

## 3 / Ship's Log

What follows is an exact reproduction of the log-entries I made in my new log-book as we sailed up the coast toward New York.

### July 15:

Today I took a photograph of Hamilton sitting at the wheel with the sun setting behind him. He frowned.

“Now take a picture of me,” I said, and handed him the camera.

He flipped the camera over, unsnapped the back, pulled out the film, and tossed it over his shoulder into the ocean. “If I find any more film on board it will join that roll,” he said.

“It’s just a photo,” I replied.

“It’s evidence,” he snapped back.

This is the first evidence I have had that he even thinks we could be caught.

“Let me see your wallet,” he said. I gave it to him. He threw away all my identification except for my fake Florida license. “Might come in handy,” he said.

### July 16:

Dead calm today. Hot. The sails hanging limply from the gaffs like sleeping bats. At one point I dove overboard and swam around the boat as if it were at anchor. Hamilton threw an empty bottle overboard and we bobbed along next to it for hours. By the end of the day we may have covered a mile. No more. Feel like a sitting duck.

Said so to Hamilton. He drifted into a story about his biggest concern on the ocean being pirates, not police. Told me about friends in the business who were boarded by pirates who tied them to the masts, and then took their stash.

Somehow, I find this absurd and can't stop thinking of Captain Hook and his crew of pirates in Peter Pan. Wish Hamilton would swallow a clock so I could hear him creeping around. He stalks me like a mumbling crocodile.

### **July 17:**

Started reading Heart of Darkness. Already thinking that Kurtz is waiting for me in New York along with his gang of savages— and a deep mystery about the evil in the soul of man that I can't solve until I get there.

### **July 18:**

Woke up to gunshots. Carefully stuck my head above the deck hatch and saw Hamilton firing his pistol at cans he tossed into the air. He missed them all. I knew he had a pistol because I'd poked around the cabin and found it under his mattress. When he saw me he made me put a can on the end of a yardstick and stand up on the bow while he shot at it from the stern. He missed each time, which was not a relief. I heard the bullets whiz by. William Tell was a good shot and put an arrow through an apple on his son's head. William Burroughs was a terrible shot. He put a glass of water on his wife's head and shot her just above the eye. The Mexican police called her death an accident. If Hamilton hit me I'd just drop into the water and sink like a stone. Nobody would know the difference— not even him.

## **July 19:**

I've missed talking to another human. Last night, after Hamilton came to relieve me of my shift, instead of heading down to the main cabin to sleep, I stayed put. I remained as mute as Friday to Crusoe, hoping that he'd break the ice. But he didn't. He held his hot tea to his lips, and patted delicately at his beard, his fingers slowly adjusting the symmetry after his nap.

“Have you ever thought about what might happen to us if we get caught?”

Hamilton's laugh came out of him like a coiled spring jiggling up and down. He had to set down his teacup. “You are afraid,” he finally said. “Afraid of the punishment. You can't be afraid of what we are doing, because we're doing nothing wrong.” My fear amused him. He began a new round of wild laughter. The compass light illuminated his face so that he looked like a carved pumpkin. If I had any hope of reaching shore, I'd jump overboard. I stood up and went downstairs. But I didn't sleep. Hamilton had read my mind—I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm just afraid of the punishment.

## **July 20:**

The sea is like unrolled velvet under the half moon. Fell asleep at my watch. Tilted forward and hit the edge of the compass with my chin. Blood streamed down my neck and chest. Thought I had severed my carotid artery. When Hamilton saw me, he shook his head. After he had a cup of tea he cleaned out the gash and put a bandage on it. I should be fine. Had a headache all day.

**July 21:**

No birds. No music. No noise. No clouds. No wind. Hamilton pacing in circles like an angry clock. In the sky the jet streams crisscross from east to west and west to east like ICBMs. Perhaps when we reach New York it won't be there. No city. No country. No people. We'll just travel around the globe like the navy in Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, searching for survivors and waiting for the radiation cloud to cook us.

**July 22:**

Ate too much hash. Stared up at the full moon's blemished face. Thought of men walking on the moon. During the first moon walk I was watching television at a friend's house in Florida when a car ran off the road and hit the side of the house. Scared the crap out of us. The man had been driving with his head sticking out the window, staring up at the moon, looking to see the spaceship.

**July 23:**

Not well.

**July 24:**

Same as yesterday.

**July 25:**

I was sitting at the cabin table eating some dried prunes when Hamilton looked over at me from the kitchen. "I haven't seen you take a shit yet," he remarked.

