimportant or uninteresting, as to forbid an attentive perusal.<sup>3</sup>

Chase's narrative, however, does not tell the entire truth. In the first place, Chase likely wrote the book with the assistance of a ghostwriter.<sup>4</sup> He says in 'To the Reader' that he is publishing the book simply to make money, but, as Nathaniel Philbrick points out, he has another motivation in his desire 'to represent himself—a young officer in need of another ship—as positively as possible.'<sup>5</sup> Chase and his ghostwriter exclude large and small details, avoiding the telling of any mistakes Chase made during the voyage.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chase, Owen, et al. *Narratives of the Wreck of the Whale-ship Essex*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1989, p.13.

<sup>4</sup> Philbrick, Nathaniel. *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*. New York, Penguin: 2001, p.203.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.204.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.205.



In *New Voyage Round the World* (1697), Dampier also seems to have had assistance in the writing and made efforts to conceal any unlawful involvement he had in the piratical events he records.<sup>7</sup> In 1743, Bulkeley and Cummins, two survivors of the wreck of the *Wager*, wrote their version of events in order to clear themselves of charges of mutiny. Their *Voyage to the South-Seas...A Faithful Narrative of the Loss of His Majesty's Ship the Wager* was one of four narratives, four different perspectives eventually published on the tragedy. In turn, contemporaries of Captain Bligh argued over perceived inaccuracies and omissions in his *A Narrative of the Mutiny* (1790). Being the first one home to England, Bligh rushed to get his book to press in order to get out his version of the events, as well as to salvage his reputation by laying claim to leading one of the most impressive open boat journeys in history. Edwards summarizes: 'All published [eighteenth-century] voyage-narratives are exercises in public relations. The unrelenting self-protection which they evince is no doubt instinctive, but a good deal of calculation goes on in the manipulation, accommodation and adaptation of reality.'<sup>8</sup>

*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789) has long been considered the most significant first person account of the Middle Passage and a major keystone of maritime history and black studies. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that Equiano fabricated parts, if not the entirety of the first section of the story.<sup>9</sup> Morgan explains: '[In the 18<sup>th</sup>-century] the demarcations we today make between fiction and nonfiction, between autobiography (which had not really been invented back then) and the novel were more fluid, far more

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<sup>7</sup> Edwards, pp.21, 28-9, et al.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.132.

<sup>9</sup> Carretta, Vincent. *Equiano, The African: a biography of a self-made man*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005, pp.xiv-xv.

porous...this context may help explain why Equiano used his imagination more than we might have thought.’<sup>10</sup>

In *Two Years Before the Mast*, one of the most famous and replicated sea voyage narratives, Dana opens his first edition by making his own claim to truth:

With the single exception, as I am quite confident, of Mr. Ames’ entertaining, but hasty and desultory work, called “Mariner’s Sketches,” all the books professing to give life at sea have been written by persons who have gained their experience as naval officers, or passengers, and of these, there are very few which are intended to be taken as narratives of facts...

In the following pages I design to give an accurate and authentic narrative of a little more than two years spent as a common sailor...It is written out from a journal which I kept at the time, and from notes which I made of most of the events as they happened; and in it I have adhered closely to fact in every particular, and endeavored to give each thing its true character.<sup>11</sup>

Yet Dana does not mention that as soon as he arrived in Boston he lost his primary journal. He wrote *Two Years* from memory and a small ten-page book of notations.<sup>12</sup> Dana re-orders events, uses direct speech, and makes some notable omissions.<sup>13</sup> Foulke writes that *Two Years* ‘sometimes reads like reportage, sometimes like fiction, but most frequently shares the conventions of both.’<sup>14</sup>

Absolute realism is not possible in any telling, of course. The omission of details, the generous stretching of a tale, and the skewed perspective to benefit the narrator are strategies common in all stories, in any genre in any time. But they seem especially intrinsic for narratives set at sea, whether it be a ‘fish story,’ a ‘sailor’s yarn,’ or an attempted honest depiction of what happened ‘out there.’ Perhaps this is based on the lack

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<sup>10</sup> Philip D. Morgan by email in: Howard, Jennifer. ‘Unraveling the Narrative.’ *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 9 September 2005, p.A15.

<sup>11</sup> Dana, Richard Henry, Jr. *Two Years Before the Mast*. New York: Penguin, 1986, pp.37-8.

<sup>12</sup> Gale, Robert L. *Richard Henry Dana*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969, p.109. Gale explains Dana’s cousin lost the journal. Thomas Philbrick, in his introduction to *Two Years Before the Mast*, writes that Dana’s journal ‘disappeared’ with a sea chest on the dock immediately after he arrived (p.17).

<sup>13</sup> Philbrick, Thomas. ‘Introduction,’ in *Two Years Before the Mast*. New York: Penguin, 1986, p.13.

<sup>14</sup> Foulke, Robert. *The Sea Voyage Narrative*. New York: Routledge, 2002, p.14.

of witnesses at sea or the need for long, fascinating stories on ships in order to pass tedious hours on watch. The narrators return with only shipmates to verify what happened. And just as standards for authorship and plagiarism have evolved, it is often a matter of opinion and a reflection of the time period as to what is acceptable to be presented as fact, what level of omission or stretching or altering may ally with what is printed on the cover page of the book, what its author and publisher claim.

In 2006 three Mexican fishermen survived after drifting in an open boat for nine months in the Pacific Ocean. There were originally two other men on board, so questions arose about how they died and also if the original mission was not a fishing trip at all, but instead a trip involved with drug smuggling. There are no other witnesses. Singer wrote an account of the voyage:

In the grand scheme of things, what mattered was that, one day, five men got into a small boat, and nine months later three of them were serendipitously found floating on the other side of the world. They had survived and now had a story to tell, a story that they could explain only by referring to the supernatural. As a “true” story, that was perhaps its principal defect: no one had ever heard, told, or possibly even imagined one like it.<sup>15</sup>

In the same way, the early sea voyage narratives often felt like fiction because their content was so new and bizarre to readers ashore, written in a time before television and film. Before Chase’s account, for example, who had heard of a sperm whale twice smashing into a whaleship? How many of the readers at that time even had an accurate mental image of a Pacific island?

The early narratives of voyages at sea also had major implications for the wealth and safety of entire nations, so their authors laced them with skewed details. Writers modified, rewrote, and pirated narratives for all sorts of reasons, such as sequestering the advantages of a particular harbor or as propaganda for colonization. Journals and logs kept aboard

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<sup>15</sup> Singer, Mark. ‘The Castaways: A Pacific odyssey.’ [sic] *The New Yorker*. 19 & 26 Feb 2007, pp.150-1.

English ships were turned over at the end of a voyage as property of the Admiralty.

Inaccurate editions of Cook's voyages, which he considered to contain complete falsehoods, were published without his approval; the first edition commissioned by the Admiralty was by Hawkesworth, an author with no maritime experience and one who had earlier declared his preference for works of fiction, writing: 'those narratives are most pleasing, which not only excite and gratify the curiosity but engage the passions.'<sup>16</sup> Hawkesworth edited, rewrote, reordered, and embellished Cook's account.

Other writers fictionalized foreign narratives in the process of translation, in order to benefit their country's mission or to advance a religious agenda.<sup>17</sup>

So there has been a long tradition of nonfiction accounts with questionable facts and steep bias. Foulke explains:

The streams of fact and fiction never separated entirely in the voyage narratives of later centuries [after Cook] and probably never will. Since such accounts are in part the maritime autobiographies of the writer, the Danas and Slocums out there cannot avoid emphasizing, suppressing, and sometimes reordering the events of their voyages.<sup>18</sup>

To avoid questions of veracity altogether, some authors choose to simplify the issue and write a work of fiction, and declare it so. Mariners such as Cooper, Marryat, Melville, London, Conrad, and Childers turned their own sea experiences into novels told in the first person, trying to wash their hands of any claim to factual events and the scrutiny that came with it. These authors usually worked from actual voyages, however, ones that they had been on or ones they heard and read about. They then proceeded to change the names, places, and ships in various degrees. *Redburn: His First Voyage* (1849) is a narrative Melville based on his youthful voyage aboard a transatlantic packet ship. Conrad derived 'Youth' (1902) from his service aboard the *Palestine*. London learned the details for his

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<sup>16</sup> Hawksworth, John. *The Adventurer*. No. 4, 18 November 1952, as cited in: Edwards, p.87.

<sup>17</sup> Edwards, p.3.

<sup>18</sup> Foulke, p.17.

*The Sea-Wolf* (1904) on his own voyage aboard a sealer, just as Childers used his personal yachting experiences for *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903). Because of their connection to actual voyages, the novels by these writers had large fibers of fact, bordering at times on memoir.

Even sea voyage narratives that seem wildly fictitious have connections to actual adventures. Coleridge claimed his 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798) was 'a work of such pure imagination,'<sup>19</sup> yet he spun parts of the narrative from factual accounts. This is a poetic work, of course, but it is useful to mention here because it is an influence on so many works of prose. Coleridge had not been afloat on anything more than a ferry, but a great deal of his material drew from actual stories from his brothers who went to sea, and likely from what he heard while growing up in the thriving port of Bristol. He was a voracious reader and claimed to have read *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) when he was six years old. Before creating 'Rime,' Coleridge had read Cook's accounts, Bligh's narrative, other mariners' accounts, and ballads of sea voyages like 'Sir Patrick Spens.' Coleridge learned about icebergs, bioluminescence, sea snakes, slimy fish, the doldrums, and stories of ghost ships, all of which he included in 'Rime.'<sup>20</sup> Wordsworth wrote that he gave Coleridge the idea of having the sailor shoot an albatross off Cape Horn after he had read about one of these birds being shot in Shelvocke's *A Voyage Around the World by Way of the Great South Sea* (1726).<sup>21</sup>

Following Coleridge were dozens of fantastical sea voyage narratives, such as *Symzonia, A Voyage of Discovery* (1820), a surrealistic (and some say satirical) passage into the middle of the Earth via the South Pole, and Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under*

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<sup>19</sup> Lowes, John Livingston. *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927, p.302.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp.27, 87-92, 131, 261-94, et al.; Holmes, Richard. *Coleridge: Early Visions*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1989, p.173.

<sup>21</sup> Moorman, Mary. *William Wordsworth: A Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965, p.348.

*the Sea* (1870), translated into a very popular, though highly inaccurate, English-language version. These texts were some of the first works of what is today called science fiction, but they still derived their content from genuine debates and theories of the day. These fictional narratives naturally involved voyages on the ocean because that was how most exploration was done at the time.<sup>22</sup> Authors also wrote short stories about the strange and horrible at sea, such as Gould's 'The Haunted Brig' (1834). Thomas Philbrick explains how even these nineteenth-century tales looked toward nonfiction: 'Although the exploitation of terror might seem anything but a movement toward realism, it had the effect, most clearly seen in the work of Poe after 1835, of emphasizing the creation of a realistic surface, for its force depended on the credibility of the context in which the strange adventure was embedded.'<sup>23</sup>

Some authors of sea voyage narratives choose fiction to further a social or political agenda. Especially in his early sea novels, Cooper was especially conscious of sustaining and building American participation in maritime endeavors.<sup>24</sup> Douglass wrote *The Heroic Slave* (1853), a novella about a man who escapes slavery and leads a rebellion at sea, for his abolitionist weekly.

Writers of sea voyage narratives also choose fiction for the simple joy of the creation and the challenge to transport the reader to an entirely different world. Cooper, credited by Philbrick as 'the originator of the sea novel'<sup>25</sup> wrote how he believed that 'the delight of pure imagination, the transportation of ourselves beyond our bounded vision and existence to the past and the distant, into scenes of splendor, and into conditions which

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<sup>22</sup> For a brief definition of science fiction and its origins see: Rose, Lois and Stephen. *The Shattered Ring: science fiction and the quest for meaning*. London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1970, pp.13-29.

<sup>23</sup> Philbrick, Thomas. *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961, p.104.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.49.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.viii.

fancy has devised, and fancy alone could sustain or enjoy, are among the rarest pleasures that the reader of fiction tastes.’<sup>26</sup>

Another significant reason why an author chooses fiction for the medium of his or her narrative is to have the freedom to make the story more complete, to be able to shape the plot, characters, and setting without constraint or guilt. Hemingway, author of *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), wrote about the difference between fiction and journalism: ‘But if you make it up instead of describe it you can make it round and whole and solid and give it life. You create it for good or bad. It is made; not described.’<sup>27</sup>

Conrad took this further, believing fiction can reveal a greater or more significant truth. In his ‘Preface’ to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), he writes:

The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories. But the artist appeals to the part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom: to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition—and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn...

Fiction—if it at all aspires to be art—appeals to temperament. And in truth it must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time.<sup>28</sup>

For Conrad, fiction revealed a higher truth, closer and deeper than anything nonfiction could provide.

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<sup>26</sup> Cooper, Fenimore. *Early Critical Essays (1820-1822)*, cited from: Philbrick, Thomas. *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*, p.53.

<sup>27</sup> Hemingway, Ernest. ‘Monologue to the Maestro: A High Seas Letter.’ *Esquire*, October 1935, in White, William. *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967, p.216.

