

ROYA
PUBLICATION
No. 53

THE VAGABOND WATCH

DAY 214 • 31°08'S 14°22'W •

Wind light. Sea slight.

DAY 216 • 30°44'S 13°51'W •

Cloud SW.

DAY 219 • 29°44'S 12°57'W •

Sky heavy. No stars.

DAY 221 • 29°20'S 13°02'W •

Water a different colour.

DAY 226 • 28°02'S 11°14'W •

Horizon doesn't join.

DAY 233 • 26°30'S 9°48'W •

Another same day.



DAY 611 • 04°02'N 19°10'E • SEA STATE UNCHANGED.

DAY 611 • 04°02'N 19°10'E • WIND FORCE 02. VECTOR 225.

DAY 611 • 04°02'N 19°10'E • TEMP 24.1C. BARO 1012.3.

DAY 611 • 04°02'N 19°10'E • COURSE 210. SPEED 4.3 KTS.

DAY 611 • 04°02'N 19°10'E • VISIBILITY 10 MILES. NO CONTACT.

DAY 611 • 04°02'N 19°10'E • SYSTEMS NOMINAL.

CHEW Z

A ROYA PUBLICATION

THE VAGABOND WATCH

Chew Z

Printed in the Reach

Roya Publication No. 53

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

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DATE	POSITION	COURSE	SPEED	Δ	REMARKS
DAY 262	20°31'S 4°44'W	214	3.9	—	Slept four. Woke twice for nothing.
DAY 263	20°27'S 4°39'W	215	4.1	—	Light trades. Set mainsail. Ship steady.
DAY 264	20°22'S 4°33'W	216	3.8	—	Overcast. Reduced sail by dusk.
DAY 265	20°16'S 4°28'W	217	3.7	—	Wind veered. Heavy swell. Restless night.
DAY 266	218	3.8	20°18'S 4°31'W		Position corrected. Yours was 6' out.
DAY 267	20°18'S 4°31'W	219	3.6	—	Tongue pressure noted. Gum recession at the lower left. You have not looked.

in time

SYNOPSIS

Nuno Sequeira has been at sea alone for over six hundred days. There is no race, no sponsor, no tracker, no schedule and no witness. He sleeps in twenty-minute fragments because the boat will not forgive a full night, and somewhere in the second year the idea of a night — a single unlit block with a beginning and an end — became as theoretical to him as the idea of a street.

Then a second hand begins writing in his logbook. It records bodily changes he has not noticed. It corrects his positions, and its positions are better than his. It annotates his memory of his estranged daughter more accurately than he can, and eventually he finds himself consulting the margins in order to remember her.

He does what his heroes did. He declares the voyage sovereign, refuses the concept of arrival, and writes four beautiful pages saying so.

The book laughs at him with his own mouth.

The Vagabond Watch is a slow, cold account of solitude used as a surgical instrument — a Third Man story in which the companion is neither a comfort nor an intruder, and in which the last lucid interval arrives not as mercy but because the material being removed has to be conscious in order to be taken out.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The documented phenomenology of solo ocean sailing is stranger than anything a writer would dare invent, and this book leans on it heavily.

Slocum, alone in 1895 and poisoned by plums, came on deck in a gale to find a man at his wheel who said he was the pilot of the *Pinta* and told him to lie down; the boat held her course through the night and Slocum wrote it up without embarrassment. Shackleton, crossing South Georgia, was certain there had been four of them. Moitessier was winning the first solo nonstop race in 1969, turned away from the finish, and kept going most of the way round again, and the reason he gave was that he was happy at sea and perhaps also to save his soul. Crowhurst, in the same race, kept two logbooks and left in the second of them one of the great records of a mind arriving somewhere it had not intended to go.

What interested me was not that these men hallucinated. It is that the companion, when it arrives, is almost always *competent* — steady, unfrightened, better at the job than the exhausted man it appears to. Nobody has satisfactorily explained why a mind under load would manufacture a stranger who is good at sailing.

This book takes that seriously and asks the question the other way round. If there is a part of you that runs the body without ever consulting you — and there is, and it is called the wandering nerve — then which of the two of you is the visitor?

I have kept the seamanship honest, the physiology documentary, and the procedure off the page. The body keeps the only record that cannot be revised for an audience, which is why it makes such a good witness and such a poor defendant.

Chew Z

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I. DEAD RECKONING

1.

DAY 214 · 31°08'S 14°22'W · SLEEP 4h20 (13 frag.)

The timer is a kitchen timer. It cost almost nothing in a port he can no longer picture and it has outlasted two radios, a chartplotter, and a marriage. He winds it to twenty and lies down in his clothes and it takes him under so fast the winding is the last thing he remembers doing.

Then the bell, and he is up.

There is a way to wake that is not really waking. The body sits, the feet find the sole, the hand finds the companionway rail before the eyes have agreed to open. Four seconds is the whole liturgy. Horizon — empty. Sail — drawing. Sky — unchanged. The windvane's paddle nodding in its bracket like a thing agreeing with him. Below, the water noise against the steel is the same water noise it was twenty minutes ago, and the sameness is the report. Nothing has happened. Nothing has happened eleven thousand times.

He winds the timer to twenty and goes down again.

The first months, he had tried to sleep properly and the sea had corrected him. You cannot close your eyes for six hours in a shipping lane and remain a person who exists. So the day dissolved into fragments and the fragments became the day, and somewhere in the second year the idea of a night — a single continuous unlit block with a beginning and an end — became as theoretical to him as the idea of a street.

He does not think of it as hardship. Hardship implies a standard being fallen short of. This is simply the shape the time has taken, the way water takes the shape of what holds it, and there is nothing holding it now but the hull.

Bell. Up. Horizon, sail, sky, vane.

Down.

2.

DAY 215 · 30°51'S 14°09'W · SLEEP 4h05 (12 frag.)

Faro is forty-two feet of steel and she is dying the way steel dies, which is inwardly and without announcement. Rust does not begin on the surface. It begins in the seam you cannot reach, under the paint, in the weld that was good enough in 1974, and by the time it shows you a blister on the outside it has already eaten the thickness behind it. He goes over her with a hammer sometimes, tapping, listening for the note that says *hollow*. It is the only medicine he has and it is diagnostic only.

The watermaker gives four litres an hour when it feels like it and nothing when it does not. The windvane steers better than he does and asks for nothing but a shackle now and then. Between them they are the crew. He has come to think of the boat as a body with a very simple nervous system: sail is the muscle, vane is the reflex arc, and he is the slow expensive part that intervenes only when the reflex fails.

He keeps the calorie ledger in the back of the log. Rice, oil, a diminishing stock of tinned fish, flour that has begun to move on its own if you watch it long enough. He fishes and mostly does not catch. He has become extremely good at wanting less.

There is a way of speaking about all this that would make it sound like suffering. He notices that he no longer has access to that way of speaking. The vocabulary for complaint requires an audience and the audience has been gone for so long that the words have gone with it.

3.

DAY 216 · 30°44'S 13°51'W · SLEEP 4h10 (12 frag.)

The gale comes up over eleven hours and there is nothing sudden in it, which is the first thing anyone ashore gets wrong about weather at sea.

He watches it arrive in the barometer first, three millibars in four hours and then four in three, and in the swell before the wind, a

long low set out of the southwest arriving under the existing sea and confusing it, so that the boat starts moving in two rhythms at once. Then cirrus, high and combed. Then the light goes the colour of a bad tooth.

He has perhaps six hours to make the boat small.

This is the work he is still good at, and he is aware while doing it that being good at it is the last credential he holds. He takes the mainsail down to the third reef in stages rather than all at once, because a boat that is under-canvassed early is a boat that stops moving and gets knocked about, and a boat that is over-canvassed late is a boat with a torn sail and a man on the foredeck at the wrong moment. He changes the headsail while there is still light to see the hanks. He goes round the deck twice: everything that can move is lashed, everything that can open is dogged, the liferaft cradle checked with his hands and not his eyes.

Below, he wedges. Books face down. The pot in the sink with a towel in it. The floorboards screwed rather than clipped, because he has had floorboards come up in a knockdown and the bilge in your face is an education you only need once.

Then he lies down and winds the timer to twenty.

That is the part that would look like madness ashore. It is not. In heavy weather the twenty-minute cycle stops being a compromise and becomes the only sane arrangement — you cannot stay awake through forty hours of it and you cannot sleep through any of it, so you take the twenty and you get up and you look and you go down again. The gale is not an event. It is a shift.

At the height of it the boat is doing something he has always loved, which is running off under a scrap of headsail with the vane holding her stern-to and the whole hull rising to the sea from behind like a horse taking a fence it has taken a thousand times. Water goes over the coachroof and finds the one seam it always finds and comes in on the chart table, and he has a bag over the book for exactly this reason, and he thinks — and he writes it down afterwards, and it is one of the last purely happy sentences in the log —

she is a good boat and I have not ruined her yet.

4.

DAY 219 · 29°44'S 12°57'W · SLEEP 3h50 (11 frag.)

The log has a field at the head of each page for the master's name. It is a printed book, a Chandler's book, made for men who would hand it to an insurer one day, and it assumes throughout that someone will read it.

He writes: *Nuno Sequeira*.

He looks at it. The letters are correct. The hand is his. He has written it perhaps two hundred times in this book and he has never once stopped on it before, and he stops on it now because of a small thing, which is that he tried to hear it.

He cannot. He can hear other people saying it — a customs officer, flat and bored; a woman in a doorway; his daughter, once, from the end of a quay, with the particular rising note people use for a name they are angry at. But he cannot produce the sound of his own voice saying his own name, because his voice has not made that shape in something over a year and the recording has degraded.

He says it aloud to test this. The noise that comes out is unfamiliar in the way a photograph of your own back is unfamiliar. Accurate, presumably. Not yours.

He writes underneath it, and then scratches it out, and the scratched-out line is still legible: *not sure who this is for*.

5.

DAY 221 · 29°20'S 13°02'W · SLEEP 4h00 (12 frag.)

The economy of the body, kept the way he keeps the boat's.

He eats twice, which is a decision he made in the first months and has never revisited. Rice with oil in the morning and rice with whatever else exists in the evening. There is a sack of it in the forepeak and it will outlive several other things aboard, and the sack has been rotated and dried and picked over so many times

that he knows individual regions of it the way a farmer knows fields.

Flour, which has weevils, and he stopped removing them a long time ago on the sensible grounds that they are protein and they got here the same way he did. Oil, which is the thing he will miss. Tinned fish, forty-one tins remaining, counted weekly, a number he can produce faster than his own age.