"So?" I replied. My face reddened. Taking a shit was private business.

“Just curious,” he said. “It’s a small boat. If you don’t shit in the crapper I can only hope you’re not doing it like a sneaky cat behind the hash.”

“Well, I’m not shitting in the fo’c’sle, if that’s what you mean.”

“Where then?” he asked, raising his nose like a shit detective and sniffing loudly.

“Overboard,” I said. “Like the old-time sailors.” “Those old-timers had seats out under the bowsprit. What do you do? Just hang off the bowsprit and shit down the back of your legs?”

“No. I jump into the water and hang on to the towrope and shit in the ocean.”

“Bloody hell!” he cried out.

“Bloody hell!” I cried back, mocking him.

“You know what can happen to your ass if you shit in the sea?”

“Get arrested by Jacques Cousteau?”

“No. Worse. You can get your ass bit off. Sharks will chum your links and bite your arse down to the bone.”

“You’re putting me on,” I said.

“Seen it happen,” he said. “Shark took his legs.”

“Really?”

“Believe it,” he said.

“So how do you do it?” I asked.

“The crapper,” he said. “That’s what it’s there for.”

“Are you telling the truth?” I asked.

“Of course,” he said. “I still need help sailing the boat otherwise I wouldn’t give a shit about your ass.”

**July 26:**

Started using the crapper.

**July 27:**

All the bread is old. Furry with medallions of blue mold. Hamilton toasts it. Each time we take a bite clouds of mold spores drift across the table. We slather the bread with jam in an effort to keep the dust in place. It helps, but as soon as the bread splits open it coughs out another cloud. We have to eat it on deck with the wind to our backs to keep ourselves from gagging.

**July 28:**

No entry.

**July 29:**

Another night without a breeze. Nothing to do. I tried to read, but instead of focusing my attention, I became restless. I’m tired of just sitting. I smoked some hash and then dove overboard. I swam around the boat and on my second lap I noticed Hamilton’s porthole was open. We usually keep them closed, but with the sea so flat we aren’t worried about waves splashing through. I stopped beneath the porthole and listened for a minute. I could hear him breathing, heavily. I held on to the bottom rim of the hole and pulled myself up with one hand. With the

other I reached in and grabbed his leg. He hollered, and kicked out. I dropped under the water, but even from there I could hear the gunshot. Oh no, I thought. I flipped him out. I swam around to the stern and pulled myself up. As soon as I got my head above the deck I saw him step up out of the main hatch and point the pistol at me. It went off. I buckled and dropped back into the water. I was so scared I didn't know if he had shot me or not. I swam around to the port side and quietly broke the surface. I reached up and held on to the bottom of a stanchion.

I could hear Hamilton back at the stern. "You think you're so funny? I'll show you what scared is!" He fired into the water. And again. "You laughing yet? You failed to consider that in the British navy an officer has the right to execute a sailor who is a danger to an operation."

I didn't know how to calm him down so I kept quiet. I peeked up over the deck and watched him.

After a few minutes he dropped the gun and began to adjust the sails. "Here we are," he shouted to himself, "bobbing out here like a bloody cork. It's enough to make a man go mad and I'm stuck here with a nitwit."

I dropped back into the water and swam around to the stern, where it was easier to pull myself up. "Can I come aboard, captain?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "I'm tired of wanting to shoot you. I'd just like to flog you instead." Then he turned and went back to his cabin.

I retook the wheel and when my shift was up I didn't dare go wake him. And when he finally came to relieve me, he didn't say a word. He certainly scared me. And I think he scared himself firing blindly into the water. I didn't like that he called me a nitwit, but I haven't brought it up for discussion.

## **July 30:**

Of all the sea books I've been reading, the book that has taken me over is Jack London's *Martin Eden*. Just as Holden Caulfield sees phonies everywhere, those same phonies can't recognize Eden's talent and they run him down. He was a man trying to create greatness, and the phonies were too ignorant to recognize anything beyond their own limitations. On my night shift I've begun to act out the final scene, where Martin Eden pushes himself through a porthole and dives into the dark water and intentionally drowns himself. I don't have a porthole to dive through, but I do have a ship to dive from.

I don't really want to kill myself so I tie the end of our yellow towline in a tight knot around my ankle before diving in. There in the darkness with the sky full of stars I lie on my back and glide through the water with the boat pulling me along. It is beautiful to look at the boat, lit only by the compass light and the moon off the sails as she glides up and over the slow swells. It is so peaceful. Martin had once seen the moon as hopeful, too, but after he was beaten down by cynics the moon was dark for him. I wondered if I could ever kill myself as he had. If that yellow towline slipped off my foot, would I sink into the sea as he had or would I swim for all my life to catch up to it? I won't know until it happens. I do know that there is no reason for me to drown myself from sorrow since I haven't yet tried to achieve anything great.