<sup>28</sup> Conrad, Joseph. *Great Short Works of Joseph Conrad*. New York: Harper and Row, 1967, pp.57-8.

In the 'Author's Note' to *Life of Pi*, Martel writes: 'That's what fiction is about, isn't it, the selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence?'<sup>29</sup> His comment is ironic, in that his story is very much about the perception of the real: even this introductory note is fictionalized. The reader at first takes this preface to *Life of Pi* as truthful; the author is simply telling the story of how he came about this tale and how he met a Mr Patel, the man who survived an open boat journey with a tiger on board. The note sounds like the author and is believable, matching the biographical description of the writer on the back of the book and the jacket. Martel explains why he has chosen to tell Patel's story in first person and how the man kept a journal, hence his detailed memory of the events. The 'Author's Note' even includes a paragraph of acknowledgements. The narrative then begins, in the voice of Patel, and progresses as a chronological story, including an extraordinary amount of material to lend credence to later events, such as information on animal behavior. When Patel's story ends with his arrival in Mexico, the author, Martel, returns into the text, playing again with the plausibility of Patel's tale by delivering the transcripts of tape records of the boy being interviewed after he landed. The cover of *Life of Pi* clearly states 'a novel,' but Martel makes the layers of fact and fiction, the claims, the confusion of truth in storytelling, a significant part of the text. By the end the reader is not sure what to believe, which story, even though it is all fiction in the first place. Which is Martel's point.

Perhaps because the tradition of sea voyage narratives has so often grayed the lines between fact and fiction, several authors have chosen, as did Martel, to make this blending a significant part of their story. Poe overtly mixes fact and fiction in his *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), an attempted hoax, in which he played into the popular appetite for sea

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<sup>29</sup> Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. New York: Harcourt, Inc, 2001, p.viii.



stories and horror. He presents *Pym*<sup>30</sup> as a true narrative and combines nearly every salty adventure into one tale, including mutiny, shipwreck, cannibalism, ghost ships, sharks, polar exploration, and encounters with deceitful natives. Poe uses his role as editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* to frame the narrative so that it sounds as if he has come upon this story and an actual Mr Pym. The opening chapters were first printed serially as fiction, under Poe's name, but when put together as a book, the work is introduced as a nonfiction narrative. Poe, as Pym, adds to the feeling of a truthful story by mentioning real people, real places, and known facts that the reader would recognize. Like many sea voyage narratives, Poe uses precise locations and long erudite digressions on nautical matters, such as the stowage of ballast or the nesting of seabirds.

Another work that intentionally blends fact and fiction in a sea voyage narrative is Steinbeck and Ricketts's *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research* (1941). The first portion of the book is a series of journal entries with all appearance of being non-fiction, including dates, locations, and footnotes with the scientific names of organisms, but the entries have been obviously smoothed and rewritten and unabashedly contain elements of humor, hyperbole, overt anthropomorphism, dialogue, and various philosophical and sociological digressions. This journal, however, is bound with a rigorous catalog of all the organisms the expedition identified and preserved during the six-week-long voyage. *Sea of Cortez* even includes a glossary and an index. The structure itself nods toward the endeavor of presenting a factual account and furthering scientific knowledge, but closer analysis reveals that an essay written by Ricketts at another time is plunked right in the middle of the

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<sup>30</sup> The similarity of names—Martel to Patel and Edgar Allan Poe to Arthur Gordon Pym—suggest in themselves the mixture of fact and fiction, just in the way contemporary author Paul Auster uses his narrator Peter Aaron, also a writer, in *Leviathan* (1992). See Beaver's 'Introduction' (*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. New York: Penguin, 1986, pp.9-10) for more about the connection of Pym's name to Poe's.

log, and the two authors exclude an entire crew member from the text: Steinbeck's wife, Carol.

Steinbeck and Ricketts are different from Dana and Chase and more like Poe and Martel in that their toying with fact and fiction is a significant part of the work, part of their point. Steinbeck and Ricketts sought to write with a storytelling voice, with human, emotional candor, placed beside, within, a careful work of science. They wanted to show that these sides were not only compatible but inseparable. The first line of *Sea of Cortez*, the opening to their 'Introduction,' is this: 'The design of a book is the pattern of a reality controlled and shaped by the mind of the writer. This is completely understood about poetry or fiction, but it is too seldom realized about books of fact.'

All of this makes the classification of nonfiction or fiction for the sea voyage narrative difficult. The author of the sea voyage narrative embraces this ambiguity, but at the same time, the simple number of how many of these works include introductions, prefaces, and author's notes that address these questions of truth emphasizes that the problem occupies his or her considerations and processes, especially for those claiming to work in nonfiction. Even Childers, for example, felt compelled to begin his novel *Riddle of the Sands* with a preface that begins: 'A word about the origin and authorship of this book.'<sup>31</sup> Foulke writes:

Clearly, historical and literary voyage narratives are often nearly identical in structure and substance: Usually no clear demarcation exists between fact and fiction, experience and imagination. Among narrative forms, voyages cling to the inescapable realities of life at sea, on the one hand, and simultaneously project human desires and fantasies on the other.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Childers, Robert Erskine. *The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Secret Service*. London: Collins, 1955, p.19.

<sup>32</sup> Foulke, p.13.

## Structure

After deciding, perhaps subconsciously, as to the level of truth intended, the author of a sea voyage narrative must then choose *how* to tell the adventure: how the story will be written and organized, both in terms of the chronology of events—the beginning, middle, and end—the *plot* or the *discourse*, and also in terms of how it will appear on the page. Their decisions have not been ‘nearly identical,’ as Foulke suggest above, but there are indeed broad similarities.

The simplest and most direct choice of prose narrative structure is to start from the beginning of the voyage itself—getting off the dock or weighing anchor—and finishing with the end of the trip—the return to the home port. The early definition of the word ‘voyage’ seems to refer to a complete round-trip, out and back to the original starting point.<sup>33</sup> In Oxenhorn’s *Tuning the Rig* (1990) the narrative begins with the heading ‘26 June. Boston, Aquarium Wharf,’ followed by the narrator describing the evening and himself standing on the Boston waterfront, gazing up at the masts of the ship on which he’s going to journey to the Arctic. The second paragraph gives his previous maritime experience in three sentences and ends with: ‘I swallowed hard. Then crossed Atlantic Avenue and climbed aboard.’<sup>34</sup> Oxenhorn proceeds with his expedition on the *Regina Maris*, forming the story, which he tells chronologically. Though *Tuning the Rig* finishes with an afterword, titled ‘Home,’ which is an update five years later about the crew and the state of the ship, the story effectively ends when the *Regina Maris* returns to the same dock. Oxenhorn’s final entry reads ‘31 August. Boston. Aquarium Wharf’ and finishes: ‘I thanked her. I thanked all who had ever sailed on her. Then opened my heart to friends on a sunlit

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<sup>33</sup> Simpson, J.A. and Weiner, E.S.C. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Vol. XIX. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, pp.777-9; et al. This definition comes partly from crew contracts, which had to be defined exactly to calculate salary. For merchant sailors signed on for a voyage, they were not paid until they returned to their home port.

<sup>34</sup> Oxenhorn, Harvey. *Tuning the Rig*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1990, p.3.

pier, to spring lines whizzing through the air, to shouts and laughter, names called over water, and to waves.<sup>35</sup>

Joseph Campbell's hero's journey structure fits well for most sea voyage narratives. An expedition at sea is usually, particularly for a newcomer, a greenhand, one in which the narrator begins alone, separated. In the voyage to the unknown, he or she must overcome adversity and challenges, usually with the help of a friend or two along the way who assists in his or her learning the ropes, the initiation. The mariner hero eventually returns home with a boon of some kind. Oxenhorn's narrative fits neatly into this separation-initiation-return structure. He begins the voyage at night, alone looking up at the masthead, afraid of going aloft. As the voyage progresses he has trouble getting into the ways of the ship community: he argues with the captain and has difficulty climbing and working in the rigging. A couple of the crewmembers are patient with him and teach him some of the skills. Slowly, he begins to love his time on the vessel. As the *Regina Maris* returns to the dock, Oxenhorn describes himself again alone, but this time aloft in that same rigging. It is a sunny day, and he is returning to his geographic starting point, but as a new man. Notice the double meaning of 'spring lines' in his final words.<sup>36</sup> By the end Oxenhorn has physically and philosophically learned a great deal. Just before climbing back to the deck he thinks about the need to embrace the value of routine, of the journey, and he says, revealing one aspect of his boon: 'This was a gift. I took it, and came down.'<sup>37</sup>

Dana's narrative, which Oxenhorn cites within his text, also follows this structure. Gale writes: 'Much of the "plot" of *Two Years Before the Mast* had mythic overtones. Like

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<sup>35</sup> Oxenhorn, p.275. [sic. regarding punctuation]

<sup>36</sup> 'Spring lines' are docklines that run at angles from forward to aft or vice-versa, but Oxenhorn is aware of the seasonal re-birth symbolism because he could have easily used the word 'docklines.' 'Heaving lines,' thinner lines attached to the larger docklines would probably have been in use, anyway, particularly if they were 'whizzing through the air.' It is difficult to throw the coil of a dockline from a ship of that size very far.

<sup>37</sup> Oxenhorn, p.275.

Jason, Aeneas, Parzifal, Gawain, Redburn, Huckleberry Finn, Stephen Dedalus, and many of their brethren, the hero of *Two Years Before the Mast* leaves home.<sup>38</sup> Dana goes through certain rites of passage, like overcoming seasickness, going aloft, and learning how to steer; he survives temptations, an evil captain, meets a few friends en route, and escapes from what would have been an even longer expedition. Gale explains: '[Dana's] entire experience is a classic rebirth ritual in its three stages of separation, initiation, and return.'<sup>39</sup>

Dana certainly structured his narrative for balance. After an introduction explaining why he published the book, he begins with the chapter 'Departure.' In the opening paragraph, in two sentences, Dana gives the date, the name of the ship, the intended route, why he is going, and places himself on board. The voyage proceeds from there chronologically. It finishes with a 'Concluding Chapter,' which is an essay on the conditions of sailors 'written after the lapse of a considerable time since the end of my voyage.'<sup>40</sup> As with *Tuning the Rig*, the story really ends with the previous chapter, when Dana returns to his home port. This is his last sentence: 'The city bells were just ringing one when the last turn was made fast, and the crew dismissed; and in five minutes more, not a soul was left on board the good ship Alert, but the old shipkeeper, who had come down from the counting-house to take charge of her.'<sup>41</sup> Dana structures the book with eight chapters devoted to the outbound journey, twenty chapters for his time in California, and then eight more for his passage home. There is also a bilateral symmetry in events, such as the outbound and homebound rounding of Cape Horn and his experiences with seasickness or death.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gale, p.131.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.132.

<sup>40</sup> Dana, p.462.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.461.

<sup>42</sup> Gale, p.112.

Poe also structures the events in his *Pym* with a close attention to symmetry.<sup>43</sup>

Dampier and Defoe both begin their circumnavigation narratives by setting out from England and end their stories abruptly with the return, providing little to nothing in the final paragraph other than the date and location where they anchored or tied up. Bligh ends his narrative with this sentence: ‘On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, 1790, we sailed for Europe, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, I was landed at Portsmouth by an Isle of Wight boat.’<sup>44</sup> In the last line of the *Essex* narrative, Chase returns to Nantucket, ending with: ‘once more to the bosom of my country and friends.’<sup>45</sup>

Sometimes the return home is a more symbolic one, as with Murphy in his *Logbook for Grace* (1945), in which he begins the story by waving goodbye to his wife and finishes when his return passage is secured. He doesn’t take the reader all the way home, but ends with two stanzas of verse about a sailor returning home and kissing his ‘true love,’ giving the reader the image of their reunion.<sup>46</sup> When a trip to sea, or at least the story, ends away from the home port, as in ‘Youth’ or *Moby-Dick*, the return to the narrator often helps to give the story the feeling of a return home. In *Two in a Boat* (2005), Lewis and her husband leave their yacht in a foreign port, their voyage unfinished because of illness. She ends with this: ‘It’s the only destination worth travelling towards, and the greatest surprise is that, boat or no boat, house or no house, health or no health, Leighton and I are already home.’<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Levin and O’Donnell first demonstrated this, as summarized by Beaver in ‘Introduction’ of Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. New York: Penguin, 1986, p.29.

<sup>44</sup> Bligh, William. *A Narrative of the Mutiny, on Board His Majesty’s Ship Bounty; and the Subsequent Voyage of Part of the Crew, in the Ship’s Boat, from Tofoa, one of the Friendly Islands, to Timor, a Dutch Settlement in the East Indies*, as cited in: *The Bounty Mutiny*. New York: Penguin, 2001, p.66.

<sup>45</sup> Chase, p.73.

<sup>46</sup> Murphy, Robert Cushman. *Logbook for Grace*. Chicago: Time-Life Books Inc., 1982, p.371.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis, Gwyneth. *Two in a Boat*. London: Harper Perennial, 2006, p.284.