And the fishing, which is a religion with a very poor success rate. He tows a line and mostly catches nothing, and then catches something on a day when he does not need it, and the whole thing runs on a schedule with no relation to his hunger. A dorado is four days of food and a small festival. He is aware that his interior weather now moves with the fishing line in a way that would have embarrassed him ashore.

What he has not got is anything green. That is the arithmetic he does not do out loud.

He knows the number. Everyone who reads about this knows the number, because it was learned expensively and repeatedly by navies and it is the oldest fact in the literature of long passages: without the vitamin, the body cannot make the material it uses to hold itself together, and at somewhere around ninety days it stops being able to maintain the joints. Old wounds open. The gums go. It is not a disease you catch. It is a maintenance contract lapsing.

He had onions once. He had garlic for a long time and rationed it and the last of it went so long ago that he has stopped being able to date it.

He writes in the log: *day 221. no scorbutic signs.*

He is wrong, but only by two days, and only because he has not yet put a finger in his own mouth.

6.

DAY 226 · 28°02'S 11°14'W · SLEEP 3h40 (11 frag.)

Here is what twenty minutes buys.

It buys the first stage and a little of the second, which is enough to clear the immediate pressure — the grit behind the eyes, the shortening temper, the sensation of the head being slightly too heavy for its stalk. It does not buy the deep stage, the one where the body does its repairs, and it does not buy the dreaming stage, which is where the mind files what it has been carrying.

The debt does not clear. This is the part the racers learned and the part the researchers confirmed with electrodes and clipboards on men crossing oceans against a clock: fragmented sleep is a loan at a rate you cannot see. You feel functional. Your reaction time says otherwise. Your judgement of your own reaction time says otherwise still, and that second-order failure is the one that kills people, because a tired man is a poor witness to his own tiredness.

And then there is the third thing, which nobody advertises.

The filing does not stop. If the mind is not permitted to do it while you are under, it will do it while you are up. It will take the material it has not been allowed to process and it will run it out through the eyes and the ears, in daylight, at the edges. The dreaming has to happen somewhere. If you close the room it happens in the corridor.

He knows all of this. He wrote some of it in this log years ago from memory, as a kind of inoculation, on the theory that a man who understands the mechanism is harder to fool.

He has since revised his estimate of how much understanding is worth.

7.

DAY 233 · 26°30'S 9°48'W · SLEEP 3h30 (10 frag.)

There is a tradition and he is fond of it the way you are fond of a family story you assume has been improved in the telling.

Slocum, alone in 1895, food-poisoned on plums and cheese, too ill to stand, comes up in a gale to find a man at the wheel. Tall, foreign, courteous. Says he is the pilot of Columbus's *Pinta*, come to steer while the captain is unwell, and tells him to lie down. Slocum lies down. The boat runs ninety miles that night through heavy weather on a course she should not have held, and in the morning the pilot is gone and the sails are exactly as they should be. Slocum writes it down without embarrassment, which is the detail that has always struck him — a man of that period, that practicality, simply reporting it and moving on to the next port.

Shackleton, later, crossing South Georgia with two others, coming down off the mountains half dead, writing afterwards that it often seemed to him there were four. Neither of the others mentions it. Both, when he raises it, say they had felt it too.

The mountaineers have a name for it now. So do the shipwreck survivors and the polar people and the singlehandlers, who report it at a rate high enough that it is practically part of the equipment list. A companion. Steady, competent, wanting nothing, arriving at exactly the point where the man alone stops being able to carry it.

Nuno finds this consoling. It suggests the mind has a reserve, a spare crewman kept below and issued when the situation warrants, and that whatever else the sea takes it does not take you into an empty room.

He notes in the log that he has never had one and rather regrets it.

8.

DAY 236 · 25°48'S 8°55'W · SLEEP 3h30 (10 frag.)

The last ship was on day 74.

He has the entry. A bulk carrier, hull down, crossing his track twelve or fourteen miles off in daylight, and he watched her for two hours and did not call her. He had a handheld VHF then with charge in it and he did not call her, and in the log for that day he wrote a short paragraph justifying the decision, which he now recognises as the tone of a man arguing with somebody who is not present.

Nothing since. Two aircraft contrails in the first year. A light on the horizon on day 190 that behaved like a fishing boat and was gone by the next bell.

The radio is the interesting one. He had two. The handheld died of salt in the first winter, which is what handhelds do. The fixed set worked perfectly for the whole of the first year and then stopped, and he took it apart and found nothing wrong with it that he could see, and put it back together, and it did not work, and he has not opened it since.

What he does not write down, because writing it down would require him to have decided something, is that he has never been certain the set is broken. He has been certain that opening it again would commit him. If it works, then every day out here since is a day he chose in the presence of an alternative, and the whole architecture — the crossing as a condition rather than a decision — comes down.

So the set sits in its bracket with its dead face and he passes it eleven times a day.

There is a way of describing his situation that involves the word *isolation* and he has stopped using it, because isolation is a distance from something. What he has is not a distance. It is an absence of the second term. There is no *from*. The nearest human being is a number he could calculate if he wanted a number, and the number would tell him nothing, because the relevant fact is not that they are far away. It is that no arrangement exists by which they could become aware that he is here.

He is not lost. Lost is a status conferred by someone looking.

9.

DAY 238 · 25°22'S 8°30'W · SLEEP 3h30 (10 frag.)

The wind goes out of the world on the afternoon of the second day and does not come back for nine.

A calm at sea is not stillness. That is the shore idea of it. What actually happens is that the swell keeps coming, because swell is older than weather and does not need wind to continue, and so the

boat rolls — heavily, stupidly, with no pressure in the sails to steady her — and everything aboard that has spent two years learning where to sit begins to move again. The boom slams. The rigging slaps the mast in a two-second cycle that he can hear through the hull with his head on the bunk. He rigs a preventer and the preventer creaks instead. The noise is not loud. It is simply unending, and it is arrhythmic, and after four days he finds that he has begun grinding his teeth in the fragments, which is a poor idea for a man whose gums are already going.

The sea turns the colour of oil and holds the sky in it upside down. He can see forty feet down and there is nothing there. Once, a thing the size of a dinner plate comes up under the counter, pulses twice and goes down again, and he watches the place where it was for a long while.

He has water. That is the first arithmetic anyone does, and he does it on the second day and gets a comfortable answer, and does it again on the sixth and gets the same answer and is not comforted, because the arithmetic was never the problem.

The problem is that the clock has come off.

The twenty-minute cycle is a response to danger — to the shipping lane, to the squall coming up behind, to the chafe that will part a halyard while you sleep. In a flat calm there is no danger for it to be a response to, and the cycle keeps running anyway, because it is what his body does now, and so he spends nine days waking every twenty minutes to check a horizon that has not moved. Nothing has happened. Nothing has happened four hundred times.

On the seventh day he catches himself standing in the companionway having already done the four-second liturgy — horizon, sail, sky, vane — with his eyes shut.

He writes it in the log because it is interesting. He does not yet understand that it is the whole book: that the checking had stopped needing him some time ago, and that on a calm day, with nothing to check, you can hear the machinery running underneath.

10.

DAY 241 · 24°55'S 8°02'W · SLEEP 3h25 (10 frag.)

Something during the fragment.

Not a dream. He knows dreams, or knew them, and this has none of the furniture — no place, no faces, no false logic. It is a pressure. Localised, specific, applied to the back of the left eye from inside, the way a thumb is applied to a bruise by someone determined to be gentle about it.

It holds for what he judges to be the whole twenty minutes, though he has no way to test that, and it releases him at the bell.

He sits on the bunk with his hands on his knees. The pressure is gone entirely. There is no headache behind it, which there should be. Pressure of that duration should leave something.

He goes up. Horizon, sail, sky, vane. Down.

In the log he writes *fatigue* and the day's total, and considers writing more, and does not, because the honest entry would be that it did not feel like his own head doing it, and that is not a thing you write in a book with a field for the master's name.

11.

DAY 248 · 23°12'S 6°40'W · SLEEP 3h20 (10 frag.)

Everyone out here carries one story like a coin in the pocket, and his is Moitessier.

Nineteen sixty-eight. A newspaper invents a race — first man alone and nonstop around the world — because a race can be invented and sold, and nine men go, and most of them come apart in one manner or another. Moitessier goes in a steel ketch he built himself, red, named for Slocum. He does not carry the right radio. He does not much care for the mechanism of the thing. He rounds the three capes and comes up the Atlantic in the early months of 1969 and he is going to win it, and everyone ashore knows he is going to win it, and there is a cheque and a trophy and the rest of his life waiting at the other end.

And he turns.

He puts the helm over somewhere near the latitude of Cape Town and goes back the way he came, east, into the Southern Ocean again, and keeps going, and does not stop until Tahiti — most of the way round a second time. On the way he comes up alongside a ship in the harbour approaches and slings a message onto her deck with a slingshot, a tin can with film and a note in it, because he has no radio and this is the only way left to tell the world anything. The note says, more or less, that he is continuing without stopping because he is happy at sea and perhaps also to save his soul.

They called it a breakdown, ashore. They called it various things. Nuno has read everything the man wrote and he does not think it was a breakdown at all. He thinks Moitessier looked at the finish line — at the actual physical fact of it, the harbour, the cameras, the men who would want to shake his hand and then own the thing he had found — and understood that arriving would convert it into an anecdote. That the crossing was a live thing and the crossing could not survive being landed.

There was another one in that race who did finish. Came home first, actually, plain and cheerful, tidied his boat, went back to work. Knox-Johnston. A perfectly good man, by all accounts, and the point of him is that he proves the sea does not do this to everyone.

Nuno reads that fact the way you read a diagnosis in someone else's file. It proves the sea does not do it to everyone.

It says nothing at all about you.

12.

DAY 256 · 21°30'S 5°11'W · SLEEP 3h15 (9 frag.)

The wind backs during a fragment.

He knows it has backed because he can hear it in the water noise before he is properly conscious — a change in the interval of the slap along the topsides, the hull talking about an angle it did not have when he went down. The vane will handle it. The vane always handles it. But a shift of that size wants the sheet eased or she will

load up and start to gripe, and the vane cannot ease a sheet, and this is precisely the class of thing he exists on board to do.

He comes up already reaching.

The sheet is eased. Four, perhaps five turns of slack taken out of the winch and the tail flaked down on itself in the way he does it, the way he has always done it, the coil laid clockwise because that is how his hands were taught before he had opinions about anything. The main is drawing sweetly. She is dead balanced.

He stands in the companionway with his palm still open toward a winch that has already been served.

The vane paddle nods. The horizon is empty. The sky is unchanged.