## **July 31:**

For the last week, the wind has been unusually calm, and in order to make any time at all we have lowered the sails and used the engine. Soon, we speculate, we will run out of fuel. About midday I saw in the distance what I first thought was an oil derrick. I pointed it out to Hamilton.

"Let's take a look," he said.

We coursed toward it. Oddly, we couldn't seem to hold our bearing and the rig kept moving from our port side to starboard. "Is something wrong with our rudder?" I asked. I was worried because the great German battleship Bismarck had been hit in the rudder and was doomed to going in circles until she was sunk by the British. If Hamilton and I were stuck going in circles, we'd soon try to kill each other—and I'd be the one getting torpedoed. Hamilton fiddled with the wheel.

"No, we're fine," he replied.

Then, as we got closer, we figured it out. It wasn't an oil derrick but an enormous Japanese fishing trawler with two tall cranes for hauling up their vast nets. Hamilton had seen one before. "They stay out for a year at a time," he said. "They catch the fish, then process and can them right on board. It's a floating factory."

I went up to the bow and began to wave to them. I could see that they were trying to avoid us because they didn't want us to foul their nets, and now the large cranes were hauling them up. A few fish flopped around trying to get back to the sea. "Ahoy!" I shouted through my cupped hands. "Do you speak English?"

The rail was lined with ragged Japanese sailors waving down at me. The deck must have been thirty feet up. After a few minutes they found a sailor who knew English.

"We're low on fuel," I hollered. "Do you have extra?"

"Yes," he hollered back.

In a moment a rope ladder was lowered. "Put some pants on," I said to Hamilton.

"Mind your own business, sailor," he replied.

I dove overboard and swam to the ladder and climbed up. The captain greeted me. Through the interpreter, he ordered several men to

fetch the fuel. They brought back five-gallon cans and lowered them down to Hamilton, who had pulled in close. He filled our tank.

I said thank you and climbed down the ladder. When I got on our deck Hamilton gave me a bottle of rum to take back up as a thank-you gift. I climbed the ladder and presented the bottle to the captain. He took it, bowed politely, then fired off some orders. A man went running to the bridge and in a moment returned with a giant bottle of sake. It was as tall and round as decorative bottles they use in liquor store displays and I had to use both hands to carry it. I bowed low to the captain, then looked down the ladder. I didn't think I could climb it without using my hands. Hamilton had drifted off about twenty yards so I just backed up a few steps, held the bottle up over my head and screamed as I ran and jumped. The ship was a lot higher than I figured. As I hugged the bottle against my chest I tilted forward. And when I hit the water, the bottle knocked the wind clear out of me. I couldn't breathe, and I kept sinking. I could see the bottom of the ship and the small fish swimming alongside the bilge drains. I thought of Martin Eden sinking lower and lower, forcing himself deeper and deeper. I thought of Jack London not putting a final period on the last sentence of the book as Martin lost consciousness and drifted into death. But I didn't want to die. I held the neck of the bottle with my left hand and began to swim toward the surface. My lungs were burning. I bit down on my lip to keep from taking in a mouthful of water. I kept kicking and stroking my arm overhead until I broke the surface and sucked in a lungful of air. I was almost dead, and now I was alive again. It was glorious. I turned onto my back and floated with the sake on my belly.

The Japanese cheered from the deck and I rolled over and with one arm dog-paddled my way to the Beaver, where I grabbed the towline and held on. Hamilton reeled me in and I held up the sake.

“This is mine,” I said.

He took it from me. “You earned it, sailor,” he said. Then he reached out and gave me a hand getting up over the stern. “I thought you were dead,” he remarked, finally smiling at me.

“Me, too. It was great.” I waved to the Japanese, then unscrewed the cap and took a big swig and poured it over my face. They roared their approval. Hamilton started the engine and we motored west, looking for land.

### **August 1:**

Now that we have fuel we have been going all out and our spirits are high. We are both looking forward to land. After a day of smooth sailing the water has turned choppy and looks to get worse. The sky is low and pressing down on us. The temperature has dropped. Hamilton put on pants and a shirt. The weather has been easy so we might be getting close to Cape Hatteras (we think), where there is always rough weather. But we don't know our exact position. We have no ship-to-shore radio. The sextant is broken because I was playing with it and snapped off a piece. I didn't tell Hamilton. We have no radio directional finder, just the compass. All along we have been headed roughly north by northwest and figure once we hit land we'll just follow the coast up.