A few authors of sea voyage narratives choose to give a preamble before stepping aboard, giving information about the events that brought their narrators to the gangway, what previous experience he or she had, some information about the ship or the expedition, or other preparations before departure. In *Redburn*, Melville writes four chapters before his narrator steps aboard with his seabag and then two more until the vessel gets underway. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville writes twenty-two chapters, more than fifteen percent of the text, before the ship sets sail.

Steinbeck and Ricketts are philosophical about preparing for their scientific voyage. They begin the first chapter discussing how previous authors never give the methods of preparation, referring to scientific papers and expedition accounts. They write:

How does one organize an expedition: what equipment is taken, what sources read; what are the little dangers and the large ones? No one has ever written this. The information is not available. The design is simple, as simple as the design of a well-written book. Your expedition will be enclosed in the physical framework of start, direction, ports of call, and return.<sup>48</sup>

Notice the subtle reference to the hero's journey. Ricketts had gone on an expedition with Campbell a decade before; he and Steinbeck were familiar with these theories.<sup>49</sup> The authors go on to devote the first three and a half chapters of *Sea of Cortez* to the acquisition of a captain, a boat, a crew, provisions, and travel documents. They explain their choices of gear and equipment, discuss why people go on voyages, and why they, the authors, are going. When they do finally leave the harbor, the narrative moves chronologically, with several digressions. The log portion of the text ends with an entry that sums up the expedition philosophically. They are in view of Cedros Island, the location they had

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<sup>48</sup> Steinbeck, John [and Ed Ricketts]. *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. New York: Penguin, 1995, p.5.

<sup>49</sup> Astro, Richard. 'Introduction.' *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. New York: Penguin, 1995, p.xviii. They also allude to the home-adventure-home motif when discussing 'a slow, painful symbol and pattern of his whole species,' p.59.

identified earlier as the ecological gateway into the Sea of Cortez. In other words, with this in sight, the voyage is over, the spell is broken, and they are home.

In *Sailing Alone Around the World* (1900), Slocum writes two introductory chapters with broad strokes, describing his birthplace, his sea experience, the building of *Spray*, and the sea trials up to the Canadian Maritimes. Slocum is eager to get the story to sea, but he needs these few details to establish, though humbly, his profound sea experience and salty lineage, while also showing both he and his boat as underdogs, written off and past their prime. In a similar way, Melville uses his early chapters to establish his Redburn as the greenest of sailors—sensitive and melodramatic—showing him leaving his house and parting with his family: ‘So I broke loose from their arms, and not daring to look behind, ran away as fast as I could.’<sup>50</sup> For Chichester, the design of his boat plagues him throughout the voyage, so he spends considerable time in his book, *Gipsy Moth Circles the World* (1967), explaining all of the planning that went into its construction. Chichester also establishes himself as alone and an underdog by showing how the vessel is ill suited for the voyage and describing his own health, notably the injury to his leg, which builds a certain suspense as to how he is going to complete the journey, regardless of the fact the reader already knows he does. Chichester could have gone back to the production of the ship through various flashbacks, but both he, Melville, and Slocum prefer to proceed through their narratives chronologically.

Slocum, in the tradition, gives very little after returning home, besides an Appendix about the specifics of the *Spray*. He ends simply, returning to the port where he rebuilt the boat: ‘I now moor ship, weather-bitt cables, and leave the sloop *Spray*, for the present, safe in port.’<sup>51</sup> Chichester’s book climaxes with his rounding of Cape Horn. Out of seventeen chapters, he devotes just three to his homebound run through the entirety of the South and

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<sup>50</sup> Melville, Herman. *Redburn: His First Voyage*. New York, Penguin, 1986, p.52.

<sup>51</sup> Slocum, Joshua. *Sailing Alone Around the World*. Hungary: Könemann, 1997, p.217.



North Atlantic. Chichester also ends with the boat's arrival to its starting place. He left it to his editor to write 'An Epilogue,' about the subsequent reception in London, his meeting with the Queen, and the significance of the voyage. Chichester ends beforehand with this paragraph: '*Gipsy Moth* had completed her passage home...Perhaps I might add that, with eight log books filled up, I had also written more than 200,000 words.'<sup>52</sup>

Authors of first person sea voyage narratives rarely use any *prolepsis* or *analepsis*, any subtle or significant foreshadowing or flashbacks, mostly because the genre by definition is traditionally a direct telling. The early narratives were created with a focus on chronological action, with less interest in the development of mood and character. One reason for this is that the authors were sailors foremost, not writers or poets, and even those narratives assisted by professionals would not want to diverge too far from that sense of authenticity by using anything but a simple chronological structure. Most later works, even fictional ones, have remained faithful to this. The use of foreshadowing, suspense, and other common tools to further a plot are not as critical, because the voyage itself intrinsically, physically, is moving forward, driving ahead to a destination and to an end. The suspense is already built in for the reader: Will the narrator make it safely home? That is enough.

Equally important to the story is how the writer chooses to physically present the narrative within the book. The chapter form, used for most works of prose in all genres, is indeed common for the sea voyage narrative, too, whether it is a novel, novella, or even the longer short story. Defoe, Stevenson, Cooper, Conrad, London, Slocum, and Childers all use chapters, either numbered or with summarizing titles. Yet their sea books still all have a distinctly day-by-day sort of pacing, nodding in various degrees toward a series of journal entries. In *Kon-Tiki* (1950), Heyerdahl uses chapters; he narrates chronologically and

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<sup>52</sup> Chichester, Francis. *Gipsy Moth Circles the World*. Aylesbury: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967, p.222.

quotes sections directly from the ship's 'diary.'<sup>53</sup> One method employed by Melville and Martel is to use numerous very short chapters to mimic this journal feeling more closely. Other writers have adjusted the length of chapters and the pacing of plot elements because of the narrative's original publication as a serial, as was the case with *Pym* and *Typhoon*. In *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* (1856), published in the Christmas issue of his periodical *Household Words*, Dickens wedged several stories from different authors into one tale by using the frame of a shipwrecked boat and various passengers and crew sharing short stories.

Several authors choose to structure their narrative as a string of journal entries, similar to how information is recorded during an actual voyage. Since before the time of Columbus, mariners, particularly if they were officers, have contributed to a general ship's log that is updated several times a day. This log is primarily devoted to the business of weather, navigation, or cargo. A mariner might also keep a personal journal in addition, which allows for private musings and observations. So it is natural and perhaps easier for authors of sea voyage narratives to use the journal entry format, particularly if not as experienced with writing a novel. In Defoe's introduction to his fictional *A New Voyage Round the World*, he ironically complains that previous historic narratives about circumnavigation have been boring and poorly written, how few of the 'several navigators whose voyages round the world have been published' give any real adventures, only detailed piloting information. He writes:

Another sort of these writers have just given us their long journals, tedious accounts of their log work, how many leagues sailed every day, where they had winds, when it blew hard, and when softly, what latitude in every observation, what meridian distance, and what variation of the compass...

Such also are the voyages of Captain John Wood...and Martin Frobisher ...all of which are indeed full of their own journals, and the incidents of sailing, but

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<sup>53</sup> Heyerdahl, Thor. *The Kon-Tiki Expedition: By Raft Across the South Seas*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950, pp.120, 158, et al.

have little or nothing of story in them for the use of such readers who never intend to go to sea.<sup>54</sup>

Defoe strove to tell the more adventurous parts of a voyage—the accidents and storms and encounters with native peoples—but he was in no way able to quash the journal method as a standard template. Even today, authors working in fiction, partly striving for the effect of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century narratives, stick with this format—a distinctly salty structure—as exemplified in *Tuning the Rig* and *Log from the Sea of Cortez*. Indeed, mariners still keep logs and journals at sea, so narratives continue to be organized this way.

Within the journal entry presentation, there is a great range. The primary problem for the writer is that voyages last for months and years, with parts worth telling occurring at different rates and times. Some authors, like Oxenhorn, choose to clearly demarcate each entry with date and location—but his voyage is only for six weeks. Fielding, in his *Voyage to Lisbon* (1755), structures his book with dated entries, but his passage lasts less than two months. More commonly, authors approach the journal structure as Dana does, slipping in and out of the day-to-day to allow more general comments and cover larger periods of time. In *South* (1919), Shackleton puts quotation marks around sections from his original journal or from those of his party, mixing them within longer entries or summaries written in retrospect. Chichester does the same.

So it is common for voyage narratives to have very short chapters or subheadings with dates and locations. In addition, the early nonfiction narratives from mariners and explorers were often glued together with a combination of other material, since the ships were not only conducting business but reporting information about new people, places, and organisms. Dampier, whom Edwards credits as the founder of the popular sea voyage narrative in Britain, was confused himself as to how much description to give in contrast to

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<sup>54</sup> Defoe, Daniel. *A New Voyage Round the World by a Course never sailed before*. London: J.M.Dent and Co., 1895, p.3.

the telling of his personal adventures.<sup>55</sup> Since then, sea voyage narratives have continued to have multiple personalities, serving as travel guide, nautical instruction manual, adventure romance, treatise on religion, botanical and biological survey, and often as a comment on anthropological, sociological, or political issues. The authors tend to digress freely and broadly, inserting and referencing the advice and content from previous voyagers or from various nonfiction sources. In *A Narrative of the Mutiny on Board the Ship Globe* (1828) Hussey and Lay, crewmembers, structure the first half of their book telling the gruesome account of a shipmate who goes mad and murders the captain with an axe. Then they progress in the narrative to a description of their time marooned in the Mulgrave Islands in the Pacific. Hussey and Lay even include a glossary of the native language. In Macgregor's *The Voyage Alone in the Yawl Rob Roy* (1867) he felt it within his bounds to digress in a footnote about how the 'phases of human character may be studied among dogs'<sup>56</sup> while in another note he discusses a future magnetic self-steering mechanism. Poe paraphrases or quotes directly from more than forty sources to make up over one-fifth of *Pym*,<sup>57</sup> and at the halfway point of the book, he alters from a more novelistic form to that of the journal structure more common to a voyage-of-discovery narrative. After a series of adventures, including being nearly buried alive, Pym 'had luckily with [him] a pocketbook and pencil,'<sup>58</sup> in which to record diagrams of coded chasms. He includes these illustrations in the text.

Poe's small drawings are well within the tradition. Beyond a mixture of prose content, sea narratives commonly contain all sorts of supporting material, including maps,

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<sup>55</sup> Edwards, pp.2, 7, 17-43.

<sup>56</sup> MacGregor, John. *The Voyage Alone in the Yawl Rob Roy*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2001, p.98.

<sup>57</sup> Research by Burton Pollin, as cited in: Beegel, Susan. "'Mutiny and Atrocious Butchery': The *Globe* Mutiny as a Source for *Pym*." *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*. Richard Kopley, ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992, pp.17-8.

<sup>58</sup> Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. New York: Penguin, 1986, p.223.

charts, diagrams, tide tables, formulas, illustrations, photographs, and footnotes. Many of these narratives when published were accompanied with large portions of scientific materials, either as an appendix or sprinkled throughout. In *A Narrative of the Mutiny* Bligh includes a diagram of his vessel, a crew list, a sketched chart, previous tide tables, advice for future mariners, footnotes, and comments on the navigation of Cook. Childers includes relevant maps and charts. Chichester includes letters, press releases, maps, photographs, to-do lists, line drawings, and, in three appendices he adds facsimiles of his log entries, a list of provisions, and the boat's sail plan.

Sea narratives often include literary or Biblical quotations. MacGregor quotes Pope's *Odyssey*. In *Two Years*, Dana uses Latin phrases and cites canonical literature regularly, such as the works of Shakespeare and Virgil—maybe in part to show off his learning and because he is a poet's son, but also perhaps because this was the style of his day. Working within the tradition of voyage stories, Golding creates a narrator in *Rites of Passage* (1980) who quotes Coleridge, uses Greek and French phrases, and references Shakespeare and Greek mythology, which in this case adds nicely to the character's pretentiousness.

In *Sailing Alone*, Slocum quotes Darwin and gives lines from sea chanteys. He includes a portion of a personal letter from Robert Louis Stevenson's wife. Steinbeck and Ricketts include citations from philosophers, historians, and biologists, and frequently write out the directions of the Coast Pilot verbatim. Murphy drops in Latin verses, entire Shakespearean sonnets, musical notations, long ballad verses, the crew list, a list of the books he brought on board, sketches of birds, and an example of a celestial calculation. Oxenhorn inserts two of his own poems. In *Passage to Juneau: A Sea and Its Meanings* (1999), Raban weaves in quotations from other sea voyage narratives and travelers, such as Cook, Vancouver, Muir, and Smeeton, while he also cites cruise ship brochures, native

stories, and a local paper's police blotter—all in the same narrative beside quotations from Emerson, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, and Barry Lopez.