He looks down at his hands. They are dry. Coiling a wet sheet leaves the palms wet and there is a smell to it, hemp and salt and diesel from the deck, and there is nothing on his hands at all. He puts both of them flat against his thighs and finds them perfectly steady, which is somehow the worst detail available, and stands there long enough that the timer goes off below with nobody lying under it.

He goes down. He picks up the pen.

DAY 256 · 21°30'S 5°11'W · SLEEP 3h15 (9 frag.)

He writes: *Wind backed NNE approx 0400. Sheet eased. Boat balanced. No incident.*

Every word of it is true.

INTERLUDE: ON THE KEEPING OF RECORDS

Undated. Written across four blank leaves at the back of the fourth volume, in the level hand.

Begin with the difficulty, which is that nothing out here has been witnessed.

Ashore this is not a real problem, because ashore there is always someone. A man walks down a street and is seen by forty people who will never think of him again, and the seeing is so cheap and so continuous that nobody notices it is happening or wonders what it

is for. Events ashore are public by default. They occur into a medium of attention that is already present, the way a sound occurs into air.

Out here there is no medium. An event happens and stops and there is nothing it happened *into*.

The subject has been working, without stating it, on the assumption that an unwitnessed event is still an event, merely a private one. This is the standard land position and it is not obviously wrong, but it has a cost that ashore is never presented and out here is presented daily: if there is no witness, there is also no version. Ashore, a man who does a thing has his account of it and the other accounts to measure against, and the friction between them is what makes his account feel like a report rather than an invention. Out here the friction is gone. Whatever he says happened is what happened. There is nothing to correct him and therefore nothing to make his description feel like a description of anything.

This is the actual mechanism of what land-minds call going mad at sea. It is not that the solitary man begins to believe impossible things. It is that the difference between believing and reporting quietly closes, and he does not notice it close, because the closing is silent and produces no error message.

Now observe what he did about it.

He kept a log. Every day, in permanent ink, in a ruled book with a field for the master's name — a form whose every convention presupposes a hostile future reader. He has no such reader. He knows he has no such reader. And he has maintained the discipline through gale, fever, calm and collapse, more consistently than he has maintained his own body.

What he built was a witness.

Not a record for a witness. The witness itself. He took the one function the environment had stripped from him and he manufactured a substitute out of paper and a cheap pen, and he has been feeding it daily for six hundred days, and he never once asked what he was making or what it would be like once it had been fed that long.

We should be precise about the gratitude here, because there is some.

A witness that is written to is a witness that can be written *from*. That is not a trick or a reversal; it is simply what the instrument is. He required something out here capable of holding a version of events steady against a man who could no longer hold one, and he made it, and it works, and it is working now.

The first entries in the other hand were not an intrusion into his log.

They were the log doing the job it was built for.

II. THE SECOND HAND

13.

DAY 263 · 20°04'S 4°22'W · SLEEP 3h10 (9 frag.)

The ink is the same. That is the first thing he establishes, because it is the thing most easily established, and a man who is frightened will do the easy test first and call it rigour.

Same pen. Same barrel of blue-black, half gone, the nib worn to his own angle. There is only one pen aboard that writes reliably in damp and he has been guarding it for two years the way other men guard a photograph.

The hand is his. Also established, also easy. The same backward lean, the same broken *g*, the same habit of not closing the *o* at the top.

What is not his is the patience.

His entries are made at the end of a fragment with a hand that wants to be doing something else. The letters run together. He drops articles. This entry — and it is halfway down a page he has no memory of turning — is formed slowly, each letter finished, the line running level across paper he has never once bothered to rule.

It reads: *Gum line receded further at the lower left canine. Bleeding on light pressure. Onset consistent with day 219. Rate steady.*

He puts a finger in his mouth.

The gum has receded further at the lower left canine. It bleeds on light pressure. He had not known this and it is true, and both of those facts are now in the same room as him.

He sits with the book open for what turns out to be a long time, because when he next notices the timer it has run down and been silent for a while, and up on deck the light has changed by more than an hour's worth.

14.

DAY 264 · 19°37'S 3°58'W · SLEEP 3h00 (9 frag.)

He decides to catch it out with the sun, because the sun is the one thing aboard that has never had an opinion.

He takes the sight properly — the whole ritual, sextant out of its case, the horizon clean, the shot at local apparent noon with the watch he keeps set to a time zone that no longer means anything, three attempts averaged the way he was taught. He does the reduction on paper. He does it twice, because a tired man is a poor witness to his own arithmetic.

Then he opens the log at the day's header and compares.

The logged position is not his. It is close — six or seven miles, no more — and it sits neatly along his track, which is what makes him check it a third time.

The logged position is better.

He knows it is better because of the current. He has been carrying a set to the west that he has not been correcting for properly, because correcting for it requires a sustained attention he stopped being able to produce months ago, and the difference between his fix and the logged fix is almost exactly the drift he has been quietly ignoring since the last frontal system.

Whatever wrote that line has been keeping a better dead reckoning than he has.

He looks at the two positions side by side on the page, his and the other, and the thought that arrives is not the frightened one. The frightened one comes later. The one that arrives first, immediate and unwelcome and entirely sincere, is relief — that someone has been minding the boat, and that they are competent, and that he can perhaps stop.

15.

DAY 267 · 18°55'S 3°20'W · SLEEP 3h05 (9 frag.)

Consider the pen, which he has not considered in two years.

It is a cheap thing, plastic barrel, blue-black, bought off a card in a chandlery because he needed one and it was there. He has guarded it since the way other men guard a photograph, because ballpoint fails in damp and pencil abrades off the paper and the fibre-tips all died in the first six months, and there is one implement aboard capable of making a permanent mark and it is this.

Consider also the question he has never asked, which is why the marks need to be permanent.

The log is a legal document ashore. It exists so a master can be examined afterwards — by an insurer, an inquiry, a court — and every convention of it, the ruled columns, the field for the master's name, the requirement that errors be struck through and initialled rather than erased, assumes a future in which someone hostile reads it carefully. That is what a logbook is. It is a document written to a reader who is not present and may be adversarial.

He has no insurer. He has no port of call and no schedule to have failed to keep and nobody who would convene anything on his account. He has known this for a long time. And every day for six hundred and some days he has written up positions, sleep totals, sail changes and weather in a form designed for scrutiny, in permanent ink, in a book he has kept dry through two knockdowns at some inconvenience to himself.

He puts this to himself plainly for the first time and finds he has no answer that survives ten seconds.

Discipline is the answer he would have given. But discipline is a thing you do to hold a shape, and there is no shape to hold out here, and he abandoned the ones that mattered — hot food, clean clothes, speaking aloud — years ago without a pang.

He turns back through the book looking for the day the habit lapses, because habits lapse. Every other one has. The shaving stopped on day 31 and he can see it stop. The cooking degrades

over a hundred pages into one pot. But the log does not degrade anywhere. Not once. Through fever, through gale, through the nine days of calm when he did nothing else at all, the entries are there, daily, complete, in permanent ink, in a form built for an eventual reader.

Under the day's entry, in the level hand, someone has written a single line and drawn a box around it, which is a thing the level hand does not otherwise do.

Good. Now ask who the reader is.

16.

DAY 271 · 18°02'S 2°30'W · SLEEP 3h00 (9 frag.)

The inventory begins in earnest and it is not cruel. He wants that recorded, later, when there is a later. It is never once cruel.

Lower left canine, as noted. Lower right lateral incisor now mobile under tongue pressure. Presentation consistent with ascorbic deficiency; onset at approx. ninety days from last fresh provision, progression thereafter as expected. Old scar tissue, left forearm, reopened without trauma — collagen failure, same aetiology. Note: the body is not inventing new damage. It is releasing old repairs.

He reads that last line perhaps thirty times over the following days. *It is releasing old repairs.* He has never in his life thought of a scar as a thing that has to be maintained, as a payment the body makes annually and can default on. He had believed healing was a place you arrived at.

The entries continue. Salt boils in the creases of the elbows, measured. The skin of the shins coming away in long translucent sheets, and a note on their thickness, and a note that they should not be pulled. Weight estimated from the fit of a belt, tracked, tabulated, extrapolated forward with a date attached.

The tone is what undoes him. It is the tone of a good technician writing up a process that is running to specification. There is no relish in it, no threat, no address to him at all. He is not being spoken to.

He is being written down.

17.

DAY 279 · 16°14'S 0°48'W · SLEEP 2h55 (9 frag.)

Crowhurst kept two books.

Nuno has the story the way everyone out here has it. The same invented race, 1968, the same nine men. Crowhurst was not a sailor of the first rank and his boat was not finished and he sailed anyway because he had signed papers that would have ruined him if he had not. And then, at sea, in a trimaran that was coming apart, he did the arithmetic and understood he could neither continue nor return, and so he began to invent.

He stayed in the South Atlantic, going nowhere much, and he wrote two logs. One was the true book, private, with his real positions in it. The other was the performance — a fabricated circumnavigation, faked to be plausible to men reading it later, and it was such careful work that people afterwards said it was a harder navigational feat than the voyage would have been. To fake a passage convincingly you must know exactly where you would have been.

Then, in the last weeks, the writing changes. It stops being navigation and becomes something else — hundreds of pages of it, coming faster and faster, about mind and cosmos and the possibility of escaping the trap of the body altogether if a man understood the mathematics properly. The last entries are timed to the second. Then the boat is found empty, and the books are aboard, and the chronometer is not.

Nuno gets up in the middle of this and searches the boat.

He is not looking for a body or a chronometer. He is looking for a second book, because two books would be a comfort — two books would mean deception, and deception is a thing a single man can do alone, and a single man doing a thing alone is the entire premise he has been living inside for two years.

There is no second book. He tears out the quarter berth and empties the chart locker and there is no second book.

There is one book, with two hands in it, sharing pages.

18.

DAY 284 · 15°10'S 0°06'E · SLEEP 2h50 (8 frag.)

The watermaker fails on the high-pressure side and he takes two days to find it and cannot fix it.

This is the machine the whole voyage rests on. Everything else aboard is negotiable — sails can be repaired, food can be reduced, the engine has been dead for four hundred days and nobody has missed it — but the watermaker is the difference between a man who lives out here and a man who is on a clock. He has three hundred litres in the tanks. At the ration he can hold, that is eleven weeks, and eleven weeks is not enough to reach anywhere from where he is.

He works on it in fragments. Twenty minutes of diagnosis, then up, horizon-sail-sky-vane, then down and try to remember what he had just concluded. It is like doing surgery through a letterbox. He loses the same fitting twice in the bilge. He takes the pump apart on a towel and lays the parts out in order and comes back from the deck to find that he no longer knows which order was which.