### **August 2:**

By this morning the wind picked up and the waves broke over the bow and swept across the deck, over the cabin, and all the way back to the stern, where either Hamilton or I was tethered to the wheel with a rope around our chest. The constant pounding of the waves is so exhausting we have to change shifts every hour. Tonight it is pitch-black except for the light from the cabin windows. We have the sails tightly reefed and tied down. If it weren't for the extra fuel the Japanese gave

us, we'd be trying to steady ourselves with the jib— which seems impossible. I think we would be swamped by now.

### **August 3 and 4:**

Storm.

### **August 5:**

After three full days and nights of the storm we are exhausted and have no idea of our position. I was on watch this morning when a Coast Guard turboprop passed low overhead and circled around and dipped low over us again. Hamilton heard it and stuck his head out of the main hatch.

“What’s he up to?” I asked.

“They’re just scanning the water after the storm,” Hamilton said. “They’re making sure there’s no trouble. Must mean we’re close to land.”

With the next pass of the turboprop it was so low we could feel the prop wash. I waved to the captain, he waved back, then curled to the west.

“Follow that plane,” Hamilton ordered. “I bet he’s heading back to the base.”

We got a compass reading on the plane before it disappeared. That night we spotted lights on the coast, but still didn’t know our exact location. We stayed offshore, following the lights north, and figured in the morning we’d locate an inlet where we might find a marina and rest up for a few days.

## August 6:

This morning the weather was hazy with low visibility. We could hear more activity across the water than what we could see, so we knew we were close to something. Then as the haze lifted we saw a sign announcing that we were in restricted military waters. “Bloody hell,” Hamilton cursed. “Let’s just push on until someone tells us to turn around.”

“Can’t we just turn around now?” I asked. “Why invite trouble?”

“Just do as you’re told,” he snapped. “Take the bow and keep a look out for shallow water.”

I did. The water was all slate gray on the surface and I couldn’t tell if it was twenty feet deep or two. Suddenly I heard a motorboat coming our way, and as it pulled close enough I could see it was a small Coast Guard launch. Hamilton saw it, too. “What do we do?” I asked.

“Wave nicely,” he said. I could see the outline of the gun in his pocket.

*Don’t do anything stupid,* I thought, as I waved and smiled.

They kept getting closer. Finally they pulled up within five feet of our port side. “You have entered restricted waters,” shouted a cadet through a bullhorn. “Turn starboard and we’ll escort you out.”

“Where are we?” I asked.

“Cape May, New Jersey,” the cadet shouted. “Home of the Coast Guard training base.”

“Oh, sweet Jesus,” I muttered. “We’re dead.” I must have gone pale.

The cadet laughed through the bullhorn, which made him seem as sinister as Poseidon was with Odysseus when he kept foiling his attempts to get home to Ithaca.

Hamilton turned north and we followed them across the inlet. The entire time I was waiting for them to pull us over and do a customs check. Hamilton insisted on flying the British Union Jack. He thought it made us look friendly and less suspicious, but in doing so, it left us open for a customs check by any military and police patrol boat.

Before long we began to spot signs for gas stations and boating supplies, and along the shore there were white mooring buoys. We were back in civilian waters when suddenly we came to an abrupt stop and I toppled onto the deck. We had run aground again.

“Are you okay?” the cadet called over as I hopped to my feet.  
“Need a tow out?”

“No,” I shouted back. “We’re just going to stop here for a while. We’ll be fine.”

“Suit yourself,” he said, waved, and the launch turned and sped away.

My heart was pounding. “That was a close call,” I said.

“The worst thing about you is you always look so guilty. If you want to be any good at this business you’ve got to learn to relax. Now, throw out the anchor and get the dinghy ready,” Hamilton ordered.  
“We’re going to shore.”

When we got off in Cape May it was the first time in three weeks I had been on land, and I had sea legs. I walked like a drunken elephant stumping from side to side. We found a burger place and bought hot food and cold drinks. Better yet, I went into the bathroom. I hadn’t had a freshwater bath in three weeks and was glistening with caked salt like a stick of rock crystal candy. I splashed cold, fresh water on my face. It felt so good.

All day we tried to reach Rik. He is staying at the Chelsea Hotel in Manhattan. They have him registered, but haven't seen him in days. I asked Hamilton where he met Rik.

“At a smugglers' convention,” he said sarcastically.

There is nothing left to do but push on.