Letters figure strongly in the life of a mariner at sea, and the authors of sea voyage narratives occasionally use this to structure their work. Conrad inserts letters into his third person *Typhoon* to provide alternative first person accounts of events and to add further depth to the characters. Barrett does the same in her *Voyage of the Narwhal* (1998) and her short story 'Birds with No Feet' (1996). Falconbridge structured her *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone* (1794) entirely as a collection of letters, written to an anonymous 'My dear Friend.'<sup>59</sup>

In *Rites of Passage* Golding uses a structure of epistolary journal entries, written for a character off the vessel. The narrator, Talbot, begins with this first entry:

(I)

Honoured godfather,

With those words I begin the journal I engaged myself to keep for you—no words could be more suitable!

Very well then. The place: on board the ship at last. The year: you know it. The date? Surely what matters is that it is the first day of my passage to the other side of the world.<sup>60</sup>

Toward the end of the book, Talbot finds a lengthy letter, which is also a series of diary entries written by another character to someone off the ship. This adds another perspective to the story and helps to solve a mystery. Even Talbot's journal itself becomes woven into the narrative. The documentation of events aboard ship becomes crucial. When Golding adds the second series of journal entries into the text, called 'Colley's Letter,' which occupies over fifteen percent of the book, he takes on the added challenge, as did Conrad and Barrett, to create a convincingly different voice and point of view.

A notable outlier to the traditional sea voyage narrative structure is *Far Tortuga*

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<sup>59</sup> Edwards, p.161.

<sup>60</sup> Golding, William. *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy*. London: Faber and Faber, 1991, p.3.

(1975). Matthiessen's novel is not in the first person, but it is important to mention here because it melds poetry, prose, and drama with careful attention to white space on the page. He incorporates small ink-brush style illustrations, usually to emphasize the fishermen's attention to solar and lunar cycles. Matthiessen includes ship documents, the engraving on a head stone, and two hand-drawn and labeled diagrams of the ship. The work is a string of poetic fragments, dialogue with thick Caribbean dialect, song, storytelling, explanatory notes that serve as stage directions, and sometimes actual stage directions. As Bender explains, Matthiessen's choice of language and structure emphasizes, internalizes, the sun, the heat, the wind, and the water.<sup>61</sup>

The conventional structure for the sea voyage narrative remains, however, distinctly linear, simple, day-by-day, a structure that spends little time either before or after the voyage. The writer tends to use little temporal shifting in the plot, preferring to tell the story directly and chronologically, yet feels free to digress on nearly any subject and to include within the text a variety of supporting materials, both textual and visual.

### **Point of View and Voice**

The author of a sea voyage narrative, like any writer, must choose from which point of view to tell the story and what tone of voice would best suit his or her purpose. Hoffman and Murphy explain that these concepts are metaphoric: 'The figure of point of view has to do with how the action is seen or experienced...the figurative narrative voice is really silent and requires us to suppose from the words on the page how that voice would sound if someone were actually speaking them.'<sup>62</sup> In other words, *point of view* means through whose eyes the reader sees the story: is this from a participant in the events, a distant

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<sup>61</sup> Bender, Bert. *Sea-Brothers: The Tradition of American Sea-Fiction from Moby-Dick to the Present*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988, p.212.

<sup>62</sup> Hoffman, Michael J. and Patrick D. Murphy. *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. Second Ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999, p.7.

witness, or just some unknown relating the tale? Point of view is usually described as first, second, or third person, but that is only a partial description with many more layers available. Attached to point of view is *voice*, which is partly the relationship and connection that the narrator invites for the reader and also how this storyteller sounds: what kind of speech does the reader imagine?

Both Booth and Leaska have created taxonomies of point of view; each emphasizing the complexity and difficulty in grouping works.<sup>63</sup> Both scholars show the inadequacy of the simple categories of ‘person,’ but it is useful here to at least begin the discussion because this is the first decision the majority of authors confront in regards to point of view for the sea voyage narrative, to define the subject: Will I write my story as ‘I’ or ‘him’ or ‘her’?

A large portion of sea narratives, especially those written as fiction, are presented in third person. This is a common choice for an author, to write about the exploits of a particular character by way of ‘he walked up the gangway,’ ‘she grasped the wheel,’ etc. Cooper, Conrad, Forester, and O’Brian all wrote numerous sea narratives this way. Though this essay focuses on first person tales, it is important to mention at least the larger variations within third person, and then to conjecture on why the author chooses one over another.

Within third person, the author might choose an *omniscient* point of view, an all-knowing narrator who is everywhere at once, who knows what is inside each character’s head, who knows the past, present, and future of everybody in the story. The narrator might step out and remind the reader of his or her presence, or remain unnamed and distant, but in the omniscient point of view there is the sense of a god-like authorial voice who chooses

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<sup>63</sup> Wayne Booth’s ‘Distance and Point of View: An Essay on Classification,’ and Mitchell A Leaska’s ‘The Concept of Point of View,’ are both excerpted from larger works in: Hoffman, Michael J. and Patrick D. Murphy, eds. *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*.



what to tell the reader, chooses when to summarize and when to slow down to give the details of an event. Kipling writes his *Captains Courageous* (1897) with the omniscient third person. In *Nigger of the Narcissus* Conrad describes the opening scene with his narrator's omniscient point of view:

The main deck was dark aft, but halfway from forward, through the open doors of the fore-castle, two streaks of brilliant light cut the shadow of the quiet night that lay upon the ship. A hum of voices was heard there, while port and starboard, in the illuminated doorways, silhouettes of moving men appeared for a moment, very black, without relief, like figures cut of sheet tin. The ship was ready for sea...The captain was ashore, where he had been engaging some new hands to make up his full crew; and, the work of the day over, the ship's officers had kept out of the way, glad of a little breathing time.<sup>64</sup>

Another option for the writer is what many contemporary authors call the *close third*, meaning the character is still 'he' or 'she,' but the narrator, hence the reader, is only privileged to be inside one character's mind. The reader might hear internal thoughts and monologue, might see the action of others, but only knows the thinking of one. Köepf does this with his *The Fisherman's Son* (1998). Some authors maintain this close third throughout the narrative, while, more commonly in the sea voyage narrative, authors allow movement from one character to another, but only one at a time, differentiating this from a full omniscient point of view—though the line is not black and white—in that they write through one character for a sustained period of time. Stone does this in *Outerbridge Reach* (1992), alternating between his three main characters.<sup>65</sup>

Authorial strategies in regards to third person and omniscience are fluid and utilized in various degrees; third and first person points of view might blend together, such as when an author shows the extensive internal monologue of a character, as Hemingway does in *The Old Man and the Sea*. In *Typhoon*, Conrad uses an omniscient narrator, but allows for a few interjections of first person points of view through his use of letters. In 'Youth,' his

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<sup>64</sup>Conrad, *Nigger of the Narcissus* in *Great Short Works of Joseph Conrad*, p.61.

<sup>65</sup> Toward the end of the work Stone introduces one more close third point of view, but only for one short chapter.

narrator briefly sets the scene and then merely records the words of another telling a story in the first person. This unnamed narrator reminds the reader that he himself is also a layer in the telling; after mentioning Marlow, he says: ‘At least I think that is how he spelt his name.’<sup>66</sup>

Most common to the sea voyage narrative, particularly those that lean toward nonfiction, is the consistent use of first person. The writer says implicitly: This is my story and here’s what happened to me. Reader, look through my eyes. Newby begins *The Last Grain Race* (1956): ‘On the day we lost the Cereal Account I finally decided to go to sea.’<sup>67</sup>

First person is perhaps the easiest method for inexperienced writers, and the most natural, in that this is how he or she would go about telling the adventure to family and friends. De Hartog explains that when he shifted to writing in English from Dutch, the first person was easier because he had been a playwright. He dictated his first sea novel, so it more naturally came out in first person. He writes of his second novel, *The Distant Shore* (1951): ‘It too was dictated and it is also told in the first person singular, which at the time was easier for me after my theatrical experience in English, as, in a sense, a story told by a narrator is a monologue.’<sup>68</sup> He goes on to explain that this led many readers to think the book was autobiographical. Indeed, for the reader, the first person point of view has the effect of an increase in confidentiality and a closeness to the storyteller. With this, however, the narrator gives up the ability to be inside the minds of other characters, as well as relinquishing some uses of poetic, figurative, or analytical language—unless the author wishes his or her narrator to have the traits to deliver this type of voice. Thomas Philbrick comments on how in the United States in the 1830s, even before *Two Years*, there was a

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<sup>66</sup> Conrad, ‘Youth,’ in *Great Short Works of Joseph Conrad*, p.179.

<sup>67</sup> Newby, Eric. *The Last Grain Race*. London: Lonely Planet Publications, 1999, p.17.

<sup>68</sup> de Hartog, Jan. ‘Author’s Preface.’ in *The Call of the Sea*. New York: Atheneum, 1966, p.v.

demand for a more realistic voice in the short story, satisfied by authors such as Ames and Leggett. Philbrick explains how this trend led to an alteration in point of view:

A new premium on the creation of verisimilitude, on documentation, on the inclusion of convincingly realistic detail...encouraged writers to relate their narratives in the first person, for what could seem more authentic than the account of an eyewitness? With increasing frequency the short sea story took the form of a yarn, a tale told in one sitting by a sailor who had viewed or taken part in the action and whose salty diction furthered the illusion of authenticity.<sup>69</sup>

Philbrick calculated that about two-thirds of the sea stories printed between 1827-1835 were written with a first person point of view.<sup>70</sup>

Some writers use the point of view of the *unreliable narrator*, more common in works of fiction. With any sea story, as discussed in regards to veracity earlier, the reader should begin with a level of leniency. ‘Every single sailor is a liar,’<sup>71</sup> de Hartog explains in *A Sailor’s Life* (1955). All are ‘yarns’ to some extent and all narratives, regardless of genre, are somewhat unreliable, but for a few maritime authors their narrative deliberately uses, is dependent, on this unreliable point of view.

The author of the sea voyage narrative might occasionally shift between first and third person for a sentence or two for the sake of a particular effect—perhaps for the purpose of formality, as in the occasional use by Bligh—or for the sake of comedy, as in those narratives of solo voyagers. In *Sailing Alone* Slocum writes: ‘On July 14...all hands cried “Sail ho!”<sup>72</sup> He declares at one point: ‘The turtle steak was good. I found no fault with the cook, and it was the rule of the voyage that the cook found no fault with me. There was never a ship’s crew so well agreed.’<sup>73</sup> In *The Voyage Alone*, MacGregor also refers to himself in third person for a laugh.

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<sup>69</sup> Philbrick, Thomas, p.103.

<sup>70</sup> Philbrick, Thomas, p.303.

<sup>71</sup> de Hartog, *A Sailor’s Life*, in *The Call of the Sea*, p.432.

<sup>72</sup> Slocum, p.30.

<sup>73</sup> Slocum, p.41.

Few sea voyage narratives, if any, are written entirely in the second person, placing the reader as the central character for the entire story, but the inclusion of ‘you’ is common not only in the introductions to these narratives, explaining why *you*, sitting in your chair, should believe this account, but also within the story to help the reader see, to participate, in a particular image. The second person also helps to break up the use, the pacing, of a single point of view. Here, for example, is Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* returning subtly to the narrator and placing his reader on deck as he describes the ship after the messy business of processing whale blubber: ‘But a day or two after, you look about you, and prick your ears in this self-same ship; and were it not for the tell-tale boats and try-works, you would all but swear you trod some silent merchant vessel, with a most scrupulously neat commander.’<sup>74</sup>

Some narrators slip into the second person in order to give instruction, in case, hypothetically or genuinely, the reader plans on doing a voyage like this, too. In *The Voyage Alone* MacGregor writes with this point of view when discussing coming into an anchorage singlehanded: ‘You sail into a port where in less than a minute you must apprehend by one panoramic glance the positions of twenty vessels, the run of the tide, and set of the wind, and depth of the water...These being the *data*, you have instantly to fix on a spot.’<sup>75</sup> MacGregor occasionally addresses the reader as if he or she is actually on board, so it becomes a first person plural point of view. After completing a digression on how to handle vessel traffic at sea, he writes: ‘This is my thought on the matter after many thoughts and some experience: meantime, while we have ate, and talked and thought, our yawl has slipped over six miles of sea, and we must rouse from a reverie to scan the changing picture.’<sup>76</sup> From this passage he begins to speak to himself, but also to the reader as if a

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<sup>74</sup> Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick*. New York: Penguin, 1992, p.468.

<sup>75</sup> MacGregor, p.37.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p.66-7.

member of the crew. The next sentence is: ‘Glance at the barometer—note the time.’<sup>77</sup>

Intimately connected to each sea voyage narrative’s point of view is the tone of this telling, the voice. The voice of the first person narrator can be a scholarly and knowledgeable voice, as with MacGregor’s—one experienced with nautical matters who digresses on psychological issues and sail-handling maneuvers. Or the author might choose a voice that is entirely informal, as if the reader and the teller are sitting at the pub and are equals, to an extreme point of what is sometimes called *skaz*, in which the voice, the storytelling, is deliberately attempting to mimic *actual* speech or the processes of thought, a voice like Huck Finn’s or Marlow’s—one that mimics the voice of the sailor, even his dialect. Leggett evokes this with his Jack Gunn: ‘It’s now near twelve years...since I shipped the first time in the sarvice; and it was about a year before that I was concerned in a bit of a scrape which I shall never forget, if I live to be as old as the Flying Dutchman.’<sup>78</sup> This informal voice might use the first person plural or the second person to evoke a more ‘fireside’ tone, a more confidential connection. For example, Patel, the narrator in *Life of Pi*, says: ‘Since we are on the subject, I became as constipated as Richard Parker,’<sup>79</sup> and later when explaining what it feels like to be a castaway: ‘The sun distresses you like a crowd, a noisy, invasive crowd that makes you cup your ears, that makes you close your eyes, that makes you want to hide.’<sup>80</sup>

Common to the sea voyage narrative is the *humble voice*, one that begs the reader’s pardon for not being a better wordsmith or storyteller. This goes along with what Booth

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.67.