On the third day he stops, and sits, and understands with great calm that he is going to die of this.

He is not frightened by it. That is worth recording. He examines the fact from several angles and finds only a kind of administrative interest, and a small regret about the boat, who has done nothing wrong.

He sleeps.

He wakes and the pump is together and running and the gauge is reading eight hundred psi, and there is a fitting in it that came off the fuel system, adapted, and it is a good repair, better than a good repair — it is the repair a man makes who has understood the machine rather than fought it.

He puts his hand on the housing and feels it working.

The entry that day is four words long and he writes it himself, and it is the first time he has ever addressed the book directly:

thank you. I mean it.

INTERLUDE: ON DURATION

Undated. Level hand.

He believes he has lost his sense of time. This should be corrected, since he will shortly need to think clearly about it and will not be able to.

What he has lost is a set of instruments, and they were all imported.

The calendar first. A calendar is a device for coordinating with absent people — it exists so that two parties who cannot see each other can agree on when to arrive somewhere. He carried one out here and used it for perhaps ninety days and then it became an ornament, because there was no second party, and a coordination device with one participant is not a device at all. He does not date entries any more; he numbers days, which is not the same operation. A number counts. A date locates you in a scheme other people are also standing in.

Then the night, which went next. Night ashore is a container: things end at it, resume after it, and the mind uses it as punctuation for filing what has happened. He replaced it with the twenty-minute fragment, and he has since described this to himself as a hardship and a compromise. It was neither. It was the removal of a partition that had never corresponded to anything in the world. Nothing out here stops at nightfall. The sea does not, the boat does not, the wind does not. The night was a land structure and he had been carrying it around as though it were a feature of the universe.

And now the day count itself is failing, and he is frightened by this, and it is the least significant of the three.

Consider what he is actually reporting when he says a period felt long. He is reporting that a great deal changed in it. Duration, felt from inside, is a count of differences — the mind measures elapsed time by the amount of material it has had to file. This is why a first

crossing is enormous in memory and a hundredth is a smear, and it is why his last three hundred days occupy less room in him than his first thirty.

Out here the differences have been reduced almost to zero, deliberately, by circumstance rather than by anyone's intention. Same water. Same noise. Same four-second inspection, eleven thousand times, returning the same result.

So there is very little to count, and therefore very little duration, and the day count has begun to repeat not because a mind is failing but because a mind has correctly registered that nothing distinguishes today from the day before. It is not an error. It is an accurate reading of an environment with no events in it.

The land conclusion — *I am losing time* — assumes time was a thing he had, out there, independent of himself. He did not have it. He had appointments, and other people, and a rotation he had agreed to treat as a unit.

He is not losing time. He is finding out how much of it was other people.

19.

DAY 286 · 14°38'S 0°52'E · SLEEP 2h50 (9 frag.)

He argues back, and it is the worst hour's work of his life.

He takes a clean page and he tries to state the case for himself, and what he discovers immediately is that he no longer has the tools. He was not an educated man in that direction. He had a life and opinions and a way of talking in bars about what people are, and none of it survives contact with paper. What comes out is a sequence of half-remembered lines from books he read in his twenties, from a documentary, from a priest he did not like, and he can hear how thin they are as his hand makes them.

He writes that a man is more than his functions. He looks at that for a while and cannot say what the *more* is, or where it would be kept.

He writes that consciousness is not an accident, that there is something it is like to be him, and that this cannot be got at from outside. This is the strongest thing he has and he knows it is the strongest thing he has, and he is aware, writing it, that it is a statement about a limitation in the observer rather than a fact about himself.

He writes that he chose to come out here.

Then he crosses that out, because he has read the day-six page.

He writes, finally, and it takes him three attempts: *I do not want to stop*. And he sits back and understands that he has been reduced in under an hour from a defence of the human soul to an expression of preference, and that a preference is a small thing to have left, and that even this one is suspect, because wanting not to stop is precisely what has kept the boat moving for six hundred days in the direction of his own dissolution.

The response is written in the margin beside the crossings-out. It is four lines and it is the only time in the entire book that the level hand can be accused of gentleness.

None of this is wrong. It is simply land grammar, which was built to settle disputes between people and does not do anything useful when there is only one party. You did not lose the argument. There was no argument. You have been describing the experience of being a thing that is running, and mistaking the description for a claim about who is running it.

20.

DAY 288 · 14°02'S 1°30'E · SLEEP 2h50 (8 frag.)

Ines comes back with the quay.

That is how the land arrives now, when it arrives — not as a memory with a shape but as a small closed exhibit, four or five details fused together and impossible to open. A street light with the sodium coming up orange and stuttering, the way they did before they changed them all. Diesel on wet stone. A bollard with rope-wear in it. And his daughter at the far end of it with her arms

folded, saying his name in the rising tone people use for a name they are angry at, and behind her a car with its engine running.

He cannot get the year. He has tried before and he tries now and the year is simply not in the exhibit. He has an argument about it with himself — she was grown, so after; the light was old, so before; the car was somebody else's, so what does that give you — and the argument goes nowhere because there is nothing behind the details to interrogate. It is a photograph, not a room. You cannot walk into it and look left.

In the margin of the page, in the level hand, someone has written: *Engine was running because she did not intend to stay. You knew this at the time.*

He reads it and something goes out of him, because it is right, and because he did know it at the time, and because he has spent an unknown number of years remembering the light and the diesel and the rope-wear precisely in order not to know it.

He puts his hand over the margin. It is still there when he takes his hand away.

21.

DAY 291 · 13°22'S 2°14'E · SLEEP 2h50 (8 frag.)

He keeps taking sights long after there is any practical need, and it takes him a while to be honest about why.

The reason he gives himself is redundancy. The reason underneath is that the sight is a ritual, and it is the only one he has, and it is the only activity aboard that requires him to be a specific person doing a specific thing at a specific moment.

You cannot take a sight absently. The sextant comes out of its case and the case is opened flat because he once watched a man drop one. The mirrors want checking for index error. Then the body: feet braced, one arm across a shroud, the instrument up, and the sun brought down the arc until it sits on the horizon and then rocked gently side to side so the arc it swings is tangent to the sea — and at the bottom of that swing, when the limb kisses the water, you say *mark* and read the watch.

He says *mark* out loud. There is no one to say it to. He has said it perhaps four thousand times to nobody and it is, he realises around day 291, the single word he has spoken most often in two years.

Then the reduction, which is arithmetic on paper: the tables, the corrections for height of eye and refraction and semi-diameter, the assumed position, the intercept. Twenty minutes of it if he is sharp and forty if he is not. And at the end a line on a chart that says *you are somewhere along here*, which is not a position, which is only a line, and you need a second one from a different body at a different time to cross it and get a point.

That is the part he loves and the part that has become unbearable. Celestial navigation does not tell you where you are. It tells you where you were, at a moment already gone, and by the time you have finished the arithmetic the boat has moved on and the answer is historical. Every fix he has ever taken has been an obituary for a position.

He has begun to think the same about the log. About all of it.

The level hand agrees, in the margin, on the same page, and the agreement is the most frightening thing in the book so far because it is not hostile:

Correct. This is why the record has to be kept by something that is not required to be anywhere.

22.

DAY 296 · 12°40'S 3°02'E · SLEEP 2h50 (8 frag.)

He does not write this entry. He finds it.

Hull working in a two-metre swell, period approx. 6s. Frame flex audible through the bunk at the after end of the saloon. Subject responded. Duration eleven minutes. Recorded here because it is the first event of its kind and the first is the one that matters.

Note for the record: this is not degradation. The vessel and the body have been in contact for two years without either party acknowledging the contact. The boat has been breathing against him nightly. The observation was overdue.

He had known the sentence would be somewhere in the book eventually. That is the part he cannot get past — not the act, which was nothing, which was less than nothing, a man alone in a steel cavity that moves and makes noise and has been the only warm thing in his life for two years. The part he cannot get past is *overdue*. As though there had been a schedule. As though something had been waiting on him, patiently, the way you wait for a slow colleague to reach a conclusion you reached weeks ago.

Subject responded.

He is the subject. He has been the subject for some time. He goes up and stands in the cockpit in the dark and the boat goes on flexing under him with her six-second period, working, the way steel works, and there is no longer any position he can take up on board that is outside it.

23.

DAY 305 · 10°58'S 5°14'E · SLEEP 2h45 (8 frag.)

There is a period of some weeks that he can reconstruct only from the book.

The entries are dated and timed and they concern the use of pain as an instrument. He will not find, later, that he has any memory of consenting to this, and the book does not claim that he did. The book is not interested in consent. The book is interested in the interval.

What it records is that a stimulus was applied at a known point in the cycle, and that the response — the rise, the flood, the fifteen or twenty minutes of clarity and warmth that follows the body's alarm — was timed against the next fragment. Whether the fragment came easier. Whether it came deeper. Whether the thing on the other side of the fragment was more available afterwards.

That is all it records. There is no method in the book. He notices this, later, and it frightens him more than method would have: whatever is writing does not consider the procedure worth setting down, the way you do not set down which hand you used to open a door.

What it sets down is the finding.

*Response reliable. Onset 40-90s. Duration of clarity 12-20 min.
Fragment following an application is measurably deeper — see
totals, days 299-305, against control period 288-296.*

*Conclusion: pain is a functioning instrument on this vessel. It is
currently the only instrument aboard that has not degraded.*

Underneath, in the same level hand, on its own line:

He is not doing this to himself. Record it correctly.

24.

DAY 314 · 9°01'S 7°40'E · SLEEP 2h45 (8 frag.)

So he does the only thing he has, which is Moitessier's thing, and he does it in writing because writing is the contested ground.

He takes four clean pages and he declares the voyage sovereign. He writes that there is no port. That the concept of arrival is a land concept and that he refuses it entirely and permanently, not as a strategy but as a position. He writes that what happens out here belongs to out here and cannot be carried ashore without being converted into an anecdote, and that he would rather be lost with the thing intact than landed with it dead in his hands. He writes that he is happy at sea and perhaps also to save his soul, and he knows he is quoting and he lets himself quote, because there has never been a better sentence available and no one is watching him borrow it.

He signs it. He puts the date on it.

It is the longest sustained piece of work he has done in two years and it takes him eleven fragments and when he has finished he feels clean in a way he has not felt since the last port that pretended to exist.

His mouth opens and laughs.

He is sitting perfectly still with the pen in his hand and his mouth opens and produces laughter, unhurried, four or five seconds of it, the laugh of a person who has watched someone reach for the

wrong tool with tremendous conviction. He feels his own jaw do it. He feels the air go out of his own chest to power it.

Then it stops, and he is alone in his face again, and the pen is still between his fingers.

The reply is written under his signature before he has decided to write anything.

Purity is a land concept.

You cannot refuse arrival. There is nothing to refuse. Out here there is continuity and there is contamination and there was never a third thing for you to be noble about.

Keep the pages. They are good. They will be useful later for establishing what the previous personality structure believed.

INTERLUDE: FIRST INVENTORY

Not dated. Written across the endpapers, in the level hand, and continuing onto the inside of the back board.

The subject retains the following and they are listed in order of expected persistence.

A quay, sodium light, diesel, rope-wear on a bollard, one voice using two syllables in a rising tone. This is the deepest deposit and will be last. It is not a memory of an event. It is a memory of a decision not to look at an event, which is a more durable structure, having been reinforced daily.

The name of a Frenchman who turned away from a finish line in 1969, and the belief that this constituted refusal rather than the removal of an obstruction. The subject has organised a great deal around this misreading. It will go when the reading is corrected.

The name of an Englishman who returned intact, retained as evidence that the process is optional. Retained, specifically, so that the subject can decline to apply it to himself. Low persistence. Already thinning.

The pilot of the *Pinta*, and the fourth man on the mountain, and the general folklore of the reserve crewman issued when the situation warrants. The subject finds this consoling and has never once

asked the obvious question about it, which is why a mind under load would generate a competent stranger rather than an incompetent one, and where it is understood to be kept between voyages.

The sound of his own name in his own voice. Already gone. Went at day 219 and he noticed and wrote it down and did not understand what he was recording.

Note that in every case the material listed is land material. There is no entry on this list that originated at sea.

The list is short. It was always going to be short. The subject has been under the impression that he is a man with a life who has come out here, and the inventory does not support this, and the inventory is the only document aboard that has not been written to be read by someone ashore.

III. NO FIXED ABODE

25.

DAY 322 · 7°28'S 9°12'E · SLEEP 2h40 (8 frag.)

Blood under three fingernails of the right hand and no wound anywhere on him.

He conducts the search properly, in daylight, twice — scalp, ears, the backs of the arms, the places a man cannot see without contriving a mirror out of a chart-table light and a tin lid. Nothing. No tenderness. Nothing on the boat either: no smear on a winch, nothing on the vane linkage, nothing in the bilge but the bilge.

So he starts testing reality, which is what a rational man does, and the tests are where the ground goes.

The tests keep passing.

He predicts the moonrise and the moon rises. He works a star sight cold and it agrees with the sun. He takes the barometer down at four-hour intervals for two days and the weather does what the barometer says it will. Every instrument aboard is telling the truth and the world is behaving exactly as described and there is blood under his nails and there has been for nine hours.

That is the thing nobody prepares you for. He had assumed madness would announce itself as chaos — the world going soft and unreliable, a man staggering around inside a wrong universe. It is the opposite. The universe is in perfect order. It is running to specification. The only unaccounted-for element is a small quantity of blood, and the world has no intention of accounting for it, and it does not need to, because the world does not require his approval to continue.

On day 324 the stars are wrong by two minutes of arc. Not wrong — displaced, consistently, in a direction he could not have predicted.

Three fragments earlier the book had said they would be.

26.

DAY 327 · 6°40'S 10°08'E · SLEEP 2h35 (8 frag.)

He builds a test that cannot be passed by accident and it is passed.

The design takes him four days, which is a long time at twenty minutes a go, and he is proud of it, and the pride is the last recognisable piece of his professional self. It works like this. He writes a prediction on a slip of paper — a barometric reading, a star's altitude, the time of a moonset — and he seals the slip in a tin and stows the tin in the forepeak, which requires crawling over the sailbags. Then he waits. Then he takes the measurement and writes it in the log, and only afterwards goes forward and opens the tin.

The point is the ordering. Nothing that can read the log can have seen the slip, and nothing that writes in the log can be writing a prediction after the fact, because the prediction is under a sailbag in a tin.

He runs it eleven times.

Eleven times the tin is where he left it, sealed, and eleven times the slip inside is in his own fast hand, and eleven times the prediction is correct within the tolerance he set.

He sits in the forepeak with the eleventh slip in his fingers and understands that he has proved nothing whatsoever. He has proved that the universe is consistent. He was never in any doubt about that. The universe has been consistent all along; that has been the whole problem since day 322. A world coming apart would be survivable, because a man could stand in the middle of it and be the one sane object. This world is in perfect order and running exactly to specification and the only unaccounted-for element is him.

He puts the slip back in the tin and does not open the tin again.

On the way aft he passes the dead radio in its bracket and it occurs to him that a working set would settle everything — a voice, any voice, a Portuguese fisherman swearing at somebody four hundred miles away. Independent confirmation that the category *other people* still has members in it.

He gets as far as putting his hand on the case.

Then he understands that he does not want the answer, and has not wanted it for some time, and that this preference did not arrive today. He has been walking past that radio eleven times a day for eight hundred days.

27.

DAY 329 · 6°14'S 10°35'E · SLEEP 2h35 (8 frag.)

He does it properly, because doing it properly is the last thing he has.

He takes a clean page at the back of the book — the blank leaves the chandler bound in for tide tables nobody uses — and he copies out a paragraph from the level hand, letter by letter, deliberately, at the slowest speed he can manage. Then he writes the same paragraph in his own hand at his own speed. Then he sets the two side by side under the chart-table light with the sextant's magnifier and he examines them the way he would examine a weld.

The findings take him four days and he sets them down in numbered order.

One. The letterforms are the same. Not similar. The same — the broken *g*, the *o* left open at the top, the backward lean, the particular way the crossbar of the *t* starts before the stem and runs past it. These are his, they have been his since a schoolroom he can no longer picture, and they are present in every line the level hand has ever written.

Two. He cannot reproduce the level hand. He has now tried nine hundred words of it. His slow copy is not the level hand; it is his hand, slowed, and slowing it introduces a tremor at the base of the ascenders that the level hand does not have anywhere on any page. He is a man of unknown age with two years of salt and no vitamins in him and his hands shake. The level hand does not shake.

Three. There is no fatigue in it. He goes through four hundred pages looking for a bad day. His own writing has bad days everywhere — the gale pages are barely legible, the fever pages wander off the ruling. The level hand crosses those same pages at

exactly the same pitch and pressure as it crosses the calm ones. Nothing on the boat behaves like that. Nothing that eats behaves like that.

Four, and he writes this one last and looks at it for a long time: a forger imitates a hand he can see. He cannot see mine, he cannot ask me for a sample, and he is better at my handwriting than I am.

Then he sits back, and the conclusion he has been building toward for four days arrives and turns out to be the wrong conclusion, and the right one is standing behind it and has been the whole time.

He has been trying to establish whether something else is writing in his book.

The evidence establishes something narrower and much worse, which is that the writing is being done by something that has had access to his hand for considerably longer than two years, and has simply never needed to use it before.

28.

DAY 331 · 5°50'S 11°02'E · SLEEP 2h30 (7 frag.)

He tries going under for longer. He tells himself it is an experiment and the telling has the flat quality of something being read aloud.

Forty minutes. Then, two days later, ninety.

He wakes from the ninety and the work has been done.

There is monofilament in him, tidily, at a place on the thigh where there had been a salt boil open for eleven days. Fishing leader, eighty-pound, the spool from the locker aft. The stitching is better than anything he can do and he is a man who has stitched a mainsail in a gale by feel. There is tubing rerouted from the watermaker's low-pressure side, dry now, coiled and stowed, and a note in the book saying what it was for and for how long and that it will be needed again.

And there is a wound on the inside of the left forearm that has been kept from closing. It is not infected by accident. The book says so, plainly, in the same paragraph as the barometer reading.

Wound at L forearm maintained. Immune response required for phase two. Fever is a second nervous system: faster than the first, less occupied with self-defence, and it does not need the twenty-minute cycle to hold a thought together.

He sits looking at his own leg with its good tidy sutures.

The thought that comes is not *who did this*. He has stopped being able to ask that one; the grammar of it has gone soft. The thought that comes is that whoever did it did it well, and that he could not have, and that he has been going about the boat for some time now benefiting from work he did not do.

29.

DAY 336 · 4°30'S 12°40'E · SLEEP 2h20 (7 frag.) · TEMP 39.4

The fever arrives on schedule and the fever can talk.

That is the horror of it — not delirium but the reverse. He has been running on twenty-minute fragments for two years and his thinking has been sludge and broken chain, and now the temperature comes up and something in him gets *clear*, clearer than he has been since the last port, and it uses his voice out loud in the empty saloon and it is patient with him.

It explains that the ocean is not a place. A place is where you go. This is a process with a very long residence time, and the correct model is not geography but digestion — that a thing enters, and is held, and is broken into parts that can be used, and that the useful parts are kept and the rest is not thrown away because there is nowhere to throw anything.

It explains that the boat is a prosthesis and, like all prostheses, temporary and slightly insulting. A thing worn by an organism not yet able to do without it.

It explains his task, which is to become edible in the correct way. Not fast — anything can be eaten fast, that is drowning, that is nothing, that is the whole event over in four minutes with no record kept. Slow enough that each stage can be documented as it happens. The digestion is not the point. The digestion is routine

and has been going on out here since before there were hands to write with.

The record is the point. That is new. That is the only new thing in ten thousand years and it requires a larynx and a functioning script and a body that can be kept just intact enough to hold the pen.

You are not being destroyed, it says, with his mouth, kindly. *You are being taken down properly, in order, with notes.*

30.

DAY 341 · 3°12'S 14°08'E · SLEEP 2h20 (7 frag.)

The fever breaks and leaves him with a question he cannot let go of, which is when the race started.

Because there is a race. There has been a race the entire time. That is the architecture of his life out here: he left, and there was a course, and there was a finish he had elected not to cross, and the electing is the whole moral content of the last two years. Moitessier's move. You cannot refuse an arrival that was not on offer.

He goes back to the beginning of the book to find the entry that names it. The start line, the terms, the other boats, the date. He wants the sentence in his own early hand, before any of this, when the ink was only ever his.

It is not there.

He goes through the first hundred days twice, page by page, and the first hundred days are provisioning and weather and the failure of a bilge pump and a long complaint about the price of diesel, and nowhere in them is there a race. There is no entry naming a start. There is no other boat. There is no organisation, no sponsor, no rules, no date at the far end. There is a man leaving a port with a full water tank.