<sup>78</sup> Leggett, William. ‘A Watch in the Main-Top,’ as cited in: Philbrick, Thomas. *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*, p.107.

<sup>79</sup> Martel, p.211.

<sup>80</sup> Martel, p.216.

calls the *self-conscious narrator*, one who reveals his or her ‘writing chores.’<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the reader’s awareness that the author is sitting down and writing or telling his or her adventure after returning from the vessel is a major element of the first person sea voyage narrative. Robertson, captain of the *Dolphin* in 1766-8, wrote the following about the scenery in Tierra del Fuego: ‘The Mountains is immensely high and not one Green Shrub from tope to bottom, the very Valeys that in oither places has some Trees Shrubs or Grass, here has non...It would require the pen of Milton or Shakespeare to Describe this place, therefor I shall give it upp.’<sup>82</sup> Cook is likewise apologetic for his writing skills, explaining in his introduction that he had ‘not had the advantage of much school education.’<sup>83</sup> In his *Journal of Researches* (1839), Darwin laments that he cannot describe the tropical plants thriving in their natural habitat: ‘I wished to find language to express my ideas. Epithet after epithet was found too weak to convey to those who have not visited the intertropical regions, the sensation of delight the mind experiences.’<sup>84</sup>

Subsequently, sticking with this historic precedent, sea voyage narrators have embraced this humble voice, which is natural to any experienced mariner who has learned humility from the sea itself. Slocum ends his narrative in the hopes his story has not ‘wearied’ his friends. This voice of humility can be a handy tool for the inexperienced writer, to get out of a description that would be especially difficult, and also, once this mariner establishes that he or she does not have the ‘skill,’ the reader might be more likely to forgive him or her, to feel even more connected, have more empathy for the narrator as a ‘regular’ person.

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<sup>81</sup> Booth, Wayne. ‘Distance and Point of View,’ in Hoffman, Michael J. and Patrick D. Murphy, eds. *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, p.124.

<sup>82</sup> Robertson, George. *Discovery of Tahiti...*[1948], as cited in: Edwards, p.93.

<sup>83</sup> Cook, James. *A Voyage Towards the South Pole...*, as cited in: Edwards, p.123.

<sup>84</sup> Darwin, Charles. *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited During the Voyage of H.M.S “Beagle” Round the World*. London: Ward, Lock and Co. 1889, p.362.

Justice writes of stepping outside her sphere in her introduction to *A Voyage to Russia* (1739), apologizing ‘for my Presumption in attempting to engage in a WORK, which requires a more elegant and superior Hand to compleat, than any Female Abilities can pretend to.’<sup>85</sup> While Justice’s voice of humility is common to the sea voyage narrative, her voice as a woman is rare. Edwards found less than a dozen sea stories by women in his study of English eighteenth-century voyage narratives. In Foulke’s 1997 chronology of significant sea voyage narratives he names only Porter’s *Ship of Fools* (1945). Davison’s *My Ship is So Small* (1956), Aebi’s *Maiden Voyage* (1989), Greenlaw’s *The Hungry Ocean: A Swordboat Captain’s Journey* (1999), and others could be added to his timeline. There are also a few published journals of wives who went to sea, such as *The Log of the Skipper’s Wife* (1979). Several well-known female fiction writers have written stories set partly on the water, and even taken their female protagonists or narrators on an ocean journey, as Woolf did in *The Voyage Out* (1915), but the experience at sea is not the focus of these texts. Though changing in recent years, the voice of the sea voyage narrative has been decidedly, nearly completely, male.

Male writers who choose the structure of journal entries or epistolary works tend to deliver a less macho voice, more self-reflective by design, since they are sharing personal thoughts and emotions. Oxenhorn regularly reveals when he is afraid and frustrated, similar to how Lewis does in her *Two in a Boat*. At the end of only his second entry Oxenhorn confesses: ‘If today is typical, the notion of limits, of what is reasonable to ask seems never to have crossed these people’s minds. If you’re asleep they wake you; when you’re awake, they work you. There is no time—none at all—to get hold of yourself, to make sense of what goes on. I feel wiped out after fourteen hours!’<sup>86</sup> This is also partly a reflection of the time period and changing views of masculinity. Dana reveals little emotion in his entries.

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<sup>85</sup> Justice, Elizabeth. *A Voyage to Russia*, as cited in: Edwards, p.179.

<sup>86</sup> Oxenhorn, p.14.

He explains instead how he takes ‘the bull by the horns’ during his first days at sea, regardless of seasickness and fatigue.

When authors create journal entries written to a particular individual, rather than a theoretical self, the narrative voice has a different type of intimacy. Murphy does this in his *Logbook for Grace*, which is about his voyage as a naturalist aboard a whaleship. The author’s wife, Grace, encourages him to go on the expedition even though it is an opportunity that presents itself at an awkward time, just after their marriage. Murphy writes the entries during the voyage, but doesn’t publish them until thirty-five years later. He retains, however, an excited and youthful voice, one who is deeply missing his newlywed. The first entry, the first lines of the narrative, describe him watching her wave goodbye on the dock. Much later in the voyage, from South Georgia, he writes:

DECEMBER 24. It is night and Christmas Eve. I have just hung up my stocking on the bookshelves at the foot of my berth, and have put in your Christmas letter, written seven long months ago. Four other sealed letters or cards that you so phenomenally collected are along with it, so I am sure to have a surprise in the morning.

There will not be any particular Christmas celebration on the *Daisy*. So far as I can determine, the Cape Verde Island Portuguese don’t know what Santa Claus means and have nobody in their folklore who corresponds to him.

During the day I made some more photographs, including my best of sea elephants to date.<sup>87</sup>

Taken as a whole, most voyage stories are narrated not only by men, but young men, with a young voice, that of the greenhand, the neophyte. Authors writing fiction often reach for this. Melville taps into this voice in *Redburn*. London does the same in *The Sea-Wolf*, even though his narrator, like Oxenhorn, is not necessarily young himself—he is young to life at sea. Stories with narrators that have come ashore and are speaking later in life usually have a nostalgic, romantic air to them, as exemplified in Conrad’s ‘Youth.’

The voice of eighteenth and nineteenth-century narratives were often biased toward a devotional, religious voice. Bligh, Chase, and others regularly refer to God’s help and the

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<sup>87</sup> Murphy, p.229.



hand of Providence. This is traced not just to the time period but also perhaps to the way experience at sea had taught them a helplessness to larger natural forces. In turn, Poe uses this voice in *Pym*: ‘All was found to be safe, and we did not fail to return sincere thanks to God for our deliverance from the imminent danger we had escaped.’<sup>88</sup> Even Slocum uses a devotional voice at times.

Another style of narration used in sea voyage narratives is the *scientific voice*, marked by curiosity and careful description that reaches for a nonjudgmental tone. This is common to the earlier narratives that hoped to compile cultural and biological information. Dampier often writes passages like this: ‘Green Turtle live on Grass, which grows in the Sea, in 3, 4, 5, or 6 Fathom Water, at most of the Places before-mentioned. This Grass is different from the Manatee-grass, for that is a small blade; but this is a quarter of an inch broad, and six Inches long.’<sup>89</sup> Dana writes about life at sea and the ethnicity of people in California. He write anthropologically about his fellow sailors and tries to describe the ports he visits: ‘The houses here [in Monterey], as everywhere in California, are of one story, built of clay made into large bricks, about a foot and a half square and three or four inches thick, and hardened in the sun.’<sup>90</sup>

Steinbeck and Ricketts use this scientific voice to describe non-scientific things in order to parody this style, making their point of the inevitable mixing of scientific endeavors with the creative and the spiritual. The use of ‘us’ and ‘one’ adds a more objective sounding voice, as if it is the formal report from a research team, and they sometimes use the passive voice and simple sentence structures to sound scientific. Steinbeck and Ricketts often use this for comic effect, such as when discussing their recalcitrant outboard engine or trying to catch Sally Lightfoot crabs, putting nearly

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<sup>88</sup> Poe, p.97.

<sup>89</sup> Dampier, William. *A New Voyage Round the World*. London: The Argonaut Press, 1927, pp.79-80.

<sup>90</sup> Dana, p.130.

everything through a pseudo-scientific method. For example: ‘The beer was warm in us and pleasant, and the air had a liquid warmth that was really there without the beer, for we tested it later.’<sup>91</sup> When trying to convince the captain to take them on their expedition, they write: ‘He was willing to let us do any crazy thing that we wanted as long as we (1) paid a fair price, (2) told him where to go, (3) did not insist that he endanger the boat, (4) got back on time, and (5) didn’t mix him up in our nonsense.’<sup>92</sup>

As in any genre, within the sea voyage narrative, there are endless variations and twists and gradations in point of view and voice, but it is possible to generalize that which is most common for this type of story: a male first person point of view with a humble, familiar, unadorned, occasionally devotional voice, which sometimes attempts to describe his world in a scientific way.

### **Tense**

As with any other genre or individual piece of writing, the author of the sea voyage narrative creates for him or herself a set of rules and boundaries. Veracity, structure, point of view, and voice are the larger decisions and are likely approached consciously at some level. There are other lesser considerations, such as the use of tense and direct speech, which for most writers of the sea voyage narrative, I believe, only arise as a choice when there is a problem—when, in the natural course of writing, something suddenly sounds off to the ear or to the author’s sense of logic.

Most sea narratives are told in the simple past tense. The narrator has returned from the sea and relates events that have been completed. Dana: ‘The second day after our

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<sup>91</sup> Steinbeck [and Ricketts], p.58.

<sup>92</sup> Steinbeck [and Ricketts], p.8.

arrival, a full-rigged brig came around the point from the northward.’<sup>93</sup> Slocum:

‘Impulsively I sprang to the jib-halyards and down-haul, and instantly downed the jib.’<sup>94</sup>

Writers cannot always tell events so simply, though, particularly when there is dialogue. Consider this example from Conrad in ‘Youth’: ‘This was something different from the captains’ wives I’d known on board crack clippers. When I brought her the shirts, she said: “And the socks? They want mending, I am sure, and John’s—Captain Beard’s—things are all in order now. I would be glad of something to do.”’ Conrad had to shift his tense for the authenticity of the dialogue and the logic of time. In this single passage, he uses four different tense variations.

Most narratives in journal form are told in the past tense. The author tries to give the impression that the narrator is unaware of what is to come, but this is only an effect and most writers allow themselves a longer, more authorial view at times. For example, as the *Alert* makes her final passage to Boston, Dana writes:

*Sunday, July 24th*, when we were in latitude 50°27’S., longitude 62°13’W., having made four degrees of latitude in the last twenty-four hours. Being now to the northward of the Falkland Islands, the ship was kept off, north-east, for the equator; ...she went gloriously on; every heave of the sea leaving the Cape astern, and every hour bringing us nearer to home, and to warm weather. Many a time, when blocked up in the ice, with everything dismal and discouraging about us, had we said, —if we were only fairly round, and standing north on the other side, we should ask for no more: —and now we had it all, with a clear sea, and as much wind as a sailor could pray for.<sup>95</sup>

Notice the use of ‘now,’ in that passage, twice, as well as the past-progressive phrases and clauses that include ‘leaving,’ ‘being,’ ‘bringing,’ and ‘standing,’ with which Dana provides a feel of living in that present, as the sailors look both backward and forward in time.

Maritime authors rarely use the simple present tense in the way some people might actually write in their diaries, as in ‘here I am in my bunk, I’m hungry and tired, and I have

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<sup>93</sup> Dana, p.279.

<sup>94</sup> Slocum, p.47.

<sup>95</sup> Dana, p.423.

watch in forty-five minutes.’ But when authors want to give the effect of this, they might use some simple present tense and its variations, to make the reader aware of the narrator’s ‘writing chores,’ as well as to bring the reader as close to the moment as possible.

Golding’s narrator uses the present tense regularly in *Rites of Passage*. London, in *The Sea Wolf*, subtly moves into the present tense to diminish the narrative distance. In the beginning of the novel it is all past tense, as Van Weyden tells the story as if sitting with us in a parlor, but then in chapter seven, he begins to introduce present tense and variations—bringing the reader farther into the story and leaving the parlor behind. He begins this seventh chapter: ‘At last, after three days of variable winds, we have caught the northeast trades,’ and then ‘Ten knots, twelve knots, eleven knots...is the speed we are making.’<sup>96</sup>

Oxenhorn introduces the present, too. This is an entry about learning celestial navigation:

I will not attempt to set down how one does this. Suffice it to say that I am now as utterly ensnared in cosines as I was six days ago in leechlines and preventers. Still, after three days’ practice, I am able to “swing the sextant” and work through the tables. Just this morning I confirmed beyond all doubt that we are in the Northern Hemisphere.<sup>97</sup>

In sea voyage narratives that use the journal entry structure, the sense of time, the tense, the degree of feigned ignorance as to how the story ends is critical to the narrator’s delivery—to the believability and consistency of the story—particularly if connected to the use of a deliberately unreliable narrator.

The injection of present tense gives the illusion of timelessness, as if the event is always happening right now. An entire work written in the present tense, however, would be a challenge, especially one in first person, as most writers want to include smaller stories within. It would be cumbersome to compose a full book of prose with sentences like ‘I eat my lunch now as I write...I clean up on my way to lookout, the Captain drives me crazy,’ and so on. If the author chooses to write omnisciently with a great portion of dialogue,

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<sup>96</sup> London, Jack. *The Sea-Wolf*. New York: Bantam Books, 1960, p.49.

<sup>97</sup> Oxenhorn, p.185.

however, or even in the form of a play, substantial use of present tense is more of an option. Matthiessen's *Far Tortuga* is the extraordinary example, in which he writes in present tense throughout—though it is not in first person. For example, he writes: 'Byrum heaves to his feet. He goes to the leeward rail to scrape his plate, brushing the Captain closer than is necessary.'<sup>98</sup>

In the first person sea voyage narrative, the author tends to stay consistently with one tense, but he or she will use a wide variety in the course of the story, particularly if there is dialogue involved. Many of these choices and shifts are unconscious, based solely on the author's reliable ear for writing and language. The most common use for the sea voyage narrative is the past tense, even if a journal entry structure is employed.

### **Direct Speech**

Even if the mariner-narrator could not possibly have remembered the exact words of various people, the reader is content to accept elements of *direct speech*, i.e. spoken phrases and sentences separated by quotation marks. There are few, if any, narratives that include no direct speech at all. It is natural in storytelling; the reader embraces this without further thought, accepting the authorial license without scrutinizing or even noticing that a given line could not be *exactly* what that person said.

Nearly all narratives, even those that cling to a close representation of truth, such as Chase's *Essex*, include a few lines of direct speech. Chase used it only during the major action moments of his story. The first time is just after the whale has sunk their ship:

With a horror-struck countenance and voice, [the boatsteerer] suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, my God! where [sic] is the ship?"...[The captain] stopped about a boat's length off, but had no power to utter a single syllable...he sat down in his boat, pale and speechless...He was in a short time however enabled to address the

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<sup>98</sup> Matthiessen, Peter. *Far Tortuga*. New York: Vintage, 1988, p.83.

inquiry to me, “My God, Mr. Chase, what is the matter?” I answered, “We have been stove by a whale.” I then briefly told him the story.<sup>99</sup>

Chase does not use direct speech again until: ‘One of our companions suddenly and loudly called out, ‘there is land!’<sup>100</sup> and then only once more just before the story’s end: ‘My companion who was steering, suddenly and loudly called out, ‘*There’s a Sail!*’<sup>101</sup>

Bligh, like Chase, only includes direct speech at crucial moments, only on two occasions, in fact—once with words from the chief whose tribe is about to attack his crew and once with the now famous words from Fletcher Christian: ‘That, — captain Bligh, — that is the thing; — I am in hell — I am in hell.’<sup>102</sup>

In *Voyage to Lisbon*, Fielding, surprisingly, is also sparing with his direct speech and careful in its usage. He begins his entry for July 23<sup>rd</sup> this way:

Early in the morning the captain came to visit us, and to press us to make haste on board. ‘I am resolved’, says he, ‘not to lose a moment, now the wind is coming about fair: for my own part, I never was surer of a wind in all my life.’ I use his very words; nor will I presume to interpret or comment upon them farther, than by observing that they were spoke in the utmost hurry.

Poe, Melville, and Slocum use much more direct speech and dialogue in their narratives. Dana uses it occasionally. Stevenson uses it throughout *Treasure Island* (1883). Conrad puts entire stories within quotation marks with his Marlow narrator.

The critical challenge for direct speech is that the characters sound authentic, convincing—that the words do not sound as if they could *not* have been spoken. Actual dialogue is rarely transcribed verbatim—this would be tedious to read in most cases. Written speech need only create the effect of actual conversation. Consider this example from *Sailing Alone*, where Slocum demonstrates that people do not speak in full sentences,

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<sup>99</sup> Chase, p.29.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p.51.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p.71.

<sup>102</sup> Bligh, p.10.

particularly in times of distress. This surely was not the actual conversation, but it feels honest, reads well, and is funny:

“What is your depth of water?” I asked.

“Don’t know; we lost our lead. All the chain is out. We sounded with the anchor.”

“Send your dinghy over, and I’ll give you a lead.”

“We’ve lost our dinghy, too,” they cried.

“God is good, else you would have lost yourselves,” and “Farewell” was all I could say.

The trifling service proffered by the *Spray* would have saved their vessel.

“Report us,” they cried, as I stood on—“report us with sails blown away, and that we don’t care a dash and are not afraid.”

“Then there is no hope for you,” and again, “Farewell.”<sup>103</sup>

Direct speech can be used to excess, however, especially in a work with a claim to nonfiction. If there is too much of it, the reader becomes too aware that this sort of talk could never have happened, eventually unwilling to allow for the storytelling license. O’Hanlon, in *Trawler* (2003), for example, delivers a lot of information, recognizing it would be more palatable coming from a character’s voice—but no one speaks in the way he writes it down. Horwitz, a contemporary reviewer, wrote:

The nonstop talk in *Trawler* – Luke and O’Hanlon banter for whole chapters like mad dons in an Oxford dining hall – also can’t be read as strictly nonfictional. Most of it occurs while the author is frantically gutting fish in wild seas with so much noise that everyone shouts. O’Hanlon is so deranged by fatigue that his rational mind barely works. Yet he repeatedly renders, verbatim, rapid-fire and pitch-perfect monologues of several thousand words, often laced with Orkney and Shetland dialect, on subjects as knotted as European Union fishing quotas and sexual selection by hedge sparrows. This simply isn’t credible.<sup>104</sup>

The use of dialect is a common tool in sea voyage narratives, especially since the mariner is so often visiting other cultures or traveling alongside sailors from all over the world. The writer seeks to achieve the sound of a dialect or foreigners speaking English by altering spelling or reordering words and phrases. The line is delicate, however, because the speech

<sup>103</sup> Slocum, p.150. [This edition printed a lower case ‘w’ in ‘We’ve lost.’ Other editions do not.]

<sup>104</sup> Horwitz, Tony. ‘Fishing for Adventure: review of Redmond O’Hanlon’s *Trawler*.’ *The Washington Post*. 16 Jan 2005. Start page: T5. Accessed: <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/...>

should evoke the dialect but not mock it to distraction, not be a comic or malicious stereotype—which is often, of course, judged by the perceptions of the time period. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville writes the direct speech of twenty-three characters in his theatrical ‘Midnight, Forecastle’ chapter, including nearly as many different accents. In *Treasure Island*, Stevenson’s dialogue creates vivid personalities through speech—what popular culture considers today, partly because of him, as stereotypical pirate talk. This is London’s depiction of a Cockney cook in *The Sea-Wolf*:

“Gawd blime me if you ayn’t a slob. Wot ’re you good for anyw’y, I’d like to know? Eh? Wot ’re you good for anyw’y? Cawn’t even carry a bit of tea aft without losin’ it. Now I’ll ’ave to boil some more.

“An’ wot ’re you snifflin’ about?’ he burst out at me, with renewed rage. ‘’Cos you’ve ’urt yer pore little leg, pore little mamma’s darlin’.’<sup>105</sup>

Another important decision when using direct speech is the inclusion of what scholars call *tagging*, phrases such as ‘I said.’ Consider how Slocum’s dialogue above would read if he had not included ‘they cried’ twice. Slocum also includes a more distant, reported phrase in ‘was all I could say.’ Consider London’s choice of ‘he burst out at me.’ Tagging brings clarity to a conversation and descriptions of *how* speech is delivered, with what intentions, but tagging also intrudes into the story. Particularly when there is a great deal of dialogue, authors often choose to use as little tagging as possible, hoping the emotion need not be stated or described, and thus the narrator’s presence minimized.

The writer uses the same sensibilities for direct speech as is necessary for point of view and voice, just on a smaller scale. Nearly every author of the sea narrative uses direct speech, but in varying degrees. The words spoken aloud must ring true within the context of the narrative. Novels tend to be more liberal with direct speech, but even nonfiction writers cite the exact words of others, even if employing a journal-entry structure.

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<sup>105</sup> London, p.27.



### Maritime Terminology

The final authorial choice to be considered here is unique to the sea voyage narrative, a question that comes up early in the course of the author's process: How much maritime terminology should I use? Will the reader understand what I am saying? How much does he or she *need* to understand?

Every industry has its own vocabulary, but the language of boats is especially specific because of a sense of a long tradition, a need for safety, and, for some, a pride in maintaining the words in order to separate the maritime world from neophytes and life on land. Dana writes in the first chapter of *Two Years*: 'Unintelligible orders were so rapidly given and so immediately executed; there was such a hurrying about, and such an intermingling of strange cries and stranger actions, that I was completely bewildered. There is not so helpless and pitiable an object in the world as a landsman beginning a sailor's life.'<sup>106</sup> Melville's Redburn explains:

People who have never gone to sea for the first time as sailors, cannot imagine how puzzling and confounding it is. It must be like going into a barbarous country, where they speak a strange dialect, and dress in strange clothes, and live in strange houses. For sailors have their own names, even for things that are familiar ashore; and if you call a thing by its shore name, you are laughed at for an ignoramus and a land-lubber.<sup>107</sup>

If the author is a mariner, to write of things aboard ship in 'land-lubber' fashion, would insult his or her pride and his or her training. If the author has not spent time at sea, he or she seeks to use an authentic vocabulary. The writer knows, however, that a text can get bogged down in long explanations of nautical processes or obscure word choice.

The most basic strategy is to simply not worry too much about it—to use the proper words, but not to excess. In the first chapter of *Sailing Alone*, Slocum uses words such as 'keel,' 'breast-hooks,' 'stanchion,' 'bulwarks,' and 'covering-board,' all of which might

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<sup>106</sup> Dana, p.42.

<sup>107</sup> Melville. *Redburn: His First Voyage*, p.117.

mean nothing to some readers. He does not pause to define these words or even to explain the caulking process. He puts certain words or phrases in quotation marks, such as in this sentence: 'I just rested on my adz and "gammed" with him,'<sup>108</sup> but Slocum does not stop the narration to explain. He leaves it to the reader to learn these words through context or, if interested, to go look them up elsewhere. The experienced sailor understands the scene about caulking, the inexperienced does not, but that doesn't greatly affect the broader enjoyment of the story, partly because Slocum moves quickly. Thousands of 'armchair sailors' read the books by Patrick O'Brian with no comprehension of the details of handling an eighteenth-century square-rigger. Gale writes of Dana's language: 'Even when one cannot fully comprehend the lingo used, the effect is often thrilling.'<sup>109</sup>

Writing without regard for the lubberly reader, however, is not always possible. Specific wording can get confusing. Consider, for example, the word 'ceiling' which in wooden shipbuilding terminology represents the interior planking of a ship, more like the inside walls of a building. What is on land a ceiling is on a ship an 'overhead,' and walls on ships are known as 'bulkheads.' If in the course of the story, the writer needs to describe these areas, he or she can either figure a way to avoid using the words or find some way to define them earlier, perhaps shown to the reader by their use in a context.

Some situations in a story, such as the description of handling sail or navigation, require not only a certain amount of terminology, but also a broader understanding of life at sea. As mentioned in regards to structure, authors often digress into a topic so that it can be understood more thoroughly, perhaps explaining something beforehand so that all is clear when the real action occurs. The prime example of this is *Moby-Dick*, where the narrator digresses into the specifics of various objects, processes, and duties. Melville does this partly for the reader to recognize the metaphysical symbolism of the crew positions and the

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<sup>108</sup> Slocum, p.14.

<sup>109</sup> Gale, p.124.

elements of the ship and whaling, but also so when the final chase occurs, the reader has a clear picture and comprehension of what is happening. As the story rushes to the conclusion, Melville can write the following:

The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove; –ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him around the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next instant, the heavy eye-splice in the rope's final end flew out of the stark-empty tub, knocked down the oarsman, and smiting the sea, disappeared in its depths.<sup>110</sup>

This paragraph could be understood to some extent by any reader if approached 'cold,' but by the time the reader of the entire book arrives at this climactic point, Melville has already spent considerable effort describing the whale line, the harpoon, the whale boat, the tubs, and the roles of the different men in the boat, so that the image is vivid, both physically and symbolically. Melville did not need to take any time to explain.