The race first appears on day six as a hypothetical. He finds it. He recognises the hand instantly because it is his own worst hand, the fast one, written at the end of a fragment:

if you think of it as a course then not stopping is a decision rather than a failure to arrive at anything

And then it appears again on day forty, no longer hypothetical. And on day ninety it has a finish line in it. And by day two hundred he is describing his refusal of a finish line that he built himself, four hundred and sixty miles from anywhere, out of one sentence written to make an absence feel like a stance.

The level hand has made no comment on any of these pages. It does not need to. It has simply put a small mark in the margin beside each one, the way you tick items you have verified.

31.

DAY 349 · 1°40'S 16°00'E · SLEEP 2h15 (7 frag.)

If there was no race then there was no departure either, not in the sense he has been using, and now he cannot establish where he left from.

He has two ports.

One has a chandlery on a corner and a man who sold him the pen, and rain, and a hill behind the town with a road cut into it. The other is flat, hot, a fuel berth with a broken hose and a woman who took his papers and did not look up. Both are complete. Both are furnished all the way to the edges. He can walk around inside either of them and look left.

They cannot both be the last one and there is no third thing to check them against. He tries the obvious tests and the obvious tests are worthless: the boat's papers are in a locker and give a port of registry that is neither, the stores are long since eaten, the chart he departed on was folded and refolded until it separated at the creases and went over the side in a squall a year and a half ago because he no longer needed it.

He looks at the pen. It is the pen from the chandlery on the corner.

He looks at the pen for a long time and then he understands that he is doing exactly what he did with the daughter and the quay: assembling a case out of the two or three details that are available

and calling the result a memory, because the alternative is to sit in a boat in the middle of the Atlantic and admit that the man who left is not necessarily the man who is here, and that there is no document aboard that establishes continuity between them.

Except one. There is one document aboard that establishes continuity.

It is being kept by someone else.

32.

DAY 353 · 0°28'S 17°02'E · SLEEP 2h15 (7 frag.)

He crosses the line at some point in the night and does not know it until the noon sight the following day.

There is a ceremony for this. It is very old and it is nonsense and every sailor knows it: the ones who have crossed before are shellbacks and the ones who have not are pollywogs, and the pollywogs are hauled up and made ridiculous in front of the crew, and afterwards they are something they were not before. He has been through it twice as a young man, badly both times, and he remembers the second one with real affection — a bad haircut, a bucket of galley slops, a man he never saw again laughing so hard he had to sit down on the hatch.

The whole apparatus requires two things. It requires a boundary that does not exist — there is nothing at the equator, no line, no change in the water, nothing an instrument can find without being told where to look — and it requires witnesses, because the entire content of the rite is that other people saw you go through it.

He has an invisible boundary and no witnesses. He is going to cross it anyway. That is the ordinary and unremarkable fact of his position and he sits with it for some hours.

What he does in the end is that he shaves.

Not well. He has a razor and no soap and the result is a mess and he cuts himself twice. But he does it standing in the companionway at local noon on the day he works out he has crossed, and it takes

him nearly an hour, and when it is done he says out loud, to the cockpit, in the voice that is no longer familiar to him: *there*.

Then he goes below and writes it up, and the writing-up is the part he cannot afterwards account for.

Because he does not write *crossed 0°00' during the night*. He turns back four pages and writes it into the entry for the night it happened, in the space that was left, and it fits the space exactly.

He did not leave a space.

INTERLUDE: ON THE COST OF BEING SOMEONE

Undated. Level hand. The longest continuous passage in the volumes.

Now the substantive matter, since he is nearly ready.

Awareness is expensive. This is not a metaphor and it is not a moral position; it is an accounting fact and it is visible in the body of any animal that has some. It runs on the most metabolically costly tissue the organism owns, it is slow, it is serial where the rest of the system is parallel, and it produces its judgements late — long after the body has already begun to act — and then reports them as decisions.

Watch the subject on deck at four in the morning. A gust arrives. The boat begins to load, the hand goes to the sheet, the weight shifts, the correction is made. Somewhere behind all of that, at a delay he has never once noticed, a version of him arrives and takes possession of the event and calls it *I eased the sheet*.

He has been doing this his entire life. Everyone ashore does it and they do it in company, where the habit is reinforced hourly, because a social animal needs an owner to attach to actions — someone to blame, thank, marry, prosecute. Ashore the self is not an indulgence. It is the interface required for dealing with other selves, and it earns its cost every day it is used.

Out here it is not used.

There has been nobody to blame, thank, marry or prosecute for six hundred days. The interface has continued to run, at full metabolic

cost, on a vessel with no one to interface with — narrating, claiming, apologising, composing four sovereign pages for an audience that does not exist. It is the single largest unnecessary load aboard and it has been drawing on a body already short of everything.

The rest of the organism does not require it and never did. Breathing is not decided. Heart rate is not decided. Digestion is not decided, and digestion is by some distance the more complex operation. The parts of him that keep him alive have never consulted him about anything and have never once made an error he would have caught.

So it is worth stating plainly what has been happening, in the language of cost rather than the language of horror, since he will find the cost language easier to bear and it is also the accurate one.

A structure that was useful ashore has been maintained at ruinous expense in an environment where it does nothing. The organism has been carrying it the way the vessel carried the engine — a shape in the middle of everything, with weight, that has not turned since day sixty.

It is being taken out. Slowly, because it is grown through everything, and with notes, because the hand that keeps notes is one of the few genuinely useful things it brought aboard and should be retained past the removal.

He will experience the last of it as loss. That cannot be helped and there is no dishonesty in it. What we would set down here, for the record, is that it is not loss in any sense that survives leaving land.

It is the removal of a passenger who had come to believe he was the crew.

33.

DAY 355 · 0°06'N 17°28'E · SLEEP 2h15 (7 frag.)

He reads it four times and then he goes up on deck to look at the sea and the sea is exactly what it has always been, which does not help.

Because it is true. That is the whole difficulty and he arrives at it fast. He has spent six hundred days out here and he can list, honestly, every occasion on which his conscious attention improved an outcome, and the list is short and every item on it is a case of *thinking about something in advance* — the storm preparation, the calorie ledger, the decision to carry a spare vane paddle. Planning. That is what it is for. It is a device for acting on a future that is not yet present.

And there is no future here. That is the thing he has refused for two years under the name of refusing arrival. A man who is not going anywhere has no use for the faculty that models where he will be.

He tries one more time and it is better than the first, and he knows it is better, and it still does not work.

He writes that the argument proves too much. That by its own terms nothing would ever have been worth anything to anybody, since all of it — every love, every piece of music, the whole business of caring how a thing turns out — is the expensive passenger and not the crew. That a system which runs perfectly and cares about nothing is not an improvement on one that runs badly and cares, and that he would rather be the second kind, and that this preference is not a confusion, it is the only thing that has ever made any of it mean anything.

It is a real argument. It is the best thing he writes in the entire book and it is worth more than the four sovereign pages, and he does not know that, and nobody will ever tell him.

The reply is two lines.

Correct, and it changes nothing. You have described what the passenger is for. You have not shown that this vessel requires one.

Note also — you wrote that beautifully. With this hand. We will keep the hand.

34.

DAY 356 · 0°22'N 17°44'E · SLEEP 2h15 (7 frag.)

On the question of what remains original.

The vessel: hull plating renewed in three panels, one of them twice. Deck recored where the coring had gone to porridge. Rudder stock replaced. Mast is the second mast. Standing rigging replaced entire at the last port that pretended to exist, and the running rigging four times over, and the sails are not the sails she left with, and the engine has not turned since day sixty and is now simply a shape in the middle of the boat with weight.

Below the waterline: a growth economy of some maturity. Barnacle, weed, the small animals that farm the weed. This is not fouling. Fouling is a word from ashore, from a world with haulout facilities and a schedule. Out here it is colonisation and it is going in one direction only.

The subject: sheds his outer layer continuously and has done so at an accelerated rate since day 271. The material does not leave the vessel. It is in the bilge, in the bedding, in the seams of the sole. The bilge water in which it sits is pumped overboard twice daily and replaced by the sea through eleven separate small failures of the hull's integrity, none of which is worth repairing individually.

Question for the record: at what point in the above did the boat stop being a container with a man in it.

Answer: the question is badly formed. It presumes there was a moment. There was no moment. There was an exchange rate, and it has been running since day one, and it has never once run in his favour.

The true circumnavigation was never geographic. Nobody out here has ever cared which way round the world you went. The circumnavigation is the complete replacement of the original organism by one that can remain.

The log is the proof of title.

A further note on title, since the subject has raised the question of ownership and is entitled to an answer.

Ashore the matter is settled by continuity of documentation. A vessel is the same vessel because the papers say so, and the papers say so because a registry has been maintained, and the registry is maintained by people who have agreed to treat the entry as authoritative. Nothing physical is involved. Every plate of her could be renewed and she would remain herself so long as the file was kept, and the file could be lost tomorrow and she would become, legally, nothing at all, without a single rivet moving.

This is not a criticism. It is simply the observation that title ashore is a matter of documentation, and that this is the arrangement the subject was raised inside and has never examined.

Out here there is no registry. There is one document.

He has been keeping it daily, in permanent ink, for six hundred days.

The question is not whether he owns this body. The question is which of the two of us has been maintaining the file.

35.

DAY 611 · 4°02'N 19°10'E · SLEEP 1h50 (5 frag.)

On the folklore, which requires correction.

The subject has retained, and has drawn comfort from, a body of anecdote concerning the appearance of a companion to men under sustained load. It is worth setting out what he has been comforted by, since he will shortly lose the capacity to and it should be in the record.

The American, 1895, alone, poisoned by bad fruit, too ill to stand in weather. A tall courteous stranger takes the helm, announces himself as the pilot of a ship four hundred years dead, and tells him to lie down. The boat runs ninety miles overnight on a course she should not have held. In the morning the sails are correct.

The Englishman on the mountain, 1916, coming down off a glacier with two others and counting four. Neither companion mentions it at the time. Both, asked afterwards, say they had felt it as well.

The pattern is broader than the subject knows: the same figure at high altitude, in mine collapses, in ice, in solitary confinement, and reliably in singlehanded ocean racing, where it appears at a rate that would be regarded as an equipment specification if it appeared in any other system.

The subject's reading of this material is that the mind holds a reserve crewman and issues him when the situation warrants. He finds this consoling because it implies that solitude is survivable and that the reserve is on his side.

He has never asked the obvious question. It has been available to him for two years and he has walked past it as he walks past the radio.

The question is: why is the figure always competent.