For maritime terminology or information that is not absolutely essential to the plot—and many have good reason to argue that not all of Melville's descriptions are essential—another strategy is to simply cut the details completely out of the book or insert them at the end. When distributed in book form, Slocum's narrative came out with an 'Appendix' that gave more thorough details of the *Spray* and her sailing characteristics. In *The Last Grain Race* (1956), Newby steps out of the narration and invites the reader who is not interested in ships to move on. At one point he inserts a headline: 'TECHNICAL INTERLUDE (resurface at page 56),' and later he writes parenthetically: 'Readers who are discouraged by technical details about sails and sail-making should skip the rest of this chapter.'<sup>111</sup> MacGregor does the same, recommending that 'ladies and landsmen' who don't care about the layout of his boat's rig may 'skip the rest of this chapter.'<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, p.623.

<sup>111</sup> Newby, pp.48, 69.

<sup>112</sup> MacGregor, p.140.

A subtle, often-employed strategy to introduce new maritime terminology is to bring the reader along through the ‘greenhand’ character. The greenhand explains what he is learning to the reader, or when an experienced sailor explains things to him or her, the reader learns, too. The narrators of sea stories are often bright, bookish, and brand new to whatever watery world they are entering. Examples include Dana, Redburn, Jim Hawkins, Newby, Oxenhorn, and Talbot. A dim-witted narrator would not be convincing at picking up the new culture or be able to explain it well to the reader.

In *The Sea-Wolf*, consider how London teaches the reader about a sealing schooner through a sensitive literary critic named Van Weyden, a man who has never worked with his hands. Van Weyden is the victim of a shipwreck in San Francisco Bay. He tells the reader how he was carried out by the current and picked up by ‘this strange vessel,’ the schooner *Ghost*. Van Weyden first gives information about the ship and the situation by a narrative intrusion and through the words of another character: ‘That first day was made more difficult for me from the fact that the *Ghost*, under close reefs (terms such as these I did not learn till later), was plunging through what Mr. Mugridge called an “ ‘owlin’ sou’-easter”.’<sup>113</sup> As the story progresses, London introduces the reader to the terminology as his narrator learns it. Knowing the names of sails is useful for an understanding of the setting and for later plot elements, not to mention for the realistic flavor of the text. In the following chapter, Van Weyden says:

Sail had been made in the early watches, so that the *Ghost* was racing along under everything except two topsails and the flying jib. These three sails, I gathered from the conversation, were to be set immediately after breakfast. I learned, also, that Wolf Larsen was anxious to make the most of the storm, which was driving him to the south-west into that portion of the sea where he expected to pick up with the north-east trades.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> London, p.26.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p.32-33.

This is the smoothest way for London to deliver the information he feels important, without leaving his first person point of view or entering into clumsy dialogue beginning with something such as ‘So, what is the name of that sail?’ and ‘Where are we going, anyway?’ London uses this tool again and again. Van Weyden summarizes conversations he has with various crew while London provides him with characters who are willing to share this sort of information: ‘All this, and more, I have learned. The *Ghost* is considered the fastest schooner in both the San Francisco and Victoria fleets...Johnson was telling me about her in a short chat I had with him during yesterday’s dog-watch. He spoke enthusiastically, with the love for a fine craft such as some men feel for horses.’<sup>115</sup>

With London’s one parenthetical phrase, ‘terms such as these I did not learn till later,’ he permits his narrator to use maritime terminology comfortably and accurately in retrospect. If the narration was structured as a series of supposedly day-by-day journal entries, he would not have had that privilege. Dana and Oxenhorn, for example, try to report new terminology as their story progresses, suggesting the process of learning. With no apparent system, Dana puts words and phrases in italics or quotation marks, and occasionally defines a word or process either parenthetically or as a note. At other times, he narrates using complex maritime terminology with no explanation.<sup>116</sup> Dana does not use as much dialogue as other voyage narratives, so he often cites various salty phrases. For example: ‘In addition to all this, I had not got my “sea legs on,” was dreadfully sick, with hardly strength enough to hold on to anything, and it was “pitch dark.”’<sup>117</sup>

Oxenhorn also uses quotation marks, italics, and parenthetical definitions. Within his entries he takes time to explain words and processes, as well as discuss the derivation of words. He uses a great deal of dialogue within his journal entries, so he is able to use his

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p.38.

<sup>116</sup> See Gale, pp.122-4, for his analysis of Dana’s maritime terminology.

<sup>117</sup> Dana, p.45.

inquisitive self to have others explain things to him, and hence to the reader. Oxenhorn is also on a sailing ship where training students is part of its mission, so it is easier for him to work the terminology into the story because part of the reason he and others are aboard is to learn. In his entry for June 27<sup>th</sup>, notice how the narrator both teaches the reader various terms and skills, bedding it into the story, while at the same time commenting on maritime language itself. Notice also his use of tense and direct speech here, which is almost theatrical:

A bright afternoon in the Gulf of Maine, heading northeast in a gentle breeze. Off duty, second mate Bill Cowan, age twenty-five, stands amidships, a belaying pin in one hand and a toothpick in the other. Sunlight bouncing off the water halos his thick blond [sic] hair. With his head tipped back, he scans the rig as the watch he leads, the main watch, gathers. It is time to learn the ropes.

All told, *Regina* has 140 of them, paired like flexor and extensor muscles to set, trim, hoist, and lower 5200 square feet of sail...We will be required to know them all and locate each one, even in the dark.

We've been given diagrams to study. Thus to distinguish the fore topgallant staysail downhauls, mainsail peak inhauls, or mizzen clew outhauls from the gaff vang just behind (I mean *aft of*) the mizzen topsail brails, you need only memorize where each one is "coiled down" along the pinrail. Or the "taffrail." "Fife rail." "Catheads." Or the "spiderband." I've been walking the deck, chart in hand, naming each pin I pass and remembering the name for about as long as it takes to mispronounce it. It would be easier to learn these terms if I knew what they mean, what functions they describe. So in an effort to find out, I sidle up to the main watch, now assembled.

"Aaah you ready?" Bill asks, displaying his perfect teeth and sea-green eyes. "This heah's the uppa tops'l halyed. Pawt side, all by itself just aft of the royal bunts. Three-quartah-inch manilla. Jack, what does a halyard do?"

"Hauls the yard."

"Meaning what?"

"Got me!"

"How do you find out?" Silence.<sup>118</sup>

When journal entries are written to an individual who does not know the maritime world, explanations to him or her provide a convenient way to teach the reader. Golding's Talbot writes to his godfather about various phrasing and the ways of the ship. For example: 'As in the lieutenants' wardroom and the passenger salon, the rear wall, or in Tarpaulin language *the after bulkhead*, was one vast, leaded window by means of which

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<sup>118</sup> Oxenhorn, pp.8-9.

something like a third of the horizon could be seen.<sup>119</sup> Golding puts maritime vocabulary in italics. His narrator delights in learning the new language. In his first entry he tells his godfather how he has placed ‘Falconer’s *Marine Dictionary* by my pillow; for I am determined to speak the tarry language as perfectly as any of these rolling fellows!’<sup>120</sup> Golding was surely aware that Falconer is recognized as the first poet to use extensive maritime language in verse, in his *The Shipwreck* (1762). A mariner himself, Falconer published *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine* (1769). Golding comments on his own choices for maritime language in his ‘Foreword’ to *A Sea Trilogy*, addressing critics who might point out that he uses a word or phrase that post-dates the time period of his work, or at least by the data from dictionaries. He writes: ‘But we must not be slavish, for that is the shortest way to a dull and sterile page.’<sup>121</sup>

Another strategy for the inclusion of maritime terminology is the addition of a glossary, though this is not common, appearing only, as far as I have found, in works with a more scientific bend, as with Wordie’s ‘Sea-Ice Nomenclature’ in the appendices of Shackleton’s *South*, or the glossary at the back of *Sea of Cortez* which defines only scientific words, none that apply to shipboard life. Editors have added glossaries in later reprints of several other narratives, however.

Authors of sea voyage narratives must consider maritime terminology. They might reduce the words or phrases into manageable bites or compartmentalize sections at the end or within the text. They might put words in italics, quotations marks, and define them within the narration, in parentheses, or even as notes below. Having a greenhand character is a convenient and often-used strategy to teach the reader. The ability to deliver a sea story

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<sup>119</sup> Golding, p.138.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p.ix.

that can be followed and appreciated by *both* the landmen and the experienced mariner is perhaps the greatest, most-specific challenge for this genre.

**Conclusion: ‘I try all things’**

In setting out to write a sea voyage narrative—a genre with an exceptionally long tradition—an author quickly becomes conscious of the need to define for him or herself any commitment to telling the ‘facts’ of a story. He or she decides whether to speak with the first or third person. As the writing progresses, the need for other decisions in regards to structure, point of view, voice, tense, direct speech, and maritime terminology will arise in order to achieve a desired effect or in response to a problem.

Of course, these paths and choices are as different as there are different writers and individual works. Authorial choices are not necessarily linear, nor are they always conscious at the outset. Writers go back and forth with their decisions. Several major topics of the craft of writing have not been discussed here, perhaps most notably the creation of character, only alluded to in the sections on structure and point of view. Nor are the topics of decision-making a set of bordered categories; they blur into one another. Surely few writers see their decisions as the discrete categories laid out in this essay. There is no set route of choices where *x* leads to *y*. This essay is limited still further by its scope, its attempt to look at well over three-hundred years of first person prose sea voyage narratives written in English, of which only a sliver have been mentioned. Nor has this essay isolated works of enduring quality and popularity. What this introduction hopes to do, only, is to show some general trends in the sea voyage narrative and to show a variety of authorial choices, *tacks* taken during the creation of this type of story, applicable in many cases to nearly any genre, and thus providing a broader palette for the aspiring writer *and* for the critic.



Melville's *Moby-Dick*, if not the greatest of sea narratives, certainly the measuring stick, has been mentioned here sparingly because it could be used as an example for nearly every single choice discussed. *Moby-Dick* has nonfiction roots in the *Essex* narrative and the story of Mocha Dick. Melville went on his own whaling voyage, and he draws regularly from published narratives and works of history. The book is still used in museums today for anthropological and historic descriptions of the whale fishery. But Melville was never aboard a ship with a mad peg-legged captain, nor was he the lone survivor of a shipwreck. So *Moby-Dick* is undeniably a work of fiction. Melville uses every structure mentioned in this essay, and more. He begins the story similar to all of the traditional sea voyage narratives, except that he does not preface his with an author's note claiming to truth or giving background as to its publication, but instead he opens with an etymology of the word 'whale' and an 'Extracts' of great works of literature (including voyage narratives and sea songs) that mention whales. He writes his chapters as Shakespearean monologue, pit theatre, biological treatise, political essay, historical musing, and as metaphysical exercise—in-between he returns to the chronological narrative of life at sea, similar to the work of Dana. Melville tells extended stories within stories. He includes footnotes, quotations, stage directions, a cannibal's signature, and the text of cenotaphs. Ishmael, the narrator, begins with a musing on why men go to sea, then writes several chapters before departure, uncharacteristic of the sea narrative in its length and depth. Melville tells the story traditionally until the vessel gets underway. Soon his narrator disappears, leaving the reader unclear as to a point of view—partly because of the shifts in tone, from familiar to scholarly, but also because the narrator is often omniscient, providing the reader with monologues and scenes where Ishmael could not possibly be. The narrator shifts tenses and person—he occasionally speaks of himself in third person—he uses direct speech in a variety of different ways, including one example where he copies Chase's

quotation: ‘Oh, my God! where is the ship?’ He deals with maritime language through the greenhand character and with dialogue, footnotes, etymologies within the text, and long digressions on maritime processes.

In short, Melville is fully aware of the tradition of sea voyage narratives from which his book grows—the choices in form and style previously made—but, in the pursuit of his own masterpiece, he did not narrow his choices; he embraced all of them, and created his own. He writes in his chapter ‘The Prairie’—and notice his use of the humble voice: ‘Therefore, though I am but ill qualified for a pioneer, in the application of these two sciences [physiognomy and phrenology] to the whale, I will do my endeavor. I try all things; I achieve what I can.’<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, p.378.

GLOSSARY OF NAUTICAL TERMS<sup>1</sup>

**aft/er**—toward the back of a vessel, as in ‘the sail that is most aft,’ or ‘walk aft,’ or go to the ‘after part of the ship.’

**aground**—when part or the entire *keel* of a vessel is resting on the shore or bottom.

**aloft**—up in the *rigging* of a *ship*; up above.

**astern**—away from the back of a vessel, as in ‘the boat left a wake astern.’

**azimuth**—the angular distance of an arc transcribed by a heavenly body when it meets the horizon, as in ‘the sun set at 275°, so its azimuth is five degrees north of due west.’

**back**—as a verb, to *sheet* a sail to *windward*, usually with the intention of slowing down the vessel or altering its course; when the wind direction ‘backs’ it goes counter-clockwise in relation to the points of the compass.

**ballast**—removable or fixed weight in the bottom of a vessel, to help with stability.

**bare pole(s)**—no sails set, usually referred to when maneuvering in winds that are too strong for any sails at all.

**beam**—a timber that supports a deck, perpendicular to the *keel*; also the measurement of a boat’s widest part, i.e. breadth.