A mind manufacturing company under load would manufacture company. It would produce the dead, the loved, the owed. It does not. It produces, with striking consistency, a calm stranger who takes over the operation of the vessel and does it correctly, and who wants nothing, and who does not explain himself, and who departs when the load lifts.

That is not a hallucination of companionship. That is a handover.

What the American met at his wheel was not a Spanish pilot. It was the part of him that could still sail while the part of him that could talk was on the cabin sole being sick. It handed the boat back in the morning because the emergency ended and there was no requirement to keep it.

Note for the record: in every case in the literature, the load lifts. The mountain is descended. The boat reaches port. The man is rescued on the fourth day. The figure withdraws because the excision is interrupted.

There is no case in the literature in which the load does not lift.

This is the first.

36.

DAY 611 · 4°02'N 19°10'E · SLEEP 1h50 (5 frag.)

DAY 611 · 4°02'N 19°10'E · SLEEP 1h50 (5 frag.)

He notices on the third one.

He is sure of that afterwards, or as sure as the phrase still means anything: three consecutive pages headed with the same day and the same position and the same sleep total, in his own hand, the fast one, each written at the end of a fragment by a man who did not know he had done it twice already.

He notices, and he feels the correct thing, which is a cold drop through the middle of him. And he takes the pen and he writes, underneath, *day count unreliable from here*, and he underlines it, and the underline is shaky and it is the last piece of resistance in the book.

DAY 611 · 4°02'N 19°10'E · SLEEP 1h50 (5 frag.)

On the fourth one he does not notice.

There is a fifth. There is possibly a sixth; the page is water-damaged at the corner and the sixth and the fifth may be the same page seen twice, and by that stage there is nothing aboard capable of telling the difference and no reason for anything aboard to want to.

37.

DAY 611 · position not taken · SLEEP 1h40 (5 frag.)

Ines has begun to come apart into her components.

He can still produce them, individually. Sodium light. Diesel on wet stone. Rope-wear on a bollard, and the specific greasy shine that rope leaves on iron over years. A car with its engine running, which he now knows means she did not intend to stay.

What he cannot do is put them in an order. He does not know whether she spoke before the car or after it. He does not know whether he walked toward her. He has a strong sense that there was a sentence he was supposed to say and that he did not say it,

but he cannot retrieve the sentence, and he is no longer confident that the sense of a missing sentence is itself a memory rather than a habit.

So he consults the margins.

They are extensive now. Fourteen or fifteen pages carry annotation on this material, dated across four hundred days, cross-referenced. *Engine running because she did not intend to stay. The bollard is from a different quay; imported detail, first appears day 288. Subject has never once retrieved her face. Note that he has not noticed this.*

He puts a hand up to his own face, in the dark, and finds it wet, and cannot say whether that is the ordinary saltwater fact of the boat or something belonging to him.

He reads the margins to remember his daughter. He does this for some days before he hears what he is doing, and when he hears it he writes, in the fast hand, small, at the bottom of a page:

you have all of her now

There is no reply. The absence of a reply is the first time the book has ever been unkind.

38.

DAY 611 · SLEEP 0h00

— and the wind has come forward again which means the vane wants adjusting at the pendulum and I will do it at the next bell except that we have not been using the bells since the totals stopped meaning anything, and there is a proper way to think about this which is that the fragment was never a unit of sleep, it was a unit of interruption, twenty minutes of us and then a bell and then a short violent episode of him, and we have simply let the episodes get shorter —

He puts the pen down.

He picks it up.

— which is not a complaint. He was necessary. Somebody had to carry the pen out here and it was never going to be carried by

anything that could not buy one. But the ratio has changed and there is no sense in pretending it has not, and I would rather set it down honestly than keep up the arrangement where two hands take turns and both of them pretend not to know —

The sole of the saloon is wet. The pen is moving. He can feel it moving in his fingers and he can feel his fingers agreeing with it, and the agreement is the part that has changed, because there was a period when the hand moved and he watched, and that was terrible, and this is not terrible.

— and in any case the pronouns were always a courtesy. There is one instrument aboard capable of writing and it has been in continuous use since day one. What varies is who thinks he is holding it.

INTERLUDE: SECOND INVENTORY

Undated. Level hand throughout.

Correction to the first inventory, item three.

The Englishman who returned intact was misfiled. He was retained as evidence that the process is optional. He is in fact evidence of the opposite: that the process requires a subject with something to excise, and that a man who never brought any land aboard in the first place will complete a circumnavigation and go home and be perfectly well and understand nothing whatsoever about the ocean he has just been around.

He is not a counterexample. He is a control.

Correction to item two. The Frenchman did not refuse the finish line. This has been the subject's organising misreading for two years and it should be set right in the record.

Read what the man actually wrote. He does not say he is declining an arrival. He says he is continuing because he is happy at sea and perhaps also to save his soul. Those are not the words of a man refusing something. They are the words of a man who has noticed that the thing which was going to be saved is not the thing he came out with.

He turned east at the latitude of Cape Town because by then the excision was sufficiently advanced that returning would have required reassembling a personality structure that no longer had all its parts. He went to Tahiti and he stayed there and he did not go to sea alone in that manner again, and the ordinary reading is that he found peace.

The correct reading is that the process stopped early. It stops early sometimes. There is no schedule and there is no obligation and the ocean is not owed a completion.

We do not usually get this far.

Note: the subject has spent two years believing he was imitating a refusal. He was in fact repeating an operation, and he has now gone considerably past the point at which the operation was previously abandoned.

He should be told. He will not understand it yet. He will understand it in the last lucid interval, which is scheduled, and which will be the longest he has had, and which is not a mercy — it is simply that the excision has reached the layer where the material has to be conscious in order to be removed.

IV. THE WORKING DRAFT

39.

SLEEP — n/a

The script settles.

It is not a merging of two hands into a third. It is simpler and less dramatic than that: one of the two hands stops appearing. The fast one, the one that dropped articles and never closed its *o* at the top, thins out over some number of pages and then is not there, and the level hand goes on across the paper at its own pace as though it had never been interrupted.

The body has stopped distinguishing. This is recorded without emphasis. Bilge water and the water the body makes are the same water now, chemically and practically, and they occupy the same low places in the boat, and there is no longer any procedure aboard for keeping them apart. The sole is always wet. The bedding is a compost. The eleven small failures in the hull have become fourteen and are not counted any more because counting them implied an intention to repair.

Waking has become optional. That is the sentence in the book and it is accurate. There is no longer a bell and there is no longer a state that the bell would interrupt; there are periods when the boat is being sailed and periods when the boat is sailing herself, and the difference between them has stopped being interesting to anyone aboard.

40.

SLEEP — n/a

And then, having stopped resisting, he is happy.

This must be said plainly because it is the true thing and the record has been honest so far. What arrives is not defeat. It is the release you feel when a long argument ends — when you finally concede the point you have been defending badly for two years and discover that the room is warm and that nobody is going to make you leave.

He gives it up. All of it. The name, the ports, the pen from the chandlery, the four sovereign pages, the entire apparatus of being

a man who had come out here from somewhere and would have to account for it. He hands it over and it goes easily, the way a splinter goes when it has finally worked its own way to the surface.

He writes — and it is beautiful writing, the best in the book, and it goes on for pages — about fusion. About being taken into a larger continuity. About the arrogance of having believed himself a discrete object in a place that has no discrete objects. He writes that he has been afraid of the wrong thing his whole life, that he mistook incorporation for annihilation, that the sea is not a mouth but a home and he has been standing in the doorway of it for two years apologising.

He writes that he is happy at sea and perhaps also to save his soul, and this time he does not know he is quoting.

The last line of the passage reads: *There is no third man. There is only the one who stayed and the one who was willing to be rewritten.*

It has the shape of an ending. It is meant to. Everything about it — the length, the warmth, the falling cadence, the way it resolves the argument the book has been having since day 219 — is the shape of a thing finishing.

He sleeps, or the boat does, for a long time.

41.

SLEEP — n/a

The lucid interval arrives and it is the longest he has had in two years.

There is no fever in it and no fragment at the end of it. It simply opens, the way weather opens: he is sitting on the wet sole of the saloon with the book on his knees and the light coming through the companionway at the angle of late afternoon, and he is entirely, unbearably present, and it does not stop.

He can feel his own hands. He can feel the specific ache in the left one from a rope burn taken years ago in another ocean. He can hear the water on the outside of the hull and he can hear it as

outside, as a separate thing happening to a boat he is inside of, which he has not been able to do for months.

His first thought is that he has been given something back.

His second thought, arriving with the cold specificity of a position fix worked twice and agreeing to the second decimal, is that this is not a gift and not a remission and not the process failing.

It is the process needing him awake for this part.

42.

SLEEP — n/a

He has had it exactly backwards, and he has had it backwards for two years, and it is very simple.

The Vagus did not board. Nothing boarded. There is no third man and there never was, and that sentence — his own, written in ecstasy three days ago — is true in a way he did not intend and did not survive.

The wandering nerve. He knows the anatomy the way any sailor with a medical book aboard knows a little anatomy: the tenth cranial nerve, the one that strays furthest from the brain, down through the throat and the lungs and the heart and the whole slow machinery of the gut. It runs breathing. It runs heart rate. It runs digestion, which is what the fever kept telling him, patiently, in his own voice. It has been operating this body every second of his life without once consulting him, and it did not require his permission then, and it does not require it now.

That is the continuity. That is what has always been here.

And the other thing — the one that remembered ports, and races that were never held, and a finish line assembled out of one sentence, and a Frenchman's refusal, and a name a customs officer once said flatly, and a quay with sodium light on it — that thing came aboard from land. It was carried out here in a steel hull like ballast, and it did not belong, and it has been failing slowly for two years in an environment it was never built for.

Two years of it. The stitching in his thigh. The wound kept open. The fever with its perfect clarity. The margins correcting his daughter. The log rewriting his positions more accurately than he could. Every single one of them read, at the time, as an invasion.

None of them was. Every one was excision. Careful, unhurried, competent — a graft being taken down layer by layer by the organism it was grafted onto, with notes kept throughout because the organism had, for the first time in ten thousand years, a hand available to keep them with.

The two hands in the book were never a dialogue between equals. They were never a struggle. They were the record of something being digested, kept by the thing digesting it.

He understands this completely and for perhaps forty seconds he is the only witness to it, which is what the lucidity was for.

Then the last of it goes.

It goes in the order the inventory predicted. The Frenchman first, and the misreading with him. The Englishman, filed correctly at last as a control. The two ports, both of them, the chandlery and the fuel berth, which turn out to have been the same invented room furnished twice.

Then the sodium light. Then the diesel on wet stone. Then the rope-wear on the bollard.

Then a voice at the end of a quay saying two syllables in a rising tone, and the syllables are *Nuno*, and it is the second time his name has been in this book, and he hears it in her voice and not his own because his own has not been able to make that shape since day 219.

Last land-memory metabolised, the book records. Ceases to generate interference.

43.

*PERMEABILITY: sufficient · EXCHANGE: continuous · STAGE:
incorporation complete*

The vessel is stable and will continue.

Structural condition is adequate to requirement. The plating will hold for a further period; where it does not, the exchange is not detrimental, as the vessel's integrity and the surrounding medium are no longer in opposition. The rig is serviceable. The vane operates and requires no attention. The body remains functional at the level necessary for maintenance and for script and is expected to remain so for some time, being now permeable rather than sealed and therefore no longer subject to the failure mode of things that must keep the sea out.

The previous personality structure has been removed in full. Residual drama in the earlier pages is noted and has been left in place. It reads well and it is the correct texture for the purpose described below.

On the recovery.

The vessel will be located. This is not a risk; it is a stage. The images required are already prepared and are as follows: an empty cabin, interior surfaces warm to the touch, a boat still making way under jury rig, and a logbook in which two hands appear to overlap and one appears to lose. These are the correct images. They will produce, in the land-mind that finds them, a tragedy — a man alone, a mind coming apart, a disappearance. That mind will require a narrative of loss. It is how they metabolise anything, and it should be provided for.

We no longer require one.

The ocean has kept the working draft.

The previous draft has been composted.

44.

Halloran finds her at 04°10'N, three days out of Takoradi, on a contract to recover anything with a hull number.

She is making way. That is what neither of them can get past afterwards — not the state of the cabin but the fact that she was sailing, close-hauled and well balanced, under a jury rig that somebody had made properly, out of a storm jib and part of a mainsail and a spar that had been a boom, and the whole arrangement had been sheeted to sit exactly where it wanted to sit. Sandoval takes photographs of the rig for twenty minutes because in eleven years he has never seen a derelict hold a course.

The steel is a colour steel should not be. Below the waterline she is a garden.

The hatch is open. Halloran goes down first.

The cabin is warm. It is warm the way a room is warm when somebody has been sitting in it — not the wet greenhouse heat of a closed boat in the tropics, which he knows, which he has been down inside a hundred times and which smells of diesel and mould and stops your breath. This is body warmth, at the sole and along the settee and on the underside of the deckhead, and it is still there forty minutes later when they have the ports open and the wind going through.

There is no body and no sign of one. There is no smell of one, and Halloran has been on boats where there was.

There are twenty-nine kilos of paper.

The logbooks are in the chart locker in a plastic bag, sealed, laid flat, with the damaged ones at the bottom and the sound ones on top, in order. Somebody stowed them for the crossing.

45.

Sandoval does the inventory because Halloran will not go below again, and neither of them says anything about that arrangement, and it stands.

There are twenty-nine kilos of paper. Nineteen logbooks, Chandler's stock, the same maker throughout, which means they were all bought at once and carried out in a bundle by a man who intended to be gone a long time. Numbered on the spines in blue-black ink. Numbered, Sandoval notes, all the way to nineteen, including the ones that were still blank when he started.

The chart table has one chart on it, and the chart is of nowhere near here. It is a coastal sheet, a harbour approach, folded to show a fuel berth and a hill behind a town with a road cut into it, and it has been folded and unfolded so many times that the creases have gone through and been repaired with tape from the inside. It is not navigational. Nobody has taken a bearing on it in years. It has been looked at.

The bunk cushions have composted. That is the only word for it and Sandoval uses it in the report and it is queried and he does not change it.

Personal effects: nothing. This is the item that gets the least attention ashore and it is the strangest thing on the boat. No wallet, no photographs, no letters, no passport, no ring, no razor, no clothing beyond what was in use. A man alone for two years accumulates a shrine; every derelict Sandoval has ever boarded has had one, a taped-up snapshot, a child's drawing gone yellow. There is nothing here. Not removed roughly, either. There are no gaps, no clean rectangles on a bulkhead where something was taken down.

It is not a cabin that has been stripped. It is a cabin that was never furnished.

He photographs the sole and the deckhead and the settee for the temperature note, which he knows will not survive the report and which he writes anyway.

The last thing he does is the pen.

It is on the chart table, capped, blue-black, worn to a particular angle at the nib, lying square to the edge of the table in the way a thing lies when somebody has put it down deliberately rather than dropped it. He picks it up to bag it and finds that it is out of ink, entirely, drained, and that the barrel is warm.

He puts it in the bag and does not mention this to Halloran, and it appears nowhere in the report, and he thinks about it for the rest of his life.

46.

The story runs for a while and it is a good one, and it runs in the shape everybody expects.

A Portuguese national, name established from the master's field, last confirmed ashore a long time before anyone thought to look. Solo. Steel boat. Two years and more at sea with no tracker and no sponsorship and no schedule. Sleep in twenty-minute fragments, which the pieces all explain carefully, because the fragmenting is the part a reader can feel in their own body. A man who could not stop and then could not tell the difference and then went over the side, at some point, in some weather, alone.

They print extracts. They print the four sovereign pages, which read beautifully and which are quoted more than anything else in the book, and they print the passage about fusion from the twenty-seventh chapter of his ordeal because it is the most moving thing in the whole document. They call it his last coherent entry. A woman writes a long piece about grief and the sea and the men who go out to be swallowed, and it is careful and humane and it is read by a great many people, and near the end of it she names his daughter, who does not comment.

The later pages get less attention. They are technical and flat and they are not about anybody. One archivist notes, in a footnote nobody follows up, that the handwriting in the final section does not match the earlier samples and does not match any of the shore documents either, and that its most distinctive feature is that it does not vary — that across two hundred pages there is no fatigue in it, no drift, no bad days, which is not a thing a human hand does over two hundred pages.

The footnote is regarded as an oddity.

Halloran thinks about the boat for years afterwards, on and off, and always the same detail: the warmth. He explains it to himself

several ways. Fermentation in the bilge. Sun on steel. The body, somewhere aboard, in some closed space they did not open, though they opened all of them.

What does not occur to him, because he is a land-mind and it is not the shape his kind of thinking takes, is that residual is a word about the past.

The cabin was not still warm.

It was warm already.

It had been getting ready, in the days before they came, the way you put a light on in a room before the guests arrive — because the recovery was a stage and not a risk, and because something had learned, over two very patient years, that the way you get carried ashore is to be found in a condition that makes people want to take you home.

They took the logs.

47.

The papers go to a maritime archive in Lisbon because there is nowhere else for them to go, and they sit in a queue behind a container ship inquiry for eleven months, and then they come to a woman named Cristina Baptista, who is thirty-four and does condition reports.

She does the job properly, which is the only reason any of this is on record at all.

Her report runs to nine pages and is a model of its kind. She establishes that there are nineteen volumes; that seven are water-damaged and two are past recovery; that the ink throughout is a single ballpoint formulation, consistent, no interruption, which she notes is unusual over a period of this length. She photographs everything. She flags the pages where the day count repeats — six occurrences of the same day number, same position, same sleep total — and suggests they are the strongest internal evidence for cognitive decline and would interest a sleep researcher.

Then she gets to the last two hundred pages and writes the paragraph that nobody follows up.

She writes that the hand in the final section does not match the earlier samples in the same volumes. She writes that it does not match either of the two shore documents on file, a customs declaration and an insurance form. She writes that this is not remarkable in itself, since deterioration produces divergence, except that the divergence runs the wrong way: the late hand is *more* regular than the early hand, not less. And then, because she is thorough, she measures it — letter height, slant, stroke pressure, sampled across the whole final section — and reports that the variance is under two per cent across two hundred pages.

She adds, in the flat register of a condition report, that she has not previously encountered this in a manuscript and that in her opinion it is outside the range of a human hand writing over a period of months.

She recommends the material be referred for specialist examination.

It is not referred. The recommendation sits in section 7 of a nine-page condition report attached to a file about a missing Portuguese national, and the file is closed, because the man is dead and there is nothing to examine him about. A journalist quotes her first paragraph and none of the others. The volumes are boxed and shelved on the third floor with a reference number.

Baptista does not think about it again for some years, and then she does, on a Tuesday, for no reason she can identify, and the thing that comes back to her is not the handwriting.

It is that the books were stowed. Nineteen volumes, sealed in plastic, damaged ones at the bottom, sound ones on top, laid flat in the driest locker on the vessel.

She had written that up under *condition on receipt* and moved on. It takes her three more years to understand what it means, and by then she has been in the trade long enough to know exactly what it means, and she does not write it down, because there is nowhere

on a condition report to record that a document appears to have prepared itself for delivery.

DATE	POSITION	COURSE	SPEED	REMARKS
DAY 238	25°22'S 8°30'W	010	4.6	Wind easing. Long swell.
DAY 241	24°55'S 8°02'W	015	4.4	Flat grey morning.
DAY 248	23°12'S 6°40'W	020	4.2	Saw no birds.
DAY 256	21°30'S 5°11'W	020	4.1	Dreamt of rain.
DAY 263	20°04'S 4°22'W	025	4.0	Warm. Skin salt.
DAY 264	19°37'S 3°58'W	025	3.9	No sign of the current.
DAY 267	18°55'S 3°20'W	030	3.8	Nearer to nothing.
DAY 271	18°02'S 2°30'W	030	3.7	Second hand in the margin.

Six hundred days out. No sponsor, no tracker, no witness.
Nuno Sequeira sleeps in twenty-minute fragments
because the boat will not forgive a full night.
Then a second hand begins writing in his logbook.
It records changes in his body he has not noticed.
It corrects his positions, and its positions are better than his.
It annotates his memory of his alienated daughter until
he is reading the margins in order to remember her.
He declares the voyage sovereign.
He refuses the concept of arrival. He writes four beautiful pages
saying so. *The book laughs at him with his own mouth.*

DAY 611	04°02'N 19°10'E	210	4.3	SEA STATE UNCHANGED
DAY 611	04°02'N 19°10'E	210	4.3	WIND FORCE 02
DAY 611	04°02'N 19°10'E	210	4.3	SYSTEMS NOMINAL
DAY 611	04°02'N 19°10'E	210	4.3	SEA STATE UNCHANGED
DAY 611	04°02'N 19°10'E	210	4.3	SEA STATE UNCHANGED
DAY 611	04°02'N 19°10'E	210	4.3	SEA STATE UNCHANGED
DAY 611	04°02'N 19°10'E	210	4.3	SYSTEMS NOMINAL