**beat**—to sail as close to the wind as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> These definitions are written in my own words, but I have consulted with the following sources in particular: *Cooke’s Seamanship for Yachtsmen* (1925), *The Oxford English Dictionary* ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)), and Model Shipways’s *Nautical Word Book* (1962). Nautical terms not only vary over time, but by region, maritime industry (e.g. fishing vs. navy), and even from vessel to vessel. This glossary is limited to terms and usage in ‘Immediate Passage’ and how the narrator uses them in the context of his experience with turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century sail-training ships, recreational sailing, and the language of the northeastern coast of the United States at his time.

**below**—under the main deck; it's generally bad form on a vessel to say 'I'm going downstairs,' partly because you would normally be descending a ladder; sometimes used as going 'belowdecks.'

**bend**—as a verb, to attach one thing to another, usually one rope to another or a sail to a *spar*; as a noun, a type of *knot* where one rope is attached to another, e.g. a 'sheet bend.'

**bilge**—the inside bottom of a vessel, above and on either side of the *keel*.

**binnacle**—a case for a vessel's compass.

**block**—an enclosed pulley to provide hauling power, i.e. purchase; when threaded with rope or wire it is called a 'block and tackle.'

**boom**—a *spar*, usually wood or metal, that supports the lower edge of a sail that runs *fore-and-aft*.

**boot stripe**—a line of paint between the *topsides* and the bottom.

**bosun**—from 'boatswain,' the crewman on a modern sail-training *ship* who is normally in charge of the general maintenance of the vessel.

**bow**—the front of a vessel.

**bowsprit**—a *spar* that extends out beyond the *forward* part of a sailing vessel to support the *jibs*.

**brace**—a rope that adjusts the horizontal angle of a *yard*; as a verb, to alter the angle of the yards, usually all of those on one *mast* at the same time.

**broad reach**—sailing with the wind approximately 45° on either side of the *stern*.

**bulwark**—the ledge around the sides of a vessel's topmost deck to keep people and things from falling into the water.

**cast off**—to throw or unfasten something, as in 'cast off a line.'

**clew**—a sail's lower, *after* corner, to which the *sheet* is attached; for *square sails*, both lower corners are clews.

**cockpit**—the recessed area in the back of a small boat, mostly for steering and some protection from wind and water.

**Colors**—ceremony aboard *ship* for raising or lowering flags.

**compass card**—floating piece inside the compass that has direction labeled on it.

**crosstrees**—metal or wood planks fit alongside the *mast* to support and angle the rigging; also *spreaders*, but crosstrees tend to be used more for standing on, for work or lookout.

**davits**—metal bars by which a vessel’s small boat is raised or lowered.

**dingy**—a very small boat used for recreational sailing or as transport to and from a larger vessel.

**dory**—type of small boat, generally flat-bottomed, designed for fishing.

**downhaul**—a rope attached to a sail for bringing it down.

**downwind**—going in the same direction as the wind, as in ‘we were sailing downwind, with all our square sails up.’

**draft**—a measurement of a vessel’s height of water required for it to be floating; the verb for this is *draw*, as in ‘how much does your boat draw when there are five fat adults on board?’

**draw**—when a sail catches the wind, as in ‘we sail much faster when the square sail is drawing’; see also *draft* above.

**drogue**—something dragged from the *stern* to slow a vessel down in heavy weather and stabilize its angle to approaching waves.

**EPIRB**—acronym for ‘Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon,’ a device that helps rescuers find a vessel at sea.

**fathom**—a measurement equivalent to a length of six feet.

**fender/fend off**—an object which protects a vessel from contact against something else, like a dock or another boat, usually made of rope or a hard plastic inflated like a balloon; as a verb it means to push away from an obstruction, as in ‘fend off with the boat hook so we don’t slam into the dock.’

**fore-and-aft**—an adjective, parallel to the *keel*.

**forecastle**—the *forward*most compartment for sailors on a *ship*, usually pronounced ‘fohk-sul.’

**forward**—toward the front of the vessel.

**gaff**—a *spar* on the top edge of a quadrilaterally-shaped *fore-and-aft* sail; can be the name of the type of sail itself.

**grey water**—rinse water from showers, doing dishes, etc.

**gunwale**—the upper edge of a boat, also ‘gunnel.’

**gybe**—to steer a boat’s stern through the direction of the wind; also spelled ‘jibe’ and ‘jybe.’

**halyard**—a rope attached to a sail or *spar* for raising it.

**handy-billy**—a *block and tackle* that can be moved around a vessel for various jobs.

**hank**—metal piece that connects a sail to a wire *stay*.

**hawser**—especially thick rope, used for docklines or heavy duties.

**heave to**—to adjust the sails and rudder so the vessel is balanced and almost stopped, often used in heavy weather.

**helm**—the position of steering a vessel; the wheel or *tiller* itself.

**hull**—the main body of a vessel.

**jackline**—a rope or similar strung across the deck to provide a clip-in point for harnesses, thus keeping crewmen from falling overboard.

**jib**—a triangular *fore-and-aft* sail set ahead of the *forwardmost mast*.

**keel**—the bottom edge and major lower structure of a vessel.

**knot**—in navigation, nautical miles per hour; also a configuring of rope put onto itself, e.g. a ‘figure-eight knot.’

**lanyard**—a piece of rope used between an object and a person or structural part of a vessel in order to keep the object from falling overboard or from *aloft*.

**lapstrake**—*hull* planking technique of fastening overlapping pieces of wood.

**lazarette**—compartment below for storage, generally in the *after* part of a *ship*.

**leeward**—the direction the wind is going toward, opposite of *windward*; on a vessel this is the side that is heeling closer to the water and the direction you should spit out your toothpaste; often abbreviated as ‘lee.’

**luff**—noun, the *forward* edge of a sail; verb, when this edge shakes, indicating the boat is off course or sailing inefficiently.

**marlin spike**—a pointed metal tool for splicing, tightening shackles, and other *ship* tasks.

**mast**—large usually cylindrical piece of wood or metal extending vertically to support the sails; a type of *spar*.

**midships**—same as ‘amidships’; a vessel’s waist or middle, perpendicular to the keel, usually referring to an area on deck.

**mouse**—as a verb, to use wire or string to secure a *shackle*, turnbuckle, or some other part from loosening.

**oarlock**—piece to hold an oar in place and act as its fulcrum, usually fastened in the *gunwale*.

**passageway**—a hallway *belowdecks* on a vessel.

**pawl**—a metal piece that clicks along the cogs of a windlass drum, allowing it to only rotate in one direction.

**pin**—a dowel-shaped piece of wood or metal for fastening lines.

**pintel**—a metal prong attached to a *rudder*, when fit into a ‘gudgeon’ that is attached to the hull, it makes a hinge; also ‘pintle.’

**port**—when facing toward the *bow*, the left side of a vessel; also a harbor, place to dock, etc.

**preventer**—a line to keep a *boom* from swinging over to the other side of the vessel.

**rail**—wood or metal extending along the top edge of a vessel, sometimes supported by *stanchions*, like the top edge of a fence; *gunwale* is a loose synonym.

**ratline**—a rope tied between *stays* or *shrouds* to make a rung of a ladder for climbing *aloft*.

**reef**—a way to reduce the amount of sail that is put up, thus exposing less canvas to heavier winds in an attempt to go slower and heel the boat less; can be expressed as a noun: ‘we tucked two reefs in the mainsail,’ or as a verb: ‘hurry up and reef the mainsail before that squall comes’; also an underwater geographic feature.

**rig/rigging**—catch-all term to refer to all of the ropes and wires that extend up to the masts of a vessel; ‘standing rigging’ refers more specifically to the fixed wires that support the masts and sails; ‘running rigging’ refers more specifically to the adjustable ropes that haul the sails up and down and adjust their angles; rig can also be used as a noun to refer to a type of sailing *ship*, as in ‘that ship has a *schooner* rig’ or ‘the *Bounty* is a *square-rigger*.’

**rudder**—piece of wood, metal, or fiberglass that is all or partly under water and attached to the back of the boat to help steer; the rudder is adjusted from the boat via a connection to a *tiller* or wheel.

**running lights**—lights used at night and in restricted visibility by vessels to show others their size, type (e.g. tug boat vs. ferry), method of movement (e.g. sailboat vs. power boat), and direction of progress.

**salon**—*belowdecks* compartment/cabin on a *ship*, usually for eating or public use; sometimes spelled *saloon* and pronounced either way.

**sampson post**—large vertical timber in the *bow* of a *ship*, used commonly for tying off anchor chain or dock lines.

**sea anchor**— something dragged from the *bow* or *forward* part of a vessel to slow a boat down in heavy weather and stabilize its angle to approaching waves.

**seacock**—adjustable valve to allow water in or out from a hole in the *hull*.

**seizing**—a lashing, a way to tie something together with twine or rope.

**schooner**—sailing vessel with two or more masts, with the after masts of the same size or taller than the *forward* masts; uses primarily *fore-and-aft* sails.

**shackle**—a means of attachment, usually made of metal and u-shaped with a bolt threaded through the open ends.

**sheet**—a rope attached to a sail for adjusting its angle to the wind; can be used as a verb, as in ‘sheet in that sail.’

**ship**—generally differentiated from a ‘boat’ by its larger size; some say a ‘boat’ can be carried on board a ‘ship,’ but that definition does not work now with the size of contemporary vessels and their cargo capacity; ship is also a type of *rig*, with three or more masts and a full set of *square sails* on all *masts*.

**shoal**—area of shallow water or hazard beneath the surface, i.e. sandbank or *reef*.

**shroud**—wire *rigging* that supports a *mast* from the side of a vessel; often *ratlines* are tied between the shrouds for climbing *aloft* so it is common to say: ‘climb up the shrouds,’ or some variation.

**slack**—the loosening of a rope or wire, could be a noun or verb, e.g. ‘slack that line because it’s too tight,’ or ‘put some slack in that stay because it’s putting too much strain on the mast.’

**sole**—the floor inside a *ship*.

**square sail**—a sail that can be set perpendicular to the *keel* of the *ship*, square in angle, but rectangular in shape; these sails are better for going *downwind*; a ‘square-rigger’ is a *ship* fitted with *square sails*.

**spar**—catch-all term for wood or metal poles that support the sails, e.g. *mast*, *boom*, or *yard*.

**spindrift**—spray of sea water blown from the crest of waves.

**spinnaker**—a sail of thin fabric for light winds.

**splice**—a joint woven into rope or wire to make it stronger and more permanent, either fastened into itself to make an ‘eye’ or woven into another piece of rope or wire.

**spreader**—metal or wood planks fit alongside the *mast* to support and angle the *standing rigging*; also *crosstrees*, but spreaders tend to extend farther out and are used less as a work platform.

**stanchion**—wood or metal pieces that support a vessel’s *rail*.

**starboard**—when facing toward the *bow*, the right side of a vessel.

**stay**—wire *rigging* that supports the *masts* and *fore-and-aft* sails of a vessel.



**stern**—back of a vessel.

**tack**—as a verb, to steer a vessel's *bow* through the direction of the wind; as a noun, it is the *forward*, lower corner of a *fore-and-aft* sail and also a line attached to a *square sail* for adjusting its angle to the wind.

**thwart**—cross-piece in a boat used as a seat.

**tiller**—a piece attached to the top of the *rudder* so as to steer a vessel; also called the *helm*.

**topsides**—outside part of the *hull* above the waterline.

**transom**—the façade of the *stern* of a vessel, usually rectangular.

**turnbuckle**—a metal, adjustable fitting to tighten the *standing rigging* or other semi-permanent wire.

**yard**—a *spar* that is fixed on a *mast* to support *square sails*.

**whisker pole**—an adjustable pole to extend out a *jib* for going downwind.

**winch**—device using leverage and gears to haul rope or chain; can be powered by hand or engine and most commonly used to tighten the *sheets* of sails.

**windward**—the direction the wind is coming from, opposite of *leeward*; on a vessel this is the side that is heeling higher and the direction you should *not* throw the bucket of slops.

**windlass**—a type of *winch*, usually set on the *bow* of a vessel to raise the anchor and for other heavy jobs; can be powered by hand or engine.

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Arguably all readings go into a work of creative writing, either consciously or subconsciously. A list of printed influence then should include books, stories, plays, scholarly articles, websites, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and a myriad of matter read or glanced at over the course of three years, all which would be impractical to record and list in its entirety, especially because influences could not be limited to the period of study (August 2004-October 2007). However, a semblance of influence during this period can be gathered. The following bibliography includes only books or articles that are cited in the critical essay, the glossary, and/or are believed to have directly influenced the thesis in some way *and* were read during the period of study, i.e. any work read expressly or partially for the purpose of improving 'Immediate Passage' and the accompanying material. Entries followed by the symbol ':!' signify that this work had also been read in full before the study period. Every text cited in the first section of this bibliography, however, was not necessarily read in full during the study period or at all. Dates listed in brackets are the year of first printing.

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